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Reading in the kindergarten

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of implementing a formal reading program in the Kindergarten. Past and present reading instruction methods were reviewed. Benefits, as well as problems, associated with such implementation and instruction were discussed and conclusions were drawn from the literature. Guidelines and recommendations for implementing various approaches to the teaching of reading in the Kindergarten were outlined.

Reading in the Kindergarten

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

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Christine E. Resch

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background and history

The reading controversy is an ever present dilemma, and is particularly entangling regarding the best method of teaching reading: phonics vs. sight or whole word reading. Another pertinent concern is when formal reading instruction should begin. According to a joint statement of the IRA (International Reading Association) and NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children), even though “. . . reading and writing abilities continue to develop throughout the life span, the early childhood years--from birth through age eight--are the most important period for literacy development” (*Learning to Read*, 1998, p. 30). Additional concerns include whether there should be formal group instruction in the Kindergarten years and, if so, what would such instruction look like and who would participate?

In researching the history of reading, one can trace its rudimentary beginnings as far back as five million years by way of markings on bone and stone. Within the last 5,000 years, the hieroglyphics of Egypt were read by scribes. Yet, neither of these examples represent the true history of reading as an educational practice affecting large segments of a given population. Such practices may be most effectively traced back to only the past 300 years with the seventeenth and 19th centuries showing the greatest expansion of reading literacy among adults and children (Kaestle, 1991).

The Colonial Period in America saw a male literacy rate “. . . of about 60 percent in 1650 and rising to . . . 90 percent by the time the Founding Fathers

signed the Constitution" (Kaestle, 1991, p. 20). Reading took off particularly in the 18th century when New England states, through particular movement of the Puritan church, developed schools and populations began to cluster together in larger groups (Kaestle, p. 20). Following the American Revolution and up until approximately 1840, the normative reading of the population was the Bible, early newspapers, political essays and tracts--reading with clear emphasis on moral and patriotic values. Students were taught by the alphabetic spelling method where they learned the alphabet followed by spelling the syllables of that word; additionally, they memorized various passages of text.

Probably most familiar to people would be the McGuffey Readers. These famous readers were published in the 1800s by William H. McGuffey, President of the University of Virginia where he remained until his death in 1873. During this period, he revised the *McGuffey Eclectic Readers* which had first been published in 1838. McGuffey sought to understand the interests, abilities, and comprehension of children by arranging them in groups by age, and by having them read selected pieces which he intended to include in his readers. Selections that generated interest and excitement were included, while others that failed the test were discarded. McGuffey's Readers eventually evolved into a series of six readers with a spelling book and, later, a high school reader. Subsequently, they went through many editions and were adopted by thirty-seven of the then existing states. It is estimated over 122 million were sold (History of the McGuffey Reading Center, 1999, p. 1).

These *Golden Rule Series* books heavily influenced society and became a significant corner stone in America. Some of the stories taught lessons about being a good child. This method was used in both the 17th and 18th

centuries where it primarily was used to develop religious beliefs, morality and patriotism. The 19th century saw a change in reading methods with the introduction of the phonics method which incorporated saying the sounds as opposed to the letter names. It was during these pre-television days that listening and correct speaking were major sources of entertainment; hence, it was important sounds be articulated well and accurately.

It was early in the 20th century that phonics instruction was replaced with the sight-word method; this was "... largely due to three factors: the new field of psychology and educational research, the need for rapid silent reading with comprehension in an industrialized society and a mushrooming publication industry" (Carr, 1995, p. 51). Much of the early part of the 20th century was influenced by John Dewey and his contemporaries who further emphasized what McGuffey began in the previous century; namely, "... the integration of the curriculum around thematic units based on children's interests" (Carr, 1995, p. 51).

In 1897, *Baldwin Readers*, the first to use colored pictures, were introduced. This stimulated greater interest in reading both because of their attractive use of color and the fact that inexpensive printing techniques offered books to the masses.

It wasn't until the 1930's that school surveys showed what educators suspected--that thousands of children were unable to read effectively. The monotonous memory drills of the 19th century had to be replaced with reading activities that freed children from the lock step of traditional technique (Kismaric, 1996, p. 25).

William S. Gray, an editor of the popular *Elson Readers* published by Scott Foresman, developed a model for a new whole-word reading system that evolved into Scott Foresman's innovative *New Basic Reading Program*. Featured in this series were Dick and Jane, who from the 1930s to the 1960s

taught millions of children how to read (Kismaric, 1996).

Though the alphabetic-spelling approach of the 19th century was clearly no longer in vogue, the whole-word method and other approaches emphasizing phonics continued to be in conflict.

This conflict reached a crescendo in 1955 when Rudolf Flesch published his best-selling *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Flesch charged that American children were not learning to read because they were not taught phonics. A decade later, in 1967, Harvard professor Jeanne Chall published a very influential review of research in which she concluded that phonics produced at least somewhat better results than the whole-word method (Graves, Juel and Graves, 1998, p. 65).

In that same year, studies by Bond & Dykstra produced findings that tended to support Chall's conclusions.

According to Graves, Juel and Graves (1998) in *Teaching Reading in the 21st Century*, phonics instruction

... is absolutely crucial to becoming an accomplished and lifelong reader. We further believe that, although a small percentage of children learn this relationship on their own without formal instruction, most children stand the best chance of learning it through direct teaching (p. 150-151).

One must keep in mind that although phonics instruction is essential, some children require more direct instruction and that the real purpose of reading is constructing meaning.

In the 1960s there was a trend toward holistic approaches with studies in psycholinguistics, cognitive psychology and the influence of Piaget, but these eventually lost out in popularity in the 1980s to "... a series of sociopolitical reform movements, including 'back to basics' and behavioral psychology's 'master learning'" (Carr, 1995, p. 51). It was during the 1990s that the holistic approach to reading took on a new name, "whole language." This is a combined philosophy of such influential educators such as Dewey and

Piaget to more current reading relationships developed through Ken Goodman, Frank Smith, Bill Martin, Jr., James Moffet and also Marie Clay and Don Holdaway of New Zealand (Carr, 1995).

As we approach the 21st century, the teaching of reading is as complex as ever. Teachers need to incorporate a variety of teaching strategies, matched with the interest and ability of each child. Three approaches to reading instruction--the traditional basal approach, the literature-based approach, and the whole-language approach--are the most commonly used by educators today. It is important children feel successful in their reading endeavor, no matter where they are in their reading entry. The at-risk learner will indeed need more scaffolding on the part of the teacher, but no matter what, the learner must feel a sense of pride and accomplishment in any reading experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review the literature concerning the pros and cons of implementing a reading program in the Kindergarten and to determine guidelines for an effective reading program in the Kindergarten. In order to achieve this purpose, the following questions will be addressed:

1. What are the advantages to teaching reading in Kindergarten?
2. What are the disadvantages and problems associated with reading instruction in Kindergarten?
3. What are the guidelines for implementing an effective program of reading in Kindergarten?

Need for the Study

The question of when children should begin to receive formal instruction in reading is one which has concerned educators for most of the 20th century. A study by Mabel Morphett and Carleton Washburn (1931) conducted at the Winnetka, Illinois School District in 1928, found that “. . . correlations between mental age and the ability to learn to read, as measured by reading progress and sight-word scores, showed a fairly high degree of relationship” (p. 502). Given this correlation, it then “. . . seems safe to state that, by postponing the teaching of reading until children reach a mental level of six and half years, teachers can greatly decrease the chances of failure and discouragement and can correspondingly increase their efficiency” (p. 503).

Gates (1937), on the other hand,

. . . found that the study conducted by him in 1937, six years after the Morphett and Washburne study, that in one of four classes he studied that children with mental ages as low as five could cope successfully with first-grade reading (Chall, 1996, p. 90-91).

However, the children used by Morphett and Washburne were an intellectually superior group, where Gates studied a more normal IQ distribution in terms of the general population. This might suggest the skewed populations would not offer valid comparisons. Yet, Chall seemed to agree when she suggested: “If we examine both studies, we must conclude that both were intrinsically valid; yet, both were relevant only for the particular situations studied” (p. 91). Thus, though both are valid, they can not be compared in such a way as to suggest the earlier findings were wrong (p. 91).

Still, more current research, including a follow-up study by Gates (cited

in: Kaestle, 1991) further reaffirmed the earlier position taken by Gates. In 1947, Gates compared scores for that year to their 1937 equivalent. In making this comparison, Gates

... found the 1947 students outperformed those of 1937. Gates argued that the proper comparison is by age, not grade, because a student's grade is an artifact of the time period's educational policies, particularly those relating to school-entering age and retention policies (Kaestle, 1991, p. 88).

This conclusion would suggest that when students enter school--Kindergarten in most all cases--they should be given reading instruction.

Similarly, Bill Honig (1997) concluded "Teaching children to read is the key to subsequent educational success and should be the most important priority of elementary schools" (p. 1). Since this is such a significant undertaking, perhaps the process of a formal reading program should be implemented in the Kindergarten years. Such a program may best be introduced to children who are eager to learn. "Therefore, early interactions with children are needed to make active learners out of passive ones" (Askew, 1998, p. 126).

Limitations of the Study

Although there was sufficient material available regarding new research in language acquisition, including how babies begin their *development in both thinking and speech patterns*, there was a *limited amount of research completed which fully substantiated the formal* introduction of a reading program in Kindergarten. There were a few primary sources dating back to the 1920s and some studies linking reading to earlier ages. There is an on-going controversy regarding when children

should learn to read. This study will examine the literature concerning the impact of children learning to read in the Kindergarten.

Definition of terms

Alphabetic principle: Understanding that there is a systematic relationship between letters and sounds.

Bottom Power: The ability to sit still for a given amount of time.

Decoding: The ability to read through a word from left to right, generate the sounds that are connected to all the letter patterns and blend those sounds into a word.

Formal reading program: A designated time period which focuses on specific skills in reading instruction with specific students or groups.

Fluency: The ability to read quickly with comprehension and expression.

Emergent literacy: Literacy rich homes where 1,000 plus hours are spent on reading and related literacy activities.

Informal reading program: Reading taught to children throughout the day. Also known as informal group instruction in reading.

Invented spelling: Refers to beginners' use of the symbols they associate with the sounds they hear in the words they wish to write.

Jargon: All the words we use to talk about reading and writing.

Phonemes: Spoken language is made up of discrete words, which are made up of syllables, which themselves are made up of the smallest units of sound called phonemes.

Phonemic Awareness: Refers to a child's understanding and conscious awareness that speech is composed of identifiable units. Words are made up

of sounds, has many levels and is the ability to hear whether or not words rhyme, changing phonemes to form different words. This is developed through repetition found in nursery rhymes and books which make words sound fun.

Phonetics: An area of linguistics that involves the study of sounds in speech. Its emphasis is on oral language, not print.

Phonics: The relationship between sounds in speech and spelling patterns.

Phonological Awareness: The ability to manipulate sounds, ability to do this is highly correlated with their success in beginning reading. Using invented spelling is instrumental in developing this.

Predictable Books: Books which have repeated patterns, refrains, pictures and rhyme.

Shared reading: A process in which the teacher and the children read a big book together.

Sight reading: All the words a reader can immediately recognize.

Whole word reading: An instructional method that emphasizes learning to associate printed whole words with their spoken counterparts

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:

Reading in the Kindergarten

Though "... articles and books on learning to read and write before Grade 1 are almost nonexistent in the literature before the 1920s" (Nielsen, 1996, p. 260), clearly, the trend in kindergarten reading instruction is growing. Two bills recently passed by the California State Assembly specifically addressed instructional materials for Language Arts, Mathematics, Reading and Spelling. The California Department of Education Reading Task Force Report places reading as the highest priority in California, and encourages a balanced, integrated program consisting of "... listening/speaking skills, writing/reading skills within an interactive environment that encourages communication and reading" (*A Look at Research*, 1999, p.1).

In Hanson and Farrel's study (1995), they suggested that the quality and timing of early reading instruction may improve the reading ability and school achievement of children in the early elementary grades. The study further indicated that parents play a significant role in contributing to the reading process. They do this by carefully selecting an appropriate preschool as well as a progressive Kindergarten program which fostered reading. Further evidence for providing reading instruction prior to first grade is found in Tyler (1964) and, more recently, in the work of Durkin (1987). Her work showed children do not have to be from advantaged homes to learn to read early.

Again, Hanson and Farrel (1995) observed that "... Students who learned to read in Kindergarten were found to be superior in reading skills

and all other educational indicators measured as seniors in high school" (p. 929). Thus, there were no negative effects from a reading program introduced in kindergarten. It further stated that any district with a policy which does not support such an early literacy program, should provide evidence of why no such program exists. Finally, they concluded "... schools having a well-developed reading program in kindergarten that is effectively and appropriately implemented should produce positive long-term benefits for all students, regardless of their background characteristics" (p. 928).

Since learning to read is a developmental process which takes into account a young child's age, word and letter level decoding skills, or other specific skills, it is important to realize that a goal of beginning reading instruction should be to move each individual child toward the understanding that readers use multiple strategies to interpret the language and construct their own meaning. In another study by Nielsen and Monson (1996), they said "... increasingly, children are coming to school with prior school experiences, and Kindergarten is essentially a universal experience for American children" (p. 259). It is important for teachers to utilize those experiences in teaching reading. Thus, even children in the emergent literacy kindergarten, though younger than those in reading readiness Kindergarten, made gains over the course of the year. The data also seemed to support the argument for enriched literacy environments for children of any age, but particularly for those who are young at the time of entrance or are considered at-risk in terms of projected success in kindergarten. (Nielsen and Monson, 1996) When students have sufficient *bottom power*, the ability to sit still for a given amount of time, and are grouped together in a guided reading program in kindergarten, they succeed (Saunders-Smith, 1998).

We've come a long way in terms of teaching reading from the days of alphabetic memorization or McGuffey readers. Consider this from Durkin's book, *Children Who Read Early* (1966) where she related the story about Midge, a Kindergarten student. Midge was capable of reading at level 4.2, but deliberately concealed her early reading ability, both in kindergarten and in first grade, because of a desire to be like other children and to do what they were doing. And reading was not what other children were doing, either in the kindergarten or in the beginning weeks of first grade, in 1956 and 1957. The accepted responsibility of kindergarten was the promotion of social and emotional development.

Clearly this paved the way for further research into reading readiness and to review research concerning preschool reading. The concept of reading readiness has been debated through the ages. Durkin (1993) observed that although there are strong arguments for heredity or environment as the strongest factor accountable for readiness, neither is the sole factor in this development. As early as the 1900s, children started first grade at age 6, as advocated by John Dewey. Durkin also reiterated that "... babies start to learn from birth, and... parents play an important part in these early learning experiences" (p. 3). In her research study conducted in New York City in 1965, Durkin concluded that the difference between early readers and nonreaders lies not so much in the children, but in the parents.

No one can dispute the importance of sound reading instruction. In *Preparation for Reading: The SOI System* (1999)

... the combined effort of all reading programs is less than universally successful--estimates vary, but somewhere between 15% to-20% of all high school graduates are functionally illiterate. (An important corollary of this statistic is that the vast majority of the 15-20% end up on public assistance or in corrections--they become a very expensive segment of society) (p. 1).

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development recognizes the supreme importance of an early and successful start to learning to read (National Institute, 1999, p. 1).

In their publication *A Look at Research* (1999), the California Kindergarten Association stressed the need for

... kindergarten teachers to help young learners develop their language skills not only through specific language activities, but through the entire day in a variety of activities including painting, drawing, building, singing, dancing, and dramatic play. ... They caution the teachers that 'workbooks are a very limited way to provide for language expression' (p. 1).

In the *Linguistic Environment of Early Readers* study by Davidson and Snow (1995),

... investigators, most extensively Wells (1986), have found familiar interaction settings with the people primarily responsible for a child's language development to be the most fruitful contexts for assessing language input. The six peer pre-readers in the study also displayed extremely sophisticated oral language skills. All these children had learned to talk in families where parents used complex and sophisticated language as they encouraged their child's language development, corrected their mistakes, and used language for the discussion of complex matters (p. 19).

Finally, Noam Chomsky (1994), a noted linguist, agreed with Davidson and Snow (1995) regarding the influence of environment on language and reading acquisition when asked about the correlation with language

acquisition as a basis of reading. In his writing, Chomsky stated that at birth, children are genetically programmed to acquire language and that it is innate. "If a child is placed in an impoverished environment, innate abilities simply will not develop, mature, and flourish" (Putnam, 1994, p. 331).

Although there may be differing opinions on when reading instruction should be implemented, and to whom such instruction should be directed, there is little doubt that sooner is better than later. The results of Nielsen's and Monson's (1996) study clearly "... underscore the importance of teachers having current knowledge of literacy development and administrators having a willingness to support timely change in the education of kindergarten children" (p. 270).

CHAPTER III

TEACHING READING IN KINDERGARTEN:
NECESSITIES, DISADVANTAGES, ADVANTAGES AND GUIDELINES

Necessities

In order to know if reading should be taught at the Kindergarten level, one must first understand the fundamental purposes of Kindergarten. There is clearly a push within school districts to bring more academics into the Kindergarten. Some districts shift the emphasis too dramatically, and an essential aspect of the Kindergarten, namely social development, is lost in favor of the more rigorous program of learning. There must be a balance between learning academics and preparing children for their entrance into formal education.

Since children from age three on are clearly being exposed to thousands of hours of television and more recently, video games, it is even more imperative that schools determine learning readiness of entering Kindergartners. It once may have been the case that "... in the typical American home, parents read to their preschoolers daily--resulting in hundreds and thousands of hours of literacy exposure prior to school entry" (Adams, 1998, p. 8). Unfortunately, there is no longer an assurance that each six year old will have had a thousand hours of being read to, taught modes of listening, or interacted closely with adults in developing appropriate speech habits. In addition, unless parents have monitored television viewing to intentionally include such programming as Sesame Street and Reading Rainbow, there is likely to be a gap in essential knowledge expected among entering Kindergartners.

For incoming six year olds; there are reasonable benchmarks of learning to be expected. Among these are counting to ten, knowing basic colors, knowing the alphabet, and identifying specific sight words. If these areas are not mastered, there may be little reason for embarking on a vigorous reading program. Reading readiness must be the determining factor when teachers decide whether or not to teach Kindergartners to read. Not all of them will be ready or able to start such a program. In *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, 1999), over two dozen kindergarten accomplishments were noted regarding the preparation of children for more formal reading instruction in first grade and beyond. Among these accomplishments are knowing letter sound correspondences, recognizing sight words, retelling stories, listening attentively to books being read, writing one's own name, and using phonemic awareness to pronounce words and spell.

Disadvantages

Clearly, if entering Kindergartners do not have these and other accomplishments already mastered, there may be little point in embarking on a reading program. The results will be mixed at best and most likely frustrating for the unprepared. Once again, other, more critical needs of the Kindergarten will be lost in an effort to *get them all reading before First Grade*.

More specifically, acceleration of learning by implementing rigorous academic demands on younger and younger children may have decided disadvantages. "Some researchers suggest this approach undermines the social and academic development of young children because the presentation of letter and number facts are typically decontextualized and not connected to

children's real lives" (Fielden, Spring 1998, p. 2).

Other disadvantages include the cost factor of implementing reading programs in the Kindergarten because of the need for more materials and personnel. To effectively include reading in the Kindergarten, school districts need to go to an all-day approach for the Kindergarten. This would impact even more on schools in terms of space allocations and time constraints.

One of the most compelling reasons to withhold reading instruction until after Kindergarten comes from Goldman (1999) who strongly suggested that children must be emotionally ready for school. Goldman's premise is that children must arrive at school with key emotional factors in place if they are going to be effective learners. Thus, there may be some evidence that kindergartners do not have the necessary emotional intelligence to cope with the rigors of an intensive reading program. Similarly, the Danish schools concur by suggesting that reading be withheld until age eight (Hannaford, 1995, p. 84).

Finally, many Kindergarten teachers feel the first grade curriculum is being pushed down to the Kindergarten. In doing this, researchers suggest children's social experiences, including experiential learning and play, are sacrificed for more rigorous academics (Fielden, Spring 1998).

Advantages

Still, an important challenge remains for educators today and that is to determine how to build a lifelong love of reading in young children. It is critical during these formative years to have guidelines for reading. If one would only subscribe to the findings of Morphett and Washburne (1931), no formal reading process would begin until the mental age of six and a half. However, studies from Fred J. Schonell, an author in England agreed with the

study of Morphett and Washburne but noted that "... five-year-olds were learning to read in the English infant schools, and nannies in upper-class homes were teaching youngsters to read even before they entered these schools" (cited in Chall, 1996, p. 90). Likewise, Gates also found that children with mental ages as low as five could cope successfully with first-grade reading. (Chall, 1996). Then research by Dolores Durkin (1964) indicated younger children can and do learn to read and that an earlier start may be better than a later one.

An important step on the road to literacy begins very early in life. In her article, *Thinking before Doing*, Mary Benson McMullen (1998) carefully examined the steps toward literacy by observing toddlers using higher levels of thinking that required them to think first and then act. This stage usually occurs by age three and this thinking is considered symbolic because children must be able to understand and use symbols mentally in order to think before doing. Thus, the child is able to store mental images and to hold onto those images in order to become active problem solvers and to interact with the world around them. This is critical in learning to read and write, for these fundamental symbolic skills are necessary for literacy to develop.

The symbolic thinking / emergent literacy connection is well grounded in child development theories. "Vygotsky (1962) and Piaget (1967, 1983) both concluded that competence with using symbols in one area should predict skill in other symbolic areas such as reading and writing" (McMullen, p. 66). Thus, providing activities such as block building, dramatic play, and experience with the creative arts provides necessary building blocks toward literacy in the emergent writing and reading process.

The challenge to early childhood educators is to provide numerous

opportunities to develop this symbolic thinking skill needed for problem solving and literacy. An atmosphere is needed in which children feel safe in taking risks; also a highly literate environment is needed that is rich in materials which promote symbol use, and caring adults are needed who encourage rather than discourage. These are all essential elements in creating competent, confident young problem solvers, creative thinkers, and efficient and motivated readers and writers (McMullen, 1998, p. 69).

Finally, the longitudinal study provided by Hanson and Farrell (1995) indicated that “. . . students who learn to read in Kindergarten were found to be superior in reading skills and all other educational indicators measured as seniors in high school” (p. 929). Thus, evidence is compelling to seriously consider implementing a formal reading program in the Kindergarten for children who exhibit reading readiness skills.

Guidelines for reading in the Kindergarten

Based on the literature, certain factors must be considered in developing an effective reading program in the kindergarten. The following guidelines are needed for a successful reading program at this level.

1. Children must be ready to read in the Kindergarten.

Kindergarten children should be active participants in the program. They should be good listeners; they should be able to sit still for an extended time and be interested in reading; they should also have basic letter identification skills in place as well as letter/sound connections. They also need certain components of phonemic awareness skills in place for beginning reading development. In fact, recent research suggests that phonemic awareness may be the “. . . most important core and causal factor separating normal and disabled readers” (Adams, 1990, p. 305).

2. The Kindergarten teacher must have an understanding of how to work with children in a positive way.

It is necessary that children enjoy reading and that teachers reflect this positive attitude in guiding the children. This would include meeting the needs of individual students and providing careful screening for children who have the necessary reading-readiness skills and background. Teachers also need to pursue all teacher-training opportunities. There should be on-going in-servicing for teachers to provide adequate training and new techniques. This will provide the needed momentum for a positive curriculum which will enhance the continued reading program. Teachers also need guidelines to determine the skills of the child. An example of such guidelines is listed in the Appendix.

3. There must be appropriate materials.

Appropriate materials include a series of readers for the kindergarten children. Also, computers are needed to enhance the developing readers. In addition, big-books are needed to provide rich print variety to students.

4. Parents must be supportive.

Parents should be active readers themselves. They should be trained and given the role of helping their child to read and see this as a priority for their time and energy. Also they should learn reading skills for helping their children to read. For example, they should know appropriate questioning techniques that they can use with their children.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study looked at reading in the Kindergarten and the different views that reading specialists hold concerning it. More research needs to be done with this topic.

The Purpose of this study was to review the literature concerning the pros and cons of implementing a reading program in Kindergarten and to determine guidelines for an effective reading program in the Kindergarten. The study addressed the following questions in order to accomplish this purpose:

1. Are there disadvantages to teaching reading in the Kindergarten?

Providing reading instruction in the Kindergarten can often become a disadvantage for children who are not ready for reading. Currently, other than Hanson's study (1995), there is not sufficient research on the teaching of reading in the Kindergarten to indicate any long-term effects. Though some studies have followed children's growth in reading from five years of age until 23 years of age, such research is difficult to pursue (National Institute, 1999). "For many years, reading research has been hampered because support for long-term studies was not available and because many earlier studies did not describe the children or the assessment/teaching methods used with sufficient precision" (National Institute, 1999, p.2).

If the reading instruction called for extensive written activities, such as worksheets, children at this young age could become turned-off to reading opportunities because they may lack the motor skills, and interest could

decline because of such rigid activities. A formal, rigid reading setting could become a deterrent to early readers. Certainly the time spent in a formal reading situation would provide less time spent in social situations with peers, and thus, the child would miss out on that growth and opportunity.

Similarly, many social skills and interactions are taught through various classroom center opportunities. However, if the bulk of the teaching in the Kindergarten focused only on reading instruction, the child's other learning opportunities and valuable social interaction would be hampered; thus, an imbalance would result in the child's development. Interaction and cooperation and peace-making opportunities all provide for a child's important first start in school.

Finally, an important disadvantage may be with the teacher. With all the demands there are in the teaching of Kindergarten, the question must be raised regarding whether or not there would be adequate preparation and teacher in-service opportunities to insure the successful implementation of such a program. Likewise, another teacher consideration must address whether or not extra help would be provided in the Kindergarten room while reading instruction was occurring with the reading readiness group.

2. Are there advantages to teaching reading in Kindergarten?

During recent years a movement toward teaching formal reading in the Kindergarten has occurred. There are many advantages to teaching reading in the Kindergarten, but only if children have demonstrated that they are ready to read. Often, children pick up information by being active listeners. Even though some children would not be a part of the actual reading group, the enthusiasm and prospect of future participation in such a group would serve as a model for non-reading children. By providing

children with reading experiences in the early years it is likely to set the stage for successful reading and citizenship in later years (National Institute, 1999).

Teaching reading in the Kindergarten would offer parents more opportunities to work with their child and teacher since this parent component is vital in the reading process. Teachers could model reading strategies and questioning techniques to help parents work better with their child at home. Certainly teaching reading in the Kindergarten could provide a positive basis for all future learning. Educators should capitalize on providing this opportunity for some Kindergartens because the dividends for the child and society will be worth it. The study cited by Hanson (1995) stated that teaching reading in the Kindergarten has no negative effects on these students, rather their learning was enhanced and provided them greater success in school.

3. What are the guidelines for implementing an effective program of reading in the Kindergarten?

1. Children must be ready to read in the Kindergarten in order for them to be active participants.
2. The Kindergarten teacher must have an understanding of how to work with children in a positive way.
3. There must be appropriate materials.
4. Parents must be supportive.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn from this study.

1. During recent years a movement toward teaching formal reading in the kindergarten has occurred. Many approved such a program and many opposed it.

2. The questions regarding advantages and disadvantages to teaching reading in the Kindergarten are complex. Ultimately, they are concerned largely with the marked differences in the development of children of the same chronological age. Five-year-olds show great variation in what they already know and what they can and want to do. (Tinker, 1971, p. 132).

3. Reading in the Kindergarten is effective if, and only if, the children are ready. This readiness can not be expected to take place only in the schools, but parents must be involved.

4. Social growth of the children can not be sacrificed for pull-out reading programs. Thus, there are cases where reading education in Kindergarten is appropriate, but these situations must be tempered in light of larger issues of social awareness and the general well-being of the child.

5. Not all children are ready to read in Kindergarten and we do them a disservice if we force them to try to learn before they are developmentally ready.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested after having completed the study.

1. Provide a balanced approach to all learners in the literacy development.
2. There must be regular teacher inservice and preparation to meet the demands of constantly changing reading practices.
3. Schools must foster critical and creative thinking in young children by expanding questioning techniques.

4. Parents must be educated how to ask questions while reading to their children.
5. Schools must develop sound practices for helping parents to play an important role in their child's literacy development.
6. Provide a literacy-rich classroom with an emphasis on providing a balanced program to include shared reading experiences.
7. Develop a formal reading approach for readers who exhibit a more sustained *bottom power* ability.
8. Provide a phonemic and phonics awareness program for all kindergartners.
9. Develop suggested reading choice centers as recommended by Henderson (1996). Such centers include, Poem box, Tape a story, Magnetic letters, Overhead, Read the room, Write the room, Flannel board, Bookmaking, Interactive charts, Pocket charts, Poetry notebook, Read with a friend, Reading garden, Big books, Book boxes, Listening, Author center, Charts, and Theme books (p. 591).
10. In developing a love of literacy, teachers and parents must be good role models engaging in reading themselves.
11. Talk with children daily as such communication is essential in developing sound reading practices.
12. Provide various reading genres to generate an interest in children and thus build on their successes in reading.
13. Further study needs to be done which will give additional information about what is needed to teach children reading in the kindergarten.

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APPENDIX:

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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Needs Assessment for Evaluating a Literate Environment in Kindergarten

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Research has identified developmentally appropriate practices in exemplary kindergarten reading programs. The following checklist will help evaluate and plan a program in relationship to these recommended practices.

Yes No

- The teacher is qualified to work with this age group through college preparation, staff development and/or supervised experience.
- Children are read to from a variety of resources on a frequent or daily basis.
- Children are given numerous opportunities to verbally interact with peers and adults.
- Instructional materials are familiar to the children.
- Instruction provides for and enhances the varied learning styles of the children.
- Children use a variety of manipulative materials.
- The teacher encourages risk-taking in early attempts at reading and writing and has an accepting attitude toward errors as part of the initial learning process.
- The learning environment is arranged to encourage exploration and independent learning without a great deal of direct adult intervention.
- Assessment and evaluation of student progress is more dependent upon direct observation rather than use of worksheets or standardized tests.
- Children engage in activities which require purposeful problem solving.
- The teacher respects the language background the children bring to school and uses it initially as a base for language activities.
- Learning activities are designed to develop children's self-esteem and encourage a positive attitude toward learning.
- Children experience success in daily activities.
- Learning activities emphasize children's active participation and exploration.

Yes No

- — Children have daily opportunities to participate in large muscle activities.
- — Children have daily opportunities to participate in small muscle activities such as painting, cutting, and the use of pegboards and blocks.
- — Children participate in activities which demonstrate the need for reading and writing.
- — Basic skill instruction occurs in meaningful situations rather than in isolated skill lessons.
- — Concept development is emphasized and based on prior knowledge of children.
- — Activities stress the integration of all subject areas.
- — The teacher works in partnership with parents by encouraging communication between home and school.
- — The teacher shares techniques that involve parents with their children in reading and related activities.
- — Children are engaged in a variety of creative and aesthetic opportunities.
- — Children work both individually and in small groups.
- — The teacher is a facilitator of learning rather than a giver of knowledge.
- — Both the physical and nutritional needs of the children are addressed.
- — Both the social and emotional needs of the children are addressed.
- — Children use a minimum of worksheets and workbook pages.
- — The instruction relates experiential backgrounds of the children to meaningful learning situations.
- — Rote memory, isolated skill instruction and drill are given minimum attention.
- — Play is used and valued in the teaching/learning process.
- — The teacher facilitates the development of intrinsic motivation and self control.
- — Children are encouraged to explore avenues of communication through such areas as visual arts, music, drama and dance.

Yes No

- — Children visit the school library on a regular basis to meet with the librarian and to check out books.
- — The teacher-pupil ratio is limited to enable individualized, small group and age appropriate programming.

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