

The Importance of People

You Can Teach Your Baby Algebra

Harry T. Gumaer

Not to be outdone by certain authors in periodicals in mass circulation, this writer makes a revolutionary offer (though with tongue in cheek) to all American parents.

IT IS amazing that we adults have succeeded in keeping the benefits of algebra away from babies as long as we have. It is a wonder that the infants, bright as they are, have not demanded long ago to be initiated into the wonders of mathematics, which we adults have at first held back from them and then made so dull in school.

Here are some little known facts which may revolutionize at least one portion of the educational world:

1. Tiny children *want* to learn algebra.
2. Tiny children *can* learn algebra.
3. Tiny children *should* learn algebra (because algebra is good to learn).

You can teach your baby algebra. This article will tell you how to go about it.

Most sets of instructions begin by saying that unless the instructions are followed precisely you will get bad results. In contrast, it is safe to say that no matter how poorly you carry out the following instructions, you will get results.

The best time to teach your child alge-

bra with little or no trouble is when he is about two months old. Beyond two months, the teaching of algebra gets harder every year. Prior to that time, you will be too busy. And the charlatans who claim that the best time to teach baby algebra is prenatally, through tapes feeding electronic waves via electrodes attached to the pregnant mother's brain, are just charlatans.

There are two *vital* factors in teaching your baby algebra:

1. *Your attitude* in teaching him
2. The *materials* you use.

Your attitude counts heavily. You must believe that learning is fun, no matter what the subject matter. You must believe that your child is going to register an IQ score of 130 or more, regardless of how stupid you secretly believe yourself to be. Most important, you must put out of your mind any thoughts which question the practical value of algebra to the infant.

The materials you use must be ours. These materials are simple, but they were developed over many years of research and have not been corrupted or influenced by math teacher groups whose members, you may feel, have failed so miserably to teach you and others this vital subject.

The *Exclusive Algebra Exposure Materials* include: ¹

1. The numbers 0-9 in red block letters 8 inches high on white cards 12 x 12 inches
2. Sets of other numbers ranging from 6 inches down to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, in various colors, on white cards
3. A very lightweight olive green plastic mallet
4. A set of algebraic symbols and letters, 4 inches high, made of bright red plastic
5. Three tapes (marked A, B and C)
6. A *Short Handbook*.

First Step

Your first step in teaching your baby algebra begins with the use of just *two* numbers. You take only the largest size numbers "1" and "2," and follow the instructions in the *Handbook* on how to show the child the difference between them. (In some areas where "1" and "2" fingers raised in the air are symbols for something else, it might be less embarrassing to start with "3" and "4.")

This first stage, using the largest numbers and rewarding recognition with cooing smiles, lasts five weeks. In the second stage you use successively smaller sets of numbers, and encourage the baby to count on his fingers and toes. If his attention wanders, say, after the third toe, here is where the plastic mallet comes in. You simply tap him gently on the head four times, say "four," and make him start counting toes again. If your baby is really "on his toes," this process should only take about five weeks also.

In the third stage, when you begin algebraic symbols, reinforcement of learning is permissible both with the

¹ These materials, of course, are not actually available.—*Editor*

plastic mallet and with a good spanking if you think the baby is letting you down and you are not getting your money's worth out of your *Exclusive* materials.

Later Stages

In the fourth and fifth stages, you actually teach algebra. You do not need to know anything about the subject yourself. Just play tapes A and B and provide the child with the numbers and symbols to play with. If you do not have a tape recorder, the instructions come on hi-fi discs and in stereo. A *Complete Exclusive Handbook* is also offered. For a small additional fee the baby's name may be embossed in gold on the cover.

At the end of 25 weeks, 6 hours a day, your child will have learned algebra. Absolutely nothing can go wrong with the plan. This is why we do not even bother to include a money-back guarantee with our set of materials.

Yet just in case something did go wrong (such as your baby starting to cry all the time; or his attention wandering consistently toward his father who is *not* demanding that he study algebra; or the first words he ever speaks are "I hate algebra!") then here is what you can do:

1. Play tape C. This is a recording of the wildest folk music of the Caribbean, wild enough to take your mind off the baby or anything.

2. Dip that olive-green plastic mallet in a pan of boiling water and you will find that it dissolves into instant martinis. Chill and drink several.

3. When you are feeling better, ask yourself honestly this question: "What would my baby have done with algebra, anyhow?"

—HARRY T. GUMAER, *Professor of Education, Glassboro State College, Glassboro, New Jersey.*

Copyright © 1964 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.