

READING READINESS IN THE KINDERGARTEN

by

LOIS VIRGINIA STARR

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

This study was undertaken to determine what type of reading readiness program was most effective for kindergarten. Special emphasis was placed on a comparison of types of readiness programs and on factors which influence reading readiness.

Purpose of the Study

Reading rediness is perhaps one of the most discussed educational terms but is the least understood. Some kindergarten teachers believe a readiness program will enable a child to read. Other teachers believe reading readiness depends entirely upon maturity and cannot be developed by means of a readiness program. They recommend no formal readiness of any kind and believe the teacher or parent can do very little to help. The argument of maturity versus training is evident in these extreme views. Kindergarten teachers must realize, however, that readiness for reading depends upon both maturity and training.¹ They need to have a thorough knowledge and understanding of three facts pertaining to readiness that were recognized as early as 1925. It is important that kindergarten teachers realize the child's previous experiences at home and in school greatly influence his desire to learn to read, and that there will be a wide variation among the children in readiness for reading when they enter kindergarten. Many of them will need enriching experiences and training before an

¹Sarah Lou Hammond and others, Good Schools for Young Children (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1963), pp. 120-121.

effort is made to teach them to read.¹

There is growing evidence, however, that indicates some children are ready to read while in kindergarten. One of the current trends in elementary education appears to be steadily growing pressure to consider the possible merits of teaching reading to certain children before the first grade. It is an apparent fact that the four-and-five-year-old children have a better intellectual understanding of words and of reading. Some of these children are learning to read before grade one.²

The degree to which the kindergarten should be consciously devoted to the development of readiness for reading is uncertain and opinions differ about the approaches to reading that the schools should use.

This study was written to provide needed information to those schools in which it is assumed that reading readiness is a definite responsibility of the kindergarten.

Different types of reading readiness programs were studied and an attempt was made to discover the advantages and weaknesses of these programs.

Method of Research

The library research method was used in the preparation of this report to determine what type of readiness program was most effective for kindergarten. The references for this report were obtained at the Kansas State University Library; The William Allen White Memorial Library; Kansas State Teachers

¹Marion Monroe, Growing into Reading (New York: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1951), p. 22.

²Albert H. Shuster, and Milton E. Ploghoft, The Emerging Elementary Curriculum (Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1963), pp. 180-181.

College, Emporia, and the Northview Elementary School Library.

Definition of Terms

Reading Readiness. "A child is ready for reading when he has reached the stage in his development emotionally, socially, mentally, and physically when he can learn to read with the greatest ease."¹

Formalized Reading Readiness Program. This program consists of a preplanned commercial program. It contains "pre-reading" or "reading-readiness" types of materials for kindergarten use.²

Experience-based Program. Emphasis is placed on individual differences and a background of meaningful experiences is provided for each child. A great variety of materials are provided, and child's growth in reading emerges from and is linked with the interests the child is pursuing.³

Mental Age. "The mental age is a measure of degree or level of mental maturity and tends to increase at a quite steady rate as the child gets older."⁴

¹Hammond, loc. cit.

²Roma Gans, Fact and Fiction About Phonics (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1961), p. 78.

³Ibid.

⁴Albert J. Harris, How to Increase Reading Ability (New York: David McKay Company, inc., 1961), p. 28.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Importance of Reading Readiness

During the past few years there has been a considerable increase in the number of studies on readiness. The significant character of this research emphasizes the importance reading readiness has in preparing children to read successfully. A well planned readiness program may prove to be one of our greatest chances to develop reading programs which are free from repeated failure and needed remedial help.¹

Some parents and teachers think of reading readiness as a short period of time which is spent preparing the children for reading. They believe it is something that must happen to children during the spring before first grade. Some kindergarten teachers think readiness should be taught and practiced through formal drill using paper-pencil techniques. It is necessary to have a thorough understanding of the meaning of readiness and be aware of the fact that readiness is a long slow progress built on many experiences over a long period of time. Readiness is not something to be taught,² rather it is a progression of experiences starting early in life and continuing as interest in reading printed words develops. The desire to read will not normally develop until an accumulation of experiences has been achieved. The lack of a gradual approach to reading has been the cause of many failures in the beginning reading classes. Teachers must realize that due to background experiences and individual differences children enter school at many different levels even though their

¹Agatha Townsend, "Readiness for Beginning Reading," The Reading Teacher, IV (January, 1963), 270.

²Ethelouise Carpenter, "Readiness Is Being," Childhood Education, XXXVIII (November, 1961), 115.

ages are the same. Because of this fact it is necessary to provide a readiness program which will provide a rich background of experience.¹ Each child must be allowed to advance at a rate which is best suited to his own individual needs which arise from his own individual stage of development. The reading readiness program has a dual purpose. It must provide each child with many opportunities to perform up to his present capacity and also establish in the child a habit of performing those tasks for which he is ready.²

Factors Influencing Reading Readiness

The entire kindergarten program should contribute to each child's readiness for reading. Reference to reading readiness first appeared during the decade preceding 1930. At this time, one of the most important concerns of the investigators was identifying factors which indicated a readiness for reading.³

During the present time, more and more information is being provided by research about child development. We are learning more about developmental patterns and about the interests, characteristics, and needs of the majority of children who fall within chronological age groupings. Useful information has also been provided to help teachers have a better understanding of the factors which influence reading readiness.⁴

¹Loid Turner Weir, "Who Teaches Reading Readiness," Grade Teacher, LXXXI (June, 1964), 98.

²Sam Duker, and Thomas P. Nally, The Truth About Your Child's Reading (New York: Crow Publishers, Inc., 1956), pp. 78-85.

³Thomas C. Barrett, "Visual Discrimination Tasks as Predictors of First Grade Reading Achievement," The Reading Teacher, XVIII (January, 1965), 276.

⁴Jerome E. Leavitt (ed.), Nursery-Kindergarten Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1958) p. 298.

These factors are often very complex, and because they are also quite involved and interwoven, it is difficult to determine what single factor or group of factors contribute the most significance to reading readiness. Certain factors are known as distinct abilities, and it is possible to observe and measure them according to clearly defined norms. Other factors are thought of as levels of development or maturation and in some instances can also be measured. Some factors are developed by training and experience during a well-planned and well-executed teaching program. Others can be brought about only by the maturation process and are affected only slightly, or not at all by the school. Conditions within the child's environment also affect certain abilities and levels of development which are necessary in the reading readiness program.¹

But the major factors which are important and which have the most influence on reading readiness are mental maturity or intellectual development, physical maturity, emotional maturity, social maturity, background of experience and motivation.²

General intelligence is the most important single factor in reading readiness. Since general intelligence is an average of many phases of mental growth, it is significantly related to most of the other factors. There is general agreement that the mental age necessary for success in reading readiness is six years and six months.³ There is definitely a substantial relationship between mental age and learning to read, but this generally accepted mental age

¹M. Lucile Harrison, Reading Readiness (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936), pp. 5-6.

²Duker, op. cit., p. 74.

³Albert J. Harris, How to Increase Reading Ability (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1961), p. 28.

may vary with the skill of teacher, the materials available, the size of the class and other factors. Mental age should not be the only determining factor in establishing an absolute dividing line for beginning a reading program. It is only one element of the whole pattern of growth which determines the child's readiness to read.¹

In addition to the generalized factor of mental age, there are certain other abilities which are necessary for readiness success. Children must have the ability to see likenesses and differences. They must have the ability to remember and have a memory span of ideas. Other mental maturity factors are very difficult, if not impossible to isolate because of their interrelationship with the other areas associated with reading readiness. For example, a child with superior mental, social, and emotional maturity, a rich experiential background and good language development may not learn to read because of visual difficulties.²

Adequate vision alone, however, cannot insure success in reading readiness. Some of the physical factors which are considered very important are age, vision, hearing, eye-hand coordination and general health. It is generally recognized that the reading readiness process is most directly and vitally affected by the vision and hearing factors. A young child is usually far-sighted, and his eyes mature gradually. A kindergarten child may be able to see distant objects clearly, but the same object would be blurred when examined closely at near vision. A child would be able to see the pictures in a book on a table clearly, but he would have difficulty in looking at the small letters involved in a word.³

¹Hazel M. Lambert, Teaching the Kindergarten Child (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1958), p. 316.

²Harrison, op. cit., p. 7.

³Sarah Lou Hammond and others, Good Schools for Young Children (New York: MacMillan Company, 1963), pp. 120-121.

The ability to coordinate eye and hand is a skill which is important to reading and is largely dependent on normal physical development. This skill can be encouraged and furthered through kindergarten activities. This fact was demonstrated by one group of experimenters at the National College of Education in Evanston, Illinois. The purpose of the research was to show that perceptual abilities can be increased with specific training. This training was given to a group of five-year-old children, but it should be stated that the kindergarten environment already has many other learning opportunities. During a four month period, Kodachrome slides were presented for twenty, fifteen-minute periods. Simple designs were flashed at 1/1000 second by means of a tachistoscope and silver screen, and the children were given an opportunity to reproduce the designs on a blackboard. Photographs of familiar objects were presented next, and the children were asked to describe the pictures. Another step in the experiment was to flash pictures in sequence which told a story. One half second was allowed for each exposure. The children were asked to retell the story in its proper sequence when the entire series had been shown. At the end of the experimental period, the children were asked to do a crayon and paper lesson which was their first formal experience in school. They were shown pen and ink designs and line drawings and were asked to identify the design they thought they saw by circling it on a duplicated sheet of paper.

On the basis of this and other rapid-recognition programs for young children, the experimenters came to the conclusion that perceptual training does promote attention which is essential to the successful learning of any subject matter, including reading. The child's interest in school and in learning was increased, and it was believed his chances for success was improved.

It should be noted that in spite of the apparent success of this

experiment, this type of program is strongly criticized by opponents of formal instruction as preparation for reading. They believe the young child's eagerness to learn will be stifled.¹

Eye-hand dominance, another physical factor affecting reading readiness is the subject of much discussion and disagreement. The issue is complex and will not be discussed at length in this report. Considerable research has been done on the relation of lateral dominance to reading ability at higher grade levels, but the significance of variations in eye-hand dominance for reading readiness is still in doubt. A child should be allowed, however, to use whichever hand he prefers for drawing, writing, painting, and other activities.²

Another physical factor on which success in reading is dependent, is the development of an appropriate degree of acuity in hearing. During the first five years of children's lives, they hear many sounds about them, but when they enter kindergarten, there are wide differences in their experiences with sounds and also their awareness of sounds. The majority of children will profit from learning about sounds before they learn to read. This learning should be directed with special reference to language, and children should become aware of ways in which sounds differ and are alike. The emphasis should not be placed on formal phonetic drill at this time.³

The general health or physical condition of each child is of vital importance, and the kindergarten teacher should be constantly alert and sensitive to each child's health needs. She can observe whether a child has a well-nourished appearance and should obtain all possible information which has

¹Lambert, op. cit., pp. 315-316.

²Harris, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

³Hammond, op. cit., pp. 121-126.

been collected concerning the physical characteristics and health history for each child. Information concerning the physical well-being of each child should be assembled so that it can be studied and analyzed. This helps the teacher understand facts about the child's health history which are important in judging what degree of readiness they will need.¹

Another physical factor which should be considered when planning a readiness program is the difference in maturity of boys and girls. Boys mature more slowly than girls in many aspects of growth. Boys usually have greater difficulty with many school tasks, particularly reading and writing. Boys constitute about two-thirds of the milder reading disability cases and make up seventy-five to ninety per cent of the severe cases. It would be easy to conclude that more boys than girls are not ready for reading instruction when they enter school.² A certain degree of mental maturity is necessary before children can learn to read. Since boys mature more slowly, they may reach this point of maturity, on an average, later than do girls. But both sexes are taught reading at the same time and are expected to achieve comparable success. It is possible that some of the difficulty comes from the fact that the slower maturing boy is not ready for some school learnings. His initial failure, because of his lack of readiness, will handicap later progress.

A kindergarten teacher must be aware of these differences between boys and girls and plan her readiness activities accordingly. She may need to plan for a longer and more detailed program of reading readiness activities for boys. Suggestions have even been made to have boys start school at a later age than

¹Lillian Gray and Dora Reese, Teaching Children to Read (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1957), pp. 7-8.

²Harris, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

girls. A solution to this problem which would be acceptable to everyone concerned has never been devised.¹

The emotional growth at the five-year-old level is often varied. Some kindergarten children adjust to the new routine with very little or no difficulty. Others are immature and have a great deal of difficulty adjusting. Once the adjustment has been made, children like to practice the things they can do well.

During this time, it is essential that the children develop the emotional security and self-confidence that will be needed in order for them to have successful learning experiences. They feel more secure in classrooms where there is a simple, repetitive routine. They need to know what activity to expect next, where to find and put away materials, what they are expected to do, and how to do it. This well structured routine should provide periods of freedom to run and talk, play noisily, and enjoy large-muscle activities. This freedom must have structure or routine, because without it, the child will feel anxiety. If the limitations of the environment are not known, he will not be able to see a purpose or the goal of his activity.²

In order to understand an emotionally disturbed child, it is necessary to study the child's home background and family situation. Conferences should be held with parents to identify the causes of the child's emotional disturbance. Highly significant information can often be learned, and it is then possible to try to remedy the situation.³

Some of the home conditions which may cause a child to be emotionally disturbed are: a broken home, with one or both parents missing, quarreling

¹Lambert, op.cit., pp. 320-321.

²Monroe, op. cit., p. 26.

³Gray, op. cit., p. 9.

between the parents, poor disciplinary actions, rejection, unsuccessful competition with brothers or sisters, and overprotection.¹ The school must also be aware that prolonged and demanding activity can also cause children to have emotional disturbances. A child's desire to learn may be seriously affected, if he is given a premature exposure to initial reading before he has achieved enough emotional maturity to succeed. The results of too much pressure may be so serious that the damage can never be repaired.²

Social maturity is closely related to emotional maturity, but reading authorities usually treat it separately for the purpose of clarity and emphasis. The child is considered in the light of his relations with others rather than from the standpoint of his own individual self. The child's social development in kindergarten is fundamental to his preparation for learning to read. Learning to live in a group of twenty-five children, building pleasant relationships with them, and sharing the teacher are big steps in social development. Each child must feel accepted by the teacher and the other pupils in order to enjoy a real sense of being a part of the group.

An extremely important aspect of social maturity is the ability to participate actively and cooperatively in group activities. Another important aspect is the desire for social approval which is also a strong motivation in each child's daily performance in the reading readiness and other kindergarten activities. Children need to feel that they are respected and belong; they must not be made to feel different, rejected or isolated. Wholesome self-respect is essential to good social development and reading readiness. Children enjoy the social approval when they perform reading readiness activities correctly.

¹Harris, op. cit., p. 41.

²Fay Green Adams, Lillian Gray, and Cora Reese, Teaching Children to Read (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1949), p. 109.

Social approval plays a very important role in determining personality and behavior, and studies indicate that the child's status in the group affects his attitude toward school. The child is the happiest when his social experiences are the most pleasing. An early attempt should be made to improve the anti-social child's adjustment in order for him to have a successful beginning in his school experiences.

A factor which is closely related to, but not identical with the need for social approval, is the need and desire for security. It is the home and school's joint responsibility to do everything possible to counteract the influences that create situations which children are unable to deal with and which increase their anxiety and insecurity. It must again be emphasized that teachers and parents of the kindergarten child should not demand difficult tasks of him before he is ready and which will cause insecure feelings.¹

The beginnings of reading are found in a child's life long before he starts to school. These small beginnings are the experiences which are so very important because they have provided the child with ideas of what reading is about.² The most important determiner of the adequacy of a child's background of experience and knowledge is the general cultural level of his home. Children whose parents are educated and cultured will grow up in a home which provides many opportunities for favorable development.³ Research has shown that children who come from environments which provide them with rich and interesting experiences and provide numerous opportunities for increasing the store of meaningful concepts are more likely to be ready for reading than children

¹Gray, op. cit., pp. 10-13.

²Grace Langdon and Irving W. Stout, Teaching in the Primary Grades (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1964), p. 266.

³Harris, op. cit., p. 14.

from underprivileged homes, where such opportunities for learning are restricted or completely missing. One study which was made to determine the relationship between home background and readiness to read, found facts which seem to confirm the existence of a positive relationship between the two. The factors which are thought to be of greatest importance among those considered in judging home background are: (1) breadth of experience at home and away from home with the parents, (2) the education and intelligence of the parents, (3) the interest of the home in the school, and (4) the cooperation of the home with the school.¹

Some children with normal intelligence but who are lacking in intellectual stimulation and experiences may find it difficult to progress in reading and reading readiness activities. They must have an understanding of the reading readiness activities and be able to interpret these activities because they will comprehend only what they already know and understand.² This does not mean, however, the kindergarten should just wait for the development of readiness.⁴ It is important to realize that an effective kindergarten program which provides experiences that are stimulating will offer children opportunities to learn and grow intellectually long before they can read from books. Experiences should be provided which will help five-year-olds develop an interest and see a need for learning to read. The curriculum should be rich in meaningful content, and it should recognize the fact children are happiest and learn best when their natural curiosity and enthusiasm for exploring are used to help them find out about their environment and world.³

¹Harrison, op. cit., p. 14.

²Helen Heffernan, "Pressures to Start Formal Instruction Early," Children Education XXXVII (October, 1960), 60.

³Elenora Haegele Moore, Fives At School (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 316.

Certain abilities will need to be developed in kindergarten before children can interpret meaning from reading in first grade. One of these abilities which must be developed by the teacher through a planned program of guidance and activities is language expression. It is essential that the teacher study the backgrounds of the children in her class in order to have a better understanding of how to plan this program. Studies have shown that the vocabularies of children from a poor environment are only half as large as those of children with a more favorable background.¹ Since poor verbal facility is often related to limited experience in general, language as an expression of meaning must be given encouragement both by offering something to talk about and creating the opportunity to express thought. The meaning of words is learned through experiences and relationships, and a child's vocabulary is actually strengthened and built when language is used as a tool to provide a base for academic progress that will be used in later grades. The kindergarten activities should contribute to the child's total language growth.²

Importance of Good Picture and Story Books

One of the most important purposes of kindergarten education today is to help the child explore, to discover himself, and to become acquainted with the many sources from which he can learn.³ This means that the school must provide an environment in which children will need and use a wide variety of opportunities to encourage learning. First and foremost in such an environment

¹Gray, op. cit., p. 112.

²Marion Monroe and Bernice Rogers, Foundations for Reading (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1964), p. 54.

³Laura Hooper, "Building on Sound Beginnings in Pre-Primary Education," Childhood Education, XXXIX (September, 1962), 25.

there should be attractive, varied, and challenging books that invite children to explore them. Most children come to school with positive attitudes and are eager to learn and anxious to begin reading activities.¹ The modern kindergarten tries to preserve this eager inquiring attitude and encourages children to learn all they can from their own observations and inquiries. The many colorful and well selected picture books which are in the kindergarten should be placed on low shelves where they can be reached easily. Through kindergarten experiences, children can learn that books are helpful sources of both pleasure and information. When children are given a choice what they want to do, looking at books should always be a possible choice. In an atmosphere such as this, children learn that books are sources of endless pleasure.²

During the story time, every possible effort should be made to help children enjoy the story. There need to be many different types of story periods. Some of the possibilities are: listening to a story told without a book, hearing a story over the radio, enjoying a story record, and reading a picture book. Kindergarten teachers also need to be selective about the content of stories and books. Children in the age range between four and six have an amazing amount of information for their relatively short life span, but there are many areas where they are seriously lacking knowledge. Small children have a tendency to accept what adults tell or read them as the truth and have not learned to think critically about everything they hear. It is desirable for children to understand and be able to distinguish between a story which is

¹Albert J. Mazurkiewics (ed.), New Perspectives in Reading Instruction (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1964), p. 297.

²Moore, op. cit., p. 28.

make-believe or pretend and one which is true.¹

If a school is fortunate enough to have a library, the kindergarten children should be introduced to it and should be encouraged to browse among the books. They should be allowed to handle the books and will need to learn the proper care of them. This association with books will cause the children to wonder what the people in the pictures are saying and what is happening in the story.²

A child's desire to learn to read depends somewhat upon his past experience with books. Children whose parents love books and like to read and who have been read to since they were quite young, will go to school with a desire to learn to read. This desire, in and of itself does not insure reading success. But the lack of this desire may keep children from achieving reading success even though they possess all the other necessary qualifications to learn.³

Instructional Activities Fostering Reading Readiness

Once the children have been well-prepared in attitudes and understanding and have a real love for books, they will want desperately to learn to read. By exposing children to books and reading situations, they become acquainted with the appearance of symbols and begin to understand the fact that reading symbols have meaning. This is a very important step in the development of a child's readiness to read.⁴

¹Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., pp. 132-133.

²Ruth Strang, Helping Your Child Improve His Reading (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1962), p. 117.

³Monroe, Growing into Reading, op. cit., p. 31.

⁴Helen Bartelt Hurd, Teaching in the Kindergarten (Minnesota: Burgess Publishing Company, 1965), p. 150.

Children should have an opportunity not only to listen to stories but to tell their own. Pictures that tell an interesting story are especially helpful in developing this storytelling ability. Children who can only name the objects they see in a picture may learn to add descriptive terms which would be a step to a higher level of verbal expression. Children who can give descriptions should be led to see the relationship between the objects. Once the children are able to interpret the objects in relation to one another, they may be helped to understand the action and will be able to tell a story about the pictures. Children should be given praise for their efforts. Language growth takes place most rapidly in a friendly and permissive atmosphere.

Developing speaking and listening skills is a very important responsibility of the kindergarten. The program needs to help the children learn to associate meaning with the new words they are hearing and should encourage the children to use these words. There are many activities which will provide opportunity to practice these skills. One of the favorites of these activities is "show and tell" which is an excellent means of expression. Various other types of shared experiences such as trips and excursions, a science table, and visual aids provide excellent basis for discussions.¹

The children need experience with poetry, jingles and rhymes. Listening to and repeating rhymes provide opportunities to hear words whose endings sound alike. Experiences with dramatic play are also valuable and should be included as often as possible in the kindergarten day. It stimulates the imagination and inspires children to observe more carefully. Dramatization helps children understand what is happening in the story. It helps to develop and enrich children's personalities by providing satisfactory experience in cooperation,

¹Monroe, Foundations for Reading, op. cit., pp. 116-118.

organization, and expression of thoughts and feelings.¹

Many studies have been made to determine the importance of kindergarten training and its effect on a child's later school progress. With few exceptions, these studies prove that the experiences and instruction which was given in pre-primary school years definitely promotes success to a measurable extent in the early primary grades. This success is probably due to the readiness which is promoted in the kindergarten. Part of the instruction in kindergarten should definitely be planned to help prepare children for the reading program in which they will be participating at a later time. The instructional activities which educators generally consider the most important in preparing for the reading program are:

1. providing pupils with real, varied, and rich experiences which are essential in order for them to be able to get meaning from the material they will be learning to read
2. providing activities and experiences to help develop the ability to do problem thinking
3. providing an atmosphere in which children will learn to speak simple sentences using proper grammar
4. developing a wide speaking vocabulary
5. encouraging accurate enunciation and pronunciation
6. providing activities to develop abilities to remember a series of events in proper sequence
7. developing a desire to read.¹

There must be a careful and deliberate structuring of the environment to

¹Harrison, op. cit., p. 15.

provide children with many choices of activities. The teacher is an essential factor in such an environment and must arrange the materials in such a way that they will invite self-initiative and self-propelled learning. The appropriate materials which are provided for the children will help the teacher see her students' particular needs. Teachers learn to observe the children's actions and are aware of their progress or particular needs.¹

Methods for Evaluating Reading Readiness

It is necessary for the teacher to assess the growth of interests, attitudes, and abilities in order to determine the level of each child's readiness for reading. An attempt has been made to show that reading readiness is a combination of many different characteristics and is affected by many factors. Some of the characteristics can be measured by standardized tests, some can be judged from information obtained from the child's family, and some can be observed by the child's daily behavior. Since general intelligence is the most important single factor in readiness for reading, and because reading makes heavy demands upon the intelligence, it is important to determine whether the child is mentally ready to learn to read. Intelligence tests are useful for appraising certain phases of readiness to read. Most schools use group intelligence tests which are comparatively simple and economical. These are practical for routine use because they can be given and scored by the classroom teacher. The directions are given orally; no reading ability is involved on the part of the children. They indicate their answers by marking on pictures. The test items commonly included are intended to measure such abilities as range of information, understanding of single words and sentences, memory, ability to

¹Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., pp. 297-298.

follow directions, recognition of similarities and differences, and logical reasoning. The group tests which are recommended for use near the end of kindergarten or the beginning of the first grade are: the Pintner-Cunningham Primary Test, the Detroit Beginning First Grade Intelligence Test, the California Test of Mental Maturity, Pre-Primary Battery, and the Kuhlmann-Anderson Intelligence Test.

It is necessary to use an individual intelligence test in order to obtain a measure of mental ability which is as nearly as possible a measure of the child's mental capacity, and is not influenced by emotional and social factors. In such a test, the examiner, who must have special training, can observe what the child is doing all the time and can also encourage him to do his best throughout the test. A new 1960 edition of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale is the most widely used individual intelligence test in the United States. The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children is also popular.¹

Studies have shown that the results of standardized reading readiness tests have a high correlation with those of intelligence tests and are just as reliable in predicting the child's probable success in reading. Reading readiness tests are prepared to measure particular phases of mental functioning which are most closely related to a child's success in reading. The Lee-Clark Reading Readiness Test, one of the shorter tests, requires thirty minutes to administer. It consists of matching letter symbols, understanding concepts, vocabulary, and following directions.²

The Marion Monroe Reading Aptitude Tests and the Gates Reading Readiness Tests are both well constructed tests. A long and reliable test which has

¹Harris, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

²Gray, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

shown up well in many comparative studies is the Metropolitan Readiness Test.¹

There are also informal tests to measure mental readiness such as the "draw a picture of a man," and tell a story from a picture. The teacher should also listen for questions, since questioning attitudes are usually evidence of an active mind.²

Teacher judgments are also a fairly reliable informal measure of readiness. There is a need for both testing and teacher judgment. There are some aspects of reading readiness which tests do not measure, and teacher judgment, based upon observation and interviews, is needed in these areas.

Anecdotal records can also be very helpful. It is wise to have a large folder or envelope for each child's records. A brief description of each incident worth remembering is recorded on a piece of paper and inserted in the child's folder.

In some school systems, a rigid administrative policy requires that children cannot be tested for reading readiness until they have reached their sixth birthday, and no reading instruction may be given until the children have been tested. The fact that young, bright children are often farther advanced in readiness than their older classmates is ignored by this type of policy. The teacher, therefore, is prevented from working out the best possible adaptations and stimulating activities for individual differences.³

All school systems should realize that although teaching and learning follow the same principles at any age level, specific practices must vary with the maturity and readiness of the pupils. A well-planned reading readiness

¹Harris, op. cit., p. 45.

²Gray, loc. cit.

³Ibid., p. 49.

program is no longer considered something that should be restricted to a small group of mentally retarded children who have a need for a prolonged period of maturation. A pre-reading program lays the foundation for successful reading and is a valid part of the total reading program. In regard to the practices of a reading readiness program, there is much confusion among parents, teachers, and administrators as to the best methods of encouraging and developing the mental powers in young children. They agree that children need well-planned pre-reading activities immediately preceding beginning reading. But some of the questions and problems which confront teachers and principals in planning and administering a pre-reading program are: how long they need it; what kind of skills should be stressed; how early the program should be started; how children should be grouped for the greatest mutual advantage; what kind of schedule in the classroom is most conducive to growth; and how cooperation between school and home can facilitate the child's transition to reading.¹

In the existing kindergartens there are great variations in goals and standards from state to state and district to district. There are even considerable differences in one district from school to school.

In this time of scientific progress, some educators and lay people, particularly parents, feel an urgency to rush children into school and "real" learning. The kindergarten, which is being looked at with questioning, is generally considered as a year spent playing games, and having a good time. They believe little knowledge has been added to what the child has already had at home or in nursery school. It is some people's belief that if a child could skip kindergarten and go directly into the first grade, he would be a whole year ahead. It is often felt that a year saved could be very worthwhile

¹Monroe, Growing into Reading, op. cit., p. 225.

because the American trend encourages higher education, special technical training, and hence, long years of schooling.

Another popular belief or reasoning stresses the fact that school learning is done mainly from reading books. They also stress the fact that the good readers are the best learners, and conclude by saying the earlier a child learns to read, the sooner he can use the knowledge books contain. This is a very controversial issue, and those people opposed are quick to show that when the conclusion does hold true, it is for a very small minority of superior children. They realize that although the conclusion seems logical on the surface, it is shallow and misleading. They are aware of the apparent fact that the majority of children who enter kindergarten still need many, many firsthand experiences which are so necessary before vicarious learning can be meaningful. They realize the possibility that there may be hidden danger from learning reading skills to early, even for the superior children.¹

There has been much discussion and writing about whether or not reading should be taught in the kindergarten. Although many of these comments are intended to support the theory of meeting individual needs, they often fail to meet the needs of the child who is anxious and ready to read. The following section of this report will attempt to present an unbiased review of the literature which is in favor of using formal reading readiness programs in the kindergarten. Methods designed to teach young children to read will be presented and the philosophy which supports early reading will be considered. The following is not necessarily the belief of the writer. Neither is the writer recommending a formal reading readiness program for the kindergarten.

¹Marguerita Rudolph and Dorothy H. Cohen, Kindergarten a Year of Learning (New York: Meredith Publishing Company, 1964), pp. 14, 379.

The Use of Formal Reading Readiness
Programs in the Kindergarten

The desirability of using the kindergarten year to instructional advantage should be unquestioned, and the development of readiness for reading should be one of the minimum goals.¹

It is important to realize that children under ordinary circumstances of daily stimulation and affection are capable of learning and growing intellectually long before they can read from books. Since reading is an intellectual process, the factors of intellectual development which foster reading readiness are of greater importance than any other group of factors. Some of these intellectual factors develop through inner maturation and are only slightly, if at all, determined by training and experience.²

There is an extensive body of evidence and theory emerging from various studies which indicate that human beings are more educable than had traditionally been supposed. Intelligence itself is also much more susceptible to development than had commonly been believed. This development must be started when the child is young.

Professor J. McV. Hunt of the University of Illinois says,

"It is no longer unreasonable to consider that it might be feasible to discover ways to govern the encounters that children have with their environments, especially during the early years of their development, to achieve a substantially faster rate of intellectual development and a substantially higher adult level of intellectual capacity."³

¹Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 127.

²Harrison, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

³Henry Chauncey, "Intelligence and the Important Early Years," The Education Digest, XXIX (April, 1964), 23-24.

Professor Benjamin Bloom of the University of Chicago reached the same conclusion in another survey of existing evidence. He estimates that extreme environments of very favorable or underprivileged, affect the development of intelligence each year in the first four by about two and one-half intelligent quotient points per year or ten intelligent quotient points over that four-year period. During the period of ages from eight to seventeen, extreme environments may have an effect of only four-tenths points per year. The conclusions of these studies point to the fact that intelligence is not completely fixed from birth, but can be influenced considerably during the early years, and to a lesser and lesser degree as the child matures. It is believed the mental processes are established very early in life. These processes, which include preschool experiences, become a permanent part of the individual and exert continuing effects on his mental growth and educational development through-out his life.

Professor Hunt despises the neglect of preschool children that is a result of the fixed-intelligence concept, and it is the conclusion of Professor Bloom that the loss of development in one period cannot be fully recovered in another period.

Similar conclusions have been reached by investigators in earlier studies. S. A. Kirk, of the University of Illinois, demonstrated the lasting effect of preschool experience. Retarded children were the participants in this study. He reported that forty-three such children who were given preschool training tended to retain the additional growth rate they received. The control of thirty-eight comparable children continued to fall behind in the later years. Terman and Oden studied highly gifted students and concluded that

"the facts obtained in the thirty-year follow-up of our large gifted group prove conclusively that children of 135 intelligent quotient points or higher who are accelerated one, two, or even three years are usually more successful in later life than equally bright children who are held in the lock step."

The importance of the preschool and early school years in developing human ability is highlighted in these studies. There is evidence that indicates not only educational achievement but also developed intelligence is dependent on successful experience at each stage of development. It is essential that the search for human potentialities must be extended beyond the identification of bright students.¹

The question is being asked, "Why should we attempt to teach reading in kindergarten?" Because of the constant increase in the amount of new knowledge being made available, the need for improving the methods of securing and using knowledge becomes more acute each day. Dr. Bentley Glass, chairman of the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, has indicated that by the year 2000 there will be 2000 times as much to know as there was in 1900 in science alone. Students must be able to read well and will have to read a wide range of material in order to use the available information in the most effective manner. Many children are coming to school with much richer backgrounds than they did a few years ago. If children are capable of beginning to read sooner and do not lose other valuable aspects of education which they require, then perhaps the school should help them overcome the problem of utilizing the vast increase in knowledge.

There are also other reasons for starting reading in kindergarten. Children are different, and this fact forces the kindergarten to recognize that some children are ready to learn to read before others. Experiments performed by a Yale professor and reports from Montessori schools indicate that some children can learn to read at pre-kindergarten ages. Some reading experts now support the belief that reading can be taught successfully and without harm to

¹Ibid.

certain kindergarten children. Reading is basic in improving efficiency in the total educational process. It is the school's obligation and responsibility to do some controlled research which will not be harmful to the students.¹

There is a need for the discovery of new methods for improving instruction. Enrichment of the environment is also needed in many schools. Some of these new methods being tried in the schools today seem revolutionary; some will not work. Other new methods will be of great help in enriching and improving educational experiences. A major importance of these new developments clearly illustrate the degree to which the schools have underestimated the capacity of children's learning abilities.

Professor O. K. Moore at Yale University has developed a method of teaching reading to three-year-olds. The modern techniques and equipment which are used in his method include an electric typewriter, a tape recorder, slide projector, and a computer. A "responsive environment" must be provided in which each child can explore a situation on his own, without praise or blame, until he can recognize the problem to be solved and find a way to solve it. Moore has shown that retarded children, children of average intelligence, and very bright children all respond to the methods he uses. Many of his students learn to read and write, to tell a story to a tape recorder, and to type it out as it is played back.²

Doctor Moore explains the extraordinary success of the typewriter by pointing out the fact that young children become highly motivated to learn when they are allowed and encouraged to make their own discoveries. He also feels there is nothing more discouraging to learning than the fear of making a mistake.

¹Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 150.

²Chauncey, op. cit., p. 24.

The children discover the typewriter never scolds and is never impatient when they make an error. Pressure is further eliminated by making all typewriter work completely voluntary.¹

Perhaps Moore's demonstration is the most spectacular of the advances in elementary education, but it is not an isolated example. In adventurous schools throughout the country, new ways are being found to introduce certain skills and concepts to very young children. It had been previously thought that these skills were not appropriate until children reached a much later age.²

Virginia C. Simmons, a kindergarten teacher at Cincinnati Country Day School, believes five-year-old children are tired of play and are eager and ready to begin the serious work of academic subjects. Mrs. Simmons criticizes the belief held by some that time at the kindergarten level is unimportant. Instruction is postponed indefinitely in many schools because children are not "ready." It is her belief that five-year-olds become ready when the emergency or the situation demands readiness.

Several reasons are cited, by Mrs. Simmons, which explains her belief why the five-year-old children of today are more advanced than children of that age used to be. Parents are younger and have a more casual attitude toward their children. More mothers work outside the home than ever before, and young children must become accustomed to a baby-sitter or nursery school. Many young children have had two years of nursery school; they have attended Sunday school, vacation Bible school, summer day camps and supervised play grounds. They have had many experiences, and Mrs. Simmons believes they are now being reared by a "new and tougher mothering pattern." She is firmly convinced kindergarten

¹C. P. Gilmore, "Omar Khayyam and His Talking Typewriter," The Saturday Evening Post, (November 20, 1965), 41.

²Chauncey, loc. cit.

children are ready for work and believes the future of their intellectual growth may be determined by the guidance they receive and the momentum of the instruction.¹

There have been numerous and varying types of methods and materials developed and can easily be obtained to put reading programs for young children into operation. Those people who favor formal education for the kindergarten believe it is a necessity for young children to experience the self thrill of learning with success. They also believe learning to read at an early age is such a powerful and dynamic force that it will affect the entire future of the child.²

Some of the reasons which are given in defense of teaching young children to read are as follows:

1. The hyperactivity of a young child is the result of a boundless thirst for knowledge and should be provided with an opportunity to learn about the world and himself.
2. The child's ability to take in information at an early age will never be equaled again.
3. It is much easier to teach a child to read at this age than at a later age.
4. Children taught to read at a younger age absorb a great deal more information than do children whose early attempts to learn are frustrated.

¹Virginia C. Simmons, "Why Waste Our Five-Year-Olds?" Harper's, CCXX (April, 1960), 71-73.

²John Henry Martin, "The Well-Documented Case for Teaching Reading Early," Grade Teacher, LXXXII (April, 1965), 93.

5. Children who learn to read while young tend to read more rapidly and comprehensively.
6. Young children thoroughly enjoy learning to read.¹

The group of individuals who are in favor of putting a formal reading, or at least a formalized reading-readiness program in the kindergarten are not in agreement as to the reasons for this type of program which would include the use of worksheets, workbooks, phonics, and word-recognition drill. One segment of the group believes an early academic start is the answer to the "Space Age Speedup." Individuals in the second segment have proof that reading can be taught to very young children. A third segment observe that children "love it," parents "love it" and it keeps the children quiet. Because children have had so much exposure to learning and reading before arriving in kindergarten, the fourth segment believes there is nothing left to do but begin on the reading materials. Those who have a vested interest in reading-readiness materials appear to make up the fifth segment.²

It is from this fifth segment that a number of publishers can be found who have prepared "pre-reading" or "reading-readiness" types of materials for kindergarten use. Although these materials vary, exercises are included to help children identify letters; to sound letters, usually starting with initial consonants; and to learn to follow instructions with other members in a group. Most of these readiness programs are planned to prepare a child for group instruction in a basal reading system which is used in primary grades. A child needs to learn to listen to directions which are intended for him as a group

¹Glenn Doman, How to Teach Your Baby to Read (New York: Random House, 1963), pp. 82-84.

²Neith Headley, The Kindergarten: Its Place in the Program of Education, (New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1965), p. 73.

member. The material, which is carefully prepared, is graduated in difficulty. A child's response is controlled. If he is asked, "In what word does 'A' come?", he must respond Apple. He may know several words which begin with "A", but Apple is the only correct response.

When children master the technical elements satisfactorily, simple books are introduced. The progress varies within a kindergarten class. Some children are eager for this type of "lesson" from the first day of school and will do well with it. Others are not yet ready and lag or wander off.

The children who are ready are usually arranged around tables in groups of six to ten. This group works on the next step in the sequence of lessons at a planned time each day. Other experiences are also worked into the preplanned programs, but they must be limited so that the work of primary importance, reading readiness, is not displaced. This work seems to assume that children's abilities within the group are similar because they are all expected to follow the instructions and make the identical responses. A few may be very interested at first but later become restless and obviously uninterested. They may be too advanced in their reading knowledge to be challenged by the exercises, or it may be too difficult. It is very unfortunate for these children; if their teacher does not understand the reason for their boredom and compels them to "pay attention." Some children resist such pressures and turn to disrupting the class. Rigid adherence to uniform materials often cause undesirable effects which can be observed frequently.¹

¹Roma Gans, Fact and Fiction About Phonics, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964), pp. 75-78.

Possible Dangers of Formal Reading
Readiness in the Kindergarten

A formal reading readiness program, such as the one just discussed, is severely criticized by many teachers, educators, and reading authorities. Dr. James L. Hymes, Jr. believes it is not necessary to stop all other activities in order to teach reading. He believes children should be busy with a variety of activities which are truly their interests rather than working on an activity because it is the teacher's command. In this type of program, each child is strengthened and learning is exciting regardless of the child's readiness development.¹ Most five-year-old children are not ready to read. An artificial or teacher dominated kindergarten which forces children to work in readiness books, workbooks and drill on phonics will not make them ready. Children in kindergarten need books and should be given an opportunity to hear the wonderful stories that have been written for them. They need to know and love the literature that was written for their age and not be required to work in workbooks.²

One of the greatest and perhaps most dangerous pressures is the demand to start formal instruction early. Twentieth-century research supports the importance of building readiness for learning reading.³ Articles which favor formal reading readiness in kindergarten can be read in respectable national magazines. One such article was "Why Waste Our Five-Year-Olds?". The two themes which were evident in this article were that five-year-old children

¹Dr. James L. Hymes, Jr., "Early Reading Is Very Risky Business," Grade Teacher LXXXII (March, 1965), 92.

²Dr. James L. Hymes, Jr., "One Good Way to Teach Fives to Read," Grade Teacher LXXIX (December, 1961), 88.

³Hefferman, op. cit., p. 57.

should be given an academic program, and they should be toughened up by less "mothering" for the tough age in which they will be living. The title of the article raises many questions. One question, "Are five-year-old children entitled to be five and enjoy it?" needs to be considered.¹

Doctor Moore has also been criticized. His critics seldom challenge the fact that children do learn from the talking typewriter, but they seriously question the advisability of such learning at an early age. Some educators fear that early reading may cause eye damage that will not become evident until later, and others, such as Doctors Frances L. Ilg and Louise Bates Ames of the Gesell Institute of Child Development, call early reading "foolish and needless." Sue Moskowitz of New York City's Bureau of Educational Research adds, "Research proves that early readers don't generally read better later on than those who learn at the regular time. Pushing an unready child into formal instruction can create destructive feelings of fear, inadequacy and frustration."²

From the high school senior down through the junior high school and the elementary grades, children are expected to learn faster. Kindergarten teachers are often under pressure to move the more formal structure and primary grade content into kindergarten. As a consequence, the kindergarten teachers must replace the opportunities and experiences which are so important with prepared readiness materials which are assumed to teach readiness to all children alike.³

Kindergarten teachers find it difficult to have the zest and enthusiasm

¹Alice V. Keliher, "Do We Push Children?," Childhood Education XXXVII (November, 1960), 109.

²G. P. Gilmore, op. cit., p. 41.

³Annie L. Butler, "Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Why?," Childhood Education XXXIX (September, 1962), 10.

which are essential to effective teaching under such conditions. Their efforts to achieve educational goals are frustrated, and they must use methods which are completely opposite from what they learned as a part of their professional training.

Much danger to the welfare of children and effective teaching is evident from the pressures which are being put on the schools. One of the most dangerous of the pressures is the demand that subject-matter learning and particularly the learning of the skills of reading and mathematics be pushed down into the curriculum for the early childhood years.¹

Recent emphasis on science, mathematics, and foreign language, which is the result of the world race for power, has caused adults to be aware of their own educational inadequacies. Because of this awareness, adults have strongly resolved that today's children shall never find themselves in the same predicament. They believe children must get an early start in order to enter a profession early, to acquire acceptable status, and to gain sufficient purchasing power in order to take advantage of the new products which are the result of scientific discoveries and technological change.

Beginning formalized teaching at an earlier age is misinterpreted as assuring that the desired learning will occur with greater comprehension and efficiency. Because there are different pressures, more attention and value has been placed on certain aspects of child behavior which previously had less influence. It is true that today's five-year-olds are learning some things faster than others, but basic patterns of child growth and development have changed little. Children can and do learn from many different kinds of experiences. A lack of ability to distinguish between personal preference and

¹Heffernan, op. cit., p. 58.

quality education is evident when education uses formalized programs in an effort to improve opportunities for learning. The possibilities that are available should be broadened rather than narrowed.¹

The experience-based program provides a great variety of materials and activities. This type of a program places its emphasis on trips for finding out and discovering, on books for examination and enjoyment, and on children's creative ability to build and construct. The teacher pays particular attention to the variations in abilities of the children in speaking, listening, illustrating, thinking and constructing. Experience-based programs places emphasis on individual differences, and readiness for the varied multiple experiences are provided. The child's growth in recognizing letters and words, beginnings in phonics and in writing emerge from the interests the children are pursuing.²

Reading is a kind of vicarious experience; it is a means of widening individuals' limited personal experiences. The need to enlarge their experience through reading is a necessity when they have exhausted their environment. But a kindergarten child is not yet acquainted with his environment and has by no means exhausted it. He needs real experiences. There is much he has not yet seen, heard, or felt, and he needs to have his attention directed to his environment. He needs to learn how to express the ideas he gets from his experiences. Most five-year-olds show unlimited curiosity for knowledge, but their interest in formal learning is short. There are many ways to make knowledge available without insisting on the skills. Pushing the child to learn skills before he is ready refuses him the right to grow in his own way, and he is not allowed to take the time he needs. He needs to learn how to play, how

¹Butler, op. cit., p. 11.

²Gans, op. cit., p. 78.

to live with others in harmony and how to control his emotions. The child's self-concept and his attitudes toward learning deserves serious consideration. If reading is forced upon him too soon, there is grave danger that the truly fundamental things will be sacrificed.¹

Educators and kindergarten teachers must not forget that in the final analysis, children exercise control over their own learning. Children may learn something entirely different from what the teacher thinks is being taught. If the classroom is abounding with pressures, the teacher's purpose, no matter how worthy, may be of no value. Children may respond with fear, distrust, and pressure as a result of conformity. Their learning may be the indirect result of anxiety which comes from the atmosphere of their homes or the school. The joy, adventure and sense of accomplishment which comes from learning may be lost from the result of rushing to master content which four and five-year-olds must eventually master, but it is possible to encourage their enthusiasm for learning. Children must feel a challenge to learn, and any attempt to hurry them in kindergarten threaten the acceptance of this challenge.

An advantage of good kindergartens is that children can move at their own pace, both in timing of their activities and in pacing of their learning.² Kindergartens are provided for what a child needs now and should serve as a preparation for first grade only to the same extent that any experience supports a later one. Readiness is build on many experiences over a long period of time. It should provide an environment of exploration, not of heated preparation.

In many schools reading in kindergarten has become so important that all

¹Gertha Williams, "The Kindergarten and Reading--Another Viewpoint," Childhood Education, XL (October, 1963), 77-78.

²Butler, op. cit., p. 12.

else is incidental. Unfortunately some people think they see trouble in kindergarten because there is "too much play." They believe children must be quiet and must be working on paper in order to learn. Many such schools purchase readiness materials because they can be ordered easily, and teach readiness, by using paper and pencil, to all children alike. Readiness, in this form, is looked upon as a cold process from which one can isolate the various steps and work on them. In a good program children develop the skills which make later reading meaningful. The skills are not isolated bits of learning but are outgrowths of an environment of active participation.¹

Children who have been exposed to a formal readiness workbook in the kindergarten do not show any more readiness or potential for reading than do children who have had an informal activity program.

The learning process takes a long time. The time for being ready is short, but the time it takes getting ready is long. Children need time to grow; they need to learn how to work with materials and other people. They must also have new experiences before they can concentrate on learning in a formalized way.

One way to broaden the view of what a teacher should do in a kindergarten is to look at the differences in children. Most five-year-old children share some needs in common with other five-year-old children, but the differences provide the spark that causes certain children to stand out from all the others.²

The Kindergarten's Responsibility to Children Who Can Read

Some of these alert children develop a continuing interest in reading between the ages of five and six. They may be constantly asking the question,

¹Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 115-116.

²Butler, loc. cit.

"What is this word?" A sensible answer is to pronounce the word distinctly. Many young children have taught themselves to read in this simple, informal way. When these children enter kindergarten, they may be able to read simple stories.¹ There are probably more early readers enrolled in the schools than ever before. Today, many children are being exposed to numerous educational influences and even children of average intelligence sometimes learn to read at age four or five. Some of the children who are able to read reject reading as a kindergarten activity and choose more sociable and creative activities which provide a new and different kind of challenge.

Other children show their interest and readiness for reading by merely asking to be taught.² The questions parents frequently ask are: "Is early reading at home good for the child? Will it hamper him in school? Will it confuse him? There are some teachers, phonics advocates, and reading specialists who, unfortunately, do not endorse early reading interests at home. They believe there is only one way for a child to begin to read. Which one method they believe should be used varies among those who maintain this position. The fact that children, through their own eagerness and using their own resources, have "taught themselves" to read is not considered important. There is no apparent concern over holding back or dampening the ambitions of the eager readers.

Long and inclusive observations of early readers show that they are not hampered and will not be confused in school if two factors are respected. First, the child should be helped in his request for aid, but he should not be high-pressured or forced into beginning reading by an overly ambitious parent.

¹Gans, loc. cit.

²Marjorie Hunt Sutton, "Listen to the Little Ones," The Education Digest, XXXIX (May, 1964), 36.

If he receives too much pressure, he may be harmed in more areas than his reading. If he is urged to read too much, he may resent the adult, resent reading, and may not feel accepted at home. If there is a relaxed, normal parent-child relationship, this adds to his sense of closeness to the parent, and his joy in learning.

Second, the child profits from before-school knowledge of reading if he is taught by a sensible teacher. She must have a respect for the knowledge and skills children possess when they enter school. It is also very important that she have respect for wholesome parent-child relationships, and young children's eagerness to learn. A thorough understanding of the proper role of the school in meeting individual children's needs, with all their strengths and variations is a necessity.¹

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

There is definitely a need for a thorough study of the kindergarten as it now exists. The result of such a study might lead to a redesign of the kindergarten in terms of modern objectives and the kindergarten child of today.

The educational philosophy of today is based on an understanding of the growth process and how best to cooperate with it in guiding the child. This philosophy is consistent with our democratic beliefs, for it maintains that the task of those who teach the young is not to force children into a predetermined pattern, but to guide growth. The most important characteristic of a democratic society is respect for the individual and the contribution he can make to the group. The most important responsibility of democratic education, therefore is to help each child achieve his maximum growth in relation to his individual

¹Gans, op. cit., p. 75.

potentialities. The nature of each child must determine in what way the child will be guided.

The preschool and primary grades have shown the greatest progress in accepting constructive educational ideas. Schools are moving toward the understanding that their goal is to enable each child to live a full rich life at whatever stage of growth he has reached. The school must do everything possible in order that the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional growth continue at the optimal rate for each child.¹

The kindergartens must be willing to continue to accept new ideas and provide for individual differences and needs. It is a well known fact that widespread individual differences do exist in a group of kindergarten children. A possible solution to meeting the individual needs is to provide a more adequate grouping system in the primary grades. Schools can no longer group kindergarten children according to chronological age and adequately take care of the current reading needs of each child. All kindergarten and first grade children in one given school system should not be expected to have all the same readiness experiences. If a child who can already read, or who is ready to begin to learn to read, is required to sit through these readiness experiences, the school is not meeting his reading needs. The child may also be developing poor attitudes toward reading and school. It is likewise dangerous and may be harmful if the school presses a child into beginning reading when he lacks maturity or has an insufficient experiential background to be successful.

There must be better programs of diagnosis that start earlier and continue throughout the primary grades if schools are going to adequately meet the reading needs of each child. It is necessary for the school to know a

¹Lambert, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

great deal about each child when he starts to school. It is too late to begin a diagnosis of each child after children have been grouped according to chronological age in kindergarten in the fall. Diagnosis should begin during the spring preceeding his entrance to kindergarten. Children are registered for kindergarten at this time, and parents can fill out a detailed questionnaire which will give the first indications of a child's readiness to learn to read.

Individual conferences with parents is also helpful and should be the second step in preparing for the proper placement of each child. If it is learned during the conference, that a child can read, he should be individually tested in an informal manner. Silent and oral reading should be used during this test, and the child's comprehension should be checked with appropriate questioning.

The tentative grouping should be made on the basis of questionnaires, conferences, and chronological ages. There should be no definite grouping during the first few weeks of school. The teacher must observe the children carefully during the group activities in this period. This observation period should help teachers make further adjustments in the membership of the groups and will also enable teachers to place those children properly who did not register for kindergarten in the spring. It is imperative that groups should be kept flexible at all times so that adjustments can be made whenever necessary according to the changing needs of each child. Parents should be thoroughly informed of the procedures and every effort should be made to help them have a sufficient understanding of the kindergarten program.

Much of the success of a kindergarten readiness program is dependent on the attitude and personality of the teacher. An understanding teacher can and usually does succeed with the available materials. A teacher who lacks understanding and feeling for children seldom succeeds even though she may have the

best materials.¹

One of the most important factors to be remembered in the kindergarten reading readiness program is flexibility. The reading readiness program must be adjusted to the children's needs. They should be allowed to progress only as fast as they can go successfully and comfortably, beginning at their particular stages of development. If children can progress at a more rapid rate, however, teachers should be willing to make adjustments rapidly and provide additional enriching materials.

A great deal of discussion and attention is being given to the kindergarten reading readiness programs at the present time. It is very important that kindergarten teachers be well informed about all new methods, but they should constantly keep their own goals in mind. Progress always involves change, and kindergarten teachers should be ready to accept changes if the kindergarten program will be truly strengthened.

In conclusion, it would be well to remember that kindergarten should remain a place free of rigid subject or skill requirements. It must provide a carefully planned program which will meet individual needs. This program must provide an organization which is flexible. It must provide a variety of activities which will meet kindergarten children's individual needs at the present time and be directly related to successfully preparing these children for their future years of education.

¹H. Alan Robinson, (ed.) Recent Developments in Reading, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 10-12.

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READING READINESS IN THE KINDERGARTEN

by

LOIS VIRGINIA STARR

B. S., Emporia State Teachers College, 1960

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The purpose of this report was to provide needed information to those schools in which it is assumed that reading readiness is a definite responsibility of the kindergarten. The degree to which the kindergarten should be consciously devoted to the development of readiness for reading is uncertain and opinions differ about the approaches to reading that the schools should use. In the existing kindergartens there are great variations in goals and standards from state to state and district to district. There are even considerable differences in some districts from school to school.

Special emphasis was placed on factors which influence reading readiness. These factors are often complex and are also quite involved and interwoven. It is difficult, therefore, to determine what single factor or group of factors contribute the most significance to reading readiness. But the major factors which are important and which have the most influence on reading readiness are mental maturity, physical maturity, emotional maturity, social maturity, background of experience, and motivation.

General intelligence is the most important single factor in reading readiness. Since general intelligence is an average of many phases of mental growth, it is significantly related to most of the other factors. There is definitely a substantial relationship between mental age and learning to read, but the generally accepted mental age of six years and six months may vary with the skill of the teacher, the materials available, the size of the class and other factors. Mental age should not be the only determining factor in establishing an absolute dividing line for beginning a reading program. It is only one element of the whole pattern of growth which determines the child's readiness to read.

One of the most important purposes of kindergarten education today is to help the child explore, to discover himself, and to become acquainted with the

many sources from which he can learn. This means the school must provide an environment in which children will need and use a wide variety of opportunities to encourage learning. First and foremost in such an environment there should be attractive books which the children can handle, and explore. Most children come to school with positive attitudes and are eager to learn and anxious to begin reading activities. The modern kindergarten tries to preserve this eager and inquiring attitude and encourages children to learn all they can from their own observations and inquiries. Well selected picture books are an excellent source of pleasure and information.

Many studies have been made to determine the importance of kindergarten training and its effect on a child's later school progress. With few exceptions, these studies prove that the experiences and instruction which was given in pre-primary school years definitely promotes success to a measurable extent in the early primary grades. This success is probably due to the readiness which is promoted in the kindergarten. Part of the instruction in kindergarten should definitely be planned to help prepare children for the reading program in which they will be participating at a later time.

There is a great deal of disagreement among the reading authorities, however, in regard to the type of instruction which should be used. The report presented the philosophy which supports early reading and a discussion of some of the methods which are recommended for a formal kindergarten reading readiness program.

The possible dangers of formal instruction and the consequences of too much pressure are also factors which have been presented. One of the most important factors to be considered in the reading readiness program is flexibility. The program must be adjusted to the children's needs. They should be allowed to progress only as fast as they can go successfully and comfortably,

beginning at their particular stages of development. If children can progress at a more rapid rate, however, teachers should be willing to make adjustment rapidly and provide additional enriching materials.

A great deal of discussion and attention is being given to the kindergarten reading readiness programs at the present time. It is very important that kindergarten teachers be well informed about all new methods, but they should constantly keep their own goals in mind. If the kindergarten program will be truly strengthened by these new methods, however, kindergarten teachers should be ready to accept changes.