

A REPORT ON THE FEASIBILITY AND DESIRABILITY  
× OF TEACHING SOME CHILDREN TO READ IN THE  
KINDERGARTEN

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

Instructional programs employed by the kindergarten must be evaluated and revised to provide for the needs and abilities of the modern child. A changing cultural environment has altered the needs and interests of the young child. Many of the historical influences which were instrumental in the development of the kindergarten curriculum can no longer serve as appropriate guides.

One of the areas which demands consideration is the language arts program of the kindergarten. It has been noted by leading authorities that some preschool children are learning to read before they enter school. Consideration of this fact has made it imperative that educationally-sound programs and practices be devised to accommodate the needs of the child who can read before he enters kindergarten. Of equal importance is the contention that many children are ready to read when they enter kindergarten as a result of preschool exposure to a background rich in experience and language.

Personal experience has stimulated the writer's interest in the kindergarten reading controversy. A two-year reading program was attempted in a kindergarten in which the writer taught. Results of the experimental program indicated that extensive study and sound educational theories must serve as the foundation for reading instruction in the kindergarten.

### Statement of the Problem

This study will investigate the contention that reading instruction can and should be provided as part of a revised kindergarten curriculum.

### Questions

Critical investigation of studies and opinions will involve an analysis of the kindergarten reading controversy through an attempt to discover answers to the following questions:

1. What historical influences prompted the development of the kindergarten curriculum?
2. What objectives serve as a basis for kindergarten instructions?
3. How does the very young child learn?
4. What is reading readiness?
5. What type of instructions is advocated to prepare a child for reading instruction?
6. What pressures have prompted authorities to suggest that the modern child needs a revised kindergarten program?
7. How have environmental changes been reflected in the altered needs and abilities of the kindergarten child?
8. What opinions have been advanced regarding the advisability of teaching reading in the kindergarten?
9. What studies have been reported to support the opinions of educational authorities?
10. How should reading be taught in the kindergarten?
11. When should reading be taught?

12. What problems must be solved if reading instruction is part of the kindergarten curriculum?

#### Limitations

1. This study will involve collection of data from library sources. The availability of reference materials will limit the findings.
2. The kindergarten reading controversy is of comparatively recent origin. Many studies are just being initiated. Significant considerations have not been fully explored.
3. The attitude of many educators, teachers, and administrators has prevented objective exploration of the issues involved.
4. Measurement will be subjective. Personal bias will be evident.

#### Delimitations

1. This study will be limited to materials published in the late 1950's and early 1960's.
2. The problem will be explored through examination of factors which indicate the feasibility and advisability of teaching reading in the kindergarten.
3. An examination of the theories proposed by authorities who favor delayed reading instruction will be presented.

#### Definition of terms

1. Reading readiness. That state of development of the whole child which provides the necessary background of oral language skill and experience required for initial reading instruction.



2. Prereading instruction. Planned procedures designed to promote specific skills and abilities necessary for beginning reading instruction.

3. Reading instruction. Planned procedures designed to teach the skills and abilities needed to gain meaning from the printed page.

### Design and Procedure

Type of study. This report will be a descriptive study which will use library sources for the collection of data.

Method of gathering data. The following outline will be used for systematic, comprehensive collection and presentation of data:

1. Historical Background
2. Major Objectives of the Kindergarten
3. Principles of Learning
4. Reading Readiness Concepts

Types of Programs

Conflicting Theories

5. Analysis of Issues

Contributing Factors

6. Reading in the Kindergarten

Value of Early Education

Conflicting Opinions

Studies Reported

Program Problems

Method of analysis of data. Comparison of conflicting theories and studies will be presented in the report.

Conclusions and implications of various studies will be reported and compared.

## CHAPTER II

### FINDINGS

#### Historical Influences

Friedrich Froebel. The kindergarten was introduced in 1837 by Friedrich Froebel in Blankenburg, Germany. Froebel's recognition of the importance of early childhood education was instrumental in the creation of the kindergarten.<sup>1</sup> The instructional emphasis in the first kindergarten centered around "doing," "self-selection of activities," and "self-expression."<sup>2</sup> Instruction was developed to provide for the needs of the pupils.

Because Froebel recognized the child's ability to learn when physically engaged in activities designed to instruct, the program recommended by Froebel provided ample opportunity for the child to actively participate rather than passively attempt to absorb verbal understandings. Factual considerations were of little importance at the kindergarten level according to Froebel's estimation of the ability of the young to profit from instruction. He stressed the belief that memorization of material could serve no real purpose. Froebel contended that through an environment which was designed to encourage active participation and extensive sensory exploration, the child would develop a deeper concept of self and the universe of which he is a part. Through the directed

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick Mayer, A History of Educational Thought (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Brake, Inc., 1960), pp. 281, 284.

<sup>2</sup>Hazel M. Lambert, Teaching the Kindergarten Child (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1958), p. 6.

implementation of play activities, additional understandings of the adult world and the world of nature could be encouraged.<sup>3</sup>

Since the major goal of the kindergarten was to develop social and moral understandings, a social environment characterized Froebel's early kindergarten program.<sup>4</sup> Froebel designed a basic core of materials and activities for use in the kindergarten to instruct the child through symbolization because he believed that life is lived on two levels.<sup>5</sup> Individuals live and exist in the actual world which is filled with things which can be understood through sensory perception; beyond the level which is understood and known by the senses is the level of symbolization through which man is able to grasp the ultimate meaning and nature of the universe

Instruction in the Froebelian kindergarten was highly formalized. "Gifts" designed by Froebel to acquaint the child with the characteristics of number, form and measurement have been described by Lambert as objects intended to symbolize concepts to be learned. Through manipulation of colored balls, cubes, cylinders and spheres, the child learned to count, understand fractions, measure quantities, and analyze properties.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Mayer, op. cit., pp. 283-284.

<sup>4</sup>Lambert, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Mayer, op. cit., p. 285.

<sup>6</sup>Lambert, op. cit., p. 6.

The "Occupations" selected by Froebel were also to be used in a highly formalized manner. These activities included modeling with clay, singing, games, finger plays, and nature studies. It was suggested that these learning situations be used as substitutes for free play activities.<sup>7</sup>

The influence exerted by Froebel's early kindergarten has been analyzed by Foster and Headley who have asserted that many of the activities proposed by Froebel are used today in American kindergartens. Foster and Headley list "singing, playing, talking, painting, gardening, modeling, weaving, looking at pictures, and listening to stories"<sup>8</sup> as suggestive of the activities which American kindergartens have inherited from the Froebelian kindergarten.

Revision of the early kindergarten was necessitated by the findings of current research. Foster and Headley reported that the time allotted to certain activities has been extended due to the effect of changes which have resulted from advances in the knowledge of the needs of the young child. Additional alterations noted by Foster and Headley include the modern lack of emphasis

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Foster and Headley, Education in the Kindergarten (New York: American Book Company, 1966), p. 42.

concerning the development of small muscles. Immature vision has been guarded through an enlargement of materials.<sup>9</sup>

Foster and Headley report that although the kindergarten is regarded as the "direct descendent"<sup>10</sup> of Froebel's "garden of children," true Froebelian schools cannot be found in America today. Explanation of the causes which precipitated changes in the original kindergarten was made by Foster and Headley through a description of the contrast which resulted when German cultural demands were compared with the expectations of an American society. The German culture, rich in tradition and designed to serve European preferences, produced a kindergarten which was intended to mold the thinking and direct the growth of future German citizens. When America adopted the kindergarten, alterations were made necessary in view of the frontier nature of the culture which it was to serve.<sup>11</sup>

Maria Montessori. The theories advanced by Montessori were introduced in America in the early years of the twentieth century, but their acceptance was delayed until they were reintroduced in the late 1950's. At that time ardent followers established both American Montessori and pure Montessori schools in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

Many of the principles and theories suggested by Montessori have been incorporated into the American public school. Foster and Headley stated that Montessori's major contribution to the kindergarten curriculum relates primarily to methods and materials proposed for the social and personal development of the child. Montessori believed that the young child should be taught to care for himself at an early age. The development of a sense of personal responsibility for the environment in which the child lives was regarded by Montessori as a major objective to be achieved by the learning situation of the school.<sup>13</sup>

The school of Maria Montessori did not seek to provide directly for the emotional needs of the child. Lambert reported the intellectual development of the individual was the main interest of the Montessori school.<sup>14</sup> Intellectual development was believed to depend on provision of a type of education which was based on the ability to use the senses to develop concepts and understandings. Sensory growth was promoted through the inclusion of many experiences of a varied nature, but play was not part of the instructional program since the world of fantasy was excluded from the Montessori curriculum. Activities were considered important only if they were of practical significance in the real world in which the child lived now, and in which he would live as he grew toward maturity.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>14</sup> Lambert, op. cit., p. 9.

The teacher in Montessori schools was given the role of a helper who remained ready to give needed assistance, but who was able to fade into the background of the learning environment when the children were testing skills of independent action. The teacher attempted to guide the children without imposing her own personality upon the awakening consciousness of the pupils; she observed the children as they worked and played and offered her assistance only when it was needed.<sup>15</sup>

Formal introduction of the foundation subjects, reading and mathematics, was given to very young children. The methods and materials used by Montessori for skill training were original and especially designed to capture the imagination and interest of the very young child.<sup>16</sup> Montessori insisted that the young child should not be under any type of pressure. Independence, self-pacing, and protection of the individual were emphasized. Montessori stressed the importance of educational attempts designed to teach the child how to use freedom to foster independent skills through which he could achieve his own growth and development.<sup>17</sup>

Early American kindergarten. The kindergarten became a part of the public school system in 1873 when the first public

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Mayer, op. cit., p. 353.



kindergarten was introduced by Susan Blow in St. Louis. The St. Louis kindergarten was sponsored by W. T. Harris, Commissioner of Education of the United States and Superintendent of Schools in St. Louis. The public kindergarten in St. Louis was responsible for the spread of the kindergarten movement throughout the United States.<sup>18</sup>

Historical implications. The importance of historical considerations was stressed by Newman who believed that the controversy which concerns the type of program offered by the kindergarten today is rooted in the early development of the kindergarten.

Newman discussed the characteristics of the Froebelian kindergarten which helped shape the curriculum of the American kindergarten. It was noted that although the symbolic instruction favored by Froebel did not gain favor in the American kindergarten; his child-centered curriculum which stressed the importance of basing instruction on the interest and needs of the child was widely accepted.

Of equal importance was the temper of the time when the kindergarten became popular in America. When the kindergarten was included as a part of the American public school system, the progressive theories advocated by Dewey were dominant factors which dictated the type of instructional practices to be employed by the schools.

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<sup>18</sup>Lambert, op. cit., pp. 18-29.

The influence exerted by the Progressive Movement determined the shape of the emerging American kindergarten. Objectives were vague; academic content was discarded; subject lines were neglected. The teacher was no longer an authoritative figure. Freedom was encouraged, and real situations replaced artificial experiences. The dominant features of the curriculum were those which promoted the social and emotional development of the pupil.

The child was the object of instruction, and the child was considered the instruction. An environment was provided which was conducive to the development of interests commonly found among five-year-old children. The metaphysical concepts Froebel intended to serve as instructional content for the kindergarten child were discarded. Additional content was not inserted to replace the symbolic teaching which was rejected. The social growth of the child took precedence, and the methods employed were determined by the expressed needs and inclinations of the child.

Throughout this period, parents and educators knew that some subject content was being offered to pupils from the first through the twelfth grades. Kindergarten, however, had only recently been added to the school system. Richly endowed by its German heritage with those characteristics which made it unique and distinct, protesting the need to instruct in social, physical, and emotional growth rather than to concentrate on intellectual pursuits, firmly rejecting formal subject-centered instruction--the kindergarten assumed a position which separated it from the rest of the elementary school.

Newman has asserted that the kindergarten controversy began when Sputnik aroused a complacent America. The shadowy goals and undefined methods of the American school came under sharp attack at this time. The kindergarten was unable to offer any evidence of intellectual endeavor.<sup>19</sup>

Mayer suggested that objective examination of the practices employed by the kindergarten reveals that we may have leaned too far in the direction of a curriculum built entirely around the child's expressed interests.<sup>20</sup> Although ample provision has been made for play activities, areas may have been neglected which would be beneficial in the development of intellectual growth. Protesting that subject matter does not belong in the classroom with the five-year-olds, authorities in the field of childhood education have insulted the intelligence of the young child by making the kindergarten experience an "encounter with triviality."<sup>21</sup> Intellectual labor is discounted and mental activities have been designed to be easily accomplished by all students.

Mayer suggested that a study of history affords an understanding of the reasons behind the development of trends and theories. The teaching of educators who lived in previous years affords an insight into many of the problems and possible solutions which may assist present attempts to provide for students who will

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<sup>19</sup>Robert E. Newman, "The Kindergarten Reading Controversy," Elementary English, XLIII (March, 1966), 235-9.

<sup>20</sup>Mayer, op. cit., p. 286.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

shape the world of the future. Mayer cautioned that clinging to the ideas of past generations is not the object of a study of historical thought. Novel innovations of an earlier time cannot be considered progressive today. History must be used as a guide to help education rise to the challenge of meeting the requirements of present cultural demands.<sup>22</sup>

#### Definition of Education

General education has been given a broad, comprehensive definition by Mayer who concluded that education is a "process leading to the enlightenment of mankind."<sup>23</sup> Education, if this definition is accepted, is not static but rather open-ended. The educational process requires continuous examination and evaluation in the light of constantly altered circumstances in which it operates.

Although education is offered in the formal atmosphere of the classroom, it also exists in areas of life outside school buildings. Many sources and forms of communication provide the individual educational advantages. It is not possible for the school to be considered an institution which is set apart from the main stream of human existence. Society must be influenced by the labors of the school; the school, in turn, is altered and shaped by the culture in which it is established.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 366.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

Objectives of the Kindergarten

Introduction to school. Since the kindergarten is often the child's first association with school, a fruitful beginning which will set the stage for future achievement and provide an incentive to learn should be made.<sup>25</sup>

Experts in the field of childhood education have insisted that goals for the kindergarten should be present-oriented rather than those which provide for anticipated future needs. Current needs rather than future achievements are considered the major concern of the kindergarten; enrichment of the child's present life, and provision for experiences for which the child is ready now should guide objective determination.<sup>26</sup> "The job of pre-primary education is to help fours and fives flourish, not to reform them."<sup>27</sup>

Prepare for first grade. It is believed, however, that a carefully planned kindergarten program will assist the child in his attempt to master more complex skills required in later grades. Selected studies reported by Smith show that even though kindergarten does not teach formal reading, children who attend kindergarten are prepared for first grade instruction. A study was

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<sup>25</sup>Rudolph, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>26</sup>Helen Heffernan, "Fullness of Living Here and Now," Reading in the Kindergarten? (Washington, D. C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1962), pp. 6-7.

<sup>27</sup>James L. Hymes, Jr., "Fruitful Beginnings," Reading in the Kindergarten? (Washington, D. C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1962), p. 25.

reported by McLatchy which concerned pupils in several Ohio schools who did not have kindergarten training. Results were compared with reading readiness test scores made by children who had a year of kindergarten. It was found that children who had been enrolled in the kindergarten achieved higher scores. The promotion rates of 12,750 children who had kindergarten training were investigated after one year of first grade by Morrison. It was concluded that children who did not attend kindergarten had a higher incident of retardation.<sup>28</sup>

A study by Fox and Powell, however, revealed that kindergarten did not develop readiness for first grade work. It was further concluded that kindergarten did not promote better achievement during first grade. Fox and Powell suggested that the value of kindergarten should be tested against the goals which have been established for development of the kindergarten program. Kindergarten purposes should be compared with other purposes in an effort to judge the value of kindergarten training.<sup>29</sup>

Fuller concluded that kindergarten helps a child adjust to first grade requirements regardless of the type of program offered by the individual kindergarten. However, the advantages of

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<sup>28</sup>Nila Banton Smith, "Shall We Teach Formal Reading in the Kindergarten?" Membership Service Bulletin-H (Washington, D. C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1962), pp 2-3.

<sup>29</sup>Raymond B. Fox and Marvin Powell, "Evaluating Kindergarten Experience," Reading Teacher (November, 1964), pp. 118-20.

kindergarten training disappear by the time the child enters third grade.<sup>30</sup>

Social and emotional development. Rudolph stated that promotion of good mental health was a major objective of the kindergarten. Within the security of a friendly, permissive atmosphere, the child can learn about the world in which he lives and can become familiar with the people who work and play in his immediate environment. The emotional stability of the child can be further established through the guidance offered by the teacher concerning acceptable behavior and proper channels for directing emotional reactions.<sup>31</sup>

Burts suggested that the primary purpose of the preschool is to offer young children an opportunity to work and play with others who are of a similar age. The ability to control personal emotions and to develop skills which enable the child to relate socially with others justifies the establishment of nursery school and kindergarten.<sup>32</sup>

Rambush objected to the importance kindergarten teachers give to social understandings and skills. Instruction which is

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<sup>30</sup>E. M. Fuller, "What Research Says to the Teacher About Kindergarten," Department of Classroom Teachers (American Educational Association of National Education Association, 1961), pp. 4-14.

<sup>31</sup>Rudolph, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>32</sup>Eleanor Burts, "Introduction," Reading in the Kindergarten? (Washington, D. C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1962), p. 3.

designed to emphasize the child's position as a part of the larger group rather than that which stresses the individuality of each pupil was not favored by Rambush. The child who is not yet seven or eight has very little inclination to socialize with his peers. Greater importance should be attached to plans which permit the child to use his own methods of attempting to establish a successful relationship within the group.<sup>33</sup>

Durkin stated that the kindergarten could provide experiences which would help the child mature intellectually and, in addition, assist the child in social and emotional growth. Durkin concluded that "maturity doesn't come in a vacuum."<sup>34</sup>

Intellectual development. Rudolph asserted that the kindergarten seeks to promote the ability of the young child to grasp basic understandings which will enable him to solve problems through the use of critical, creative, scientific intellectual growth. Rudolph accepted the need to provide instruction which would help minds grow, but contended that intellectual development should be introduced without the assistance of text books. General, broad understandings and knowledge should be used for instructional periods; skill training should not be included in the kindergarten program.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Nancy McCormick Rambush, Learning How to Learn (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1962), pp. 27-29.

<sup>34</sup>Dolores Durkin, "Early Readers--Reflections After Six Years of Research," Reading Teacher (October, 1964), p. 5.

<sup>35</sup>Rudolph, op. cit., p. 381.



Newman suggested that testing the outcome of activities designed to promote an understanding of self is extremely difficult. The position taken by many experts who have emphasized the value of the guidance offered by the teacher in the kindergarten is also contested by Newman. The guidance which an average kindergarten teacher can provide cannot be considered adequate. Newman concluded that the types of objectives described above must be considered of questionable merit.<sup>36</sup>

Environmental factors. The value of kindergarten training has frequently been related to the shortcomings found in many homes. It has been stated that exposure to traditional kindergarten programs helped overcome these deficiencies. This argument was contested by Fox who maintained that many children have already learned all that the kindergarten proposes to teach in nursery school or through a rich, varied environment. By attempting to regulate all pupils through instruction designed to give every student the same background information and understandings, bright students are bored and neglected.<sup>37</sup>

Insistence that the kindergarten is traditionally characterized by a flexible program with an instructional content which is not determined by artificial demands was examined by Leavitt. It has been argued that construction of the kindergarten program

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<sup>36</sup>Robert E. Newman, "The Kindergarten Reading Controversy," Elementary English, XLIII (March, 1966), pp. 235-91.

<sup>37</sup>Fox, loc. cit.

was determined by the needs, interests, and abilities of the children served. Leavitt contended that if these statements were true, the kindergarten should be capable of providing for the needs, interests and abilities of the more mature pupils who show a readiness for a more advanced series of experiences.<sup>38</sup>

The influence of nursery school training has altered the role to be assumed by the kindergarten. Durkin found that many children were not satisfied with kindergarten instruction because in many instances the kindergarten duplicated experiences of the nursery school. It was reported by parents that those children who had not attended nursery school were happy in the kindergarten for part of the year, but boredom often became apparent as the year progressed because the activities remained of the same type and quality. Durkin compared the nursery school with the kindergarten and found that the programs were very much the same for both levels. Usually the nursery school provided a program which was more interesting for the child. If the kindergarten was considered the better of the two, it was so regarded when it offered a program designed to compensate for differences between pupils.<sup>39</sup>

### Principles of Learning

Weisman has stated that the child must experience before he can think, feel, or communicate.<sup>40</sup> Since learning is thought

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<sup>38</sup>Jerome Leavitt, Nursery-Kindergarten Education (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1958), p. 298.

<sup>39</sup>Durkin, loc. cit.

<sup>40</sup>Dorothy Weisman, "Is Play Obsolete?" Saturday Review, XLVI (November 16, 1963), pp. 77ff.

to exist without form in the very young child's mind, the value of concrete instructional situations is emphasized. Physical manipulation encourages sensory perception and satisfies seemingly aimless exploration which is necessary in the initial stages of any learning attempt. Weisman traced the learning cycle from exposure to real experience, into symbolic experimentation with the remembered experience, and toward abstract handling of the knowledge obtained.

Four sequential steps have been described by Burke as basic to the learning process: (1) the first stage involves sensory-motor activities which permit the child to learn through the use of his senses; (2) the second stage requires the use of perceptual learning for the development of an understanding of the world in which the child lives; (3) the third stage emphasizes the use of conceptual learning for the discovery and organization of meanings; and (4) the final stage of learning encourages the child to use language and thinking as attempts are made to adjust behavior, thoughts, and understandings to fit the world in which he lives.<sup>41</sup>

"Periods of sensitivity"<sup>42</sup> described by Rambush explain the need to capture the child's interest at the time when the interest is greatest. Morris stated that these sensitive moments are of a

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<sup>41</sup>Margaret B. Burke, "Research Gives Guidelines to Learning," Weekly Reader X (Kindergarten Teacher's Edition, September 27, 1967), p. 1.

<sup>42</sup>Joe Morris, "Can Our Children Learn Faster?" The Saturday Evening Post, CCXXXIV (September 23, 1961), p. 24.

transitory nature and must be taken "at flood tide"<sup>43</sup> if they are to yield inner motivation. The child will grow toward different interests in later years and satisfaction of earlier developmental needs will be increasingly more difficult to promote.

The importance of self-direction and self-discovery is stressed by Weisman who stated that all learning is accomplished within the learner. It is imperative that the child find meanings in his world through self-motivated exploration which permits discovery, expression, growth, and development unhampered by intrusion of the adult need for order and objectivity. Play, Weisman concluded, is the one way open to the child through which he can come to terms with his environment and with himself.<sup>44</sup>

#### Readiness Concepts

Readiness was defined by Mason and Prater as "reading progress."<sup>45</sup> Stern and Gould defined reading readiness as a prerequisite for reading instruction. Two kinds of growth were listed as necessary for the development of a readiness to read. The first type of growth concerns the internal process of natural growth which must afford the child the degree of maturation which is required for reading instruction. The second type of growth is related to specific abilities. Included among the necessary

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Weisman, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>45</sup>G. E. Mason and N. J. Prater, "Early Reading and Reading Instruction," Elementary English (May, 1966), pp. 483-7.

abilities which must be developed are language skills, visual and auditory perception, and interest in words and books.<sup>46</sup>

Pertinent factors. Most primary teachers became familiar with reading readiness concepts in 1936 when Harrison wrote about the factors involved. Harrison contended that learning to read required development in several specific areas. Included in Harrison's list of necessary skills which must be developed before reading instruction can be started were: (1) visual discrimination; (2) auditory perception; (3) language development; (4) exposure to rich and varied experiences which yield an increased fund of information; and (5) the ability to understand basic concepts.<sup>47</sup>

The practice of teaching reading to all children who had achieved a chronological age of six years prompted the development of reading readiness theories in the early part of the twentieth century. Durkin stated that the lack of regard for individual differences and the poor methods employed to teach initial reading skills were responsible for the insistence by authorities that readiness must be developed before instruction could be begun. Work done by Morphett and Washburne in 1931 resulted in statements which suggested the need of a mental age of at least 6.5 for the pupil who was given initial reading instruction.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Catherine Stern and Toni Gould, Children Discover Reading (New York: Randon House and L. W. Suiger Company, 1965), p. 41.

<sup>47</sup>Helen Huus, "Developing Reading Readiness," The Instructor (March, 1965), p. 59.

<sup>48</sup>Dolores Durkin, Children Who Read Early: Two Longitudinal Studies (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), p. 5.

Programs. Butler stated that readiness programs which serve the needs of the young child must assist the child in: (1) development of intellectual powers; (2) sensory perception; (3) adoption of an attitude of delight as knowledge and its many uses makes a dramatic entrance in the child's familiar world. Butler rejected the use of prepared materials for readiness instruction because she stated formal approaches would dictate that all the children be geared toward the same degree of readiness, at the same time, regardless of individual differences.<sup>49</sup>

Conflicting theories. Beckett<sup>50</sup> insisted that the obvious lack of agreement concerning the meaning and nature of readiness has resulted in gross inconsistencies in educational goals, philosophy, programs, and methods. The result of a questionnaire which was sent to teachers in Ohio was used by Beckett to illustrate the inconsistencies which presently exist. Although the teachers stated a negative attitude toward the use of formal instruction in the kindergarten, they reported that they used either formal learning situations or a readiness workbook.

A detailed analysis was presented by Beckett to illuminate the extreme positions assumed by various experts who have attempted to explain the concept upon which the idea of readiness rests.

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<sup>49</sup>Annie L. Butler, "Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Why?" Reading in the Kindergarten? (Washington, D. C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1962), pp. 28, 30.

<sup>50</sup>Dorothy B. Beckett, "Philosophical Differences in Reading Concepts," Reading Teacher (October, 1964), pp. 27-32.

Developmentalists emphasized the importance of the inner growth of the child. Gesell believed that chronological age as well as physical maturity assumed an important part in the individual's developmental level, because behavior was thought to develop in conjunction with the growth of the whole child.

Social Learning Theorists stressed the importance of external influences which affect the individual's progress. Sullivan stated that learning was a result of the social pressures which the individual experienced. The reaction of the pupil to the demands made by authority figures conditioned the learning process.

Beckett arranged the various opinions on a scale which proceeded from the extreme position assumed by the Developmentalists through a middle, hybrid series of opinions to the opposite end of the scale occupied by the Social Learning Theorists.

The fact that all authorities agree that the child must be ready before instruction can begin prompted Beckett to conclude that it is the definition of the term "ready" which triggers the verbal conflict between experts. Examination of definitions resulted in the assumption that the central issue revolved around whether or not readiness could be built.

Readiness has been subjected to a multitude of interpretations. As a result, theories of readiness have been the source of a series of educational debates. Fuller analyzed two of the most popular theories used to explain the concept of readiness.

One theory contends that readiness must develop through intrinsic maturation which unfolds without outside pressure, at its own speed, and in its own predetermined time. Instructional experiences must be child-centered to allow for the natural development of interests peculiar to each individual child.

The opposite position maintains that readiness can be developed through formal instruction which offers experiences related to those the child will experience in later grades.

It has been found that most kindergartens today tend to use some of each theory to produce a "hybrid" type of program. The majority of kindergarten teachers are inclined toward the belief that readiness can be developed through instruction.<sup>51</sup>

Intrinsic maturation. Hymes defined readiness as the developmental level of the child. When all areas of growth have matured sufficiently, the child will be able to bring to the printed page the capabilities necessary to learn to read. Before these abilities have matured, the child is ready for other types of instructional assistance.

The importance of waiting for readiness has been made obvious by Hymes through examination of the waste of time and energy which results from instruction which is started before the child is ready. The attitude developed by the pupil concerning the reading act is also conditioned by his readiness to learn when instruction is begun.

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<sup>51</sup>E. M. Fuller, "What Research Says to the Teacher About Kindergarten," Department of Classroom Teachers (American Educational Association of National Education Association, 1961), pp. 4-14.



Hymes stated that readiness cannot be built or developed. Time is the only factor required. Attempts made to impose readiness result in poor instructional methods. Activities which are formal in nature are adopted; pencil and paper tasks are allowed to replace other activities which would encourage natural development of readiness. Artificial readiness activities are generally too easy for the child according to Hymes; they do not provide a rich experiential background upon which reading skills must be built. Parents are lead to expect a type of development which cannot be achieved when attempts are made by teachers to build the child's readiness for reading.<sup>52</sup>

Readiness, as defined by Boyd, is the art of effectively waiting for time to pass to allow the child sufficient maturity to meet the demands of formal instruction. The beliefs of Rousseau have been restated by Boyd to support the contention that instruction must wait for the child to mature. Rousseau wrote that successful teaching of young children demands that teachers understand the importance of wasting time in order that time can be profitably used later.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>James L. Hymes, Jr., "The Importance of Pre-Primary Education," Childhood Education (September, 1962), pp. 5-9.

<sup>53</sup>Verna Boyd, "Personal Experience Records as a Method of Reading Readiness," Reading Teacher (January, 1966), pp. 263-6.

The time devoted to building experiential background is considered by Heffernan<sup>54</sup> and Butler<sup>55</sup> the most important part of the reading program. The child can learn to read with meaning only that which he has already known. Time to mature gives the child the advantage of bringing to the reading act the interest, development, and experience which will enable him to learn to read with relative ease and certain success.

Gans stated that it is not possible to force a child from one intellectual stage to another.<sup>56</sup> Experiences must be provided to help the child prepare for the next intellectual step which he will be required to take. Time should be devoted to those learning experiences which must be included as part of the readiness program.

Durkin has reviewed the theories of those authorities who emphasized the importance of heredity in the determination of the child's development.<sup>57</sup> John Watson, in 1925, emphasized the significance of heredity in his book, Behaviorism. G. Stanley Hall encouraged educators to recognize the role heredity assumes in the development of the young child. Growth has been described as predetermined at birth; stages of development were thought to occur in

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<sup>54</sup>Helen Heffernan, "Pressures to Start Formal Instruction Early," Don't Push Me (Washington, D. C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1960), p. 18.

<sup>55</sup>Butler, op. cit., pp. 10-13.

<sup>56</sup>Roma Gans, "They Must Talk Before They Read," Grade Teacher, LXXXIV (December, 1966), p. 100.

<sup>57</sup>Dolores Durkin, Children Who Read Early: Two Longitudinal Studies (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), pp. 3-5.

fixed, sequential steps. Gesell regarded growth as an inner function of the child's neural maturation.

Hymes stated that readiness for reading develops without outside help or pressure. Development toward readiness for reading can be compared with development in other areas of the child's life. Walking is begun when the child has mastered the stages which must precede any attempt to move without support. Talking is also achieved when the child has sufficiently matured as a result of growth which was accomplished without adult interference. The young child is not too young to benefit from many types of instruction; failure to profit from instruction is sometimes caused by the adoption of activities which are too difficult.<sup>58</sup>

The fact that some children mature faster than others was recognized by Hymes, but he stated the difference in rate of development should not excite excessive concern. Although intensive probing might uncover some children who are ready to read before the average, it is not necessary to begin reading instruction the very moment the child has achieved sufficient maturity. Readiness will not vanish if allowed to lie dormant for a few months; it will, rather increase as the child continues to live in a healthy environment.

Factors related to readiness for reading instruction were explained by Hymes. It was suggested that visual perception must

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<sup>58</sup>James L. Hymes, Jr., Before the Child Reads (New York: Row, Peterson and Company, 1953), pp. 6-99.

be developed, but this maturation is accomplished through environmental influences which encourage observation by provoking within the child a curiosity to see and to know. The skills related to auditory perception are also encouraged by an environment which stimulates the curiosity to hear. Hymes insisted that intellectual growth is fostered by situations which exist in the daily environment of the child. Memory, concentration, reasoning, planning, the use of language, and the ability to observe are provoked by life around the child. The environment also provides interest in knowing and understanding.<sup>59</sup>

Extrinsic development. The tendency of many educators to rely too heavily on theories of intrinsic maturation has been contested. Research suggests that if the child's developmental level is raised only through waiting for maturation, the fault may rest with the instructional methods and materials used. Many authorities now contend that readiness for instruction is mainly determined by the child's environment.<sup>60</sup>

Pines has reviewed the theories held by a group of psychologists who adhere to the cognitive school. This group has rejected the theories projected by Gesell. Harvard's Jerome Bruner, Benjamin Bloom of the University of Chicago, and J. McV. Hunt from the University of Illinois have expressed the belief that the

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Durkin, op. cit., pp. 68-72.

learning experiences which the child is given before the age of four determine the growth he will achieve when he reaches adulthood.<sup>61</sup>

Diack traced the tribute paid to the concept of readiness to the theories of educational authorities who did not understand the basic characteristics of the preschool child. Readiness concepts have guided American educators and have resulted in delayed instruction in this country. The instruction which is regarded compatible with readiness principles has bored and stifled the eager young minds upon which it has been inflicted.<sup>62</sup>

Simmons has objected to the policy which tends, on the basis of readiness principles, to withhold instruction until enough time has passed to insure a developmental state which will permit instruction. It is stated by Simmons that this artificial barrier which is raised to prevent instruction in lower grades is the first "official imposing of anti-intellectualism."<sup>63</sup>

Reading readiness exists to some extent in every child. It is not a quality which some children have and others lack. It is rather, a way of evaluating the extent of development a child has achieved in specific areas. Reading readiness is not, therefore, something for which the teacher must wait. It results as the child

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<sup>61</sup>Maya Pines, "A Pressure Cooker for Four-Year-Old Minds," Harpers (January, 1967), p. 55.

<sup>62</sup>Morris Pincus and Frances Morgenstern, "Should Children Be Taught to Read Early?" Reading Teacher (October, 1964), pp. 37-42.

<sup>63</sup>Virginia Simmons, "Why Waste Our Five-Year-Olds?" Harpers, CCXX (April, 1960), p. 71.

experiences those situations which promote ability to gain meaning from the printed symbol. If ready to read, the child can see a symbol and understand the fact for which it stands. The child is also able to relate printed symbols with the spoken symbols for which they stand. This ability can be developed through planned instruction. Unless the child is suffering from retarded mental, emotional, social or physical growth, he will be able to gain from instruction which is planned to prepare him for beginning reading.<sup>64</sup>

Content of pre-reading programs should help prepare the child for the reading task which will follow. Durrell, of Boston University, has concluded that early reading success is promoted by the child's early exposure to reading instruction. The use of readiness work which relied on non-verbal forms did not increase the child's reading readiness.<sup>65</sup> Instruction which provided opportunities to learn the names of letters, match letter forms, and copy letters and words correlated .55 with reading achievement. Hillerich cautioned that this correlation may not be illustrative of the reason a child reads, but may rather indicate the child's previous learning environment and his innate ability.

Barrett traced the development of the readiness concept to the 1920's when it became an important factor in educational planning;

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<sup>64</sup>Are Your Children Ready to Read (American Book Company, 1941) p. 12.

<sup>65</sup>Robert Hillerich, "Kindergartens Are Ready! Are We?" Elementary English, XLII (May, 1965), pp. 569-73.

Since that time, research has attempted to discover aspects of growth which tend to suggest the child's readiness level. Readiness characteristics have been studied to ascertain a pupil's possible success in later reading instruction. The one indicator found which could be used to judge a child's probable reception of reading instruction was visual perception.

Barrett studied various visual skills to determine which of these skills was most important. Results of this study indicated that the most accurate single predictor was the ability to read letters and numbers. The cause and effect relationship between reading achievement and the ability to read letters and numbers cannot be stated. The environment of the child may have contributed heavily to both abilities. Readiness instruction, planned to teach children how to read letters and numbers, will not automatically insure the child's successful mastery of the reading act. Barrett stated that several visual tasks must be combined and used for the most effective type of instruction. Teachers have been hampered by readiness programs which wait too long to introduce visual tasks. Only when a teacher discovers the child's ability to display all related visual skills can readiness be evaluated.<sup>66</sup>

Stern suggested a beginning structured program for the introduction of reading skills. Instruction of this type was

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<sup>66</sup>Thomas C. Barrett, "Visual Discrimination Tasks as Predictors of First Grade Reading Achievement," The Reading Teacher, XVIII (January, 1965), pp. 276-82.

justified on the basis of the innate curiosity commonly exhibited by five-year-olds. Learning letters and their sounds has been found interesting and profitable for this age group. Instruction which takes full advantage of the child's natural interest is able to capitalize on inner motivations to learn.<sup>67</sup>

Brzeinski stated that when the concept of readiness is restricted to a limited definition, the principle is employed to rationalize and promote delay of instruction.<sup>68</sup> Bruner has stated that readiness... "is a function not so much of maturation as it is of our intentions and skill in transplanting ideas into the language and concepts of the age level we are teaching."<sup>69</sup>

#### Analysis of Issues

Attitude assessments. Past failures to solve the reading controversy have been the product of an emotional, subjective type of thinking which has clouded the issues and ignored facts. Newman<sup>70</sup> has observed a recent change of attitude which has encouraged the use of more scientific methods for solution of the problem. There is a growing tendency for experts to objectively examine facts, test theories, and seek acceptable solutions.

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<sup>67</sup>Catherine Stern and Toni Gould, Children Discover Reading (New York: Random House and L. W. Singer Company, 1965), pp. 41-52.

<sup>68</sup>Joseph E. Brzeinski, "Beginning Reading in Denver," Reading Teacher (October, 1964), p. 17.

<sup>69</sup>Jerome S. Bruner, "On Learning Mathematics," The Mathematics Teacher (December, 1960), p. 617.

<sup>70</sup>Robert E. Newman, "The Kindergarten Reading Controversy," Elementary English, XLIII (March, 1966), pp. 235-94.



The reading controversy cannot be solved until an attempt has been made to state the problem in concise, objective terms. Hillerich<sup>71</sup> suggested that the early reading issue should not be allowed to become an either-or dichotomy. The central considerations should revolve around: (1) the type of reading instruction to be planned for kindergarten pupils; (2) determination of the kind of kindergarten pupil who will benefit from the reading instruction proposed.

When Durkin's first study was proposed, the attitude of educational experts toward this type of research was one of disinterest. Today, a decade later, the topic of offering reading instruction to the very young child has become a subject charged with interest and explosive possibilities. The emotional reactions provoked by discussion of this subject should be replaced by more objective types of investigations.<sup>72</sup>

Walcott disapproved of extreme views which make it impossible for authorities to achieve the compromises required for intelligent solution of the kindergarten reading controversy. Definitions and underlying goals of reading have become issues. The nature of the reading process and the anticipated outcomes of instruction are described in contradictory terms by different authors. Factors

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<sup>71</sup>Robert L. Hillerich, "An Interpretation of Research in Reading Readiness," Elementary English, XLIII (April, 1966), pp. 359-644.

<sup>72</sup>Dolores Durkin, "Early Readers--Reflections After Six Years of Research," Reading Teacher (October, 1964), p. 3.

which are pertinent to improvement of instruction are selected or rejected on the basis of how effectively they can be used to compliment individual arguments.<sup>73</sup>

Durkin was critical of the attitude assumed by some advocates of early reading instruction who "rush to be modern"<sup>74</sup> and insist that reading must be taught to all kindergarten children. Critics, who protest that the kindergarten is not the place for reading instruction, "rush to be traditional"<sup>75</sup> and insist that children be allowed the pleasures of an unrestricted childhood for a period of time which should extend from infancy into the primary grades. Durkin objected to the opinions expressed by the traditional group because many of their statements were clouded by "nostalgic thinking and sentimentality."<sup>76</sup>

Durkin advised that solution of the kindergarten reading controversy demands that professionals search for and find answers to pertinent questions through research and observation conducted with an open-mind and a sincere desire to obtain the best possible information.<sup>77</sup>

Ability of kindergarten child. Many of the opinions which tend to reflect an unrealistic evaluation of the kindergarten child's abilities have been criticized by Hillman. Some adults

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<sup>74</sup>Durkin, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-7.

cling to the idea that kindergarten children are not able to do much more than learn how to properly put beads on strings. Many experts in the field of childhood education believe that the kindergarten year should be devoted exclusively to the development of skills which help the child make satisfactory social adjustments. At the opposite end of the scale are those opinions which favor early formal instruction of reading skills. As a result of the heated debate which weighs the wisdom of teaching the kindergarten child to read, Hillman finds it deplorable that the kindergarten child has been "maligned, misunderstood, and underestimated."<sup>78</sup>

Purposes of instruction. Austin has stated that the reading controversy should not be reduced to consideration of the question which asks whether or not all kindergarten pupils should be subjected to early reading instruction. The central consideration should be examination of the provision which is made to insure that each pupil has the opportunity to use and develop the unique abilities he brings with him to the learning situation.<sup>79</sup>

Fisher stated that the major area of concern should not be whether or not early learning is to be fostered, but rather determination of the most advantageous type of education for young minds.

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<sup>78</sup>Rosemary Hillman, "In Defense of the Five-Year-Old," Saturday Review, XLVI (November 16, 1963), p. 76.

<sup>79</sup>Mary C. Austin, "Reading in the Kindergarten," Instructor (March, 1965), p. 90.

<sup>80</sup>Robert J. Fisher, "Assault Upon the Young," Childhood Education, XLI (January, 1965), pp. 247-8.

Examination of the controversy has prompted Newman to suggest that the underlying question appears to be simply, "What are kindergartens for, anyway?"<sup>81</sup>

### Contributing Factors

Recent demands that traditional programs of instruction be examined and revised have been sparked by the many changes which have been made in our culture. The age in which we live has been described by Smith as characterized by the push of many and varied pressures.<sup>82</sup> Demands that reading be taught to very young children have been shaped by the existence of pressures which have infected society.

Sputnik, Spock<sup>83</sup> and Durkin<sup>84</sup> have described the panic which followed the launching of the first Russian Suptnik as an important source of pressure on the schools in America to push academic content down to lower and lower levels. The frenzy of activity which followed the news of Sputnik's success indicated the severity of the American reaction. Scientific accomplishments realized by a country which was considered a potential enemy of the American democratic political system made Americans fear that the traditional supremacy of the United States was in jeopardy.

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<sup>81</sup>Robert E. Newman, "The Kindergarten Reading Controversy," Elementary English, XLIII (March 1966), pp. 235-9

<sup>82</sup>Nilia Banton Smith, "Shall We Teach Formal Reading in the Kindergarten?" Association for Childhood Education International; Membership Service Bulletin-II (1964-65), p. 1.

<sup>83</sup>Benjamin Spock, "Why I Don't Believe in Speeding Up Primary Education," Redbook, CXXV (October, 1965), p. 26-27; Dolores Durkin, "They Should Have the Opportunity," N.E.A. Journal, (November, 1963), p. 23.

Spears suggested that the unsettled conditions which exist in the world today have made the American public anxious about the competence the children of today will have when they become adults. Anticipation of the international problems which will be forced upon the next generation has resulted in demands that the schools concentrate on making pupils achieve and excel academically.<sup>85</sup>

Education values. Strom suggested that a nation will tend to preserve and strengthen those aspects of culture which are favorably regarded. Families which value an early start in intellectual pursuits will pressure for early formal instruction of academic subjects.<sup>86</sup>

Spock<sup>87</sup> stated that home environments which stress the value of education tend to motivate children to achieve academic goals. Educational achievement is viewed by many parents today as a symbol of status. The demand for skilled labor is cited by Spock as an additional factor which has increased the value of advanced educational opportunities.

Cultural pressures. O'Kelley estimated that seven and one-half million mothers have joined the ranks of those employed outside

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<sup>85</sup>Harold Spears, "Introduction," Don't Push Me (Washington, D. C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1960), pp. 1-2.

<sup>86</sup>Robert D. Strom, "The School Speed-Up," Educators Digest, XXXX (April, 1965), p. 42.

<sup>87</sup>Spock, op. cit. p. 26.

the home. This situation often creates additional responsibilities for children; parents tend to expect young children to assume mature attitudes.<sup>88</sup>

Butler stressed the relationship which seems to exist between the fact that many mothers have positions outside the home and the fact that an increased number of children are now cared for by outside agencies. Exposure of young children to many experiences and to other children through widespread use of nursery schools, more regular attendance in Sunday Schools, and through organized playground programs has increased the child's readiness for formal school instruction.<sup>89</sup>

McCormick stated that the cause of the controversy could be traced to the tendency of people to notice extreme points of view and to disregard the thinking of the conservative majority. Literature which stressed the failure of reading instruction has been read and reviewed throughout the country. Rudolf Flesch's book, Why Johnny Can't Read, marked the "beginning of the public's assault on education."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>G. C. O'Kelley, "A Parent Speaks," Don't Push Me (Washington, D. C. : Association for Childhood Education International, 1960), p. 33.

<sup>89</sup>Annie L. Butler, "Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Why ?" Reading in the Kindergarten? (Washington, D. C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1962), pp. 10-13.

<sup>90</sup>Nancy McCormick, "The Countdown on Beginning Reading," The Reading Teacher, XX (November, 1966), p. 115.

Instructional tool. Because reading is valued as a tool of instruction, reading instruction has been significantly affected by recent pressures. Robinson noted that pressures have been exerted in an effort to promote instruction designed to provide excellence in all subject areas sooner and with increased success.<sup>91</sup> Reading achievement has been considered of extreme importance because through reading other content areas are accessible. Demands have been made to dispense with time-consuming readiness periods and to adopt any type of instruction which will teach more, sooner, and better.<sup>92-93</sup>

Reports of recent research. Sheldon reviewed several sources of current pressures and concluded that pressures to speed up educational achievements have frequently resulted from the concern produced by published reports which have described current studies of reading achievements made by very young children. Interest voiced by the public, by powerful foundations, and by the press has made it imperative that educators assume a stand on policies related to early reading instruction. Demands that the preschool child be given reading instruction have also been made by parents who have

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<sup>91</sup>Helen M. Robinson, "Teaching Reading Today," The Instructor (March, 1965), p. 56.

<sup>92</sup>Smith, op. cit., p. 229.

<sup>93</sup>Ruth G. Strickland, "The Language Arts in the Kindergarten," Toward Better Kindergarten (Washington, D. C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1967) p. 61.

children of above average ability; publishers of various reading materials, some kindergarten teachers, and many first grade teachers.<sup>94</sup>

The work done by several leading educational experts was exposed by Durkin as suggestive of the influences which have resulted in pressure for earlier reading instruction: (1) children of three and four have been taught to read and write in some American schools through the use of materials and methods suggested by Maria Montessori; (2) the "talking typewriter" of sociologist O.K. Moore has given extensive publicity by the press; (3) research studies of early reading has suggested that a high I.Q. is not always a prerequisite for early reading achievements; (4) it has been found that some children have already proven that it is possible for the preschool child to learn to read. Implications of this type of research have suggested that an early start may be of greater advantage for the slower learner. Studies have not discovered "pedagogical, physiological, or psychological problems" in any of the early readers.<sup>95</sup>

Changes in the child. Hillerich stated that policies based on Washburn's early study must be considered obsolete. The children, materials, and methods used as a basis for Washburn's

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<sup>94</sup>William D. Sheldon, "Teaching the Very Young to Read," The Reading Teacher, XVI (December, 1962), p. 163.

<sup>95</sup>Dolores Durkin, Children Who Read Early: Two Longitudinal Studies (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), pp. 68-72.



conclusions have been altered by the changes which have occurred in the American cultural patterns. Children in primary grades today have more extensive vocabularies; exposure to a broader base of experiences has given today's children a larger fund of general information.<sup>96</sup>

Bacci has concluded that today's children are past the need for readiness instruction when they start to school. Preparedness for reading has been accomplished by informal instructional situations created by the influence of television and commercial readiness materials which are available in grocery and dime stores throughout the nation. Many children can write the entire alphabet in capital and lower-case letters when they start to kindergarten.<sup>97</sup>

Research has supported the contention that the vocabulary of the young child has increased over the past three decades. Templin, in 1957, duplicated a study which had been done earlier by Davis and McCarthy. It was found that children today use significantly longer sentences, and that they command larger speaking and listening vocabularies.<sup>98</sup>

Conclusions offered by Templin have been varified by Strickland and Loban who found a direct relationship between

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<sup>96</sup>Robert Hillerich, "Kindergartens Are Ready! Are We?" Elementary English, XLII (May, 1965), pp. 569-73.

<sup>97</sup>Williams Bacci, "Children Can Read in Kindergarten," School Management (May, 1961), p. 121.

<sup>98</sup>Mary C. Austin, "Reading in the Kindergarten," The Instructor (March, 1965), p. 57.

reading abilities and the ability to listen and speak. Loban supported this view when he stated that children who displayed the greatest proficiency in language skills learned to read sooner and maintained their advantage throughout the elementary grades.<sup>99</sup>

Durkin stated that the child is responsive to the mass of words which crowd his early environment. Words are of major concern for the preschool child because they stand for things which relate to his immediate experiences. The child exhibits a mature understanding for the meaning of many words because they concern "what he did, or liked, or saw, or even ate."<sup>100</sup>

Kelly<sup>101</sup> asserted that a different type of child is coming to kindergarten today. Social, emotional, and physical provisions should still be part of the kindergarten curriculum, but they should not constitute the entire instructional program. The child today enjoys the benefits of a home environment which is rich in readiness experiences. Trips, books, magazines, puzzles, and educational toys and games are part of most children's preschool training. The result of an enriched environment has been an increase in the child's ability to understand spatial concepts. Parents who have had the advantage of extensive educational backgrounds are better able to guide children toward more mature

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Dolores Durkin, "Children Who Read Before Grade One," Reading Teacher, XIV (January, 1961), p. 163.

<sup>101</sup> Marjorie Kelly, "When Are Children Ready to Read?" Saturday Review, XLVI (July 20, 1963), p. 58.

ideological understandings. Vocabulary expansion and the desire to express thoughts and facts verbally are noticeably more developed in the five-year-old of this generation.

Conflicting Opinions: Negative Assessment

Maturity required. Educators who have opposed kindergarten reading programs have contended that the five-year-old child does not possess the mental, physical, or emotional maturity required to permit early reading success. Leavitt stated that the possibility is very remote that any child who possesses all of the prerequisites necessary for reading instruction can be located in a class of kindergarten children.<sup>102</sup>

Moskowitz's belief that formal reading instruction should not be given to kindergarten children was based on the assumption that reading is a task which requires maturation of the whole child. Complex skills which are associated with reading demand visual, auditory, mental and verbal development. Moskowitz reported research findings which revealed that many young children are unable to associate meaning with symbolic forms. It is also difficult for the immature child to recall minute visual and auditory differences which distinguish various sounds and shapes. An advanced type of maturity is required when an effort is made to relate symbols with their appropriate sounds. The problems created by these difficulties

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<sup>102</sup>Jerome Leavitt, Nursery-Kindergarten Education (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958), p. 306.

were described by Moskowitz as severe for the young child, but relatively easy for the child who has been given time and opportunity to mature.<sup>103</sup>

The importance of mental maturity was stressed by Lambert. The level of mental maturity characteristic of the kindergarten child requires instruction which is concrete, present-oriented, and based on sensory perceptions. Reading skill can be developed only when the child is able to grasp abstract reasoning, symbolic representation, and high order generalizations.<sup>104</sup>

Attempts which have been made to lower the age requirements for school entry have indicated that more time was needed for the child to gain required maturity. Inez B. King studied first grade children who entered first grade at an early age and reported that this young group failed to accomplish required work.<sup>105</sup> The result of a decision made by the N. Y. C. public schools to lower the entrance age to 5.4 for first grade entrance was described by Keliher. The entrance age was raised again when it was discovered that premature formal instruction resulted in failure and subsequent damage to emotional health.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Sue Moskowitz, "Should We Teach Reading in the Kindergarten," Elementary English, XLII (November, 1965), pp. 798-804.

<sup>104</sup> Hazel M. Lambert, Teaching the Kindergarten Child (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1958), p. 61.

<sup>105</sup> William D. Sheldon, "Harm Might Result," N. E. A. Journal (November, 1963), pp. 20-22.

<sup>106</sup> Alice V. Keliher, "Do We Push Children?" Don't Push Me (Washington, D. C., Association of Childhood Education International, 1960), p. 4.

Children with the same intellectual ability have been compared to discover the effect of chronological age on the child's progress in reading. Mason and Prater reported that older children make greater progress.<sup>107</sup>

Smith stated that although some children can learn to read early, the fact that they can does not mean that they should.<sup>108</sup> The dangers of impaired vision, caused by forcing farsighted eyes to work with small symbols which require close scrutiny, may account for the increased number of five-year-olds who have recently been forced to begin wearing glasses. Sheldon also suggested that it is possible that early reading may result in visual damage.<sup>109</sup>

Physical immaturity, reflected by lack of eye-hand coordination, is cited by Lambert as a primary reason for delay of reading instruction.<sup>110</sup> Heffernan agreed that the preschool child is generally unable to perform skills which require mature eye-hand development.

Heffernan expressed concern for the physical restriction imposed by early reading instruction. Immature muscles need ample opportunity to engage in activities which will promote development. Requirements which demand that the child sit for long periods of

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<sup>107</sup>G. E. Mason and N. J. Prater, "Early Reading and Reading Instruction," Elementary English (May, 1966), pp. 483-7.

<sup>108</sup>Nila Banton Smith, "Shall We Teach Formal Reading in the Kindergarten?" Membership Service Bulletin-H (Washington, D. C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1964-65), pp. 2.

<sup>109</sup>William D. Sheldon, "Harm Might Result," N. E. A. Journal (November, 1963), pp. 20-22.

<sup>110</sup>Lambert, op. cit., pp. 311-315.

time ignore the physical needs of the kindergarten child. Heffernan suggested that the small number of children who do possess the maturity required for reading instruction will not suffer if they must wait a little longer to learn how to read.<sup>111</sup>

Theories of learning. The increased popularity of practices which favor acceleration and forced academic instruction have alarmed educators who stress the fact that principles of learning must be used as fundamental guides in the selection of educational methods and practices. Efforts made to push formal instruction into the kindergarten curriculum have been criticized because the needs of the kindergarten child are not met when a program which resembles that of the first grade replaces the child-centered kindergarten program.<sup>112</sup> The goals of education and the fundamental nature of the young child are not recognized when the need to hurry through the curriculum is emphasized.<sup>113</sup>

The popular belief that today's kindergarten child has been able to develop faster and has more ability to bring to the learning situation because of the richness of his preschool environment has been questioned by Rudolph. Acknowledgement was made of the fact that kindergarten children today possess more capabilities because

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<sup>111</sup>Helen Heffernan, "What Is Good Education in Nursery School and Kindergarten?" Childhood Education, XLI (October, 1964), p. 27.

<sup>112</sup>Marguerita Rudolph and Dorothy H. Cohen, Kindergarten: A Year of Learning (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), pp. 5-7.

<sup>113</sup>Dorothy Weisman, "Is Play Obsolete?" Saturday Review, XLVI (November 16, 1963), pp. 77-8.

modern knowledge of the nature of the young child has enabled educators to instruct children with greater success. Rudolph, however, asserts that the differences between today's child and children of earlier generations are, in effect, illusions. Although the child has been guided toward a fuller realization of the powers he possesses, the potential of each child remains the same regardless of the advances in education and culture.<sup>114</sup>

Williams suggested that teachers who force reading on the young child before experiential concepts have been fully explored, do so because it is easier to teach a measurable skill than it is to learn how to effectively teach through the use of environmental situations.<sup>115</sup> Moskowitz gave support to this view when she asserted that there is a possibility that reading is taught in the kindergarten because teachers are not able to devise creative, original types of instruction for the bright child.<sup>116</sup>

If reading is taught in the kindergarten, other activities must be removed in order that time can be arranged for reading instruction.<sup>117</sup> Authorities have expressed the belief that make-believe and play activities should be encouraged until the child

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<sup>114</sup>Rudolph, loc. cit.

<sup>115</sup>Gertha Williams, "The Kindergarten and Reading," Childhood Education (October, 1963), pp. 77-8.

<sup>116</sup>Moskowitz, op. cit., p. 803.

<sup>117</sup>Robert Fisher, "Assault Upon the Young," Childhood Education, XLI (January, 1965), p. 248.

has developed sufficiently to permit creative thinking. Formal instruction demands that the child relinquish his desire to pretend and recreate.

The suggestion that reading should be taught in the kindergarten because the child needs the use of this intellectual tool as soon as possible was not accepted by Keliher who stated that the kindergarten child has many other roads for intellectual growth at his disposal. The vast number of Americans who are able to read, but who do not read, suggests that mastery of reading skills and use of those skills are not necessarily related.<sup>118</sup>

Rights of childhood. Authorities who refuse to consider the possibility that reading in the kindergarten might be beneficial for some children have expressed the opinion that adoption of early reading instruction would abuse the right of the child to experience a natural childhood. Heffernan<sup>119</sup> questioned the worth of those aspects of American culture which have emphasized the value of material gains and mechanical skills and, subsequently, contributed to the rejection of recognition of the right of children to enjoy childhood.

Jenkins expressed the fear that the early years of growth and development are in danger of being lost because of the demand that the child mature at the pace stipulated by adults. It was

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<sup>118</sup>Alice V. Keliher, "Do We Push Children?" Don't Push Me, (Washington, D. C., Association for Childhood Education International, 1960), pp. 5-6.

<sup>119</sup>Helen Heffernan, "What Is Good Education in Nursery School and Kindergarten?" Childhood Education, XLI (October, 1964), p. 26.



suggested that the special demands of childhood should be understood and accepted by the adults who shape the curriculum.<sup>120</sup>

Fisher concluded an argument directed against early reading instruction by asserting that since childhood is the only road to adulthood, the child must be allowed to be a child before he can hope to become an adult.<sup>121</sup>

Because the child will "never be five again,"<sup>122</sup> Heffernan stated that this period should be used to its fullest through provision of opportunities to explore, discover and experience. The intrinsic characteristics of the child should be studied if the right of children to enjoy a period in which they are permitted and encouraged to be children is to be respected. Plans and projects which attempt to inflict adult goals on young minds restrict the child's development. Writers have described with yearning the "Golden Age of Childhood." Opinions voiced today have made it difficult for Heffernan to believe that such an era ever existed or that it is considered of value for the young child of today.<sup>123</sup>

Results of early reading instruction. Critics of early reading instruction have rested a major portion of their argument on the negative results associated with attempts to teach reading to very young children.

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<sup>120</sup>Gladys Gardner Jenkins, "What Price Pressures?" Don't Push Me, (Washington, D. C., Association for Childhood Education International, 1960), p. 10.

<sup>121</sup>Fisher, loc. cit.

<sup>122</sup>Heffernan, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>123</sup>Heffernan, op. cit., pp. 25-28.

Smith<sup>124</sup> and Moskowitz<sup>125</sup> described the future effects of forcing instruction on the child who is not physically or emotionally ready for formal training. Specialists in the field of early childhood education have suggested that negative behavior in reading situations is often caused by early reading instruction.

Reading is, by definition, a process which requires that meaning must be taken to, and obtained from printed symbols. Reading one word at a time and failure to comprehend the meaning of passages results when a child is not given the time or the opportunity to learn from first-hand experiences. Smith warned that the child may be taught to decipher symbols and may learn to speak the words represented, but without an understanding of the meaning of these words, the child cannot be thought to be reading.<sup>126</sup>

Hymes maintained that those children who are forced to hurry through important levels of growth must suffer the harmful pressures caused by adult demands and rigid controls. Feelings of insecurity and frustration make adequate social adjustments impossible. The child's immediate situation becomes stale and stagnant. The problems of adjustment which will manifest themselves later in the child's life may be an even more serious nature. Hymes cautioned

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<sup>124</sup>Nila Banton Smith, "Shall We Teach Formal Reading in the Kindergarten?" Membership Service Bulletin-H (Washington, D. C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1964-65), pp. 1-2.

<sup>125</sup>Moskowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 801.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid.

that although some children may be able to read at five, all children should not be considered candidates for this type of instruction.<sup>127</sup>

Spock has insisted that investigations indicate that children who learn to read at eight suffer no disadvantage from a delayed start. Acceleration of the child's academic progress can cause perplexing problems later in the child's educational career. A realistic consideration of all sides of the problem must be pursued. Spock illustrated his remarks by voicing the concern that rushing children through elementary school will place these children in high school and college at a very early age. The social and emotional adjustment which will be required of pupils who are younger than most at these academic levels may create problems for which the students can find no answers.<sup>128</sup>

Learning through experience is a vital part of beginning reading instruction. Baker stated that if formal reading skills are presented too early or too quickly, the experiential background which is the foundation of the reading program would be seriously neglected. Premature instruction stresses skills for which the child feels no need; understandings which are necessary to later instruction are replaced by skill training. The pupil in the middle grades who did not achieve readiness through real experiences

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<sup>127</sup>James L. Hymes, Before the Child Reads (New York: Row, Peterson and Company, 1958), pp. 6-99.

<sup>128</sup>Benjamin Spock, "Why I Don't Believe in Speeding Up Primary Education," Redbook, CXXV (October, 1965), pp. 28-31.

is unable to bring or take meaning from the printed page. The younger child and the older pupil both suffer from this neglect.<sup>129</sup>

Jenkins protested that pressures which do not take into consideration the effect of constant pushing toward impractical goals result in considerable damage to the emerging personality of the young child. Some kindergarten pupils are known to be taking tranquilizers. Jenkins suggested that the price required by current pressure to teach reading in the kindergarten is too high.<sup>130</sup>

The damage of early instruction may inflict on mental and emotional development has not been scientifically tested, but Sheldon stated that future studies may prove that early reading produces harmful side effects. The damaging effects of premature instructions were described by Rousseau<sup>131</sup> who stated that it would be better for a child never to learn to read than to force him to read too soon. Plans for reading in the kindergarten were rejected by Fisher who described the traditional kindergarten curriculum in idealistic terms. Fisher stated that until recently, the kindergarten has stood alone . . . "the last haven" . . . away from educational battle fields.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Emily V. Baker, "Reading Readiness Is Still Important," Elementary English, XXII (January, 1955), pp. 17-23.

<sup>130</sup>Jenkins, loc. cit.

<sup>131</sup>William D. Sheldon, "Teaching the Very Young to Read," Reading Teacher, XVI (December, 1962), pp. 9-14.

<sup>132</sup>Robert J. Fisher, "Assault Upon the Young," Childhood Education, XLI (January, 1965), p. 247.

Rejection of early reading programs has been justified by statements which report that skills taught to very young children are not retained. Sheldon reported the findings of a study made by Vernon, O'Gorman and McLeelan.<sup>133</sup> Eight-year-old children from Scotland who had been taught to read when they were five were compared with a similar age group of English pupils who read at six. Comprehension skills were found to be the same for both groups.

Keister offered the opinion that children who learn to read when they are five are able to retain the skills sufficiently to enable them to master first grade requirements. The skills are lost in the summer months between first and second grade.<sup>134</sup> McCormick supported Spock's contention that advantages gained by early reading instruction are not in evidence by the time the child reaches third grade.<sup>135</sup>

Sheldon concluded that examination of research, observation of classroom situations, and scrutiny of the permanence of the effect of early instruction offer no justification for reading programs in the kindergarten.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup>William D. Sheldon, "Teaching the Very Young to Read," Reading Teacher, XVI (December, 1962), p. 163.

<sup>134</sup>Nila Banton Smith, "Should We Teach Formal Reading in the Kindergarten?" Membership Service Bulletin-H, (Washington, D. C. : Association for Childhood Education International, 1964-65), p. 1

<sup>135</sup>Nancy McCormick, "The Countdown on Beginning Reading," Reading Teacher, XX (November, 1966), p. 116.

<sup>136</sup>William D. Sheldon, "Teaching the Very Young to Read," Reading Teacher, XVI (December, 1962), p. 168.

Conflicting Opinions: Affirmative Assessment

Early education. Pincus<sup>137</sup> has criticized educators who, through a serious lack of understanding, reject the assumption that preschool children possess a natural readiness for learning.

Rambush<sup>138</sup> objected to the lockstep type of planning which reserves educational benefits until the child achieves the magic age of six and, consequently, denies the preschool child the right of a real education. Kindergarten has been regarded a provisional place in which children are exposed to, but not expected to master, readiness skills. Quality education, designed to develop the potential of the young child, is necessary if preschool education is to earn a respectable reputation.

The importance of instructional training during the early years of childhood has received increased recognition in recent years. Pincus<sup>139</sup> reported a study, made in 1962 by a group of research workers from Teachers College, which indicated that intellectual growth is most pronounced in the child between the ages of three to six.

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<sup>137</sup>Morris Pincus and Frances Morgenstern, "Should Children Be Taught to Read Earlier?" Reading Teacher (October, 1964), pp. 37-42.

<sup>138</sup>Nancy McCormick Rambush, Learning How to Learn (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1962), p. 4.

<sup>139</sup>Pincus, op. cit., pp. 37-42.

The staggering amount of information learned by many children during the preschool years has been described by Rudolph and Cohen.<sup>140</sup> The amount of knowledge acquired suggests that the years between four and six are years in which the child learns very rapidly.

Since each stage builds on previous achievements, Rambush<sup>141</sup> insisted that early instruction is a necessary prerequisite for later training. The developmental rate of each child must be periodically evaluated because individual rates fluxuate at different times. Motivation for learning is highly dependent upon successful mastery of each level of growth at the proper time.

Recent attention directed toward the problems of the culturally disadvantaged has increased regard for the preschool learning which the child brings to the formal school situation. It is felt that learning situations which confront the child in first grade exert very little influence on the child's ability to learn when compared with the effect of preschool experiences. Benjamin Bloom's book, Stability and Change in Human Characteristics,<sup>142</sup> emphasized the importance of the social skills and understandings developed

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<sup>140</sup>Marguerita Rudolph and Dorothy H. Cohen, Kindergarten: A Year of Learning (New York: Appleton-Century-Crafts, 1954), p. 380.

<sup>141</sup>Rambush, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>142</sup>Benjamin Bloom, Stability and Change in Human Characteristics (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1954).

during the preschool years. Bloom contended that methods employed by reading teachers may exert very little influence on the progress the child makes toward reading achievement.

Lack of readiness for reading instruction is characterized by an attitude of immaturity. Macdonald<sup>143</sup> explored the possibility that children suffering from emotional upsets, intellectual sluggishness, and lack of interest and motivation for academic pursuits may have possibly been aptly described when it has been suggested that they lacked readiness for instruction. Readiness concepts may not be "rationalizations"<sup>144</sup> after all. Present methods may be as ineffective as attempts made to put out a raging fire by using a water pistol. Our attempts to instruct these children may be well meant, but poorly timed, and improperly placed means of accomplishing an impossible goal.

Evidence that the learning potential can be developed through training of preschool children supports the theory that such a potential does exist. Four-year-olds have been taught algebra and have learned how to spell difficult words. Recognition of the learning capabilities possessed by the young child was made by the Policies Commission of the N. E. A. when that group recommended

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<sup>143</sup>James B. Macdonald, "Beginning Reading Research: A Reflection of Social Reality?" Educational Leadership (March 1965), pp. 442-445.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., p. 443.



that a formal program of instruction in the public school be extended to all four-year-olds.<sup>145</sup>

The possibility of developing the learning potential of the young has not always been recognized. It has only been in recent years that theories which stated that intelligence was set at birth, and that development was accomplished at a predetermined speed, have been replaced by the belief that guidance and training directly influence the amount and the rate of mental growth. Although it was formerly believed that experiences planned to increase intellectual growth in the preschool years were unproductive or dangerous, work which has been done recently in orphanages supports the contention that intellectual growth can be fostered through training.<sup>146</sup>

Bruner gave the importance of early instruction recognition when he stated, "any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child in any stage of development."<sup>147</sup>

The possibility of developing the young child's mental abilities through early training is closely related to the desirability of providing instruction of this type. Rambush insisted that the child should be taught at the earliest possible time those skills and understandings which he will be required to master. If an introduction is made at an early age, the child will have ample time

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<sup>145</sup>"Unlocking Early Learnings Secrets," Life, LXII (March 31, 1967), p. 41.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>147</sup>Jerome S. Bruner, The Process of Education (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. and Random House, Inc., 1960), p. 32.

to master instruction before mastery becomes mandatory. If instruction affords the child an opportunity to learn these skills early, there will be sufficient time for the child to pace himself. Refusal to make early education significant will, Rambush stated, result in a denial of the potential of the young and will create an increased need for corrective rather than preventive instruction.<sup>148</sup>

Stating that lack of intellectual challenge before four reduces the potential achieved by the middle class child, psychologists from the cognitive school insist that poor learning environments of culturally deprived children reduces them to failure in school and later failure as adults. Experts who share this opinion suggest that intellectual training be administered shortly after the child is born. Corrective work is suggested for children who have reached the ages of four and five.<sup>149</sup>

Durkin<sup>150</sup> suggested that any attempted improvement of the kindergarten curriculum must be guided by consideration of the problem in its broadest context. The intellectual capabilities of the very young must be examined and provision must be made to assist the preschool child through instruction which can help him

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<sup>148</sup>Rambush, op. cit., pp. 6-7, 57.

<sup>149</sup>Maya Pines, "A Pressure Cooker for Four-Year-Old Minds," Harpers (January, 1967), p. 55.

<sup>150</sup>Dolores Durkin, Children Who Read Early: Two Longitudinal Studies (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), p. 131.

realize his potential. Durkin stressed the fact that values which accompany early instruction and the demand for earlier training cannot be neglected.

Readiness. Early reading debates have frequently explored the importance of the visual maturity of the preschool child. Hillerich<sup>151</sup> contended that research has failed to establish evidence of the five-year-old's inability to read because of immature vision. Accommodation skills characteristic of young eyes permit reading even for those children who suffer poor vision. Shaw<sup>152</sup> has stated that the normal child's eyes are sufficiently mature at one year to permit reading. The visual acuity of the average kindergarten child has been developed to a point which allows the child to easily tolerate reading activities.

Most authorities have not contested the necessity of providing concrete learning situations to assist in readiness development, but demands that these experiences must consume the entire kindergarten year have been rejected by educators who recognize the changes which have taken place in the child's world. The experiences provided by the home environment of many children today has been noted by Bacci<sup>153</sup> to suggest that readiness requirements have been completed by some children before they enter kindergarten.

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<sup>151</sup>Robert L. Hillerich, "An Interpretation of Research in Reading Readiness," Elementary English, XLIII (April, 1966), pp. 359-364.

<sup>152</sup>Jules H. Shaw, "Vision and Seeing Skills of Preschool," Reading Teacher (October 1964), pp. 33-36.

<sup>153</sup>William Bacci, "Children Can Read in Kindergarten," School Management LI (May, 1961), p. 120.

Hillerich<sup>154</sup> insisted that the obvious abilities of the kindergarten child are ignored by those who protest attempts to offer early reading instruction. The child has spoken his native language for several years when he arrives in kindergarten. He has been able to understand it even longer. Reading does not require that a child master a language which is foreign; sounds, words, and sentences are ones which are familiar even though they are presented in a new form.

Critics of early reading programs have firmly maintained that reading instruction in the kindergarten will produce strains, tensions, and failures which will cause severe emotional damage. Pincus<sup>155</sup> refused to accept the theory that one factor can be the sole cause of emotional strain. Tensions which result in impaired mental and emotional health are complex and varied. One single factor cannot be isolated and blamed for the development of poor emotional adjustment. Pincus protested that attitude which has propagated the idea that early reading instruction "ranks with feeding and toilet training as a major psychological determinant of behavior."<sup>156</sup>

It has been suggested that negative behavior and undesirable attitudes are provoked by the harmful effects of experiencing severe

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<sup>154</sup>Hillerich, op. cit., p. 571.

<sup>155</sup>Morris Pincus and Frances Morgenstern, "Should Children Be Taught to Read Earlier?" Reading Teacher (October, 1964), pp. 37-42.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

difficulty when premature attempts are made to learn to read. Pincus<sup>157</sup> contended that warnings of this type should be dismissed because this type of danger is always present when an important skill is taught.

The physical restraints imposed by seditary activities which accompany formal reading instruction are cited by critics of early reading programs who believe that these activities require too much concentration and listening for the young child. The five-year-old needs activities which will assist in the development of his large muscles. Physical activities which will provide opportunities for required development are neglected when time is used for passive, inactive types of instruction. Pincus<sup>158</sup> refuted this argument by comparing the requirements placed on the child during story time with the demands imposed by reading instruction. During story time the child is not physically active; attention must be maintained; concentration is demanded. Reading instruction places similar requirements on the young child. The values of story time are not questioned; critics do not suggest that reading to children be discontinued because of the lack of physical exertion demanded. Pincus explained that the basic question involved is not determination of whether active or passive activities should be used exclusively in the kindergarten. Both types of experiences have a

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<sup>157</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-42.

<sup>158</sup>Pincus, loc. cit.

decided place in any kindergarten program if balance is maintained in selection of each. The issue which demands attention concerns the type of passive activities which should be used in the kindergarten. Deliberations which explore this issue should recognize that reading instruction would involve a small fraction of the total time of each kindergarten session.

Although some experts are willing to admit that it is possible to teach the preschool child how to read, many authorities hesitate to agree that this type of instruction should be planned. Comparison is frequently made between the toddler's acquisition of skills which result in the ability to walk and the child's progress in development of abilities required for reading achievement. Comparison of these two aspects of growth is made on the basis of faulty logic.<sup>159</sup> Pincus explained the difference which exists between the two forms of development by stating that the child will walk as a result of the internal growth process which is virtually impossible to halt. Learning to read requires instruction in most cases. The illiterates found in our society attest to the need for planned instruction to insure the achievement of reading skill.

Pincus<sup>160</sup> noted that a wide range of difference in the rate of development is evident and normal for all kinds of development. To state that it is natural for a child to teach himself how to walk earlier than the projected norm but unnatural for a child to be

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<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid.

taught to read sooner than average is unreasonable. It should be remembered that all walking is self-paced; reading, however, almost always requires instruction.

Failure to study the problem with realistic objectivity has encouraged opponents of early reading instruction to cling to outdated practices. Opinions based on personal observations rather than scientific probings were not accepted by McGee and McClintic<sup>161</sup> as valid substantiation for objections voiced against early reading instruction. The emotional harm which may accompany early reading instructions is presented in terms of "wet pants."<sup>162</sup> Protests usually revolve around a sentimental appeal to allow the child a free, unrestricted, happy period in which he can capture and savor the joys which are believed to accompany natural childhood.

Related factors. Attempts to discover and analyze behavior patterns, attitudes, home environments, and developmental aspects which can be considered characteristic of the early reader have revealed factors which suggest important implications for curriculum revision.

Durkin's<sup>163</sup> study revealed the importance of the child's attitude toward learning how to read. The ability to successfully

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<sup>161</sup>Robert J. McGee and Jean M. McClintic, "Early Instruction in Readiness: Who Speaks for the Children?" Reading Teacher, XX (November, 1966), p. 121.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid.

<sup>163</sup>Dolores Durkin, "Early Readers-Reflections After Six Years of Research," Reading Teacher (October, 1964), pp. 3-7.

master beginning reading skills is highly dependent upon the attitude the child brings to the instructional situation. Reading instruction is valued by children who (1) associate desired independence with the ability to read; (2) equate maturity with reading skill; and (3) believe that learning to read will result in social prestige.

Early readers were labeled "book hungry"<sup>164</sup> by Sutton who found that these children used every opportunity to explore the contents of available reading materials. The relationship which exists between various language arts areas was emphasized by Sutton's<sup>165</sup> discovery that early readers showed an early, continuous interest not only in reading, but also in skills involving writing and spelling.

Sutton stated that parental attitude influenced the child's evaluation of reading achievement. If meager interest in reading activities was shown by adults in the home, favorable attitudes toward learning to read were not easily captured by the preschool child.<sup>166</sup>

Investigation of environmental determination of attitude prompted Sutton to report that the environmental conditions which affect the child's attitude toward reading skill mastery are often

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<sup>164</sup>Marjorie H. Sutton, "Readiness for Reading at Kindergarten Level," Reading Teacher (January, 1964), p. 237.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., pp. 234-9.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid.



neglected at the kindergarten level. Children soon realize that the kindergarten teacher believes school is a place in which play is of paramount importance. When reading activities are not encouraged in kindergarten, the child finds it difficult to sustain a positive attitude toward this type of achievement.<sup>167</sup>

A keen desire to read complimented by provision of an opportunity to learn required skills were dual factors noted by Austin.<sup>168</sup> Implications of factors involved suggest that attitudes and achievement would be improved if the kindergarten offered reading instruction to all pupils.

Early readers in Sutton's study<sup>169</sup> came from predominately white, Protestant homes. The cost of the families' houses ranged from \$5,000 to \$35,000. Early readers generally came from homes where the father was working on a relatively high economic scale; late starters were usually from homes where the father had manual tasks to perform.

In the first study made by Durkin<sup>170</sup> many of the early readers came from "blue-collar class" families. Several reasons were advanced to explain this situation: (1) There may have been more

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<sup>167</sup>Marjorie H. Sutton, "Attitudes of Young Children Toward Reading," Education, LXXXV (December, 1964), pp. 240-241.

<sup>168</sup>Mary C. Austin, "Reading in the Kindergarten," The Instructor (March, 1965), p. 57.

<sup>169</sup>Marjorie H. Sutton, "Readiness for Reading at Kindergarten Level," Reading Teacher (January, 1964), pp. 234-239.

<sup>170</sup>Dolores Durkin, Children Who Read Early: Two Longitudinal Studies (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), p. 46.

"blue-collar class" families living in the school district. No statistics were available to ascertain the validity of this assumption. (2) The Warner's "Index of Social Class Scale" was used to classify socio-economic stratifications and this scale underestimates groups which are not white. (3) During the time of the first study, schools advised parents to let the teachers instruct the children in beginning reading skills. Higher class families were in closer contact with schools and knew school policies. The result was that the higher classes refused to help young children read; lower economic classes, unaware of school demands, offered help when the child requested it.

Durkin's<sup>171</sup> second study discovered more early readers who came from families in which the parents were college graduates. School attitudes toward help given at home had changed between Durkin's first and second studies, and many higher socio-economic families were offering help with reading skills at home when the second study was made.

Investigations revealed that help given at home was a major contributing factor in the child's early reading success. Sutton<sup>172</sup> sent a questionnaire to parents of early and late readers. Results revealed that eighty-two per cent of the early readers had asked questions about printed and oral words; sixty-two per cent of late

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<sup>171</sup>Ibid., pp. 93, 94, 95.

<sup>172</sup>Sutton, loc. cit.

readers had shown this tendency. Additional questions revealed that while fifty-two per cent of the early readers had received help from older brothers or sisters only thirty-five of the non-readers had been given this type of help. Sutton found that readers had been read to at an earlier age than non-readers, and slightly more readers had enjoyed this advantage.

Reasons given for provision of help in the home were listed by Durkin.<sup>173</sup> Some of the children were given help intentionally because the child was persistent in his eagerness to learn, and because parents felt that first grade would be easier for the child. The majority of cases reported that help was not given purposefully, but because the child was extremely curious about printed words and letters.

Plessas and Oakes<sup>174</sup> reported that many of the children in their study had been helped at home. Pre-primers, phonics, flash cards were used for this family-type instruction. It was concluded that reading skills had been developed as a result of help given and not merely through an accident of change.

Characteristics of early readers. Personal characteristics commonly found among children who learned to read before they entered school have been listed by Sutton. Reported evidence suggested that

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<sup>173</sup>Durkin, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>174</sup>Gus P. Plessas and Clifton R. Oakes, "Prereading Experiences of Selected Early Readers," Reading Teacher (January, 1964), pp. 241-245.

early readers were not "happy-go-lucky"<sup>175</sup> individuals but were, rather, conscientious children who were able to use mature powers of concentration.

Durkin<sup>176</sup> reported early readers were described by parents and teachers as children who showed exaggerated curiosity for the world in which they live. They developed traits which permitted early self-reliance. All of the early readers studied by Durkin showed marked signs of persistence.

Differences between the sexes are not as great as the differences found among individuals of the same sex, but recent attention has focused on readiness problems which seem to affect the progress achieved by young boys. Plessas and Oakes<sup>177</sup> compared the ability of both sexes to use verbal skills and found that girls use words in sentences earlier than most boys. Plessas reported more girls were early readers.

In Sutton's<sup>178</sup> study of early readers, fifty-five per cent were girls. Sutton tested the reading achievement of early readers at the end of first grade and found that eight of the girls who read early achieved a higher level of reading than was achieved by the highest boy in the study.

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<sup>175</sup>Sutton, op. cit., p.237.

<sup>176</sup>Durkin, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>177</sup>Plessas, loc. cit.

<sup>178</sup>Sutton, op. cit., p. 234-239.

An investigation conducted by Plessas and Oakes<sup>179</sup> established a mean I. Q. of 128 for the group of early readers studied. On the basis of this report, Plessas and Oakes concluded that early readers have superior intellectual abilities.

Krebs<sup>180</sup> reported that examination of the characteristics which are usually found among groups of children who read early revealed the similarity between these traits and traits which indicate that a child is ready for reading instruction. Among the traits which were found to be associated with both early reading skills and readiness abilities was an intelligence which was above average.

Sheldon<sup>181</sup> stated that children who read before kindergarten were exceptional children with mental abilities which surpass those of the average child. Sheldon suggested that there is usually one in every kindergarten who is able to associate printed forms with their verbal counterpart. This single student is the cause of considerable frustration and despair in the classroom and in the home. Terman's<sup>182</sup> study of the gifted revealed that forty-five per cent of the bright children studied read before they were five.

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<sup>179</sup>Plessas, loc. cit.

<sup>180</sup>R. E. and M. C. Krebs, "Reading Can Be Taught to Preschool Children," Parents, XLI (April, 1966), pp. 54-55.

<sup>181</sup>William D. Sheldon, "Teaching the Very Young to Read," Reading Teacher, XVI (December, 1962), pp. 163-9.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

Terman stated that it is to be expected that the very bright will read earlier than average children. It was also stated that early reading instruction should be offered only to above average pupils.

Factors which influence early reading success are not all measured through administration of intelligence or reading readiness tests. For example, Durkin's<sup>183</sup> first study reported early readers displayed better memories; their ability to concentrate appeared to be higher than most of the late starters. Tests given during the second study provided an opportunity to check attitudes toward tasks, approaches used for solutions to problems, and the development of memory skills. These tests indicated that early and delayed readers were very similar in the development of traits tested. Intellectual traits, imagination, original thinking, and flexibility of thought were also found to be about the same for both types of readers.

Advantages which result. Recent investigations, which have been made to discover the effect of early reading instruction, have strengthened the belief that the young child should be given reading instruction when he is ready.

Austin<sup>184</sup> established evidence to show that the majority of above average, early readers made higher reading achievement scores

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<sup>183</sup>Durkin, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>184</sup>Mary C. Austin, "Reading in the Kindergarten," The Instructor (March, 1965), p. 57.

after only five years of formal instruction than late starters who had the same mental capacity were able to achieve after six years of classroom instruction.

Durkin's<sup>185</sup> first study tested reading achievement as pupils progressed through kindergarten and first grade. The reading level achieved by children who learned to read at three was significantly higher at the end of grade one than any other group tested.

Brzeinski<sup>186</sup> stated that the introduction of beginning reading skills in the kindergarten favorably affected the achievement made by pupils in the Denver Project.

Reading achievement was higher in Durkin's<sup>187</sup> second study than it has been in the first investigation made in California. Double-promotion resulted in higher reading achievement, especially for the boys. The achievement of early readers was significantly higher, at the .05 level, than the achievement reported for the late starters. This gain was maintained for the three-year period of the study. Eight of the early readers were double-promoted. None of the late starters were accelerated.

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<sup>185</sup> Dolores Durkin, "Children Who Learned to Read at Home," Elementary School Journal, LXII (October, 1961), pp. 15-18.

<sup>186</sup> Joseph E. Brzeinski, The Effectiveness of Teaching: Reading in Kindergarten (Colorado: Denver Public Schools, 1967), p. 6.

<sup>187</sup> Dolores Durkin, Children Who Read Early: Two Longitudinal Studies (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), pp. 81, 82, 83.

Sutton<sup>188</sup> reported that reading achievement tests produced scores which indicated that late readers were not beginning to achieve the levels attained by early starters. The gap appeared to increase as the children grew older.

Brzeinski<sup>189</sup> emphasized the importance of observation to detect signs of growth which indicate a desire and need to learn to read. If the child is ready and eager for instruction, denial of this demand could lead to feelings of "rejection and indifference and indecisiveness"<sup>190</sup> and subsequent emotional harm.

Brzeinski<sup>191</sup> stated that the retention of skills learned in the kindergarten depended to a large extent on the type of instruction the child receives in later grades.

The cause and effect relationship between reading and mental abilities has been discussed by Doman.<sup>192</sup> It is possible that the genius of some preschool readers may be more fully realized because the child learned to use the reading tool at an early age. Doman suggested that, although a high intelligence may cause the child to read early, it may be equally true that early reading causes the child's intellectual level to be raised.

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<sup>188</sup>Sutton, loc. cit.

<sup>189</sup>Brzeinski, loc. cit., p. 6.

<sup>190</sup>Dolores Durkin, "Kindergarten and Reading," Elementary English, XXXIX (March, 1962), p. 274.

<sup>191</sup>Brzeinski, loc. cit.

<sup>192</sup>Glenn Doman, et. al., "You Can Teach Your Baby to Read," Ladies' Home Journal, LXXX (May, 1965), p. 62.



Durkin<sup>193</sup> stated that slow learners benefited from extended time for repeated application and intensive instruction. An early start could allow the child who was below average to gain valuable additional time for skill mastery. Examination of test scores after one year of instruction indicated that the bright child gained more from early reading instruction. When scores for a three-year period were compared, slow learners seemed to gain more advantages from earlier instruction -- but the advantages enjoyed by the bright seem to be decreasing.

Closely associated with early reading is the "sheer joy"<sup>194</sup> which Durkin stated resulted from reading achievement, and which was apparent in the radiance which seemed to light the personality of the child who enjoyed this early skill mastery.

Brzeinski<sup>195</sup> and Appleton<sup>196</sup> have insisted that early readers developed great enthusiasm for reading. Voluntary reading seemed directly related to early skill instruction.

Brzeinski<sup>197</sup> reported that teaching reading in the kindergarten in the Denver Project resulted in greater achievement in other subject areas.

<sup>193</sup>Durkin, op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>194</sup>Durkin, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>195</sup>Brzeinski, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>196</sup>Edith Appleton, "Beginning with Enthusiasm," Education, XXCVI (February, 1966), p. 349.

<sup>197</sup>Brzeinski, loc. cit.

Newman<sup>198</sup> has emphatically stated that kindergartens can only be justified as part of the public school system if they offer reading instruction. Learning to read at an early age permits the child to develop the use of a tool which can be employed throughout life to gain knowledge and pleasure. Reading materials designed for the child under ten, offer information which is of interest to the young child. Grade level placement of reading skills delays the child's ability to read independently those books which would be of interest to him. Around the age of ten, the child has mastered independent skills, but new interests and activities begin to command his attention. The social requirements of belonging to peer groups becomes increasingly important; heterosexual understandings begin to assume a greater importance in the child's life; independence and symbols of developing maturity are sought. Areas which hold interest for most adolescences are not discussed in books which are available to teenagers because of the attitude of our society concerning what should be offered to the young adolescent for literary consumption. Society is, however, willing to offer stories to children below ten which deal with those things which are of interest to this younger group.

Professional guidance must be made available to those schools which already support reading programs in the kindergarten.

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<sup>198</sup>Robert E. Newman, "The Kindergarten Reading Controversy," Elementary English, XLIII (March, 1966), pp. 235-9.

An investigation made by Austin<sup>199</sup> revealed that twenty-eight percent of those schools which include a kindergarten, are currently teaching reading to some of the kindergarten children.

Durkin<sup>200</sup> questioned the merit of proposals which would result in wasteful use of the time and energy of mature five-year-olds. Children who are ready to read should not be forced to repeat experiences and activities which do not stimulate learning. An entire year in the kindergarten devoted to development of general readiness is time wasted for many of the five-year-olds of today.

#### Program Problems

Need for revision. The kindergarten program has not been changed significantly for almost one hundred years. Many kindergarten teachers have been frustrated by the demand that an outmoded instructional plan be used to satisfy the needs of the modern kindergarten child. Instructional practices in different kindergartens have been marked by a wide range of variations. The inconsistencies which exist have been described by Durkin.<sup>201</sup> Work which required the use of pencils and paper has been forbidden by many school systems because the kindergarten child has not considered to be ready for this type of formal instruction. In other

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<sup>199</sup>Helen M. Robinson, "Teaching Reading Today," Instructor (March, 1965), p. 56.

<sup>200</sup>Dolores Durkin, "Kindergarten and Reading," Elementary English, XXXIX (March, 1962), p. 274.

<sup>201</sup>Dolores Durkin, Children Who Read Early: Two Longitudinal Studies (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), pp. 138-139.

schools formal reading programs have been introduced in the kindergarten because of the high value reading achievement has been given by suburban inhabitants. Kindergarten teachers have been disturbed and perplexed because conflicting theories have made it difficult to determine how the young child should be taught.

Home interviews conducted during Durkin's<sup>202</sup> first study investigated the attitude of parents concerning the value of the early reader's kindergarten experience. Discussions suggested that parents were not enthusiastic. None felt that the kindergarten had offered to promote the child's early reading abilities. Half of the parents questioned kindergarten policies which dictated that reading skills be neglected.

Sheldon<sup>203</sup> has suggested that the characteristics of the five-year-old who comes to school today should guide the needed examination of the kindergarten and assist in the development of a new program. The impact of exposure to television, signs, and labels which has altered the interests and abilities of the modern child--should be investigated. The need to improve the kindergarten curriculum has been indicated by the fact that many teachers in the kindergarten have started to teach reading because reading

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<sup>202</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>203</sup>William D. Sheldon, "President's Report," Reading Teacher (January, 1962), p. 287.

readiness programs have been made obsolete by experiences provided by an enriched environment.

Through skillful blending of the best of the old and the most effective of the new, a new kindergarten may be designed which will assist in the present attempt to redefine the kindergarten in terms of the purpose to be assumed. Brzeinski<sup>204</sup> has suggested that the added values proposed for the kindergarten program should help retain the traditional features which have been considered beneficial, and also make it possible for the kindergarten to accommodate the requirements made by the changes in the world and the child of today.

Individual differences. The mental age in a typical kindergarten is reported by Sheldon<sup>205</sup> to range from 3.9 to 7.0. If reading is given to the above average students, others are required to waste time at their desks. Since only one child out of every fifty who enter kindergarten has already started to read, Sheldon has opposed alteration of a program which has been proven beneficial for the majority it has served. Because the traditional kindergarten program has always been flexible, unstructured, and informal, Sheldon concluded that provision for a formal reading program would be impossible. Only by neglecting the few who are

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<sup>204</sup>Joseph E. Brzeinski, et. al., "The Effectiveness of Teaching Reading in Kindergarten," (Colorado: Denver Public Schools, 1967), p. 9.

<sup>205</sup>Morris Pincus and Frances Morgenstern, "Should Children Be Taught to Read Earlier?" Reading Teacher (October, 1964), pp. 37-42.

ready to read, by allowing them to read independently, or by placement of these children in first grade -- either for reading instruction or for all of their school day -- could the early reading problem be solved by the kindergarten.

Many of the programs suggested for early reading instruction have been criticized by McCormick.<sup>206</sup> Several attempts have been reported successful because the problem of individualized instruction has been solved by teaching only one child through the combined efforts of several adults. This type of solution cannot be considered practical for the classroom situation. Additional studies have recommended that early readers be placed in the first grade. McCormick objected to this solution because the accelerated children would be behind their classmates in all areas except reading. Teaching reading in the kindergarten is considered too exacting for the average kindergarten teacher. The pressures of instruction which must be adopted to several age levels often results in frustration and insecurity for both the teacher and the child.

Programs which stress unhurried, exploratory types of learning situations and which use discussions and oral contributions as a basis for teaching and learning have been favored by many authorities because this type of instruction has made grouping

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<sup>206</sup>Nancy McCormick, "The Countdown on Beginning Reading," Reading Teacher, XX (November, 1966), pp. 116-119.

unnecessary. Grouping and division of the class into small units makes it extremely difficult to give each child the attention he requires. Gans<sup>207</sup> stated that reading instruction in the kindergarten ties the teacher to the reading group. Grouping for reading instruction makes it necessary to neglect pupils who lack readiness. Experiences must be planned and guided by the teacher during all of the kindergarten session because immature children do not independently develop abilities needed for reading progress.

The kindergarten curriculum should provide for all stages of learning. It should be open at each end and should offer stimulating, provocative opportunities to encourage all pupils to achieve to the best of their ability. The kindergarten has frequently been described as a place where children are encouraged to set their own pace because instruction starts where it finds the child. If problems caused by individual differences are left unsolved, approximately thirty per cent at the top of the kindergarten class will continue to be denied appropriate instruction. Pincus<sup>208</sup> has reminded experts that the problem of providing for different ability groups is not original in the kindergarten, but rather exists--and is provided for--at all levels. Rejection of opportunities to serve

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<sup>207</sup>Roma Gans, "They Must Talk Before They Read," Grade Teacher, LXXXIV (December, 1966), pp. 100-101.

<sup>208</sup>Morris Pincus and Frances Morgenstern, "Should Children Be Taught to Read Earlier?" Reading Teacher (October, 1964), pp. 37-42.

the needs, interests, and abilities of the above average student in an effort to provide fully for the below average child cannot be considered an acceptable solution for the problem of individual differences.

Graves<sup>209</sup> has described the system used in Joplin, Missouri to organize groups on the basis of academic achievement. Within the framework of the self-contained classroom, children have been placed in homogenous groups in which one teacher teaches reading to a reading level--rather than to a grade based on chronological age. The amount of time a child is required to spend at each level depends on his ability to master the skills taught at the particular level.

The Joplin Plan has made provision for beginning kindergarten children to learn sounds, listening skills, and visual discrimination of letters. As children mature, more concentrated instruction is offered. Tests and observations determine the formation of new groups during the second half of the year. When the child has completed the kindergarten level, phonics are introduced in a formal, structured instructional situation.

Van Wie<sup>210</sup> has reviewed the subject of individual differences in the kindergarten and has concluded that the only differences which are recognized at this level are those which relate to

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<sup>209</sup>William H. Graves, Jr., "A Blueprint for Reading," Elementary English, IXL (March, 1962), pp. 248-249.

<sup>210</sup>Ethel Van Wie and Donald M. Lammers, "Are We Being Fair to our Kindergarten?" The Elementary School Journal, LXII (April, 1962), pp. 348-51.



emotional or social variations. Experts have made adequate provision for individual assistance to help the young child develop necessary attributes of personal maturity. Learning to live in the group has been given adequate attention as the kindergarten program has been developed. The restricted view which has characterized goal determination for the kindergarten suggests that experts believe the young child has lived in a "social vacuum"<sup>211</sup> before he enters the kindergarten. Individual differences have not been recognized in the kindergarten if they were of the intellectual variety. Educational principles, which dictate that instruction at all levels should be built on the knowledge and skills which the pupil already has mastered, demand that attention be given to the intellectual differences which exist in every kindergarten.

Formal or informal. Statements which have insisted that reading must be taught in a formal, structured environment have been proven false by studies of children who have learned to read in classrooms which were characterized by an informal, relaxed atmosphere. Sutton<sup>212</sup> has reported conclusions of a study which found that reading instruction could be given to the very young, and that this type of instruction could be taught without pressure or force.

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<sup>211</sup>Ibid., p. 349.

<sup>212</sup>Marjorie Hunt Sutton, "First Grade Children Who Learned to Read in the Kindergarten," Reading Teacher (December, 1965), pp. 192-196.

Hillerich<sup>213</sup> has suggested that the difference which exists between various types of kindergarten programs is not related to the adoption of formal or informal instructional approaches. Differences involve the type of content which is stressed. The formal program stresses reading skill instruction; the informal program promotes general readiness for reading. When the content of the two types of programs has been analysed, it has been found that informal instruction, through experiences, produced more gain than the formal programs which relied on workbook exercises to emphasize picture study and gross discrimination skills. The selection of experiences produced more interest and enthusiasm than was obtained from use of traditional readiness workbooks, but neither of these two types of programs developed fundamental skills. However, when context clues and association of sounds and letters were taught, the formal approach yielded better results than the experience-centered program. Use of a workbook to teach specific pre-reading skills was found more effective than the adoption of unstructured lessons.

Materials. Values to be gained from the use of workbooks have been questioned by Durkin<sup>214</sup> and Hillman.<sup>215</sup> Work required by readiness workbooks fails to encourage independent thinking.

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<sup>213</sup>Robert L. Hillerich, "An Interpretation of Research in Reading Readiness," Elementary English, XLIII (April, 1966), pp. 359-364.

<sup>214</sup>Dolores Durkin, "Early Readers-Reflections After Six Years of Research," Reading Teacher (October, 1964), pp. 3-7.

<sup>215</sup>Rosemary Hillman, "In Defense of the Five-Year-Old," Saturday Review, XLVI (November 16, 1963), pp. 76.

Directed by the teacher, demanding passive attention, requiring only that the child color, look at pictures, or draw matching lines--many workbooks have failed to challenge, stimulate or provoke mental growth.

Hillerich<sup>216</sup> has reported that workbooks can be effective instruments of instruction. Groups of children who used a readiness workbook scored higher on reading readiness tests than did groups which did not use the workbook exercises. Retention was tested at the beginning of first grade, and it was found that only three points had been lost by the workbook group. First grade teachers reported that (1) the children who had been given workbook instruction in kindergarten were better able to adjust to the demands of the first grade; (2) grouping for skill instruction was facilitated; (3) the workbook group used the library to greater advantage; (4) less difficulty with speech was found among those who had received a more formal type of readiness instruction in the kindergarten.

Schoeploester<sup>217</sup> has reported that a formal program with workbooks developed readiness skills for below-average ability groups better than did programs which were informal and which did not use workbooks. Many experts have advised against the implementation of structured, sequential programs because it is believed

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<sup>216</sup>Hillerich, op. cit.

<sup>217</sup>Hugh Schoeploester, et. al., "The Teaching of Pre-reading Skills in Kindergarten," Reading Teacher (February, 1966), pp. 352-357.

that the children suffer from the inability to accomplish required tasks. Emotional harm and negative attitudes toward later reading instruction are dangers associated with formal programs of reading in the kindergarten. In the study reported by Schoeploester, none of the disadvantages feared were realized.

Materials used beneficially by children who learned to read early have been listed by Durkin<sup>218</sup> to suggest tools which could promote beginning reading instruction in the kindergarten. Chalkboards were used by all of the early readers in Durkin's study. Pencils and paper provided opportunity for the child to explore and satisfy his urgent desire to learn how to write. Alphabet books were available in the homes of early readers; children who read before they entered kindergarten had been read to at an early age.

In the Whitby School, children have learned how to read and compute through the use of materials which can be handled and manipulated. Letters and words are made familiar through a sensory approach. The child is given an opportunity to see and to feel the shape and distinguishing characteristics of the symbols studied.<sup>219</sup>

The need for the preparation of materials designed to serve the needs and requirements of the very young child has been stated by many authorities. Research should attempt to discover the kinds of materials which will promote the most effective learning for the young child.

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<sup>218</sup>Durkin, op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>219</sup>Nancy McCormick Rambush, Learning How to Learn (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1962), p. 7.

Content and methods. Durkin<sup>220</sup> has suggested that activities which are already in use in the kindergarten can serve as a core around which additional instruction can be developed. Effective use of such activities demands careful organization and thoughtful implimentation. Recommended for use are procedures such as (1) attendance checks for learning to read names; (2) learning sequence steps through preparation of pudding, etc.; (3) relating oral and printed symbols through dictation of class and individual stories. The content and methods employed must be varied to serve the variety of interests and abilities which exist in the classroom. Many of the activities should lead toward the informal development of reading skills.

A study which will be made by Durkin<sup>221</sup> in the near future will attempt to develop a language arts program which will serve the needs of four- and five-year-olds. Opportunities to use regular pencils, blackboards, and other writing tools will be provided as an important part of the program. Spelling will be emphasized; sounds will be taught and used especially for spelling instruction. Schedules of work which are based on the short attention span of the child will be replaced by recognition of "interest binges"<sup>222</sup> which will dictate the type of work selected

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<sup>220</sup>Dolores Durkin, "They Should Have the Opportunity," N. E. A. Journal (November, 1963), pp. 23-24.

<sup>221</sup>Dolores Durkin, Children Who Read Early: Two Longitudinal Studies (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), p. 58.

<sup>222</sup>Durkin, op. cit., p. 137.

and the time allotted to the work period. Attempts to develop an interest in learning to read will be made through inclusion of many periods in which the teacher reads to the class, through discussions of television weather reports, quiz programs, and commercials. Words which the child is exposed to by his immediate environment will be used for instruction; vocabularies will be studied to determine the words which have particular appeal to the different sexes. Durkin has warned that every attempt must be made to guard against the possibility that the kindergarten be changed to become "a good imitation of a poor first grade program."<sup>223</sup>

Hildreth<sup>224</sup> has found that reading skills have been given an added emphasis when writing and reading are taught together. Schools in Europe have adopted methods which teach these two skills together, but American educational practices have been slow to imitate this procedure.

Writing can serve as a link which connects individual parts with the whole. The look-say method and the phonic method can, in this way, be combined as the child is taught to recognize the letters which constitute the parts and then to assemble their forms into patterns which indicate the whole word.

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<sup>223</sup>Durkin, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>224</sup>Gertrude Hildreth, "Early Writing as an Aid to Reading," XL (January, 1963), pp. 15-20.

The introduction of structured reading instruction to solve the problem of providing stimulating activities in the kindergarten has been opposed by Hoppock,<sup>225</sup> Hildreth,<sup>226</sup> and Heffernan.<sup>227</sup> Effort required to master pre-primer vocabulary consumes time which should be spent exploring understandings related to the natural, physical, and social work of the child. These authorities have recommended that the content of the kindergarten curriculum be improved by increasing valuable lessons rather than by discarding them in an effort to push the child through this stage of his development quickly. Moving faster through a program of studies does not mean that the instructional content has been improved. During this period of educational controversy, when attempts should be made to retain the gains which have been realized in the field of education, the quality and scope of the existing program should be guarded.

The quality of teachers selected for a revised kindergarten program is considered by Hillerich<sup>228</sup> to be of major importance. Kindergarten teachers have not been trained to teach reading to kindergarten children; many are not interested in this type of

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<sup>225</sup>Anne Hoppock, "What Are Kindergartens For?" Membership Service Bulletin-A (Washington, D. C., Association for Childhood Education International, 1960-61), pp. 4, 5, 6.

<sup>226</sup>Gertrude Hildreth, Reading for School Beginners (New York: World Book Company, 1950), pp. 248-271.

<sup>227</sup>Helen Heffernan, "What Is Good Education in Nursery School and Kindergarten?" Childhood Education, XLI [October, 1964], pp.25-28.

<sup>228</sup>Robert L. Hillerich, "An Interpretation of Research in Reading Readiness," Elementary English, XLIII (April, 1966), pp. 359-364.

instruction. Many kindergarten teachers have been taught how to teach rather than what to teach. Some have been hindered by the lack of effective materials to be used for this purpose. Kindergarten teachers have extensive knowledge of preschool and kindergarten children, but they usually are not familiar with the type of instruction which will follow the kindergarten year.

Implications for instruction planned by the school can be found in Durkin's assessment of important factors which promoted early reading attempts made by children who were part of Durkin's<sup>229</sup> first study. Early achievement of reading skills were influenced by the child's desire to express himself, the interest and help given by the child's family, and through exposure to an environment which encouraged early reading development.

Plessas<sup>230</sup> inspected the circumstances which were involved in early attempts to learn to read independently and found that many early readers gain some skill and interest from watching television. Most wrote their name before they entered first grade. All of the early readers had experienced a wide variety of activities which helped develop skills needed for beginning reading instruction.

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<sup>229</sup>Dolores Durkin, Children Who Read Early: Two Longitudinal Studies (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), p. 58.

<sup>230</sup>Gus P. Plessas and Clifton R. Oakes, "Prereading Experiences of Selected Early Readers," Reading Teacher (January, 1964), pp. 241-245.



Durkin<sup>231</sup> suggested that identification of those who are ready to learn to read can be made on the basis of evaluation of the child's reaction to opportunities which encourage early reading attempts. Durkin has emphasized the belief that the reading program used in the kindergarten should be enjoyable and challenging rather than boring or too difficult. No pre-determined goals should be established for either the teacher or the pupils.

Schoephoerster<sup>232</sup> has stated that a pre-reading program should teach those skills the child needs for beginning reading and for independence in word attack. Instruction which promoted a more general preparedness for later instruction is not favored by Schoephoerster. Teachers should determine which of the pupils are able to use skills of association, reasoning, making inferences, and using generalizations. Twenty minutes a day should be provided for the development of basic reading skills to groups of children who give evidence that they are ready to read. Books should be used for this instruction.

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<sup>231</sup>Dolores Durkin, "Kindergarten and Reading," Elementary English, XXXIX (March, 1962), pp. 274-6.

<sup>232</sup>Hugh Schoephoerster, et al, "The Teaching of Prereading Skills in Kindergarten," Reading Teacher (February, 1966), pp. 352-357.

## CHAPTER III

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary. External features in many kindergartens have been noticeably improved. Lavish provision of scientifically tested equipment, spacious rooms and playgrounds, and highly qualified professional personnel afford the kindergarten of the 1960's a modernistic appearance.

Internal factors characteristic of many kindergartens, however, suggest stubborn resistance to any major attempt to alter the traditional kindergarten program. The goals, content, and methods used, have persisted without major alteration for almost one hundred years.

Inherent weaknesses in the type of instruction offered in typical American kindergartens today can be partially explained by an examination of pertinent historical influences.

The Progressive Movement dominated the educational scene when the kindergarten was received into the American public school system. Broad, intangible goals served as an outline for curriculum development; experiences in living were used to replace formal content. Emphasis, materials, activities, and practices reflected concern for the child's social, emotional, and physical growth and development.

The importance of early intellectual training was not recognized during this period because accepted theories of learning stressed the influence of heredity. Intellectual achievements in

the American kindergarten were to be accomplished by the child when he was interested, as he experienced a need to learn, and through personal selection of activities and materials.

Many reasons have been suggested to explain the changes which were made in the early American kindergarten. Findings made by research made it necessary to stress some activities and to reject others. If research could dictate the need for revision of the early kindergarten program, it would seem plausible to suggest that new scientific discoveries should guide the development of a kindergarten program which could be used to meet the needs of the present.

Differences found between the raw, untutored, pioneer, American society and the cultured, tradition-bound, German society have also been cited as influential factors which prompted alteration of the early kindergarten curriculum. The demands of American society today are not the demands of one hundred years ago. The purposes served by a program created a century ago need to be re-evaluated in the light of changing conditions.

Since attitudes have been encouraged which tend to remove the kindergarten from the important considerations of the American educational system, the kindergarten has adopted its own special set of objectives. These objectives do not always relate to future academic goals. They stress, rather, the development of the child as he exists today and tend to ignore future requirements. Justifications for this practice are many, but until kindergarten

instruction is planned to articulate with the goals established for the rest of the school, kindergarten programs will not be given their rightful recognition.

Goals which concern the emotional and social development of the child have been traditionally elevated to a position of extreme importance in the kindergarten. Certainly, the young child must learn skills associated with successful adjustment to group life. Admittedly, kindergarten instruction offers many opportunities to help the child control and channel emotional needs. Development of personality, emotional maturity, and social skills should be a part of the kindergarten teacher's concern.

However, to reserve a year of the child's life for development of traits which are virtually impossible to teach, and which do not permit evaluation seems illogical and unsound. Instruction designed to assist development in these areas should be used in conjunction with other types of training.

The kindergarten program, when based on child-centered theories which encourage growth through exposure to many varied experiences, rejects responsibility for teaching specific content or skill mastery. Interest and need determine individual intellectual development. Practical, sequential, structured understandings are replaced by development of broad, general, unrelated funds of information which cut across subject lines.

Intellectual differences of pupils have not received attention in the traditional kindergarten program. Although, theoretically, each child develops at his own rate and in accord

with his own capacity to learn, grouping and individualized instruction have not been provided at this level. Large group instruction has been the rule, and understandings generally revolve around the level of development which is characteristic of the average or below average child. Examination of the results of kindergarten instruction should be made to determine the benefits offered to the child who brings superior intellect to the kindergarten classroom. If it is found that activities and experiences do not encourage intellectual growth and development for all pupils, plans must be made which permit this type of progress.

Even though selection of objectives can be justified in terms of educational principles, actual realization of proposed objectives should be tested empirically. If the results of a program fail to achieve goals which determined the design of the curriculum, the inherent worth of the objectives is negated by failure to achieve that which was intended. The purpose of the kindergarten should be examined in the light of current needs and with regard to purposes proposed for other areas of instruction. The actual achievement of the kindergarten child should be used to assess the exact worth of the year of instruction offered in the kindergarten.

Frequent evaluation of any type of instructional program is necessary. Realistic, objective determination of goals which are consistent with current conditions is needed in the kindergarten. Tenacious clinging to a program made obsolete by the ever-changing nature of society results in extended use of an antiquated program which is incapable of realizing the goals used to guide its implementation.

Instruction is effective only to the extent that it is based on an understanding of how the young child learns. Different areas of growth must be recognized and provision made to include the development of the whole child. Teachers must be aware of the fact that the child's ability to learn is in a constant state of flux. The differences which describe various children, as well as the differences which exist within each child, require skillful planning and expert management. It is assumed that if instruction can begin at the time when interest to learn a particular skill is at its height, effort can be minimal and the success of the instruction high.

Time allotted to play activities can be considered beneficial only when adult guidance and direction are provided. If play situations are used to emphasize and solidify understandings offered through other types of instruction, the opportunities to recreate through play are often extremely rewarding. Unrestrained, pointless play periods would seem to serve only limited purposes.

Accepted definitions of readiness involve the pupil's developmental stage. If successive steps toward maturity have been successfully mastered, and the child has accomplished those prerequisites which are believed necessary--the pupil will be "ready" for instruction because he will be able to bring to the instructional situation sufficient maturity to permit successful understanding.

Authorities who believe readiness is a result of intrinsic maturation insist that the development of the child cannot be influenced through instruction. Intrinsic development depends

on time. If instruction is to be profitable, teachers must be willing for internal functions to develop naturally and without external prodding. The whole child is involved in any learning situation, and the whole child must be allowed to mature to a point which will permit a stage of readiness sufficient for mastery of planned instruction.

A few children in any classroom may mature at a faster rate than the majority. Teachers are cautioned that concern should not be felt if these children are forced to wait for formal instruction. It is believed that readiness is not a perishable commodity which will waste away if not captured at the precise moment of its manifestation.

The influence exerted by environmental factors has been given increased attention recently. Studies have been reported which indicate that early experiences have a tremendous impact on the readiness the child brings to the formal learning situation. Patterns of learning are molded by the experiential background of the preschool child. Later academic accomplishments are directly dependent upon intellectual development which is accomplished between the ages of three to six.

It has been repeatedly suggested that instructional failures rather than intrinsic maturation processes should be blamed for a child's lack of readiness. The importance of environmental factors has been elevated as a result of recent investigations which have found that readiness is a product mainly of early environmental influences.

The advanced nature of the kindergarten child in the mid-sixties supports the contention that readiness is more the product of environment than of heredity. Technological advances, cultural advantages, improved communication, travel, and a higher standard of living have produced a generation of five-year-olds who bring to the kindergarten a new type of readiness for more advanced instruction. The informal, experiential program of the traditional kindergarten has been usurped and used in the child's behalf long before the kindergarten is invaded. The benefits and usefulness of the unstructured kindergarten session have been served, and the child is ready for the next step in his academic pursuits. Comparisons which have been made between children of this and previous generations support the belief that today's child has greater language proficiency, more extensive funds of knowledge, more advanced social skills, and greater interest in learning. Observations of pre-school children from culturally deprived environments further illustrates the dramatic effect which the richness of the environments enjoyed by children from affluent homes has provoked. It seems incongruous that some authorities refuse to recognize the accelerated growth made possible by environmental changes. Blind adherence to outdated theories is evidenced by reports which state that, although today's children seem more advanced, they are really the same because their potential is unaltered. Regardless of the amount of potential a person possesses, if that potential is not realized--it can exert little effect on the individual's ultimate achievements.



Recent research indicates a growing recognition of the values realized through kindergarten readiness programs. Most kindergarten teachers include readiness training as an integral part of the kindergarten curriculum. The goals established to determine the content of kindergarten readiness instruction illustrate the continuing conflicts which besiege attempts made to offer the young child a firm foundation upon which later achievement can be built.

Adoption of goals which stress the importance of general skills of readiness indicates the desirability of using informal, unstructured, experiential learning situations. Development of the whole child is attempted through provision of opportunities which encourage the child to grow in abilities related to (1) visual and auditory discrimination; (2) development of large and small muscles; (3) familiarity with books; (4) development of an interest in the content of printed materials. Whole class instruction is favored; understandings are stressed which can be mastered by all ability levels. The ability to work in a group, becoming acquainted with the school situation, control of immature emotional behavior, and acceptance of general standards of work habits are outcomes stressed by programs of this type. No attempt is made to encourage actual reading, but minds are prepared to receive instruction which will come later.

A different type of program is planned by experts who believe readiness for reading should be developed by teaching specific skills

which relate directly to the reading process. Studies have been cited which indicate the desirability of teaching letter-shapes and letter-sounds to develop crucial skills of perception.

Devoting a full school year to the development of undefined readiness appears to be of questionable value. A sensible resolution to the problem might be to devote half of the kindergarten year to general readiness development. The last half of the year could be used for small-group and individualized instruction related to mastery of specific skills associated with the reading act.

The issues at stake in the kindergarten reading controversy frequently elude comprehensive translation. Protests made against plans to include reading instruction in kindergarten programs have frequently been based on emotional, subjective evaluations. Formerly accepted goals, established methods and practices, familiar routines and schedules are defended with considerable vigor but supported by few facts. Scientific findings, when used, are frequently reports which were concluded twenty to thirty years ago. Facts which are employed have been, in many cases, proven false by current knowledge and the altered conditions of our modern society. When facts prove insufficient, the debate's course is pointed toward revelation of possible harm which might result in the future if early reading is attempted in the kindergarten. Although the validity of these beliefs cannot be accurately weighed at present, some longitudinal studies have recently been completed which suggest

that the projected dangers are figments of overworked imaginations and have no actual basis in fact.

Attacks made against proposals to plan early reading instruction in the kindergarten usually include sentimental reminders to recall the popular belief that childhood should be a time of sheer enjoyment, free from adult demands and pressures. The traditional kindergarten depicted in glowing terms as a place in which the burdens of maturity are made lighter and the conflicts of life are painlessly resolved. It is assumed that one last year of unrestricted self-indulgence will magically increase the child's ability to successfully meet the challenges he will face when he is inevitably plunged into the uncompromising formal situation characteristic of most first grades.

Equally illogical are statements which insist that all children must be taught how to read through formal kindergarten reading programs. The homage paid by middle class American families to educational achievement is reflected in the demand that reading must be learned as soon as possible by all children regardless of individual differences and in spite of the child's ability to learn. Sound educational principles are brushed aside in the feverish desire to pour more knowledge into more children at the earliest possible opportunity.

An objective, unemotional examination of the kindergarten reading controversy reveals the desperate need for an immediate termination of biased, uncompromising attitudes. Lines which have

been drawn to separate authorities to a position on one side or another must be eradicated. The deafening roar of the conflict must be stifled if the issues are to be explored and resolved in an intelligent fashion.

The kindergarten reading controversy began to assume increased dimensions in the years immediately following the news of the first Russian Sputnik. Recognition of the vast amount of knowledge to be learned and anxiety concerning the need to "catch up" resulted in demands that intellectual instruction be increased, accelerated, and pushed down even into the kindergarten.

The American public has given education greater attention in the past ten or twenty years. More parents have enjoyed the benefits of extensive educational opportunities, and these parents tend to instill within their children attitudes which recognize the value of instruction. Technological advances have increased the demand for more skilled labor. Suburban families, influenced by the pressures of a higher standard of living, regard education as an important symbol of advanced status.

Reading serves a dual function. It is a subject to be learned, and it is also a tool to be used in learning. Early mastery of this tool subject is stressed because it is stated that our culture demands that its citizens learn as much as possible as soon as possible.

Recently reported conclusions from studies which have investigated early reading attempts have added weight to the

pressures which have provoked the early reading controversy. Publication of findings of these and other investigations has brought the early reading conflict into sharp focus.

Changes have been caused by the work accomplished by research which has made it possible for teachers to have at their disposal scientifically tested, improved educational methods.

Home environments of the preschool child offer enrichment activities, experiences, and materials. Parents are more concerned and better able to provide readiness situations which stimulate the child's mental acuity and motivate him toward academic accomplishments. The child grows in a sight-and-sound environment which is filled with letters and words.

Changes in society have produced an altered kindergarten child who emerges from the confines of the home atmosphere ready, willing, and quite able to successfully meet the challenges of a kindergarten beginning reading program.

Early reading instruction is not favored by educators who believe the traditional form and content of the kindergarten deserves respect and continued acceptance. Informal, unstructured, experiential situations allow the child the freedom he is thought to need to master his present level of development.

Excessive attention has been given to the importance of chronological age. Theories are advanced which state that if many children are not ready to read at six, most will be unable to read at five.

Kindergarten authorities are especially vociferous in their contentions that kindergarten programs are to be valued because instruction is offered which allows each child to select and absorb that for which he feels a personal need. This type of program, however, has not been used to provide for the needs of those children who enter the kindergarten with the desire to learn to read.

Critics of early reading programs have made alarming predictions concerning the dangers of impaired vision which may accompany early reading instruction. It has been reported that the number of young children who wear glasses is increasing every year. Early reading instruction is suggested as a prime contributing factor. It must be remembered, however, that many more children enjoy the advantages of early detection of visual deficiencies and are subsequently given glasses to correct these handicaps.

Arguments which discourage early reading instruction on the basis of general physical immaturity fail to recognize the possibility of providing for physical development, and also allowing some time for more inactive activities. The two are not mutually exclusive. Careful planning could provide for both needs without severe neglect of either.

Consideration should be given to reports which suggest that girls are able to achieve reading skills sooner than most boys. Explanations for this fact include reminders that girls are engaged in activities which require close vision and eye-hand coordination.

Boys, however, are more inclined to spend time in activities which require extensive use of large muscles. The implication seems to be that early use of eyes and small muscles assists in development and promotes increased interest in related tasks. Planned activities to increase these abilities might be more profitable than simply waiting for development to occur.

A fairly plausible argument against reading instruction in kindergarten is made when questions are raised concerning what portion of the existing kindergarten curriculum will be removed to make room for reading instruction. Kindergarten sessions are traditionally short, and the intrusion of a new type of activity will certainly necessitate removal of a sizeable segment of the existing program unless plans are made to lengthen the time of each session.

The outcomes of early reading instruction are viewed with disdain by educators who oppose this type of kindergarten revision. The attitudes which are produced by premature instruction are described as negative and unresponsive. It is believed that later instruction is often rejected by the child who has been forced to suffer through instruction for which he was unready. Behavior problems are traced to pressures produced by unsuccessful reading attempts.

Many references have been found in the literature which suggest that the neurotic behavior patterns observed in an increasing number of young children are rooted in attempts to force premature

reading instruction on unready minds. Although it is argued that pressures of instruction may provoke negative emotional reactions, it should be remembered that these pressures do not all stem from early reading demands. Presentation of instruction through an adjusted program could be accomplished without evidence of later harm.

Learning to read words which have no meaning for the child is the product, many authorities believe, of forced instruction which is not based on knowledge and concepts gained through direct contact with real experiences. Parrot-like imitation of distorted sounds to match incomplete visual discrimination of letter and word forms is rejected as a desirable method of initiating reading instruction. The artificial rewards and the dishonest methods and devices which usually accompany this type of early instruction do not attempt to develop abilities required if reading is to be achieved on its many levels of complexity. It is argued that instruction should be postponed until the child is able to bring meaning to and take meaning from printed pages encountered.

Consideration should be given to the various goals of reading instruction. If a skill is taught to beginning students, complex subtleties of that skill are reserved for later understanding. Initial instruction involves acquainting the pupil with the most basic aspects of the desired performance. The child must learn to use the symbols through which reading operates; sounds



which relate to various written forms must be distinguished and mastered. Only after the first basic steps have been mastered can reading begin to involve consideration of detailed, difficult, shaded depths of meaning. Arguments which protest early reading instruction frequently suggest that critics believe all of the various skills and understandings related to mature reading processes will be taught to the kindergarten child. In reality, suggested plans to teach reading to preschool children involve introduction only of the most basic, beginning steps related to reading achievement.

Critics of early reading instruction stress the belief that the young child is not able to retain the benefits obtained from premature instruction. However, the achievement scores of early readers reveal a widening of the gap which exists between early and late starters. Interest in reading is maintained and increased. Studies of voluntary reading activities reveal the sustained advantage experienced by children who master reading skills in the kindergarten. It has been reported that the effects of early instruction persist and are not lost as the child progresses.

It seems highly possible that planned intellectual content has been traditionally deleted from kindergarten programs partly because earlier experts were not aware of the young child's ability to learn if instruction was of a type which satisfied his needs and interests. Methods employed by first grade teachers

produced unsatisfactory results, and educators concluded that academic instruction for children below first grade was not feasible. Improved methods and a greater understanding of the true nature of the young child should be used to guide attempts to improve the intellectual content of kindergarten instruction. Skills and understandings should not be reserved until the child has attained the maturity required to profit from methods and activities used to instruct older pupils. Rather, methods and activities should be created which can be used to instruct the very young. It would seem that the kindergarten child brings the ability to learn to the instructional situation, but the instructional situation is unable to provide the type of experiences needed to develop these particular abilities.

Realistic appraisal of advances made by leading educational authorities demands that recognition be afforded the potential for learning possessed by the young, and the benefits attained through provision of instruction designed to achieve the realization of his potential.

The relationship which was formerly thought to exist between mental ability and reading achievement has been recently questioned. Personality traits characteristic of early readers have also been discovered among many late starters. If neither superior intellectual abilities nor aspects of personality can be considered responsible for the fact that some children learn to read before they enter school, additional causes must be explored. Investigations have been designed to study the actual reasons which prompt some young children to learn to read at an early age.

The effect of early instruction seems to be dependent upon two factors. The initial instruction must be carefully planned and must offer opportunities to learn specific skills directly related to reading processes. In addition, the instruction which follows initial introduction of reading skills must be of a type which will use and extend skills already learned. If a child is taught beginning reading in the kindergarten and subsequently is placed in a first grade which ignores the child's initial advantages, reading achievement may not be as pronounced and retentive powers may suffer. Instruction must provide for continuous, sequential progress. Teaching readiness in first grade to a child who has learned to read in kindergarten does not promote desired results.

Advantages to be gained from a reading program in the kindergarten include the possibility of providing sufficient time for mastery before achievement becomes mandatory. If beginning reading skills are offered before the child enters first grade, opportunities for repeated exposure and practice can be extended. Individual rates of development can be respected, and the child can select reading activities on the basis of interest and ability.

Early exposure to planned skill instruction will give the child a firm, broad base of experience. Development of mental skills at an early age is believed to assist in subsequent intellectual achievements.

If the child is taught to read before he is exposed to peer expressions of anti-intellectualism, reading habits can be

strengthened through a prolonged period of use. When peer approval becomes important, reading achievements will be firmly established, and the difficulties experienced by the beginning reader will be frustrations of the past.

Many educators have expressed concern because reading is being taught in many kindergartens today. Without professional assistance and adequate training, many kindergarten teachers are unable to offer comprehensive programs which will serve the needs of the young child. Recognition of the fact that with or without expert guidance many kindergarten teachers will teach reading to kindergarten pupils makes it imperative that educators resolve the current controversy, and devote time and energy to the development of programs which can effectively promote reading progress in the kindergarten.

Conclusions reported by investigators confirm the opinion that it is possible to teach kindergarten children beginning reading skills. The feasibility of this type of instruction is conditioned by the need for materials and methods appropriate for the age level involved.

It is possible and advisable to retain portions of the framework of the traditional kindergarten to provide a foundation upon which new program designs can be constructed. The existing flexibility, which is typical of most kindergarten programs, must continue to dominate the atmosphere of any learning situation prepared for young minds. Instruction should permit improvisations

to accommodate sudden surges of interest. Manipulation and exploration of materials and concepts should be encouraged by a relaxed atmosphere in which pressures to achieve are held at a minimum level. Content should be definite and goals must be established to direct and guide efforts made by teachers and pupils; rigid insistence that each child master all segments of the instructional program has no place in kindergarten classrooms.

Small children learn best through individualized instruction. The age of the kindergarten pupil, the length of time given to sessions, and the number of children enrolled make it difficult for the kindergarten teacher to establish small groups or to plan instruction for one pupil. It is necessary that these provisions be made if many children are to profit from early reading instruction. Solutions to problems which involve classroom organization have not yet been found. Progress in the development of reading programs for kindergarten instruction will not be made until these quandaries are resolved.

Formal methods of instruction have not proven satisfactory for use with the very young. Physical restrictions, imposition of rigid standards of behavior, and acceptance of teaching which is predominately verbal in nature do not serve the needs, interests, or abilities of the preschool child. Academic skills can be taught through more informal methods. Provision for physical activities which assist in developing understanding, exploration of real experiences, and the development of sensory perception through

which symbolic concepts can be promoted should be used--not merely to achieve unstructured readiness skills--but to accomplish early skill development related to beginning reading instruction.

Revision of the content of the kindergarten must be combined with an effort to revise materials used. Special equipment is necessary; scientifically tested aids and devices are needed. Workbooks, planned and explained by educational experts, can be an acceptable instrument of instruction if they are intelligently used.

Language arts should continue to serve as the core around which the kindergarten curriculum is constructed. Opportunities to learn and to practice related skills of communication should be provided. The relationship which exists between writing and reading should be explored.

The interests of the kindergarten child should serve to guide program development. Realistic evaluation of interests must be made; however, strict adherence to formerly acceptable assessment of the interest which motivated the young child are not applicable today. Many children are ready for beginning reading instruction and this experience should not be arbitrarily withheld on the basis of outmoded, artificial barriers.

One of the most important aspects of the needed revision concerns the training and selection of teachers for the kindergarten. The teacher stands as a vital link between the program and the pupil. Arguments which suggest that reading instruction

is not practicable in the kindergarten because of the caliber of teacher usually found at this level must be contested. If it is believed that reading can be taught to kindergarten pupils, teachers must be hired who are capable of administering this type of instruction.

Conclusions. On the basis of critical analysis of recent literature and as a result of limited empirical knowledge obtained during the past ten years, this writer has concluded that it is possible to teach beginning reading skills to many children who enroll in the kindergarten. Many problems are still unsolved; many facets of the situation are yet to be explored. However, work recently done by reputable experts in the field of early education supports the contention that early reading attempts can be successful and beneficial.

The benefits to be gained from a kindergarten reading program reveal the desirability of providing opportunities for the young to learn basic reading skills. Negative effects seem to disappear when appropriate methods, materials, and activities, are provided.

The time is ripe; the child is ready. The kindergarten must be revised and rejuvenated if it is to serve modern needs of a changing culture. Some kindergarten children should be offered an opportunity to achieve beginning reading skills through the creation of a special type of program which can effectively serve his interests, needs, and abilities.

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A REPORT ON THE FEASIBILITY AND DESIRABILITY  
OF TEACHING SOME CHILDREN TO READ IN THE  
KINDERGARTEN

by

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## ABSTRACT

Examination of pertinent literature, published during the first half of the 1960's, was attempted to investigate attitudes, opinions, and findings related to the early reading controversy. An effort has been made to compile (1) statements made by experts who favor the insertion of beginning reading activities in the kindergarten; and (2) arguments advanced by authorities who oppose the adoption of formal reading instruction for five-year-olds.

The problem was approached through an analysis of the influence of historical factors. Early objectives were compared with objectives which serve the kindergarten today. The adequacy of accepted objectives was presented through examination of reported values obtained from a year of kindergarten experience. Changes in the American culture, society, and the five-year-old child were explored and related to the problem of providing an adequate instructional program for the very young. Conflicting theories which pertain to readiness factors have been emphasized to show the basic area around which the conflicting protests revolve. The major considerations of the report have been presented in a digest of statements made by those who oppose and those who favor early reading instruction. Problems, dangers, disadvantages, and advantages comprise the nucleus around which the major portion of the problem has been constructed.

Findings of this report suggest that many children today should be offered an opportunity to learn beginning reading skills in the kindergarten. Modern cultural advantages which are found

in the home environment of many preschool children have produced a new state of readiness for formal instruction by the time some children are enrolled in kindergarten. Recent studies have established a respectable body of facts to show that damage to the child's emotional and physical development does not result from early reading instruction.

Advantages to be gained from a kindergarten reading program have been established by several longitudinal studies. An early introduction of beginning reading skills makes it possible for the child to move at his own rate through a personal selection of appropriate materials. Pressures to achieve are reduced because the learning requirements are not mandatory. Slow learners are benefitted through extension of time for practice and repetition of instruction. More able students are given an opportunity to learn when interest and need are greatest.

Reported conclusions from recent studies indicate that reading in the kindergarten is both possible and desirable. The key to successful instruction is provision of an opportunity to learn through planned instruction of skills which are directly related to the reading act. Subsequent achievement and retention of skills is possible if later instruction is planned to continue and promote early gains.

Revision of the traditional kindergarten must be accomplished before an effective reading program for this level can be developed. Reading programs in the kindergarten should not become reflections

of first grade instruction. Materials and methods should be devised which will serve the unique needs of the five-year-old child. Instruction should be flexible, free from pressures, and built upon the interests of the preschool child.