

Towards knowing the numbers up to five



each child will appreciate the conservation of number within 5

Conservation of number means that the number in a set remains constant even if the objects are rearranged. This concept is crucially important in a child's developing understanding of number. Children who find mathematics difficult may need a lot of support to reach this stage. Comparing equivalent sets as part of their experiences in cardinal number should be used to promote this idea. It is essential that each child is tested individually for conservation of number. Until this concept is secure progress to further experiences involving components of number or addition will have little meaning.

CHECK ONE The child is asked to put out a set, say 5 children.

Teacher: How many children are there?

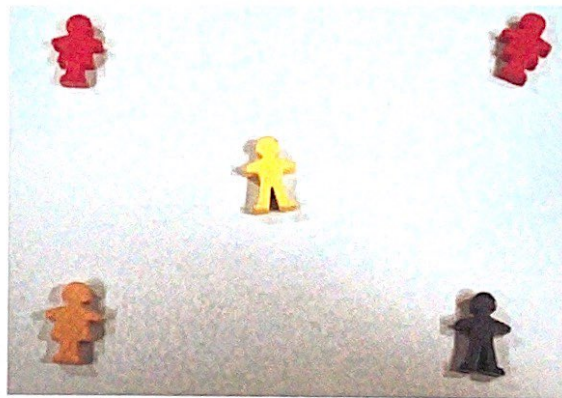
Child: Five.



Teacher: I'm spreading them all out.

How many are there now?

(Child responds).



Teacher: I'm putting them all in a neat row.

How many are there now?

(Child responds).



If for each rearrangement the child responds immediately 'five', without counting, he has conservation of that number. If he needs to count each time he has not. It is important that children are aware that there are no 'tricks' in what the teacher is doing; they should be encouraged to watch closely all the time.

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CHECK TWO

This is a more challenging check which should give a clear indication of the child's level of understanding.

Teacher: Here are some bears. (five) Give each bear an apple. Are there more bears or more apples?

Child: Both the same.



Teacher: Watch carefully. I'm putting all the apples together. Are there more bears or apples now?



Child responds and is invited to match the apples back again to check.



Teacher: I'm leaving the apples in a line this time and I'm moving all the bears into a space. Are there more bears or apples now?

Child responds.



When a child is certain that, whatever the arrangement, there are always as many apples as bears the notion of invariance has been established for five. Any child who is insecure at any point of the check needs more experience of returning the arrangement to its original position to see the exact match again.