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The effect of all day, every day kindergarten on the traditional half day, every day program

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The effect of all day, every day kindergarten on the traditional half day, every day program

Abstract

As a result of an array of social and financial factors, changes in kindergarten programs over the last ten years have brought about a variety of attendance patterns. Beginning July 1, 1992 all kindergartens in Iowa, both public and private, will operate a minimum of 180 days a year for at least 5 1/2 hours a day. These standards tentatively proposed by the Department of Education, as reported in the Des Moines Register (Lantor, 1987), will achieve statewide uniformity of attendance patterns.

The Effect of All Day, Every Day Kindergarten
on the Traditional Half Day, Every Day Program

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

by

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Entitled: The Effect of All Day, Every Day Kindergarten
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has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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The Effect of All Day, Every Day Kindergarten on the Traditional Half Day, Every Day Program

The Problem

Introduction

As a result of an array of social and financial factors, changes in kindergarten programs over the last ten years have brought about a variety of attendance patterns. Beginning July 1, 1992 all kindergartens in Iowa, both public and private, will operate a minimum of 180 days a year for at least 5 1/2 hours a day. These standards tentatively proposed by the Department of Education, as reported in the Des Moines Register (Lantor, 1987), will achieve statewide uniformity of attendance patterns.

Reviewing educational literature to find justification for expanding or extending the traditional half-day program is no longer a critical factor in the decision-making process for Iowa practitioners. The challenge to be addressed now is the implementation of an all day, every day kindergarten

attendance pattern which values early childhood philosophy and preserves for Iowa the distinction of leadership in quality standards for education.

Statement of the problem

The purpose of this study was to evaluate effective practices in current kindergarten programs in order to provide a sound early childhood based curriculum while implementing all day, every day attendance patterns for five year olds.

The historical development of early childhood education in this country was reviewed. Questions derived from the review were: Why are schools changing the attendance patterns for kindergarten? Does research show full day, every day to be the most effective attendance pattern for five year olds? Although these questions need to be answered, the urgent task of establishing all day, every day programs within five years gave rise to these questions: How should the additional time be used? What effect will physical fatigue have on activity planning? What effect will financial factors have on the learning environment of five-year olds?

The second purpose of this study was to provide a

base of information which will directly assist curriculum decision-making for planning all day, every day kindergarten programs.

Importance of the study

During the transformation phase from half day to all day kindergarten, modifications will be planned in existing kindergarten programs. In order for this new organization to have a sound educational base teachers and administrators will need to:

- (1) review the historical development of early childhood education in the United States
- (2) examine research to gain insight into current successful programs produced by the variety of current schedules
- (3) provide a balanced curriculum incorporating the social, emotional, and cognitive development of the child

Administrators are faced with conflicting choices of programmatic philosophies and financial principles. Teachers experience community and parent pressures to incorporate traditional first grade formal academics into kindergarten. The recent emphasis on excellence in education has created a notion that "sooner is

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Review of Related Literature

Historical Development of Kindergarten

Specialists in many professions have long recognized the importance of the early years of a child's development. The establishment of the first public school kindergarten in this country took place more than one hundred years ago. Kindergarten was conceived by Friedrich Froebel in 1837 in Blankenburg, Germany. Devised as a preschool for three to seven year olds, the curriculum was a system of intellectual, moral, and physical education which reflected pedagogical principles (Ross, 1971). Froebel gave significance to a child's play and the need to base the curriculum on the child's interests and needs. He designed a sequential curriculum which applied a theory that each stage of growth evolves from a previous one. Learning by investigating and manipulating concrete objects to draw conclusions was stressed. His series of activities, and associated materials, is still used in Europe. Froebel's original intent was to train men to be kindergarten teachers. The plan received limited interest so he prepared young, unmarried women for the

positions (Woodward, 1979).

The first private kindergarten in the United States was established in Watertown, Wisconsin in 1855. The first public school kindergarten was established in 1873 in St. Louis, Missouri. In the next generation kindergarten was adopted as a means of improving the quality of life of the urban poor and a means of "Americanizing" children of immigrants. Teachers worked with them in the morning and with their mothers in the afternoon (Spodek, 1973). The kindergarten concept was a contributory factor in changing the rigid formalism and discipline which existed in the primary grades during that era (Wortham, 1985). Although Froebelian methods faded as the scientific study of children offered more information on child development, his ideas and influence remain embedded in kindergarten philosophy today.

Public school kindergartens have become a reality in most states. Kindergarten programs began in this country on a full-day basis. The attendance pattern shifted to half-day programs during World War II as a result of the increased birth rate, shortage of teachers, and building space (Oelerich, 1984).

Full-day programs began to surface again during the 1960s and 1970s.

Although HDED continues to be the predominant choice, full-day programs have been the trend during the 1980s. Changes in Iowa kindergarten attendance patterns are reflected in the decrease in HDED programs during the last ten years. According to the information released by the Department of Education (1987) there were 316 schools in Iowa in the 1976-77 school year having HDED patterns. In the 1986-87 school year there were 134 HDED patterns. Plans announced by the Department of Education call for ADED attendance patterns in all kindergartens by 1992.

Research on the Effectiveness of Full-Day Kindergarten

Full-day kindergarten is a trend throughout the United States despite objections by educators and the lack of statistically sound data to support it (Peskin, 1987). Kindergarten attendance patterns are changing in response to social and economic factors. The primary social concern is meeting the needs of working parents. Arrangements for transportation, babysitting, and the parent's daily routine is simplified when the

child is in school a full-day (Naron, 1981). Three to four transitions a day are stressful for all involved (Cruikshank, 1986a). Expenses are reduced when parents no longer pay for child care. Many children of working parents have adjusted to full-day programs, such as day-care/preschool combinations, prior to entering public school. School districts in many regions of the country are experiencing declining enrollments. A combination of economic conditions and a decrease in the national birthrate are affecting the decline. Fiscal budgets are a critical factor to administrators facing limited funds. The initial cost of implementing full-day kindergarten is seen as long term savings. Reports of studies show ADED kindergarten to be cost-effective in that children require less remedial services in later years (Naron, 1981; Humphrey, 1983). Facilities are not a concern in many districts. Declining enrollments have made classroom space available.

The research on the effectiveness of full-day kindergarten remains inconclusive. Although literature in support of full-day kindergarten is growing, much of it is unpublished and difficult to obtain. The

majority of research completed on attendance patterns was initiated and conducted by school districts incorporating full day programs. These studies were done with small samples, weak control groups, and frequently used academic achievement on standardized testing instruments for comparison. Reports of the studies tend to be brief and in some cases do not have substantiating data. An example of a summary statement in one review provided the following: "These results, although not statistically significant, provide support for the study's hypothesis." The need for stronger research methodology and reporting practices is evident (Puleo, 1986).

Although there are conflicting results, the general conclusions of the studies and reviews are that ADED patterns are superior to both HDED and ADAD attendance patterns. In addition HDED programs resulted in higher performance scores for children than did the ADAD programs (MSDE, 1972; Mueller, 1977; Mow, 1977; Beckner et al, 1978; Pligge and Smith, 1978; Wenger, 1978; Alper & Wright, 1979; Cleminshaw & Guldubaldi, 1979; Hatcher, 1979; Oelerich, 1979 and 1984; Barrett, 1980; Hatcher and Schmidt, 1980; Nieman

& Gastright, 1981; Schulz, 1981; Stinard, 1982; Ulrey et al, 1982; Humphrey, 1983; Gullo & Clements, 1984; Glazer, 1985; Tephly, 1985; Gardner, 1986; McConnell & Tesch, 1986). Academic gains are consistently reported for educationally disadvantaged groups in ADED attendance patterns (Herman, 1984; Puleo, 1986).

Positive indications for full-day kindergarten emerged from a longitudinal study done in Evansville, Indiana (Humphrey, 1983). The study concluded children who attended full-day kindergarten tend to have higher academic and conduct marks on report cards, a lower retention rate, lower handwriting ratings, and higher standardized test achievement scores. Student self-concept and attitude about school were not negatively affected by participation in the full-day kindergarten program. Samples for the study were drawn from students who were currently in the second through fourth grades.

Implications for Curriculum Planning

Studies have not revealed innovations to guide decision-making in providing a balanced curriculum in ADED programs. However, theories and practices basic to traditional kindergarten philosophy are

substantiated. Puleo (1986) found little conceptual or theoretical activity in current research that would provide organization and direction for future research. Even though ADED programs were reported as effective in producing academic gains, current research has not answered the question addressing what aspect of the full-day programs produced the reported gains.

Few reports provide details regarding a description of their program. In contemporary times kindergarten goals have been battered between two camps. The traditionalists argue that children are entitled to the "right to be five" and are viewed as believing that children are not capable of sophisticated educational involvement (Yawkey & Silvern, 1976). Conversely, there are educators who view the years from four to six as a critical growth period for intellectual development, a time to develop to full potential. Teachers today are faced with weaving a philosophy which recognizes the truths within each conception. Many agree on goals such as building self-concept, gross and fine motor development, social concepts, responsibility, and self-discipline through an informally structured program. Conflicts occur in

the area of intellectual growth and development. These are not as involved with pedagogical theory as they are with the use of appropriate methods and materials.

Educators trained in early childhood methods recognize the importance of Froebel's emphasis on play and the child's interest. Allowing a child to explore and to guide him/her to discoveries in the environment engages the interest and intrinsic motivation of the child.

Katz (1973) labels this concept as the disposition for learning. Others, who embrace enthusiasm for building intellectual growth during the early years, incorporate tasks designed for older children into the curriculum without recognizing that young children do not learn in the same way as older children or adults. Such methods may in fact have a negative long term effect on learning. Piaget's theories provide insight into the child's thought processes and the changes that occur. Children must be involved in concrete experiences and activities which will develop foundations for later, more sophisticated concepts and understandings.

As the amount of time children spend in kindergarten increases, caution should be exercised to assure that additional activities, which are

Incorporated into the curriculum, are selected with care to meet the goals of the program. Rothenberg (1984) suggests the length of the school day is only one dimension of the kindergarten experience. As long as the curriculum is developmentally appropriate and intellectually stimulating, either type of scheduling can provide an adequate introduction to school.

Studies, examined by this researcher which reported on fatigue factors seldom identified the length of time children were in school. Definitions of full-day or extended-day programs remain vague. An example of one study, reporting in terms of minutes, was done in Huntington Beach City, California (Anderson, 1985). A comparison was made between half-day classes identified as 180 minutes and full-day classes which were increased to 270 minutes. The conclusion was drawn that students in the extended-day showed no evidence of suffering from excessive fatigue during the afternoon portion of the day. This information is not particularly useful to this researcher whose students will extend their attendance from 165 to 405 minutes. Another concern in Iowa is for the rural student who must further extend the day

by the number of minutes spent on the bus. Age of students was seldom identified in research addressing fatigue.

Early childhood educators are concerned that decisions based on financial factors have not had a positive effect on the five-year old learning environment. Reports offer only limited analysis of the cost factors involved in implementing ADED programs. The range of estimates of cost differential is between 20 to 30 percent for full-day kindergarten not including the cost of additional support staff. Of course, the design of the program will determine the final cost. Studies frequently suggest that although the initial expense of implementing full-day programs may be greater, this expense will be offset by the full state aid to be received for each child (Gorton & Robinson, 1969). In Iowa full state aid is given for each half-day kindergarten student. Many reports refer to available classrooms due to declining enrollment. In this researcher's school district there is declining enrollment, but there are no available classrooms. The trend to extend the day will double the rooms needed, so space becomes a key issue. Even though

administrators and school boards want to shape the school to meet the needs of children, cost-effective decisions must be made. Lack of classroom space results in higher pupil-teacher ratios. Kindergartens are placed in classrooms lacking facilities and the storage space recommended for this age group. As a consequence of staff reduction, teachers with no training in early childhood education are assigned to teach kindergarten. Economic conditions in Iowa are forcing school administrators to make decisions which have a direct negative effect on the highly regarded quality of the state's educational system.

Summary and Conclusions

The trend to full-day kindergarten seen today is the result of social and economic factors. During the last twenty-five years, an emphasis on early childhood education has been viewed as a solution to the problems of society. Kindergarten has been the subject of a host of social, economic, and political pressures (Elkind, 1986). Historically, changes in kindergarten have been brought about by political decisions, not empirical studies. No clear evidence, from research, demonstrates greater effectiveness of any of the attendance patterns for five year olds. Those trained in child development and the learning process are not usually consulted. Decisions tend to be more politically driven rather than research driven.

Although many studies are being done, it is difficult to draw conclusions in regard to the long-term effects or benefits of full day kindergarten attendance. There is no simple answer to which pattern is best. Findings are difficult to generalize for all school districts (Jalongo, 1986). Very few research reports provide a description of the all day, every day

kindergarten program. The emotional and cognitive immaturity of children has been used to rationalize both shortening and extending the length of their school day. The terms "full-day" and "extended-day" have only vague meanings since few studies define either program in terms of in-school time. An important limitation of the research, noted by Robertson (1984), was the lack of evaluation of social and emotional differences. Measurements were most often done on short-term academic achievement. Results which were statistically significant in ADED attendance pattern studies cannot be solely attributed to the additional time spent in school. If an experiment, comparing full-day and half-day patterns, controlled everything except the length of the school day, then observed differences in a student's progress could be attributed to time rather than to other variables (Jalongo, 1986). Actually such a study is infeasible.

Little empirical evidence is found to guide the practitioner in making curriculum decisions. Logical deduction leads one to the conclusion that additional time in school will not guarantee improvement of instruction. Few studies provide more than cursory

attention to the analysis of curriculum (Glazer, 1985). The nature of the young child and how he/she learns tends to be ignored. No new research is available which would question the concept of how a child thinks from that established in the 1950s and 1960s. Current investigations only confirm that young children process information differently from older children and adults. Still there are those who insist on teaching young children with the same methods and materials as those used with older students. As all day, every day kindergartens are initiated it is feared that formal learning will be incorporated into the curriculum. When programs for four year olds are implemented in public schools and kindergartens are extended to full-day programs, it is apparent that long range curriculum modifications will be affected throughout the elementary grades. Educators must address this issue soon and design studies which compare academic achievement in the two program formats.

Curriculum in kindergarten should include "academics", however, the presentation must reflect the intellectual development of young children (Cruikshank, 1986b). Caldwell (1982) reminds teachers and

administrators to initiate an effort to inform the general public about the implications of early childhood educational philosophy and appropriate instructional practice. As Iowa teachers contemplate all day, every day kindergarten classes it is not realistic to assume that twice as much time will be gained by extending the day. However, it is possible to have quality full-day programs which are appropriate for the maturational level of the students and which value the philosophy of early childhood education. Teachers who recognize the effectiveness of discovery in a child's intellectual development will look forward to the extra time the children will spend in the classroom. It will enable them to extend activities horizontally. The need for full-day kindergarten, as viewed by Naron (1981), is the result of prekindergarten programs fulfilling the mission of providing the first school experience. She advised not only a focus on social and physical considerations, but also on cognitive development. Individualized instruction is needed to meet the diverse abilities of the children. This function requires more instructional time than is available in a traditional

half-day structure. Naron suggested a carefully constructed full-day kindergarten that has been shaped to meet the different needs of children. Some children will experience fatigue, others will not. Physical endurance must be assessed on an individual basis.

Care and education cannot be separated (Law, 1979). Parents do not want the most efficient, cost-effective schedule in kindergarten; they wish to have the needs of their child met in quality programs whether or not the best approach is efficient or cost-effective. It is impossible to make one decision and serve all children in the best way. Decisions will need to be made which take into account the needs and possibilities of each individual program. Changes in kindergarten attendance patterns are emotional issues for parents and communities.

The kindergarten child needs a balanced approach of both social, emotional, and cognitive activities. The key to such instruction is not only the readiness of the student, but also the readiness of the teacher. Teachers must grow and develop in their knowledge of the use of methods and materials in order to engage their students' minds at the most appropriate time.

Most effective gains can be attained by children through learning initiated by better teaching, not by additional time in school. Emphasis in the future needs to be directed at in-servicing kindergarten teachers and assisting them in developing appropriate curriculum for students. Effective implementation will be best achieved by guiding those who are responsible for instructional design. Each attendance pattern has strengths and weaknesses. All day, every day kindergarten in Iowa will also have its strengths and weaknesses. The effectiveness of a program is not dependent on the number of hours a child attends, but rather on the quality of the experience.

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