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A comparison of selection procedures for transition room placements

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Abstract

This study seeks to identify and compare procedures that can be used to distinguish between students who are, and those who are not, ready and mature enough to enter a regular first grade. Kindergarten teachers' recommendations and individual children's test scores will be collected and analyzed. A follow-up first grade evaluation based upon teacher recommendations, test scores, and individual evaluations will be used to check earlier predictions.

A COMPARISON OF SELECTION PROCEDURES FOR TRANSITION ROOM PLACEMENTS

A Research Paper

Presented to

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Chapter 1

Introduction

When kindergarten teachers consider recommending a child for placement in the first grade, two questions almost always need to be answered. Is the child ready for first grade? Is the child socially mature enough for first grade?

Each child who enters school in Iowa must be five years old before September fifteenth according to the School Laws of Iowa (Benton, 1981). Yet chronological age is not a sufficient basis for predicting readiness or maturity.

Readiness, according to Dorothy Beckett, can be conceived of as the state of being of the child or as the result of teaching and stimulation (1964). More recent research has demonstrated that readiness is not a specific point in age but rather a continuous, ever-evolving process, ". . . resulting from instruction in and exposure to a continuum of various communicative activities and skills" (Collins, 1979, p. 182). Hale Shirley estimates that fifteen percent of children reaching school age are not ready for instruction (1955).

Piaget considers maturation to be contingent upon biological functioning, which in turn is fostered by

experience and training (Piaget, 1959). Children enter kindergarten with mental ages ranging from three to eight years old. Developmental lag in motor, language or perceptual skills is not uncommon even in kindergartners of above average intelligence. Physical, behavioral, or emotional problems make it difficult for some five year olds to learn. Other circumstances such as family size, family instability, and background experiences play a significant role in the maturity of a kindergarten child (Solem, 1981).

Is the child ready for first grade? Is the child mature enough for first grade? The answer is sometimes very definitely "No." If so, then what should the educational placement for that child be? What kind of placement would assist that child to develop in areas of school readiness?

Some children need more time and additional experience to grow in readiness and maturity otherwise they are likely to encounter failure and even more importantly damaged self-concepts (Ragan, 1972). Should the teacher wait passively for maturation to occur? Should readiness skills be attempted if the child is immature? Shilden finds training to play a significant role even in those functions in which maturation is of primary importance (1964). The teacher cannot wait for

the child to mature. Neither should the teacher expose a child to the kind of instruction that is inappropriate at that child's stage of growth. What kind of placement would be most appropriate for the child who needs to mature and grow in school readiness?

The transition room might be the most appropriate educational placement. A transition class is designed for children advancing from kindergarten but who are not yet ready for first grade. Transition classes were recommended by Jansky and de Hirsch as early as 1966 (1972). They suggested a transition class that would start where the child is and would take him/her through a carefully planned program designed to help each child with specific problems. Teaching methods would primarily be individualized. The transition class size would be small so that the teacher could effectively support the child who needs individual guidance (Johnson, 1965). The instructional program would be designed to improve reading and math readiness, to develop oral language, to increase the child's ability to understand spoken language, to listen, and to follow directions. Activities would be aimed at developing gross motor skills and eye-hand coordination. Development of a healthy self-concept would also be an essential part of the program (Solem, 1981).

The concept of a transition room is appealing because children do differ in their rate of development both physically and mentally. They also differ in their ability to gain from the experiences in which they participate. ". . . Because of these differing rates of development, we recognize the fact that some need an extended period of readiness at a given point, rather than a full push ahead to a level a whole step higher" (James, 1967).

Elementary schools that are meeting individual differences are adopting new practices in regard to promoting, grouping, and reporting on the progress of pupils. Studies reveal that ". . . (1) approximately fifty percent of general school achievement attained at grade twelve has been reached by the end of grade three and (2) in terms of intelligence measured at age seventeen, about fifty percent of the development takes place between conception and age four and about thirty percent between ages four and eight" (Worth, 1965, p. 72). This data would seem to support an educational plan that would permit children to progress through the school program according to their own rates of learning. Such a plan would improve the quality of instruction in the kindergarten and primary grades (Worth, 1965). The transition room for kindergarten children not ready for first grade would be an integral part of this plan.

A transition room could be justified by the existence of kindergarten children with the aforementioned special needs. How then would the children be nominated for this placement? What methods would be used for identifying the children who are not ready and are not sufficiently mature to begin the first grade?

Standardized achievement tests are one method of evaluating a child's status with respect to essential intellectual abilities and skills. They have been devised by evaluation experts and are generally valid and reliable instruments for measuring academic achievement. They have been administered to a large number of children in different regions of the nation so that national norms have been established. A school district or teacher, can compare pupil scores with the national average (Jarvis, 1966).

Kindergarten teachers can be asked to identify candidates for the transitional classroom. Their observations and judgments can play a significant role in the screening process. A study of the effectiveness of four readiness tests as predictors of first grade academic achievement states that ". . . standardized tests should be used in conjuction with the social, emotional and behavioral context provided by the classroom teacher" (Teledgy, 1975, p. 9). Along with standardized achievement

tests and teacher referrals, some schools ask teachers to complete informal rating scales to identify candidates for a transition classroom.

In summary, a transition room is a placement for children not yet ready for first grade. Data has been cited to support the educational need for such a classroom. Methods used for nominating children for a transition classroom have been identified. This writer proposes to further investigate procedures for selecting kindergarten students who would benefit from this placement.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to identify and compare procedures that can be used to distinguish between students who are, and those who are not, ready and mature enough to enter a regular first grade. Kindergarten teachers' recommendations and individual children's test scores will be collected and analyzed. A follow-up first grade evaluation based upon teacher recommendations, test scores, and individual evaluations will be used to check earlier predictions.

The questions this study hopes to answer are: Can kindergarten teachers accurately predict which children will have difficulty with first grade work? When the

identified children are in first grade, do their first grade teachers also judge them to have learning problems? When compared with other first grade students, are the identified children judged to be lower in readiness and maturity? Do children judged to lack readiness and maturity also obtain low scores in achievement measures? If first grade teachers' nominations and pupil test scores seem to support the assessments of kindergarten teachers, can it then be assumed that kindergarten teachers' nominations can be used to identify children for the alternate placement offered by a transition room?

Importance of the Study

Kindergarten teachers in Ottumwa, Iowa, are perennially faced with a child placement problem. What placement should be recommended for the child who a teacher believes is not yet ready to proceed to first grade? Most of these children lack readiness in language and psycho-motor skills. They usually show immaturity in social skills and very often possess marginal work habits. Their reading and math readiness are far behind those skills of their peers because of these immaturities. Therefore, a program such as a transition room would enable these children to gain maturity so that they might be able to progress

through subsequent grades with a more advanced level of readiness for school activities. This would prevent students from being discouraged by early failure, which often occurs when they are not ready for the academic activities of first grade.

In Ottumwa, a child placed in first grade who needs extra help has few available options. If a kindergarten child scores below the 60th percentile in the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, he/she may receive Chapter I readiness assistance in first grade. This child ordinarily receives approximately thirty minutes a day in reading groups. The group is usually composed of not more than six children with the special reading teacher. Thirty minutes a day is insufficient time to help the very low student.

Two other options are currently available for Ottumwa kindergarten children entering the first grade. They may be placed in the Learning Disabilities Class or a special integrated class. In order to qualify for either of these classes, a psychological evaluation must show that the child falls below a certain I.Q. standard. In Ottumwa a child is placed in a resource room if the I.Q. is between 75 and 85 or a Special Class with integration if the I.Q. is between 55 and 75 (Ottumwa Schools, 1984). Kindergarten children who need another year to mature may

not qualify for these programs because their I.Q. is too high. These children are not of low intelligence, they simply are not ready for a first grade experience.

The transition classroom would be well received by kindergarten teachers in Ottumwa. Typical comments include, "This is something I've hoped for during my many years in Ottumwa" (Benson, 1981). "Some of our children are better off at school all day, but they have not acquired the skills to be successful in first grade" (Pettet, 1981). "I do not like retention, yet I do not want them facing failure in first grade" (Parsons, 1981).

School administrators in Ottumwa readily admit that a placement for children not yet ready for first grade is desirable. They have been presented a curriculum for a transition class that they deem acceptable. What they really want is a defensible system for determining which children belong in such an educational placement. This study proposes to devise a method for determining such a placement.

Assumptions

This study supports the need for an alternative placement for kindergarten children. If such a placement were available, this study assumes there are children in

Ottumwa who would benefit from this educational option. This study further supports kindergarten teachers, standardized tests, and screening devices as viable identifiers of children who would benefit from the educational placement that a transition room would offer.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the kindergarten and first grades in the Ottumwa Community School System. Of the nine elementary school, eight chose to participate in the study. Ottumwa is located in southeastern Iowa. The population is approximately 27,000, and is largely a blue-collar community. The school census in 1984 indicated 2,906 elementary children attend the Ottumwa schools. The kindergarten and first grade teachers who responded to this study have classes in Agassiz, Douma, Horace Mann, James, Lincoln, Pickwick, Wildwood and Wilson schools.

The results may have limited application to other school systems because the Ottumwa schools may be unique with regard to population and placement of kindergarten children in an educational system.

Identification of children in need of extra help is limited to teacher referral as well as the Iowa Tests of

Skills given to all kindergarten children and the Gates-MacGinitie tests given to all first grade children. Other evaluations are a kindergarten readiness checklist obtained from the Area Education Agency Fifteen and a first grade readiness checklist constructed by the author (see appendix).

The evaluation took place between the Spring of 1983 and the end of the 1983-84 school year. Thus the results do not affect any other classes in any other school year.

Literature used in the study for research purposes is limited to books, periodicals, pamphlets and abstracts found in the University of Northern Iowa library and an Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) search obtained through the Department of Public Instruction in Des Moines, Iowa.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions are used:

Achievement: In the academic sense, progress made by the learners as measured by a commercially produced and nationally standardized tests.

Development: Changes in an organism from conception to death.

Educational Alternative: The choice between a regular first grade classroom or a transition room.

Gross Motor Activity: Movement in which groups of large muscles are employed and rhythm and balance are of major importance.

Grouping: Placing children by achievement level, special learning needs or interest for more effective learning.

Individual Differences: Degree to which an individual is unlike comparable individuals; some common variables are intelligence, specific skill areas, and physical and emotional characteristics.

Learning: Undergoing changes in behavior and/or performance due to insightful experience.

Maturation: Physiological, mental, and neurological development consistent with chronological age.

Perceptual Motor: The ability to receive, integrate, and respond to various sensory input by selecting an appropriate and executed motor response.

Psychomotor: Domain which includes manipulative skills.

Readiness: Readiness is an ability to engage in a given activity depending on the learners level of maturity and previous experience.

Sensorimotor Skills: Auditory, motor, and visual

abilities necessary for the development of efficient language and reading competence.

Transition Room: Good provides this definition. "A group of children who have been in kindergarten for a year but are not yet ready for first grade and who tnerefore are given enriching experiences for a period of time until they are ready to enter first grade"

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

"Kindergartners Flunk" is the headline in an Associated Press news story found in a recent Iowa Newspaper. "School officials in Minneapolis have flunked more than eleven percent of this years kindergartners and are requiring them to attend summer school before they can go on to first grade" (Minneapolis Star and Tribune, 1984). Even though such startling reports give negative publicity to kindergarten teaching, it is likely that these statistics reflect national trends. The Minneapolis School Superintendent further reports that "he hopes half of the 340 pupils held back will make enough progress in summer school to advance to the first grade next fall." Those who don't, will be placed in a transition program to receive special academic help (1984). The school officials based their decisions on a comprehensive test of children's skills administered on an individual basis and ". . . teacher's evaluations of classroom performance, social skills and attendance records" (1984).

The transition program mentioned in this news story is a placement used in Iowa and other states for

kindergarten children who lack readiness for first grade. The child needs another year to mature and to concentrate on readiness skills not yet attained. If such a placement exists, and the research shows it does, how are the children selected for a transition room? The Minneapolis school system used comprehensive tests and teacher evaluations as selective procedures (1984). The research supports both methods, as well as some kind of questionnaire for a screening device.

Teacher Referral

Kindergarten teachers have expertise in judging the readiness of the children who are assigned to them. In the studies of Ilg and Ames, their developmental findings closely agreed with the teachers' judgment. They found that the teacher is dealing with the maturity of the child, and that maturity can often determine the child's readiness for their present grade level (Telegdy, 1975). The question of promotion to first grade requires the kindergarten teacher to make a judgment about the maturity and readiness of a child. The teacher usually makes this judgment by observation and by use of standardized tests (Telegdy, 1975).

Studies show that kindergarten teachers are asked to make referrals for existing transition rooms. A junior first grade program has been in existence since 1970 in

Sioux Falls, South Dakota. ". . . Kindergarten teachers identify candidates for these transitional classrooms" (Solem, 1981). Teachers are asked to complete an informal Pupil Behavior Rating Scale for each child. In addition, the Metropolitan Readiness Test and the Yellow Brick Road Screening Test are administered (Solem, 1981). The Rochester, New York school district places children in transition classes upon teacher recommendation (Dolan, 1982). In Iowa, the Hudson school district uses teacher referral as the main identifier (Taylor, 1983). In the Harlan Community School ". . . individual need and readiness is assessed by the kindergarten teacher" (Patten, 1981). Children in the Grinnell-Newburg Community School District gain entrance into the existing transition room by teacher referral alone (Steffens, 1984).

In a study that used four readiness tests as predictors of first grade academic achievement the authors found that ". . . teacher predictions have several aspects that standardized tests cannot replicate. They represent the impressions of a professional who spends several hours a day with the child and who observes him in many forms of social and emotional as well as educational contexts" (Telegdy, 1975, p. 11). The readiness tests were analyzed according to their strengths and weaknesses and it was found that standardized tests add ". . . significant

predictive value when combined with teacher evaluations. Therefore, standardized tests should be used in conjunction with the social, emotional and behavioral context provided by teacher observation" (Teledgy, 1975, p. 9).

David Pisani found a transition class was receiving inappropriate referrals. ". . . The class was designed to serve normal children between kindergarten and first grade who seemed to need an extra year of maturation" (Pisani, 1978, p. 4). However, students who had discipline, emotional, and learning problems were being placed in this class, while students who might have benefitted from the readiness class were sent to regular first grade ". . . where they encountered much difficulty" (Pisani, 1978, p. 4). To ensure more appropriate placement new referral procedures were developed. Teachers' opinions concerning students' readiness and maturity, scores on the Slasson Intelligence Quotient Test, and the Meeting Street School Screening Test were used to select candidates for the program.

A handbook for teachers and school counselors entitled Early Identification and Intervention was written because of the importance of educational assessment, ". . . specifically the identification of children who may be developmentally disadvantaged" (Rowe, 1981, p. 45). For identification purposes, the screening and assessment included five important phases. The first part (1) Screening,

included teacher impressions, classroom observations, parent interviews, and the ACER checklist for school beginners. The other four phases included: (2) Definition of the problem, (3) Pinpointing and design of the intervention, (4) Monitoring of progress and (5) Follow-up. The screening and assessment would find particular strengths and weaknesses of the individual children and then adapt teaching methods to the developmental levels and needs of those children (Rowe, 1981, p. 82).

The research indicates that kindergarten teachers have some expertise in determining placement for kindergarten children. Barbara and Christopher Johnson warn teachers not to "overplace." When children are overplaced, they are confronted with work for which they are not yet ready, or are presented with social-emotional requirements that are beyond their maturity level. Frequently children who are overplaced fall behind academically, are unhappy with school, and never make up lost ground (Johnson, 1982, p. 53).

The Educational Testing Service surveyed first grade teachers who reported that sixty percent of their children were not ready for the academic work of first grade. This sample included seven thousand children from across the United States (Johnson, 1982, p. 53). When confronted with this kind of statistic, a kindergarten teacher might want to ask, "Was a transition room one of the available

options or were large numbers of inadequately prepared children sent to first grade because no such option was available? Furthermore, was the lack of the option due to identification procedures that relied too heavily or exclusively on teacher evaluations?"

Standardized Test Results

Along with the teachers' judgments about the readiness of the children, evaluations were based on achievement testing. The Early Primary Battery of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills were administered to kindergarten children in Ottumwa, Iowa. The results indicated that these tests ". . . are useful in determining readiness for learning and for diagnosing strengths and weaknesses in skills performance that may be used as a partial basis for making instructional decisions" (Hieronymous, 1984, p. 5).

The Marion Community Schools in Indiana identified children whose academic achievement was low by using the Metropolitan Readiness Test, along with teacher evaluations. They have established a Junior Step-Up Program between kindergarten and first grade (James, 1967).

In the Kensington section of Philadelphia the transition class is called a Readiness-Pre-First year class. The class was introduced to the school system in an effort to improve readiness of school children entering first grade. For several years it had been the practice

of the schools to retain the kindergarten children who were not ready for first grade. This practice was found to be a problem for several reasons. One of the problems was "the childrens' half-time attendance" allowed only "half-time attention" to their learning problems. Another area of concern was a need for new materials rather than a repetition of old experiences. All kindergarten children were administered the Santa Clara Inventory of Developmental Tasks. These tests were intended to determine "objectively" which children would be candidates for the readiness class (Goldenberg, 1978).

Test scores are often used in testing kindergarten children for reading readiness alone. In "An Investigation of the Relationship between Readiness Test Scores for Kindergarten Children and Achievement Scores Obtained at the End of Grades One and Two," findings suggested that those children who scored high in readiness tests in kindergarten were more likely to achieve reading success in grades one and two. The researcher concluded that according to ". . . these findings it seems reasonable to encourage teachers to distinguish between those children who can safely move into regular reading instruction and those who would benefit from further informal reading activities" (Warkinton, 1979).

Children in a transition room would certainly be

candidates for further informal reading activities. The research shows that standardized achievement tests are one method of locating the children who most need concentrated readiness activities.

School Readiness Instruments

The research also described a variety of instruments that can be used to make placement decisions. These tests do not test overall achievement. They were constructed by establishing certain criteria believed to be associated with success in school.

In South Carolina the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery was selected because of the relationship to eighteen kindergarten educational objectives. Prior to the test, kindergarten teachers were asked to rate each child in their classes in terms of readiness for first grade. The teacher ratings obtained through this process were used in conjunction with the students' performance on the CSAB. A score of eighty-eight out of one hundred seventeen, or seventy-five percent, was considered "not ready." A result of the adoption of this readiness test was to point out individual developmental needs of each child and a plan for local readiness programs for 1980-1981 (Hill, 1980).

Four other readiness tests used as predictors of first grade achievement include: The Screening Test of

Academic Readiness (STAR), the Bendar Gestalt Test (BGT), the First Grade Screening Test (FGST), and the Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT). The results of the research suggested that the STAR or the MRT, coupled with teacher observations, and the BGT can provide a school system with an adequate screening readiness battery (Telegdy, 1975). They further suggested ". . . that teacher predictions are quite efficient and can complement formal tests" (Telegdy, 1975, p. 11).

The Hayes Early Identification Listening Response Test is designed to measure readiness for school. It emphasizes listening comprehension, visual perception and five motor skills. The major strength of this test is its ". . . effectiveness in identifying preschool children who may experience achievement problems in the early elementary grades" (Buttramand and Covert, 1976, p. 543).

Other research suggests that the Pre-Reading Skills Test (PRS), the Visual Pattern Recognition Test (VPRT), and the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Achievement Test are viable instruments for readiness assessment "because these tests are designed to assess individual students' present level of performance on specific skill tasks and because they can be readministered easily at numerous times during the year" (Collins, 1979, p. 187).

The Human Figure Drawing Test (HFD) has also been

studied for use as a predictor of a kindergarten child's academic readiness for the first grade classroom. The child is asked to draw a person on an 8½X11 blank sheet of white paper. The findings suggest that such a test would be useful in the identification of a kindergarten child who is not ready for formal schooling as well as being helpful for the educational programming of this student (Baade, 1981).

A study concerned with evaluating the Yellow Brick Road Test found it to be an instrument useful for identifying strengths and weaknesses in the areas of motion, visual, auditory, and language development. This instrument is necessary as "educators address the challenge of preventing learning problems and because they require validated screening methods that accurately identify children at risk" (Lindeman and Goldstein, 1984, p. 117).

The review of literature in this study has found teacher referral, standardized achievement tests and specific readiness devices are all used by schools for the identification of the non-ready kindergarten child. The literature also supports the need for another form of placement for students not ready for a regular first grade. As Linn Mar, Iowa, Bowen Woods Elementary School Principal Roger Messerly states so well, "The alternative takes away the stigma of the failure of repeating kindergarten. The

alternative is not a failure program, it is success oriented" (The Gazette Metro Iowa, January, 1984).

Chapter III

Data Collection Procedures

This study seeks to propose procedures that can be used to identify students who are not ready or mature enough to enter a regular first grade classroom. This chapter discusses the procedures and data used for this purpose.

Teacher Recommendations

This study was begun in the Spring of 1983. A letter was written to all of the kindergarten teachers in the Ottumwa Community Schools. The letter described the purpose of a transition room. The kindergarten teachers were then asked to recommend two or three children from each of their classrooms that they viewed as candidates for a transition room if one were available. They were asked to identify children who would not be retained in kindergarten but who, in their judgments, were not yet ready for first grade. (See Appendix A.)

Checklists

Each teacher was then asked to complete a School Readiness Checklist for each child identified as a potential transition room candidate. (See Appendix B1.) This checklist is often used by psychologists in Area Education

Agency Fifteen as a screening device for children who have not yet started kindergarten. It was the writer's intent to identify children who were most immature and least ready for first grade. The instrument included a check-list devoted to the speech, fine and large motor skills as well as questions about the child's ability to follow instructions and understand simple words. Teachers were asked to provide a yes or no response to each item. Each "no" response identified a weakness that was believed to be detrimental to a child beginning the first grade. Thus the more "no" responses a child received, the greater the likelihood that the child would encounter difficulties in fulfilling the requirements of first grade. Such a child was designated by this study as one most likely to profit from a placement in a transition room.

Standardized Testing

All of the kindergarten children were given the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in the Spring of 1983. These tests were given before teacher nominations were made. Teacher judgments may have been influenced by a pupil's performance on these tests. Ottumwa children who score below the 60th percentile are eligible to receive reading assistance in the first grade. Scores below the 60th percentile would seem to indicate a greater need for academic assistance.

Comparison Identification

A year after receiving the kindergarten teacher's list of children who would be potential candidates for a transition room, first grade teachers were asked to identify any children in their classrooms who they thought had experienced problems with first grade work and would, therefore, be questionable candidates for second grade. (See Appendix C.) The first grade teachers did not have access to the list of children compiled from the kindergarten teachers' participation in the study. These teachers were not limited to the identification of two or three children as had been true of the kindergarten teachers. The open-ended format was chosen to increase the number of pupils named and increase the likelihood that previously identified children would again be named. This procedure was not without its problems. One school with three kindergarten teachers recommended twenty children as having learning problems of sufficient severity to raise doubts about readiness for second grade.

First Grade Checklist

This researcher decided to develop a first grade problem checklist to help determine which children, among those already named, were experiencing the most difficulties. The first grade teachers were asked to participate in the development of a first grade screening checklist.

They were asked to indicate which academic or non-academic characteristics they believed to be indicative of a child's readiness to advance from first to second grade. With the aid of these teachers the writer was able to construct a checklist that addressed reading and math readiness as well as work habits, maturity and social skills. (See Appendix D.)

The first grade teachers were then asked to complete the First Grade Readiness Checklist for each of the students they had earlier identified as having learning problems. This checklist, along with the scores from the Gates-McGinitie tests, was used to ascertain the readiness of each child for second grade. Low scores in the Gates-McGinitie tests were believed to be indicative of a lack of reading readiness. These tests were administered three times during the first grade year. The number of "no" responses on the checklist was believed to be indicative of social skill deficiencies and a marginal ability to respond to the first grade classroom with mature work habits or with sufficient knowledge of the subject matter. Finally, each teacher was asked to supply the names of children in their classrooms that they had recommended for retention in first grade. Some kindergarten and first grade teachers preferred not to supply the full names of children. They responded, instead, with the child's

initials. The writer did assure teachers that names of the children would not be used in the study. It was decided that a letter system would be used to designate each child in the presentation of data.

It should also be noted that one kindergarten teacher did not respond to any of the requests to identify children for this study. The first grade teachers in that school did answer the request for general readiness information, but declined to identify children who were experiencing learning problems. Thus ten kindergarten and twenty-one first grade teachers from eight elementary schools supplied data for the study.

The data supplied by this study purports to answer the questions: Can kindergarten teachers accurately predict which children will have difficulty with first grade work? When the identified children are in first grade do their first grade teachers also judge them to have learning problems? When compared with other first grade students, are the identified children judged to be lower in readiness and maturity? Do children judged to lack readiness and maturity also obtain low scores on achievement measures? If first grade teachers' nominations and pupil test scores seem to substantiate the assessments of kindergarten teachers, can it then be assumed that kindergarten teachers' nominations can be used to identify children for the alternate placement a transition room would offer?

Chapter IV

Summary of the Findings

This study is concerned with ways of identifying children who are not ready for a regular first grade placement by using procedures explained in the previous chapter. This chapter will summarize the findings of those procedures.

Kindergarten Findings

In the Spring of 1983 ten kindergarten teachers representing eight elementary schools in Ottumwa, Iowa, recommended thirty children, twenty-one boys and nine girls, as potential candidates for a transition room. These were children who, in their judgment, needed to repeat kindergarten but instead were to be promoted to first grade. These children were to be promoted although the kindergarten teachers had serious reservations about their chances for success.

Before teacher nominations were made, these kindergarten children had taken the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. These test scores may or may not have influenced the teachers' selections. Twenty-two of these kindergarten children obtained scores below the fortieth percentile, and of these twenty-two children, twelve ranked below the

thirtieth. All but two of the thirty children nominated received composite test scores below the fiftieth percentile. In the Ottumwa schools, students who score below the sixtieth percentile are placed in Chapter I, a reading assistance program, at the beginning of first grade.

The kindergarten school readiness checklist contained twenty-one items. Twelve of the thirty children received eleven or more "no" responses. Eight more children received nine or ten "no" responses, thus twenty of the thirty children obtained more than eight "no" answers out of a possible twenty-one. Of the twenty students receiving nine or more "no" responses, fifteen were boys and five were girls.

The ten kindergarten teachers were asked to choose five of the twenty-one checklist questions as those they thought to be the primary indicators of maturity or readiness for first grade. The questions receiving the most votes were numbers three, four, fifteen, sixteen and eighteen. The breakdown of the ten teachers' votes for each of these, now labeled "primary" questions, is as follows:

3. Can the child pay attention to a short story when it is read and answer simple questions about it? Ten votes.

4. Can the child draw and color beyond a simple scribble? Seven votes.

15. Can the child remember instructions and carry out two or three simple tasks after being told once? Ten votes.

16. Can the child tell the meaning of simple words like bicycle, apple, gun, shoe, hammer, water, etc.? Eight votes.

18. Can the child supply the last word to statements like: "Mother is a woman, father is a _____."? Seven votes.

Eighteen of the thirty children were given a "no" response to number three. Eleven children seemed to have trouble coloring or drawing as specified in item number four. Seventeen children received "no" responses on number fifteen which dealt with the ability to carry out instructions. Eight children were given a "no" response on item number sixteen. Seventeen children were unable to finish statements such as, "Mother is a woman, father is a _____."

While only three of the kindergarten teachers chose item number one on the checklist as one of the most important readiness indicators, twenty-three children received "no" responses for the item "Was the child five years, six months or older when he began kindergarten?" It is the writer's opinion that most children who were judged unready were in the younger half of the class. However, kindergarten teachers took this fact for granted

and chose other questions as primary indicators of readiness deficits.

The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills is an instrument designed to measure a child's ability to perform selected mental tasks. The School Readiness Checklist assesses other abilities such as fine and large muscle development, listening, following directions, and language skills. While it is conceivable that some kindergarten children could perform well on tasks of mental aptitude and perform low in school readiness tasks, or conversely could perform low on measures of mental ability and high in school readiness tasks, the thirty children who were deemed not ready for first grade had difficulties in both areas. Seventeen of the children were both below the fortieth percentile on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills and received more than eight "no" responses on the School Readiness Checklist. These seventeen children received "no" responses on the five primary checklist questions; three, four, fifteen, sixteen, and eighteen, as well as for question number one concerning the age of the child upon entering school.

First Grade Findings

Twenty first grade teachers identified fifty-eight children as having learning problems of such severity that they would be questionable candidates for second

grade. Of these fifty-eight children, twenty-eight had also been named by the kindergarten teachers the year before. While kindergarten teachers were asked to name two or three students, the first grade teachers could name as many of their students as they deemed questionable candidates for second grade. This difference in the instructions may account for the larger number of recommendations from first grade teachers. A search of the first grade enrollments led to the discovery that all of the children named by kindergarten teachers now enrolled in first grade were identified as having difficulties by first grade teachers. Thus, all of the children from the original group, who were still enrolled in the Ottumwa schools, were experiencing learning problems.

All first grade children were given the Gates-McGinitie tests three times during the year: fall, mid-year and spring. While all scores were examined, it would seem that the spring percentile score provided the best indicator of the growth occurring during the first grade.

Among the fifty-eight first grade children cited as having learning problems, forty-three obtained scores below the fiftieth percentile. A score below the fiftieth percentile places a child in the lower half of all children taking these reading aptitude tests. Three of the fifty-eight were not tested. Only four of the twenty-three

first grade children, who kindergarten teachers had identified as not ready for first grade, received a score that was above the fiftieth percentile.

The First Grade Readiness Checklist contains twenty-five yes-no response items under the headings (1) reading readiness, (2) math readiness, (3) work habits, and (4) maturity and social skills. Thirty-four out of fifty-eight children received more than ten "no" responses. Sixteen of the twenty-three first grade children, who had been recommended for a transition room by kindergarten teachers, received ten or more "no" responses.

Sixteen of the fifty-eight children named by first grade teachers were to be retained in the first grade. Two children would be admitted to a mental disability classroom. Eleven of these eighteen children, who would seem to need more help, had been previously identified by kindergarten teachers.

The first grade children who were to be retained, and who had likewise been identified by kindergarten teachers, all scored below the fortieth percentile on the Gates tests. All received more then ten "no" responses on the readiness checklist.

Of those children to be retained by first grade teachers, but not recommended by kindergarten teachers, two had Gates percentile scores above the fiftieth per-

centile. All of the other students' scores were below the fortieth percentile. Four to be retained, but not recommended by kindergarten teachers, had more than ten "no" responses, and three had less than ten "no" responses on the readiness checklist.

Further Analysis

Kindergarten children recommended for a transition room had been designated by a capital letter. Four of the thirty children were assigned two capital letters. (ie.: AA, BB). First grade children were assigned small letters. Those children, who had been previously identified by a kindergarten teacher, were assigned a small letter that corresponded to the already assigned capital letter. (ie.: Aa, AAaa.) Double small letter and triple small letter designations were used, so all fifty-eight children could be identified without disclosing their identity.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to devise an effective procedure for identifying students for a transition room. The use of kindergarten teachers' recommendations, checklists and standardized test scores were studied as possible methods for identifying children who might profit from this kind of placement.

Using Teachers' Perceptions as Pupil Placement Indicators

Ten kindergarten teachers in eight Ottumwa, Iowa elementary schools identified thirty children as potential candidates for a transition room. Their recommendations were based on their beliefs that these children would experience learning difficulties in the first grade. A year later twenty-three of these thirty children were named by first grade teachers as pupils who had indeed experienced problems in the first grade. The seven children not named by first grade teachers were no longer in the Ottumwa schools. That all of the remaining children were recommended by both kindergarten and first grade teachers is highly significant. It is this writer's opinion that teachers can make valid predictions about a child's academic performance and do so as accurately as it can be done by

standardized tests that are commonly used for this purpose. Teachers' predictions are based on their observations of childrens' behaviors in their day to day experiences in the classroom. Along with informal observations, teachers assess childrens' strengths and weaknesses through the use of pencil and paper instruments and structured observations of their participation in classroom activities and discussions. The conclusions reached from these observations become increasingly more accurate as they are tested against the daily realities of teaching.

While the study found teachers to be the best judge of readiness and maturity in their classrooms, good teachers also devise checklists as further ways to monitor academic success and social development.

Using School Readiness Checklists as Placement Indicators

Checklists are useful because they address specific areas of child development such as social skills, spoken language development and work habits. Standardized tests may be restricted to intellectual aptitude or academic achievement. Checklists may be used to study emotional and social factors that may influence school performance. Children may not perform well on standardized tests because they don't understand the language, because they are not motivated, or because they are too immature to stay with the demands of such tests. These factors aside from the

child's actual academic ability, may influence standardized test information.

A large proportion of the "no" responses on the first grade checklist were assigned to categories (3) work habits and (4) maturity and social skills. There were thirty-two "no" responses out of a possible fifty-eight for the question, "Can the child finish assigned tasks correctly in an appropriate length of time?" Thirty-one "no" responses were reported for the question, "Does the child seem confident with him/herself?" An additional study might deal with the factors that influence these characteristics in students believed to be ill-equipped for first grade.

While checklists seem to be another useful way to look at a child, they are not always useful by themselves. One child identified as poorly prepared for first grade had twenty "no" responses out of a possible twenty-five, while another child similarly identified received only one "no" response. Again we need to examine the whole child. Checklists only examine a part of that child.

While teachers seem to play a vital role in the identification of children with problems, checklists are a useful secondary measure for examining these problems. Standardized test results can also be used to identify children who have difficulty in performing mental tasks.

Using Standardized Tests as Placement Indicators

Teachers should consider standardized test scores as additional placement data. They can be used to determine readiness for a given academic program by measuring skills known to be essential to success in an educational program. This study found the kindergarten and first grade children identified as having learning difficulties scored for the most part below the fiftieth percentile on both the Gates and the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. There were a few notable exceptions. Three children who had been recommended for a transition room by kindergarten teachers received first grade Gates percentile scores of seventy-two, eighty-three and eighty-seven. Yet these three children were identified by first grade teachers as having experienced learning problems. It is evident that test scores, while being one useful way to identify children with learning problems, don't always identify children teachers believe need more help with problems. These three children obtained more than ten "no" responses on the checklist.

It might not be psychometrically accurate to compare measures of achievement like those obtained on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills with measures of reading aptitude secured from the Gates-McGinitie. However, these are the test scores available to teachers in Ottumwa, Iowa and they are used by them to get some picture of each child's

achievement and ability. More legitimate comparisons might be achieved if tests designed to measure similar objectives were used.

Description of a Typical Transition Room Student

Having used teacher observations, checklists and standardized tests to gather data that can be used to predict a child's success or failure in first grade, the writer is able to describe a potential transition room student. Such a student would most likely be a child five years six months or younger. The child would need speech therapy for either receptive or expressive language. Such a child would have problems attending to stories or directions. This child would most likely have fine or large motor difficulties and would seem to have trouble finishing assigned tasks in the appropriate time. Test scores on the Gates-McGinitie would fall below the fiftieth percentile. The child would generally not be motivated to learn and would usually lack self-confidence. A majority of teachers who participated in this study would say that the child may need additional time to mature, and a transition room placement would provide this additional time.

Some recent research indicates that transition room children don't receive as much reading instruction as transition room eligible children who are placed in regular

classrooms. This research suggests transition room programs are "watered down too much" and that "negative expectations of school personnel may contribute to the poor educational outcomes." This research also suggests that often new and inexperienced teachers are used as teachers for transition rooms (Gredler, 1984).

This writer is aware of some poor examples of such programs. However, given the Ottumwa school personnel's approval and support coupled with some good teachers, a transition room would provide a program for children who need both time and selected educational experience to gain the readiness and maturity required for first grade. It is the writer's recommendation that kindergarten teachers be used to identify children in need of such a program. Teacher recommendations should be supplemented with checklists and standardized test results. Perhaps tests and checklists could be administered to all kindergarten children during the month of March. With these results and recommendations, school personnel could meet with parents of the children who are recommended for a transition room placement. The emphasis on more instruction suited to individual needs and smaller classrooms will encourage parental support. The success of children who participate in the program will result in a continuation of this much needed educational alternative.

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Appendix A

Kindergarten teachers,

I am doing a research paper concerning children in kindergarten who are not ready for promotion to first grade. I am proposing a transition room for such children. This would be a placement that would allow another year of growth and learning for an unready child who is often the younger child in a kindergarten classroom. As a part of this research I am studying methods of referring children into such a transition room placement. This is where I need your help.

Would you please give me the names of children in your classroom who, at this time of the year, seem to lack readiness for a first grade placement? Two or three names would be fine. I do assure you that this information will be treated with strictest confidence.

Thank you very much for your help. I value your knowledge and experience. Maybe this study will lead to a new program for these children.

Joyce Warren
Kindergarten, Lincoln

Appendix B1

THE SCHOOL READINESS CHECKLIST

Child's First Name Only _____

Growth and Age:	YES	NO
1. Was the child 5 yrs. 6 mo. or older when he began kindergarten?	___	___
2. Could strangers easily understand the child's speech?	___	___
3. Pay attention to a short story when it is read and answer simple questions about it?	___	___
4. Draw and color, beyond a simple scribble?	___	___
5. Tie a knot?	___	___
6. Zip or button up a coat?	___	___
7. Walk backward for a distance of 5 to 6 feet?	___	___
8. Stand on one foot for 5 to 10 seconds?	___	___
9. Alternate feet walking down stairs?	___	___
10. Walk a straight line?	___	___
11. Fasten buttons he can see?	___	___
12. Tell left hand from the right?	___	___
13. Repeat a series of 4 numbers without practice, such as "say after me 6-1-7-4?"	___	___
14. Repeat 8 to 10 word sentences if you say it once, "The boy ran all the way home from the store?"	___	___
15. Remember instructions and carry out 2 or 3 simple errands or tasks in the home after being told once? (Pick up the book, bring me the pencil, close the door.)	___	___

Checklist, cont.

16. Tell you the meaning of simple words like bicycle, apple, gun, shoe, hammer water, shirt, horse? ___ ___

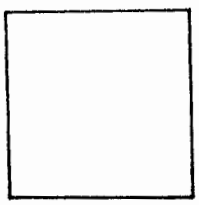
17. Count 4 objects? ___ ___

18. Supply the last word to all of the following statements?
Mother is a woman; Father is a _____. ___ ___

19. Put together a simple puzzle of 3 to 6 pieces? ___ ___

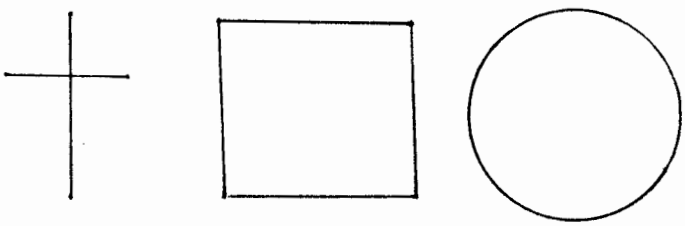
20. Tell what parts are missing if you draw a stick picture of a person and leave out a leg and an arm? ___ ___

21. Draw or copy this square? ___ ___



22. Name correctly these drawings? ___ ___

a cross a square a circle



Appendix B2

Dear Kindergarten Teachers,

Once again I need to ask for your assistance concerning kindergarten children and first grade readiness. I have previously sent you the school readiness checklist for each of the children that you had determined were lacking in readiness for first grade. I am now enclosing that same readiness checklist for your study and opinions.

After you have re-read the questions, would you please circle the five items that you think are most indicative of lack of readiness for first grade in a kindergarten child. If there is something else that you use as a measure of readiness, please feel free to indicate your ideas in writing. If your addition is one of the five most important, circle it as you choose from the other items.

Thank you very much.

Joyce Warren
Lincoln School

Appendix C

Dear First Grade Teachers,

I am working on a thesis toward completion of my masters degree at the University of Northern Iowa. It concerns the need for and a way of determining placement for a transition room between Kindergarten and First Grade. This would be an alternative placement for children who are not quite ready for First Grade, but who need all day, every day remedial help that a Kindergarten is unable to provide.

Last year I asked the Kindergarten teachers to name those children who they thought were lacking in readiness for First Grade. Each teacher completed a Questionnaire for each of the students so indicated. Mr. Ahrens gave me permission to use test scores as further evidence.

Now you have these children in your First Grade Classroom. Of course you don't know which names have been given to me earlier by the Kindergarten teachers. Would you please indicate to me which children at this time of the year you see as lacking in readiness for Second Grade. You may indicate by initials if you wish. Be assured that when the statistics are assembled, no childrens' names will be used. A numbering or lettering system will provide anonymity.

I am now putting together a questionnaire to send later with regard to the children you have named. The questionnaire should address the characteristics of readiness for Second Grade. I would appreciate your input toward the completion of the kind of measure that would indicate either the readiness or lack of readiness for Second Grade. What do you use as a measure of such readiness? Both academic and non-academic characteristics should be examined.

I do appreciate your knowledge and experience and thank you for your cooperation.

Joyce Warren

Lincoln School

Appendix D

A First Grade Readiness Checklist

I. Reading Readiness

1. Does the child have a sight word vocabulary of approximately 50 words?
2. Does the child understand and use the decoding process with consonants, vowels and some blends?
3. Can the child read basic sentences smoothly without word identification problems?
4. Can the child read short stories and understand what he/she has read?
5. Can the child spell correctly words used in their basic sight vocabulary?
6. Can the child write simple sentences?

II. Math Readiness

1. Can the child recall basic addition and subtraction facts 1 to 10?
2. Can the child count one to one correctly?
3. Can the child solve simple "word" problems?
4. Does the child understand basic quantitative concepts such as larger or smaller?
5. Can the child write the numerals to 100 correctly?

III. Work Habits

1. Can the child follow instructions?
2. Can the child work independently for at least 10 minutes?
3. Can the child finish assigned tasks correctly in an appropriate length of time?
4. Can the child correct work after minimum help?

Checklist, cont.

5. Does the child participate in class discussions appropriately

6. Does the student share productively within a small group?

IV. Maturity and Social Skills

1. Is the child motivated to learn?

2. Can the child accept rewards, criticism, or failure?

3. Does the child accept responsibility for her/himself during the school day?

4. Does the child work and play well with classmates?

5. Does the child seem emotionally stable?

6. Does the child seem confident with him/herself?

7. Can the child work without constant teacher approval?

8. Is the child's speech appropriate for his/her age and grade level?

Appendix E

Child by letter	Iowa Tests of Basic Skills RS	GE	PC	Kindergarten Checklist Yes	No	Kindergarten teacher referral	First Grade teacher referral	Gates McGinitie- Spring Composite - vocabulary - comprehension RS	PC	GE	First Grade Checklist Yes	No	Retained
A	71	P7	5	7	14	yes	no		?		?		
B	112	K5	39	12	9	yes	no		?		?		
C	100	K3	28	12	9	yes	no		?		?		
Dd	109	K9	39	5	16	yes	yes	38	24	1.5	14	11	no
E	no score			10	11	yes	no		?		?		
Ff	104	K4	32	13	8	yes	yes	55	72	1.8	10	15	no
Gg	93	K0	19	15	6	yes	yes	61	58	2.0	17	8	no
H	105	K4	33	12	9	yes	no		?		?		?
Ii	96	K2	22	11	10	yes	yes	25	9	1.3	17	8	no
Jj	104	K4	31	16	5	yes	yes	41	30	1.5	14	11	no
Kk	81	P6	12	10	11	yes	yes	13	-	1.2	11	14	no
Ll	108	K5	36	11	10	yes	yes	31	17	1.4	10	15	yes
Mm	105	K4	33	13	8	yes	yes	51	44	1.7	25	0	no
Nn	87	P9	13	15	6	yes	no	25	9	1.3	8	17	yes
Oo	88	P9	18	9	12	yes	yes	21	4	1.2	11	14	no
Pp	93	K1	17	14	7	yes	yes	23	6	1.2	18	7	yes
Qq	116	K8	51	10	11	yes	yes	28	13	1.3	10	15	MD
Rr	112	K5	41	12	9	yes	yes	77	83	2.8	18	7	no

Appendix E

Child by letter	Iowa Tests of Basic Skills RS	GE	PC	Kindergarten Checklist Yes	No	Kindergarten teacher referral	First Grade teacher referral	Gates McGinitie - Spring Composite - vocabulary-Comprehension RS	PC	GE	First Grade Checklist Yes	No	Retained
Tt	no score			17	4	yes	yes	44	35	1.6	15	10	yes
Uu	64	P6	4	2	19	yes	yes	39	28	1.5	7	18	yes
Vv	116	K5	38	5	16	yes	yes	79	87	3.2	23	2	no
Ww	106	K5	35	17	8	yes	yes	58	54	1.9	20	5	no
Xx	93	K1	20	13	12	yes	yes	33	20	1.4	18	7	yes
Y	no score					yes	no		?		?		?
Zz	114	13	55	11	10	yes	yes	50	42	1.7	11	14	yes
AAaa	52	P5	3	0	21	yes	yes	18	8	-1.0	4	21	moved
BBbb	96	K1	20	11	10	yes	yes	35	22	1.4	6	20	yes
CCcc	87	K5	47	10	11	yes	no		?		?		?
DDdd	no score			8	13	yes	yes	53	46	1.7	14	13	no

	Number of No on checklist	Item numbers marked no for Work habits	Item numbers marked no for Soci skills
AA	21	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
BB	20	1 5	3 5 6 8
DD	13	2 3 4	1 3 7
D	11	3 5 6	1 5 6 7
E			
F	15	1 2 3 5	1 3 7
G	0		
H			
I	8	3 5	6 8
J	11	3 4 6	2 3 6 7
K	14	3 4 6	2 3 6 7
L	10		
M	0		
N	17	1 2 3 5 6	1 3 6 7
O	14	5	7 8
P	7		7
Q	15	1 2 3 5 6	1 2 3 6 7
R	7		

Appendix F

	Number of No on checklist	Item numbers marked no for Work habits	Item numbers marked for Social skills
T	10	1 6	1 3 7 8
U	15	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 3 5 6 7 8
V	7	2 3	3 5
W	5	3	3 5 6 7
X	10	1 6	4 5 6 8
Y			
Z	k4		
ee	23	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
ff	5	3	6
gg	10	2 3 4	5 6 7
hh	--	--	--
ii	9	2 3 4	1 2 3 6 7
jj	4		6
kk	1	--	--
ll	12	1 2 3 4	2 5 6 7
mm	12	3 4 5 6	6
nn	12	3 4 5 6	6
nn	2	--	--

	Number of No on checklist	Item numbers marked no for Work habits	Item numbers marked no for Soci skills
pp	18	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 4 5 7 8
qq	25	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
rr	9	1 2 3 4	2 3 4 5 6 7
ss	12	3 4 5	4 5 6 7
tt	12	3	3 4 5 6 7
uu	17	1 3 4 5	3 5 6
vv	3	3	
ww	12	2 3 5	1 2 3 4 8
xx	9	1 2 3	1 3
yy	15	1 2 4	4 6 7 8
zz	16	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
aaa	5	--	--
bbb	10	2 6	4 5 6 7 8
ccc	13	3 4	1 3 8
ddd	12	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5 7 8
eee	10	1 3 5 6	6
fff	19	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 3 5 6 7