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DEVELOPMENTAL READING PROGRAMS FOR EARLY READERS

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

There is a possibility that some children, for generations, have entered school reading fluently. However, the concern for providing programs for early readers has only recently come into view. One reason for this concern may be that increased emphasis by psychologists on the role of the family in teaching reading has generated professional interest in early education. Perhaps recent emphasis on quality education for all may have resulted in an increase in the number of children who are able to read upon entrance to school. Increased interest in and support of programs for special or exceptional children has caused educators to become more aware of exceptional children.

In addition to these changes in the educational milieu, the number of early reading children may be increasing because of educational practices. More preschools emphasize prereading skills and materials for teaching reading in the home are readily available. Educational television also played a part in helping early readers. With these factors in mind it is likely that the number of early readers will continue to increase. As more and more demands are placed upon schools to produce competent students, it is essential that early readers be identified and given the opportunity to develop to their fullest.

In working with preschool and primary aged children, the writer recognized the need of support for programs for early readers. Many early readers go through reading readiness programs unidentified, or identified and neglected, because the schools or the teachers are not prepared to accommodate them. These teachers are sometimes torn between the idea that teaching reading before first grade is harmful and the idea that if the child is ready and eager to learn, teach him.

This report was prepared to share some ideas with those who are interested in helping early readers obtain a rewarding and interesting experience in reading upon entrance to school.

Statement of the Problem. The purpose of this study was to review literature that described developmental reading programs designed to provide success for children who had learned to read early, and to compare and contrast the developmental reading programs for early readers in the Shawnee Mission and Lawrence, Kansas, school districts. The writer believes that many early readers are not identified so that schools can make proper provisions for them, and that many who are identified follow the same program as non-early readers. This paper attempts to describe methods of identifying early readers and methods of meeting their needs. It also takes a close look at the programs of two school districts.

The Shawnee Mission program promises to identify early readers during prekindergarten screening or at the beginning of the kindergarten year by teacher observation and parent teacher conferences. The child is taken from where he is with the goals of maintaining his interest in reading and motivating him to develop reading skills. Individualized instruction with a wide range of varied reading and audio visual materials are available. The Lawrence program promises to identify early readers early in the school year by the use of standardized testing and teacher observation. It provides a broad-based oral language program which children can take as far as they are capable. Individual needs are met through the use of the language experience approach to reading, and a wide range of library books and audio visual aids.

Limitation of Study. Information on which this report is based was limited to what the writer could secure from libraries and bookstores by visiting with directors of reading programs in two school districts in Kansas

(Shawnee Mission and Lawrence), and observing in kindergarten classrooms in these districts.

The choice of districts was made because these districts had identified early readers and had incorporated them into their kindergarten programs. Both were willing to share their ideas with the writer. Although other school districts in Kansas have initiated developmental reading programs for early readers, an exhaustive collection of data was not attempted.

Information on the achievement of early readers in one program or another was not collected. Examination of the programs was undertaken more as a means of exploring alternative to meeting the needs of children than to evaluate the programs or the progress of children in them. This approach seemed warranted by the recent development of the programs for early readers.

Definition of Terms. In this report, the following terms are consistently used as indicated below.

Early Readers are children who learn to read before entering the first grade, including those who learn to read at home with the help of siblings, television or by other means, and those who learn to read by attending preschools.

Advanced Placement is placement of unusually able students in grades or subjects of a higher level to avoid repetition and fundamental drills.¹

Enrichment is the act or process of increasing the quality or quantity of the offering in a unit of instruction by the inclusion of pertinent illustrative and related materials with the basic subject matter or lesson to be taught.²

¹Bond, Guy L. and E. B. Wagner. Teaching the Child to Read. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1966, pp. 353-354.

²Good, Carter U. Dictionary of Education. New York: McGraw Hill, 1959, p. 151.

Special Grouping is the process of classifying pupils for instructional purposes applied to class groups, or interclass groups.³

Gifted Child is a child whose mental age is considerably higher than his chronological age as compared with children in the general population.⁴

Talented Child is one who is capable and able in a special field, or having natural aptitude capable of high functioning under training which does not necessarily imply a high degree of general intelligence.⁵

Creative Child is one who demonstrates superior ability in a special field and has many original ideas and a high degree of independence of mind.⁶

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The seventies having been declared the decade of the "right to read," the eyes of the nation are upon teachers of reading, reading materials, and reading results.⁷ Many programs are being funded by the federal government to encourage and enhance an earlier start in reading. However, interest in preschool reading is not new. Description of the earliest form of education in the United States indicated that beginning reading was once taught more often in a kitchen than in a classroom.⁸

Historical Overview. Home teaching was very common during the colonial period. It continued even after public schools were established. "Eventually,

³Ibid., p. 256. ⁴Ibid. ⁵Ibid.

⁶Witty, Paul A. "Reading for the Gifted and Creative Student." Newark: 1971 Documented in ERIC. ED 070 044 pp. 17, 24.

⁷Gunderson, B. V. "A Reading Program to Fit the Child." The Reading Research Quarterly, Summer, 1970, p. 565.

⁸Durkin, Delores. Teaching Them to Read. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1971, p. 49.

as educational opportunities became a heritage of all, rather than the privilege of a few, the job of teaching reading to large groups of children was transferred to the school."⁹ During the colonial period, reading books consisted of the Bible, other religious literature, and reading text books addressed to the parents and masters of apprentices.¹⁰

As time passed being in first grade and learning to read became very closely associated. Also developing was the idea that attempts to teach reading before the school years would not result in achievement.¹¹ Opponents of early reading argued that preschool reading would be injurious to the child's vision and emotional development. Parents were not trained to teach reading, they argued. Preschool reading achievement was viewed as a temporary gain that could lead to confusion and boredom once school instruction had begun.

Each of these arguments has been addressed by educational researchers. The belief that early reading is injurious to the child's vision is still common even though there is no research data supporting this belief, nor has it been expressed by medical experts. However, until research is productive of facts about the effects of early reading on vision, one should probably adopt a somewhat conservative position when questions about preschool reading are raised. The more current belief is that if a preschooler shows interest in written language he is probably visually ready for reading.¹²

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Smethurst, Wood. Teaching Young Children to Read at Home. New York: McGraw Hill, 1975, pp. 20-21.

¹¹Durkin, Delores. Teaching Them to Read. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1970, p. 49.

¹²Ibid., pp. 50-51.

Smethurst stated that emotional or psychological problems are possible, perhaps even likely, where parents use threats, punishments, stress or emotional pressure to force the child to learn to read.¹³ However, research has shown that children who read early as a result of interest shown in written language seem to do well without any traceable aftereffects of having learned to read early.

Parents are not trained to teach reading. Some opponents of early reading feel that only professionally trained teachers should teach reading and that most parents are not trained to teach reading. It is believed that parents could turn children off to reading, or cause them to hate it, by giving inappropriate reading instruction.¹⁴ Research has shown that some children from all socioeconomic levels do learn to read at home. Since ability to read does not just happen in some spontaneous fashion, it must be assumed that children who read before entering school learned this skill and so, in some sense, were "taught." Someone or something in early readers' preschool environments gave them the opportunity to learn to identify written words.¹⁵

In two longitudinal studies of early readers done by Durkin (1970) findings indicated that:

"Productive help comes from sources like television commercials or labels attached to illustrations found in picture dictionaries and alphabet books. The same research also showed that other very successful help can

¹³Smethurst, Wood. Teaching Young Children to Read at Home. New York: McGraw Hill, 1975, p. 39.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁵Durkin, Delores. Teaching Them to Read. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1970, p. 41.

come in the form of a parent's answers to a preschooler's questions about written words, or a sibling playing school at home with a younger brother or sister. The research also emphasized that the child's learning to read depends more on his interest than on the availability of opportunities for learning. If a child is sufficiently interested in reading, then teaching reading to him will simply be a response to his questions and requests for help."¹⁶

The argument that preschool reading achievement is only temporary and could lead to boredom or confusion once school instruction began is countered by two longitudinal studies showing that early readers maintain their advantages over non-early readers.¹⁷ These studies also showed that, getting a head start in reading leads to boredom or confusion as a result of the school's inability to make provisions necessary to accommodate early readers. Therefore, the problem is with the school and not the early readers.¹⁸

Thus, no evidence of physical ill effects such as impaired vision was found in any of the studies done on early readers. Emotional difficulty is occasionally reported in young children who were pushed hard by parents, tutors or preschool teachers, but children who learn to read early as a result of interest in written language had no emotional difficulty and often read better than non-early readers.¹⁹

¹⁶Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁷Durkin, Delores. Children Who Read Early, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1966, p. 133.

¹⁸Durkin, Delores. Teaching Them to Read. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1970, p. 50.

¹⁹Smethurst, Wood. Teaching Young Children to Read At Home. New York: McGraw Hill, 1975, pp. 51-52.

There exist documented cases of preschool aged children of all socio-economic levels who have been taught to read by nonprofessional teachers such as parents, siblings or other relatives.²⁰ Research has also indicated that an early start in reading leads to boredom or confusion only when schools fail to recognize and meet the needs of early readers. Therefore a head start in reading does not necessarily lead to boredom or confusion, but inappropriate reading instruction does. The problem of boredom or confusion lies with the schools and not the early readers.

Recommendations for Programs for Early Readers. There is strong indication that schools do not always provide comprehensive reading programs for early readers. Factors which may account for this deficiency in the schools are lack of teacher time, lack of appropriate materials, failure to identify early readers, and the lack of willingness on the part of the schools or teachers to provide the kind of instruction these children need.

Witty (1971) gave some needs of early readers that should be considered in planning or selecting a reading program for gifted and creative early readers. (Gifted and creative refer to individuals who have demonstrated superior ability as well as the potential for such performance.)

"One of the greatest needs of verbally gifted children involves provision of individually appropriate reading experiences from the beginning of his school entrance. He should be encouraged to read from varied reading sources that are individually suitable and appealing. In every class, provision should be made and guidance offered so that the child who knows

²⁰Durkin, Delores. "A Fifth-Year Report on the Achievement of Early Readers," The Elementary School Journal, November 1964, pp. 76-78.

how to read will continue to develop his reading abilities and will be able to apply them widely."²¹

It should be recognized that reading for enjoyment is a legitimate feature of a developmental reading program for early readers. Disadvantaged children need to be encouraged to develop and cultivate worthy interest patterns. The use of an interest inventory may yield significant clues.²²

Early readers should be allowed to make extensive use of children's literature. They should develop their interests in areas such as stamp and coin collection, specimens of many kinds, and other hands-on activities.²³

During the primary grades, routine basal reading instruction should be replaced by a balanced program adopted to individual differences and interests.²⁴ The interests of these children should be used to motivate non-early readers.

Corb (1977) made a list of similar recommendations for improvement of programs for early readers. Some of these recommendations are as follows:

1. Provide opportunities for reading experiences as an integrated part of the broader communication process that includes listening, speaking, and writing. A language experience approach is an example of such integration.
2. Use evaluation procedures that are developmentally appropriate for the children being assessed and that reflect the goals and objectives of the instructional program.
3. Respect the language the child brings to school, and use it as a base for language activities.

²¹Witty, Paul A., "Reading for the Gifted and the Creative Student." Newark; 1971. Documented in ERIC. ED 070 044. p. 14.

²²Ibid., p. 14. ²³Ibid., pp. 19-20.

²⁴Ibid., p. 18.

4. Plan flexibly in order to accommodate a variety of learning styles and ways of thinking.

5. Encourage developmentally appropriate language learning opportunities in the home.²⁵

Role of the Teacher in a Reading Program for Early Readers. In any educational program, the materials or the approach do not make or break the program; it is the teacher who makes the program effective. "It is the teacher who sets the environment which inspires or destroys self-confidence, encourages or suppresses interests, develops or neglects abilities, fosters or banishes creativity, stimulates or discourages critical thinking, and facilitates or frustrates achievement."²⁶

The role of the teacher of early readers is basically the same as for any good teacher. However, the teacher of early readers is faced with some special problems in dealing with individual differences in ability and interests of children. According to Witty:

"The teacher who guides the reading of gifted and creative children (early readers) will need to be informed about the development of children and youth and should be skilled in using child study techniques, such as the interest inventory. The teacher should also become thoroughly acquainted with literature for children and youth, and should work closely with parents and libraries in obtaining suitable and varied materials to satisfy the interests and meet the needs of these children. The teacher should read

²⁵Corb, Jeanne and Committee. "Reading and Pre First Grade," Educational Leadership: February 1977, p. 325.

²⁶Witty, Paul A. "Reading for the Gifted and Creative Student." Newark: 1971. Documented in ERIC. ED 070 044 p. 51.

widely and communicate to pupils his interest, enthusiasm and pleasure in reading."²⁷

Witty (1971) gave some implications for teachers of gifted and creative children, some of which are applicable to teachers of early readers.

1. The teacher must possess an understanding of self. The learning of children is influenced not only by what teachers do but also what they are. The teacher must understand himself in order to understand the needs, feelings and behaviors of children.

2. The teacher should be a facilitator of learning rather than a director of learning. A function of education is to prepare the student for lifelong learning. The teacher should build learning experiences around the child's natural curiosity by dealing with problems relevant to his individual needs, purposes, and interests. Allow students to take part in organizing and planning learning activities; provide real life experiences that the child can participate in; act as a resource for learning rather than a dispenser of information; give the child a chance to see the need for more information; keep programs flexible enough to encourage exploration; encourage initiative; allow the child to make mistakes and to accept the consequences (as long as consequences are not dangerous).

3. The teacher must provide challenge rather than pressure.

4. The teacher must provide alternate learning strategies.

Children should be given the opportunity to find different ways of reaching a goal. The direct path to a goal may not be the most interesting one.²⁸

Role of the Parents of Gifted and Creative Early Readers. There is evidence that parents play a critical role in the lives of early readers

²⁷Ibid., pp. 21-22. ²⁸Ibid., pp. 52-57.

throughout their development. Parents can provide intellectual stimulation and wide opportunities for learning which affect early learning greatly. Moreover, parents may impede development by failure to provide rich and varied intellectual stimulation for young children. Once the early reader enters school, parents should cooperate closely with teachers and librarians in furthering and extending reading interest and in fostering the ability of their children to read critically, creatively, and with enjoyment.²⁹

Witty (1971) stated that "Parents should recognize themselves as teachers. They teach by example, by providing materials for learning, by approving or disapproving their children's behavior, by interacting with their children, and by patient guidance."³⁰

Legislative Support of Early Reading Programs. The past decade has witnessed increased interest in and support of programs aimed at improving expressed and obvious educational deficiencies. Characteristic of the change has been greater recognition of individual differences and of the need for suitable provisions for differences. Improvement of education for all has been emphasized, with recognition that differentiated educational opportunities are necessary. As more appropriate opportunities have been made available, the need for specialized programs for exceptional children has been noted, and provisions have been made in varying degree.³¹

The federal government has provided for specialized reading improvement programs through such sources as the Special Projects Act, "Right to Read," the Gifted and Talented Program, Title I Programs and the Head Start Program.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 38, 39, 49.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 44-46.

³¹Ibid., p. 24.

Support for Educational Television and Radio Programming. Under the provisions of the Special Projects Act, the United States Office of Education has expended over \$70 million in educational television programming from fiscal year 1968 through 1977. The bulk of these expenditures has been for support of Sesame Street and The Electric Company. These programs were established for the purpose of using television as a means of supplementing the educational experiences of children.³²

Sesame Street focuses on providing preschool children with a supplementary educational experience to help them prepare for school. A considerable portion of Sesame Street's presentations is devoted to pre-reading and beginning reading skills.

The Electric Company series is targeted at seven to ten year old children functioning below grade level in reading. It is frankly about reading and provides a bright fast-moving television experience as well as solid instruction in reading. It seems to be watched by children from two to ten years old, in and out of school. Evaluations have indicated considerable success in teaching reading concepts.³³

Right to Read (and the National Reading Improvement Programs.) The Right to Read Program is a national effort for developing and improving the reading skills of all citizens, enabling each to function effectively in our society.³⁴

³²Annual Evaluation Report on Programs Administered by the U.S. Office of Education Fiscal Year 1976. Washington, D. C.: Educational Resource Division, Capitol Publication, Inc., 1977, pp. 478-479.

³³Smethurst, Wood. Teaching Your Children to Read at Home. New York: McGraw Hill, 1978, p. 35.

³⁴Annual Evaluation Report on Programs Administered by the U.S. Office of Education Fiscal Year 1976. Washington, D. C.: Educational Resource Division, Capitol Publication, Inc., 1977, pp. 481-487.

It is both a legislated program and a coordinated national endeavor for promoting the involvement of all segments of society, both public and private, to insure that in the next decade no American shall be denied a full and productive life because of an inability to read effectively.³⁵

Among the many objectives of the program are reading improvement projects to develop and implement innovative reading programs for preschool and elementary school children. A major emphasis of the program is that of staff development and meeting the individual needs of children in reading.

The program also provides motivation in reading through the distribution of books to students as gifts, on loan, or at a nominal cost.

The appropriation for fiscal year 1978 was \$26 million.³⁶

Gifted and Talented. According to studies done by Durkin³⁷ and Price³⁸, many early readers score well above average on IQ tests, and can qualify for the gifted program. Good (1959) defines talented as being capable and able in a special field, or having natural aptitude capable of high functioning under training which does not necessarily imply a high degree of general intelligence. By this definition early readers can be classified as talented. Therefore, early readers may be accommodated in the gifted and talented program.³⁹

The Education Amendments of 1974 Section 404 enacted a federally funded program to provide educational services to gifted and talented children. A major objective of this Act is to extend grants to states and local educational

³⁵Ibid. ³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Durkin, Delores. Children Who Read Early. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1966, p. 134.

³⁸Price, Eunice. "How Thirty-Seven Gifted Children Learned to Read." The Reading Teacher, October 1976, p. 45.

³⁹Good, Carter U. Dictionary of Education. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959, p. 552.

agencies for planning, development, operation and improvement of programs and projects designed to meet the special educational needs of the gifted and talented at the preschool, elementary and secondary school levels.⁴⁰

Education of Disadvantaged Children. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was established in 1965 for the purpose of "providing financial assistance to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families, to expand and improve their educational programs by various means (including preschool programs) which contribute particularly to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children."⁴¹

One of the main objectives of the Title I program was to give priority attention to the basic cognitive skills in reading and mathematics and to support activities to help eliminate physical, emotional and social problems that impede the ability to acquire such skills.⁴²

Project Head Start. Project Head Start is funded through the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity. The purpose of the program is to provide a comprehensive preschool for disadvantaged children in an effort to bridge the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged children and middle-class children upon entrance to school. Some objectives of the program are as follows: To improve the child's health and physical abilities; to foster emotional and social development; to promote the child's mental processes and skills; and to increase the sense of dignity and self-worth within the child and his family.⁴³

⁴⁰Annual Evaluation Report on Programs Administered by the U.S. Office of Education Fiscal Year 1976. Washington, D. C.: Educational Resource Division, Capitol Publication Inc., 1977, p. 513-514.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 55, 56. ⁴²Ibid., pp. 46.

⁴³Stanley, J. C. Compensatory Education for Children, Ages 2 to 8. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973, pp. 63-64.

Methods of Identifying Early Readers. First grade and learning to read have been so closely linked that persons assume a child who is just entering first grade is just beginning to learn to read. Thus, many early readers go through reading readiness programs unidentified.⁴⁴

"Early identification and praise for success are strong influences in fostering the development of gifts and talents in children."⁴⁵ Therefore, early identification of children who read early is essential if their needs are to be met upon entrance to school.

Teacher Observation. One of the most effective evaluation techniques of any teacher is observation and judgment of behavior. The teacher has the opportunity to observe the child in many varied situations and make judgments of behavior. Through daily observation reading interests and ability may be determined.

Some behaviors characteristic of early readers include:

1. The child chooses books very often during free choice.
2. The child offers to read or tell stories often.
3. The child likes to write and spell.
4. The child is very curious, asks many questions about language.

Parent-Teacher Conference. Parent-teacher conferences at the beginning of the school year can provide pertinent information about early readers. This information can alert the teacher about the child's reading ability early enough for the reading program to be altered, if necessary, to accommodate him.

⁴⁴Durkin, Delores. Teaching Them to Read. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1971. p.

⁴⁵Witty, Paul A., "Reading for the Gifted and Creative Student." Newark: 1971. Documented in ERIC. ED 070 044, p. 48.

Standardized Tests. Many standardized tests are available for use in identifying early readers, including the different tests used during kindergarten screening.

Methods of Meeting the Needs of Early Readers. The importance of identifying early readers was discussed earlier in this paper. However, it is not enough to just identify these students. It is equally important to know their individual levels of achievement in order to provide the kind of instruction that is suitable and appealing to them.

According to Durkin (1974):

"The little research that is available gives credence to the prediction of boredom, especially for children who are both bright and fairly advanced in reading when they enter first grade. This problem however, is not a problem of getting a head start in reading, but one of the inability of the school to accommodate their instruction to the disparities among children of the same chronological age."⁴⁶

There are many ways of providing the kind of instruction these children need and can profit from most. The school may provide an enrichment program, special grouping, advanced placement, or the school may choose to do nothing which here will be termed "waiting."

Enrichment. Enrichment provides a means of allowing the early readers to remain in the classroom with their peers and receive instruction that is challenging, interesting and appropriate.

⁴⁶Durkin, Delores. Teaching Them to Read. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1974, p. 56.

In an enrichment program, it is not enough to provide a lot of materials, but it is important that a wide variety of materials and experiences be offered with different levels of advancement.

Early readers should be encouraged to explore and experience reading materials from varied reading sources. In order to insure motivation and continuity in the instruction of early readers, it is necessary to replace the routine basal reading instruction with materials more closely related to the interests and abilities of the early readers.⁴⁷

In an enrichment program the teacher is primarily responsible for the selection and use of materials for the early readers. Hence, she will need to budget her time for this careful selection and planning to meet individual needs and interests. She must consider the organization and arrangement of her classroom that would permit effective implementation of the enrichment method.

The teacher may choose to work with the early readers in small groups or individually. The extent of individualization will depend upon the differences in the reading levels and interests of the children.

Enrichment programs have proved successful in meeting the needs of early readers, and are recommended for teachers who advocate individualized instruction. It should be emphasized that this method requires a great deal of teacher time and effort in order to work effectively.⁴⁸

Special Grouping. Most reading teachers have grouped children for instruction at one time or another. Whether it's grouping by ability or by

⁴⁷Witty, Paul A. "Reading for the Gifted and Creative Student." Newark: 1971. Documented in ERIC: ED 070 044 p. 18.

⁴⁸Ibid.

interest within a classroom or within a grade level, the general objective is to provide more adequate instruction for students of similar reading ability. Ability grouping within the classroom is one of the most widely used techniques for adjusting to individual differences in reading.⁴⁹

Early readers will not need all of the different phases of beginning reading instruction that nonearly readers will need, but on the other hand, they will need some that nonearly readers are not yet ready for. Ability grouping within the classroom can be useful in providing reading instruction that both groups need without boring early readers or losing nonearly readers.

In adjusting to individual differences in the classroom by means of ability grouping, the teacher must consider the following factors: time available for teaching basic reading skills, the number of groups she will use, and the amount of teacher energy required. The teacher may feel that six instructional groups are needed, but if she can only use one hour daily for reading instruction, she might find it more beneficial to use three groups. This way she can spend twenty minutes with each group rather than the ten minutes that would be available had she used the six groups.⁵⁰

Ability grouping within the classroom facilitates learning by providing motivation and challenges for students, and it gives the teacher a chance to address individual differences within the class and the groups. On the other hand, it creates a sort of caste system in the classroom (if children are classified at the beginning of the school year and the classifications do not change.); it affects the level of aspiration of the children, who tend to aspire to work with other members of their own group or with members of the next higher group.

⁴⁹Bond, Guy L., and E. B. Wagner. Teaching the Child to Read. New York: The McMillan Company, 1966, p. 355.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 356.

Interest Grouping is one way of making grouping flexible. In interest grouping the children have the opportunity to change groups often, and to work with children of different reading levels. Children with common interest are grouped together in small groups. Reading materials of varying levels of difficulty are made available in accord with the differences in ability within each group. This method has been found helpful in guiding the reading of early readers in that the children work on a common topic or subject with each child working at his own reading level. Thus, each child may select and share his discoveries from reading materials of a suitable level. In this way the early readers can make their contributions from reading challenging sources of appropriate difficulty. In interest grouping, there should be occasions when the entire class would have the opportunity to work together in reading.⁵¹

Grouping by Grade Level. This type of grouping is sometimes referred to as homogeneous grouping. It is used in some school systems where there are several classes of each grade level in a school. The children are placed in classes according to reading ability. The superior readers are placed in one class, average readers are placed in others, and the poor readers in another.

Homogeneous grouping has much the same features as ability grouping within the classroom. It gives the teacher of superior or early readers an opportunity to enrich reading instructions and to move through the reading program at a more rapid pace. However, the problem of adjusting to individual differences still exists. Even in classrooms where children have been identified as early readers, teachers group them for reading instruction in an attempt to meet their individual needs.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 357-358.

Many educators object to homogeneous grouping on the premise that it does not provide a lifelike situation for students, and it is very difficult to maintain an intellectually stimulating environment when the class consists of the lowest third of the reading population.⁵²

There is strong indication that the problem of adjusting to individual differences in rate of achievement in reading, and in instructional needs cannot be solved by any one method of organization alone. Flexibility should be built into whatever method of organization used to meet the needs of individual children.

Advanced Placement. Some school systems have turned to advanced placement to meet the needs of early readers. With this kind of organization the child who is reading above his grade level is placed, for reading instruction only, in class with children of similar reading ability. The child returns to his regular class for the remainder of the school day.

Educators feel there is no serious problem in this type of grouping for instruction, for one class during the day, providing the age range of the children does not exceed three years. However, this is not a very popular means of meeting the needs of children. Many educators feel that the reading teacher, who teaches the skills in reading and is acquainted with the developmental needs and the ability of the child, should also teach him during the rest of the school day. The regular classroom teacher continues to teach reading as she works with children in other activities during the day and should know the achievement of each child in his reading development.⁵³ There is also indication that the children especially early readers just entering

⁵²Ibid., p. 352.

⁵³Ibid., P. 352.

kindergarten or first grade do not always feel comfortable in a class with older children.

In general educators feel that the teacher who has the child throughout the school day should be the one who gives the reading instruction, especially in the primary grades.

Waiting. The waiting method is probably the least desirable method of dealing with early readers because with this method, the school makes no special arrangement to meet their individual needs in reading. Studies have indicated that most early readers are placed in the regular basal reading programs upon entering school. This leads one to believe that even though this method is undesirable, many schools unadmittedly use it.

In a study of early readers Price (1976) found that early readers who were classified as bright were placed in a basal reading program in first grade.⁵⁴ Durkin (1975) found similar situations in a longitudinal study of early readers. Children in this study who had had two years of reading instruction, and were already reading, were given a pre-reading test and were placed in the regular basal reading program upon entrance to the first grade.⁵⁵

Popular Approaches for Early Readers. Several approaches to reading are being used to instruct early readers, with the most popular approaches being those with the greatest degree of individualization. Among the programs that promise success in meeting the instructional needs of early readers are the enrichment experiences program, literature program, individualized program and the language experience program.

⁵⁴Price, Eunice. "How Thirty-Seven Gifted Children Learned to Read," The Reading Teacher, October 1976, p. 48.

⁵⁵Durkin, Delores. "A Six Year Study of Children Who Learned to Read in School at the Age of Four," Reading Research Quarterly pp. 22-24, Number 1, 1974-1975.

Enrichment Experiences. Many of the practices reported for early readers at the primary level are aimed at providing enrichment experiences for youngsters who have already mastered the basic skills in reading.⁵⁶ This approach provides early readers with learning experiences and materials that are suitable to their ability and interests. The following is a description of the Edwardsville, Illinois, Community School's effort in providing enrichment experiences for early readers.

The enrichment experiences program focuses on a wide variety of objectives and activities. Special effort is made to identify the intellectual processes and thinking strategies fostered by a comprehensive list of supplementary readers, records, and films. Through the use of these materials early readers in the primary grades can combine reading, listening and viewing experiences, and practice creative thinking by producing a variety of unusual ideas.⁵⁷

A theoretical model that consists of eight divergent educational processes and twenty-three learning strategies is used to guide teachers in the development of imagination, curiosity, originality, and the will to take risks. Strategies include visualization skills, exploring the mystery of things, thinking of possibilities, intuitive experiences, provocative questions, skills of search, and examples of chances.⁵⁸

Children in this program are encouraged to explore and express their curiosity. They hypothesize, then search for information to prove or disprove the hypothesis; they locate origin of word meaning and make word picture displays etc.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Witty, Paul A. Reading for the Gifted and Creative Student. Newark, ERIC Document ED 070 044, 1971 p. 27.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 28.

The Literature Program. Because of the numerous topics found in children's literature, extensive use of it can provide one of the best sources of extending the interests of early readers. The literature program provides for creativity and self-expression. The opportunity to read and discuss or write about different topics in literature sometimes reveals pressing individual problems and needs of early readers.⁶⁰

The literature approach to reading instruction is used in many different ways. Below is a brief description of how Evergreen School in Vancouver, Washington, implemented this approach.

This program integrates mythology and folklore with oral, written and artistic expressions. The main objective of this program is to direct or guide children in such a manner as to encourage independent action and progress in reading and creativity in oral, written and artistic expression.⁶¹

Records, films, filmstrips, and various art media are used to motivate the children prior to introducing them to written materials. Reading is followed by discussion, which is followed by creative art activities, and rewriting of favorite tales in a modern setting. In small group discussions, the children are encouraged to seek motives and feelings of the folklore heroes and to speculate about how or why tales originated and how they might have been altered over the years as a result of oral transmission. Other creative activities include pantomimes, dioramas, and panel pictures.⁶²

The Individualized Reading Program. Another method of reading instruction used with early readers is the individualized program. In this program materials are selected from a wide variety of materials suited to the child's particular

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 52

⁶¹Ibid., p. 28.

⁶²Ibid., p. 28

interests and needs. He is allowed to move through the program at his own rate of achievement keeping a close record of his progress. The teacher meets with the child on a regular basis for evaluation of progress and to give specific help with special needs.

The following is a representative individualized program that was used to instruct early readers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

This is an enrichment program with much emphasis on individualized instruction. Children in this program are taught to type simple reports. The reports are made from a wide range of reading materials, films and filmstrips. Progress of students is charted weekly and sometimes daily in order to avoid boring children with already mastered reading skills. Creative writing is a major part of the program. The reading specialist diagnoses the strengths and weaknesses of each child's reading achievement and prescribes activities to improve the student's reading skills. A program is developed by the child's teacher and the reading specialist to suit the needs of the child. Activities are selected from a vast assortment of locally developed materials and commercially available skill-building materials. Every effort is made to choose topics of particular interest to the learner.⁶³

The Language Experience Approach. The language experience approach is the most popular and the most highly recommended approach for early readers. Since most early readers learn to read by using the elements of their immediate surrounding, it is likely that the language experience approach compliments their reasons for wanting to learn how to read.

The language experience approach is based upon the interests, experiences and verbalizations of the children. Therefore, no two language experience

⁶³Ibid., p. 29.

programs are exactly alike. What happens in a language experience classroom is determined by the peculiar mix of time, people and the circumstances.

The following is a description of a language experience program that was used to instruct early readers in Lewiston, Idaho.

The Communication Skills Through Authorship Program (CSTA), is designed to compliment any basal reading program, and is based on the premise that a child learns best to read what is important to him personally. Children in this program are encouraged to tape record many impressions, stories or expressions that are of interest or importance to them. Typed copies of each child's recordings are returned and put into the child's folder, which becomes his personalized reader.

Creativity is encouraged by allowing children to choose their topics, amount of time needed for taping and the time of day they want to do their taping. Finished tapes are typed and returned to students daily. The class may share their stories with the group or individually read them to the teacher, or each child may just read his story to himself. At times a story may be put on the overhead projector for the whole class to read. Group stories are usually used this day.⁶⁴

Strategies of this program, including key words, experience charts, picture stories with captions, daily journals, typed directions and others, are used to lead children from their own stories to the wide world of books.⁶⁵

Summary of Literature. The review of literature indicated not only that early readers do exist and are increasing in number, but that attempts are being made to identify and meet the needs of early readers upon entrance to school.

⁶⁴Smith, Lewis B., and Glen D. Morgan. Cassette Tape Recording as a Primary Method in the Development of Early Reading Material. ERIC Document ED 083 544, 1973, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 2.

The federal support for meeting the needs of special children has been instrumental in creating an awareness of the needs of early readers.

The development of early reading approaches such as the enrichment experience program, the literature program, the individualized program and the language experience program, are indications of how some schools are providing for individual needs of children who learned to read early. These approaches to early reading are varied, however the primary objective is to provide a wide range of materials that are interesting and challenging to the students.

III. DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAMS

Shawnee Mission School District's Developmental Reading Program for Early Readers. Preschools are numerous in the Shawnee Mission School District, and a large number of the children entering kindergarten have attended preschool. About 15% of these children learn to read before kindergarten, and some children who do not attend preschool learn to read at home. Therefore, the school district has developed a reading program that promises to provide a rewarding experience for and to meet the needs of these early readers.

Philosophy of the Program. The Shawnee Mission reading program is based upon the principle that every child has the "right to read." The program seeks to impart skills and abilities necessary for students to become mature and confident readers. It is designed to take the child from where he is and develop and improve established reading skills, and to identify and remedy poor reading habits through the use of an individualized approach to reading.

For early readers the main objective of the program is to maintain their interest in reading and to motivate them to develop their reading skills and become competent readers.

Identification of Early Readers. Shawnee Mission School District uses a variety of techniques to identify early readers. The Metropolitan Readiness Test is given in April during the regular kindergarten screening, which includes vision, hearing, speech, language etc. A parent-teacher conference is also held at this time. After the child enters kindergarten, teacher observation and judgment are used to help identify early readers.

The Metropolitan Readiness Test is made up of six subtests. (1) Word Meaning: the tester presents four pictures to the child, and says a word that identifies one of the pictures. The child is asked to point to the picture that is the same as the word the tester called. (2) Sentence or Phrase Meaning: the tester shows the child four pictures, then he states a phrase or sentence. The child is asked to point to the picture that means the same as the phrase or sentence. (3) The Test of Information: the child is asked to point out objects by what they are used for. He may, for example, be given pictures of four objects including a ball and asked to mark the one that is a toy. (4) Matching: in this test the child is required to show his ability to recognize similarities and differences in pictures of numbers, objects and letters. (5) Numbers: this test consists of simple arithmetic problems. (6) Copying: the child is required to copy simple forms, numbers and letters.

There is no record of early readers in the district who failed the test, but those children who do score low on the tests during kindergarten screening are given specific tasks (selected by the diagnostic team) that the parents can work on with their children during the spring and summer months, to help them improve in areas of low performance. These children are then given the tests again at the beginning of the school year.

The parent-teacher conference, held at the time of the spring testing, gives the teacher a variety of information about the child, some of which is

pertinent in identifying and planning for early readers.

The diagnostic team, which consists of the teachers, reading teachers, and reading specialists, helps with the testing. The readiness test is given individually. An average of three or four early readers are identified in each kindergarten class. The reading levels of these early readers range from second to fourth grade. Children who are very deficient in readiness skills are recommended for special education classes or a preschool before attending kindergarten.

Method of Meeting the Needs of Early Readers. By using a variety of materials and techniques the teachers and reading specialists help design individual reading programs for each student. In the process of helping the individual student, many teachers create new approaches which frequently become incorporated in the district's overall reading improvement program.

The district has adopted five basal reading series: the Lippincott, the Holt-Rinehart, the Ginn, the Houghton Mifflin, and the Rand McNally. Teachers of individual schools are allowed to select and use the series which they feel will best meet the needs of their students. Teachers of early readers use the basal series of their particular school as a guide in working these children. Reading resource rooms for students and teachers are in each school. A reading specialist is in each school to aid teachers with any problem that might arise pertaining to reading. There is strong parent support for the program. Parents are trained by the reading specialists to help their children at home and to help as volunteer aides in the classroom.

The district attempts to provide instruction for early readers in the kindergarten classroom rather than sending them to the first or second grade for reading. However, Advanced Placement is occasionally used. The district is also in the process of developing learning centers (classrooms set up with

a wide range of varied materials and activities geared toward meeting the needs of gifted and talented children) in each elementary school as a part of its gifted and talented program. Some early readers are sent to the learning centers for reading instruction.

It is the general feeling of the teachers, and the reading specialists that kindergarteners are often uncomfortable in a classroom with older, more school experienced first and second graders. Therefore, whenever possible, early readers are grouped by ability for reading instruction within the classroom.

Early readers are given lots of opportunities for reading from a wide range of varied reading materials and media. They make good use of the library and reading resource room. They are read to daily, and participate in many games and other activities which encourage them to read.

Each child receives an average of about twenty to thirty minutes of reading instruction each day, which includes group instruction, individual help from the teacher and independent work. At reading time the teacher works with the whole class on skills needed by the entire class such as visual and auditory discrimination activities, introducing new sounds, vocabulary words or new activities to be placed in the learning centers in the classroom.

Following the suggestions for sequenced reading skills set by the basal reading program, the teacher assigns independent follow-up activities on previously introduced skills such as rhyming, initial consonant sound matching etc. The directions for independent activities are usually taped so that groups of children can listen and follow the directions while the teacher works with individual children.

During the individual instruction time, the teacher gives each child the opportunity to read orally, to talk about materials he has previously read, or he may be given individual help with specific reading activities or

evaluated on skills already covered in the activity book of the basal series. After completing their reading assignments some of the early readers help non-early readers by reading to them, helping them with rhyming words, letter sounds etc. Then the children go to the centers of their choice. The centers around the room provide a variety of learning activities which emphasize basic sight word recognition in areas such as reading, arithmetic, social studies, writing, and art.

Volunteer parents work with children at centers and in various activities such as special projects, nature walks, and field trips.

At the beginning of first grade early readers will be given the ABC Academic Readiness Test to aid in placement in the program.

Scheduling. There is no set schedule of activities that teachers follow daily. Schedules are kept very flexible as a means of allowing for spontaneity, and of providing for variety in the program. The following is an example of what might happen in one classroom during the course of a day.

- 9:00 - 9:20 - Greetings and conversation, attendance-taking and routine morning activities with the whole group, such as calendar activity, review of work covered the day before and plan of activities for the day; children's choice of centers for the day.
- 9:20 - 10:00 - Unit development in areas such as science, math, social studies, etc.
- 10:00 - 10:30 - Reading instruction: the teacher gives general reading instruction to entire class; the tape recordings are used to give directions to different groups while the teacher works with individual children.

10:30 - 11:00 - Learning Centers: children work at learning centers of their choice. Each child may work at three centers each day.

11:00 - 11:20 - Snack and Recess

11:20 - 11:30 - Story or sharing time.

11:30 - Preparation for home and dismissal of school.

The class has special days for such activities as library, physical education and other activities not offered in the classroom.

Lawrence School District's Developmental Reading Program for Early Readers. Due to the increasing number of children entering kindergarten already reading, the district was faced with organizing reading groups in the kindergarten setting. The district did not want to use a structured program with small groups for reading instruction for fear that it would become too similar to the regular first grade program. The district felt that there were many skills that could be gained from unstructured reading activities that should be incorporated in a program for early readers. In an attempt to meet the needs of these children, the district adopted the Encyclopedia Britannica's Language Experience in Reading Program, which provides a broad based oral language program that children can take as far as they are capable.

Philosophy of the Program. The Lawrence reading program is designed to take the child from where he is in reading and to meet his individual needs by using an eclectic approach to reading, and to provide for continuous progress from kindergarten throughout his school years. The basic principle of the program is that there is no one best method of teaching reading; and that there is no one best way for all children to learn to read. Therefore, a variety of materials and activities in reading is available to the students.

The main objective of the program for early readers is to provide unstructured reading activities that are interesting, challenging and beneficial to them. The program integrates the teaching of skills of listening, speaking, writing and reading, and it gives early readers the opportunity to extend their interests, and to experience the pleasure of wide reading through the use of library books, and audio visual materials.

Identification of Early Readers. Lawrence School District uses the following methods of identifying early readers: The Metropolitan Readiness Test, teacher observation and the Readiness Checkpoint Test which is a part of the language experience program used by the district.

The Metropolitan Readiness Test, which was described in the Shawnee Mission Program, is used to help identify early readers. The test is administered individually in September, after the children have had time to become familiar with the kindergarten routine. The teachers give the test and provide materials and instruction that are suitable to the individual needs of the children. Teacher observation and judgment are also used in identifying and providing instruction for early readers.

The Readiness Checkpoint Test consists of ten subtests of beginning reading skills ranging from visual discrimination through second grade level phonics skills, and letter copying. The child is given a subtest on skills that the teacher feels he has mastered. If he passes the test, he is given the next test. This continues until the child scores low or fails a test. Then he begins working on skills at that point in the program. An average of three early readers are identified in each class using these techniques.

Method of Meeting the Needs of Early Readers. In an attempt to meet the needs of early readers, Lawrence School District uses a language experience

program supplemented by the use of many library books and audio visual materials.

It is the general feeling of the teachers and the reading specialists that children entering kindergarten, even early readers, need too many other "school skills" aside from reading to be placed in a first or second grade classroom for reading instruction. They felt that the first or second grade classroom would be too structured for the early readers. Therefore, advanced placement is not used with early readers. The children are grouped by ability within the classroom for reading instruction only. Other grouping in the class is done by interest or free choice of the children.

Early readers are cycled through the reading readiness program by the use of the checkpoint tests from the student activity book, which is a skill mastery workbook that is a part of the language experience program. At the end of the school year the activity book is forwarded to first grade, so that the child can pick up from where he stopped in kindergarten.

The reading specialist meets with the teachers weekly to discuss concerns about the program, such as the progress and needs of the children.

The teachers and the reading specialist feel that it is important to provide a wide range of attractive learning activities that are relevant to the children, and to give them choices so that they can feel free to explore, discover and learn.

The kindergarten classrooms are set up in learning centers. The language experience kit includes numerous ideas and directions to help teachers in setting up learning centers and constructing activities for centers. The centers around the room provide a wide variety of reading materials ranging from readiness to advanced reading. The early readers use books on topics of interest to them, and the teacher helps them develop word lists and examine the phonetic elements of words. The children dictate stories on a central topic;

the teacher writes the stories for groups of children or for individual children. The children read their stories to the teacher. Sometimes the stories are shared with the group, or the children may just read their stories at the reading center.

The children are taken on many field trips, nature walks etc. Many resource people, such as community helpers, representatives from Kansas University Natural History Museum, pet shop owners, visit the school and give demonstrations for the children. They write or dictate stories about these experiences and draw pictures and make booklets to take home. Vocabulary words are taken from the stories and written on the chalkboard or charts for early readers to copy in their word books. The teacher may make copies of the word list for the children. The phonetic elements of the words are examined to help the children recognize the words and learn new sounds. Each child is given individualized reading time each day to read his story to the teacher.

The program makes use of parent volunteers. Parents are trained by the teachers and the reading specialist to use the language experience program and the learning center activities. Parent volunteers work in most classrooms daily. They work with the children at the centers and sometimes help construct activities for the centers. Some classrooms have the sixth graders come in once or twice a week to work with kindergarteners on specific tasks such as math, science, etc.

Scheduling. The schedules are flexible in that each teacher chooses the time that is best for her particular group for most of the daily activities. However, the types of activities are similar. The following is a schedule of one classroom in the district.

8:30 - 9:00 - Whole Class - conversation time (teacher and children talk about things of interest and importance to them); attendance check, calendar and other routine morning activities.

- 9:00 - 9:30 - Whole Class - discussion of and choosing centers for the whole day. Children are assigned one center and they choose two others. The theme for the day is established and vocabulary words are written on the board.
- 9:30 - 10:30 - Center Activities and reading; during this time individual children or groups and the teacher work on writing and/or reading stories. Sometimes stories are written one day and read the next day.
- 10:30 - 10:50 - Recess
- 10:50 - 11:15 - Snack, small group work, unit development such as math or science.
- 11:15 - 11:30 - Story time, music, etc.
- 11:30 - Preparation for home and dismissal of school

The class goes to the library, physical education and other activities on specific days.

Comparison and Contrast of the Lawrence and Shawnee Mission Programs.

The Shawnee Mission and Lawrence program philosophies are very similar in that both programs promise to take the child from where he is in reading achievement, and to provide a wide range of instructional materials and lots of opportunities for reading. Both programs provide for continuous progress and evaluation of skill mastery, and provisions for challenging and interesting reading activities are made, also.

The Shawnee Mission program philosophy differs from the Lawrence philosophy in its objective for early readers. Shawnee Mission provides an enriched individualized program following a basal reading approach with emphasis on phonics, going from letter sounds to words then sentence reading. Lawrence

seeks to keep early readers from following a basal reading program which is considered to be too structured. To avoid a structured program, Lawrence uses the language experience approach to reading which takes children from sentence, to word to letter sound recognition.

Identification of Early Readers. Shawnee Mission has a more elaborate plan for identifying early readers. The district does most of the screening or testing before the child enters kindergarten, while Lawrence does all of its testing after the child has entered kindergarten.

Shawnee Mission uses at least four means of identifying early readers, three of which are done before the child enters kindergarten. The Metropolitan Readiness Test was used by both districts. However, there was a time factor involved. Shawnee Mission gave students the test before they entered kindergarten while Lawrence administered the test after the child was in school. Both districts use teacher observation in much the same way.

Shawnee Mission used kindergarten screening as a means of identifying early readers. Lawrence was not involved in kindergarten screening at all. Shawnee Mission held parent-teacher conferences before the children entered school; Lawrence did not. Lawrence used a skill mastery readiness test to help identify early readers; Shawnee Mission did not use any such test. Shawnee Mission identified an average of three or four early readers in each class while Lawrence identified an average of three in each class.

Method of Meeting the Needs of Early Readers. Shawnee Mission and Lawrence use ability grouping within the classroom in an attempt to meet the needs of early readers. Both districts provide a variety of reading materials and audio visual aids for early readers; they make good use of the library; they use learning center teaching, and give students a lot of opportunities for reading. Early readers in both districts are cycled through the reading

readiness program of their particular district. Each district uses the interests of the early readers as a key to motivation; teachers and reading specialists provide a variety of materials that are of great interest and importance to the students.

The programs differed in some ways. Shawnee Mission used advanced placement and the gifted and talented program as a means of meeting the needs of early readers, whereas Lawrence used only ability grouping within the classroom. Shawnee Mission had a reading specialist stationed in each school to help teachers with any problems in reading that might arise, and to advise and supervise teachers in the reading program. Lawrence had a reading specialist who met with teachers weekly or by request on the part of the teacher or the specialist.

Both programs make use of parent volunteers on a regular basis. According to the schedules, a kindergarten day at Lawrence is thirty minutes longer than the Shawnee Mission school day for kindergarteners. Shawnee Mission students received from twenty to thirty minutes of reading instruction each day while Lawrence students received about thirty to forty minutes of instruction each day.

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In spite of increasing interest in providing appropriate instruction for exceptional children, including gifted and talented, many early readers are not identified so that their needs can be met upon entrance to school. On the other hand, many who are identified follow the same program as non-early readers. The purpose of this report was to review literature that supported programs for early readers and that described developmental reading programs designed to provide success for them. It was also the purpose of this study to compare and contrast developmental reading programs for early readers of two Kansas school districts.

Some educators have argued that early reading is harmful to the child and that gains are only temporary. However, more recent research has shown that many preschoolers have learned to read with no harmful effects and have maintained their gains over non-early readers. These studies support the recent development and implementation of differentiated education ventures supported by such federal programs as "Right to Read", Title I, Gifted and Talented, and Head Start. The enrichment of preschoolers' environments, educational television, preschools that emphasize prereading and reading skills, and home teaching materials have placed today's preschooler in direct contact with opportunities for learning to read. Thus, more preschoolers are learning to read and are maintaining their gains without any traceable ill effects.

It is necessary to identify early readers in order to provide the kind of reading instruction they need. Some methods of identifying early readers discussed in this paper, include standardized testing, teacher observation and judgment, and parent-teacher conferences. The method used is not of prime concern; however, the concern is that they are identified and provided for. Programs for early readers use varied approaches, but the general objective of each is to provide a wide range of varied materials that are interesting and challenging as well as suitable to the individual needs of the children. Each of the programs described makes good use of audio visual materials and provides many hands-on activities. Therefore, the programs seem to advocate enriching the child's environment and providing opportunities for him to explore and learn.

The developmental reading programs for early readers of the Shawnee Mission and Lawrence school districts were compared and contrasted, and found to be very similar in the following ways:

1. Each program promises to take the child from where he is and to provide reading instruction to meet his individual needs.
2. Each program used standardized test (The Metropolitan Readiness Test) and teacher observation and judgment as means of identifying early readers.
3. Each program provided a wide range of varied reading materials and audio visual aids, and gave early readers lots of opportunities for reading.
4. The early readers of each program were cycled through the reading readiness program of the district.
5. Each program grouped children by ability within the classroom, in an attempt to meet individual needs of early readers.
6. Each program used parent volunteers in the classroom on a regular basis.

The major differences among the two programs are as follows:

1. Shawnee Mission used the basal reading approach to reading while Lawrence used the language experience approach.
2. Shawnee Mission attempted to identify early readers during prekindergarten screening in the spring before the children enter school, and Lawrence was not involved in any kind of prekindergarten testing, but attempted to identify early readers after the children were in school.
3. Shawnee Mission used advanced placement and the gifted and talented program as a means of providing for early readers while Lawrence did not use these methods.
4. Shawnee Mission has reading specialists located in each school; Lawrence has one reading specialist for all schools; Shawnee Mission teachers have access to daily supervision and support of the reading specialist, while Lawrence teachers receive weekly visits from the reading specialist.

5. Lawrence seems committed to provide unstructured experiences for kindergarteners; Shawnee Mission did not.

6. Shawnee Mission identified more early readers per classroom than did Lawrence. The fact that more kindergarteners in the Shawnee Mission district had attended preschool may account for this difference. The difference in socioeconomic levels of the two districts may also be a determining factor.

Conclusion. Based on the findings in this report it is concluded that, although many children who read early are not identified so that schools can make proper provision for them, more educators are becoming aware of the fact that early readers do exist and are probably increasing in number. It is also concluded that some early readers who are identified are placed in reading readiness programs because teachers feel that they enjoy it and need it. The reason for the seeming enjoyment that early readers derive from reading readiness activities may be that it is given at the very beginning of the school year while the child is still trying to adjust to being in kindergarten, and he is merely reacting to the familiarity of the material rather than the need of it. Due to the recent development of gifted and talented programs in the primary grades, more schools are attempting to identify children in kindergarten and first grade with gifts and/or talents. In the process of identifying children for these programs early readers are identified. Thus, comprehensive programs for them are in the process of being provided. It is also concluded that regardless of approach to reading used with early readers a wide range of varied reading and audio visual materials are a necessity in meeting the needs of these children.

Judging from the daily use of parent volunteers in the Shawnee Mission and Lawrence programs it is concluded that aides are needed in kindergarten classrooms if the needs of early readers are to be properly met.

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DEVELOPMENTAL READING PROGRAMS FOR EARLY READERS

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken in an effort to describe some alternative means of meeting the needs of children who learned to read early, and to compare and contrast the developmental reading programs for early readers of two school districts in Kansas.

A review of related literature was presented to: (1) state some background information about early readers; (2) cite some legislative support of programs for early readers; (3) describe methods of identifying early readers; (4) describe developmental reading programs designed to provide success for early readers. The information used in comparing and contrasting the Shawnee Mission and Lawrence programs for early readers was obtained by visiting with directors and kindergarten teachers of each program and by observing in the kindergarten classrooms of the districts.

Major conclusions of this study are as follows:

1. Educators are becoming more aware of the fact that early readers do exist. The development of programs for early readers, as described in this paper is evidence of this awareness.
2. Attempts are being made to identify early readers. Schools are using standardized test, teacher observation, and parent-teacher conferences as tools in identifying early readers.
3. Early readers who have been identified are often placed in reading readiness programs upon entrance to school because teachers feel that they enjoy it and often need it.
4. Teacher support is needed in programs for early readers at the kindergarten level. Most teachers have not had experience in teaching developmental reading skills at the kindergarten level and are often insecure

in their effort to work with early readers. Therefore, orientation in teaching early readers, and supervision of early reading programs should be provided.

5. Programs for early readers should include a wide range of materials that are both interesting and challenging to the child through the use of basal, enrichment, children's literature, and individualized approaches.