

The Need for Full-Day Kindergarten

NANCY K. NARON

Educators' conceptions regarding students and their learning abilities have shaped the development of classroom practices throughout the educational system. Perhaps the most basic notion is that children differ in their ability to learn and that only some students can learn to an acceptable level of mastery. This view is supported by the unfortunate fact that many students in large urban areas read at least one to two years below grade level. Success or failure in school is usually viewed as a function of ability—the same learning opportunities are available to all but students differ in their ability to use them.

These long-accepted ideas are being supplanted by new views about how students learn. Bloom (1976) and his colleagues have compiled a great deal of evidence that almost all students can learn whatever they're taught when provided with appropriate learning conditions. These appropriate learning conditions are encompassed in the theory of mastery learning and related teaching-learning strategies.

These views have far-reaching implications for curriculum and instruction, particularly in the primary grades (Bloom, 1978). In our new understanding of learning, students become more and more similar in their learning abilities over time, they "learn to learn," given the appropriate learning conditions. One important learning condition is the set

of cognitive entry characteristics of the learner. Although students can acquire these entry characteristics at the beginning of any new instruction, they benefit the most if such characteristics are instituted at the beginning of primary schooling. As a result of the use of appropriate instructional principles during kindergarten, children with very different entry characteristics will be at very similar levels of achievement by the third grade, thereby reducing the need for special remediation in later years.

The Significance of Early Childhood Education

Many compensatory early childhood programs, such as Head Start in the 1960s, were built on the assumption that early education could enable children of poor parents to achieve cognitive parity with their middle-class peers. Contrary to expectations, the highly publicized Westinghouse-Ohio University study reported that Head Start had not produced long-lasting effects in terms of the children's school achievement (Cicirelli and others, 1969).

However, there were many methodological problems built into the design of that study (Campbell and Erlebacher, 1970). More recently, Lazar and others (1977) completed an extensive longitudinal analysis of experimental preschool programs begun prior to 1969. They found that early childhood education has not only increased cognitive gains, but has also reduced the number of children assigned to special education classes as well as the number of children held back one or more grades.

The emphasis on "well-planned" curriculums is important. The programs included in the Lazar study



Today's kindergartners, with their diverse abilities and experiences, need an individualized full-day program emphasizing cognitive learning.

Nancy K. Naron is Curriculum Development Specialist, Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, Illinois.

had deliberate cognitive objectives. Similarly, a longitudinal study conducted by Bronfenbrenner (1975) indicated that the strongest differences between experimental preschool programs and their control groups were found in highly structured, cognitive-oriented programs.

As a result of these recent studies, professional educators and the general public are beginning to realize that early childhood education plays a role not only in the social-emotional development of the child, but also in the development of critical cognitive skills needed for reading and writing.

The cumulative effects of early childhood education extend beyond the level of the individual child and impinge on the kindergarten population as a whole. The children who enter kindergarten today are different from those of a decade ago, due largely to the increase in the number of children who attend pre-kindergarten programs: children between the ages of three and five enrolled in preprimary programs rose from 29.4 percent in 1966 to 49.2 percent in 1976 (Golladay and Noell, 1978). In other words, about half of the children who enter kindergarten today have received some type of pre-kindergarten school experience, compared to a small minority of kindergartners a decade or two ago.

Because only about half the children have attended some pre-kindergarten program, today's urban kindergartners fall into a bimodal distribution of readiness skills. Those who have prekindergarten experience have usually overcome the separation anxiety associated with beginning school, have learned to interact with peers and adult strangers, and have developed many of the cognitive skills necessary for more formal classroom activities. On the other hand, children who have not attended any type of preprimary program need to be exposed to activities that are common at the preschool level before they are ready to receive more formal training.

Implications for Kindergarten

We now know that the early years of a child's life are critical for building the foundation for later school learning. We know that children can learn to an acceptable mastery when provided with appropriate instruction at their developmental level, and

that the use of diagnosis and remediation as part of the teaching-learning strategy will reduce the differences in learning ability and learning rate that appear early. In light of this new knowledge, we must reexamine the function and form of the kindergarten experience.

The past function of the kindergarten, to provide children with their first school experience, is now the role of the prekindergarten program. As a result, kindergarten must assume a more demanding function. It must account for the widely diverse abilities of today's kindergartners, and focus not only on social and physical but also on cognitive areas of learning. It must provide identification and remediation of early learning deficits as well as individualized instruction according to each child's needs. In short, the new function requires more instructional time and better instructional tools than exist in traditional half-day kindergarten programs. One way to fulfill this function is to implement a carefully constructed full-day kindergarten program.

Research Concerning Full-Day Kindergarten

Very little experimental research bears directly on expanding and restructuring the kindergarten program. Several school districts around the country have initiated full-day kindergarten and compared the children's achievement with that of children in half-day programs. Other school districts have experimented with full-day attendance on alternate days compared to half-day attendance every day.

One study that examined an extended-day kindergarten program in conjunction with an individualized curriculum was conducted by Winter and Klein (1970). Two different groups of kindergartners were chosen to participate in the extended-day program. On the basis of standardized tests and teacher ratings, one group was identified as educationally disadvantaged and "least ready" for kindergarten instruction; the other group was identified as educationally advantaged and "most ready" for kindergarten instruction. Control groups were identified to match characteristics of the experimental groups. All the children attended the regular

kindergarten program in the morning. In the afternoon, the experimental groups received an additional 90 minutes of structured activities that differed according to the needs of the children. For the disadvantaged group, the additional time was used to diagnose the children's difficulties and to adjust their lessons accordingly. For the advantaged group, the additional time was used for creative approaches to learning that capitalized on the children's individual interests.

Analyses of the performance of the experimental and control groups indicated positive effects of the extended-day individualized program for both types of children. Specifically, the disadvantaged experimental group performed significantly better than the control group on the Metropolitan Readiness Test, and consistently exceeded the performance of the control group on both the Lee-Clark and the Stanford Achievement Test. Although the advantaged experimental group did not perform significantly better than the control group on these measures, due to a ceiling effect in their results, their reading levels at the end of kindergarten were exceptional compared to the controls. Specifically, all of the advantaged children in the extended-day program were reading at the second preprimer level and above, while none of the control children were reading above the first preprimer level. An analysis of their level of math readiness revealed similar differences between the groups.

A follow-up of these children conducted after the first grade revealed even more positive effects of the extended-day kindergarten program. Based on the Stanford Achievement Test, the disadvantaged experimental pupils exceeded the control children by nearly three stanine units, while the advantaged experimental pupils exceeded their controls by more than one grade equivalent unit. These results speak strongly for the benefits of a full-day kindergarten program that has been shaped to meet the different needs of children.

In a more recent study, about 200 children enrolled in a full-day kindergarten program were compared to a random sample of half-day students (Humphrey, 1980). The purpose of the two programs was the same—to

help children grow in cognitive, psychomotor, affective, and linguistic skills. The only difference in the two programs was the time allotment. Results from the California Achievement Tests indicated significantly higher scores for the full-day participants. Furthermore, and consistent with the Winter and Klein study, follow-up testing when the children were first-graders indicated significantly higher reading scores for the students who had attended full-day kindergarten compared to those who had attended half-day.

Two studies found no significant differences between the achievement of kindergarteners attending a full-day and those attending a half-day program (Johnson, 1974; Hatcher and others, 1979). However, neither of these studies even addressed tailoring the instructional program to the individual needs of the children. In fact, in the Johnson study, the purpose of full-day kindergarten is described as providing "opportunity for play out-of-doors both morning and afternoon, often a full hour of it during each period" (p. 4). This is simply not the best use of additional time. Similarly, the study reported by Hatcher appears to compare an ordinary curriculum in a half-day program with the same curriculum stretched to fill a full day. It is not surprising that extended "babysitting" time does not affect a child's achievement. It is the way time is used that is important.

Practical Considerations

One concern for the young child attending a full-day kindergarten program is his or her ability to physically and psychologically adapt to that much time in school. This concern was addressed by Winter and Klein (1970) who reported that signs of fatigue, frustration, or waning interest in school simply did not appear in their experimental pupils. Similarly, in the study by Humphrey (1980), an examination of attendance patterns indicated no differences in absenteeism of children attending the full-day compared to the half-day program. In fact, a far higher percentage of children in the extended-day program in the Winter and Klein study were reported to experience very positive feelings about school than did children in the non-extended day program.

Of course, five-year-olds today are not as "young" as they used to be. Not only have many of them attended some type of prekindergarten program, many have attended full-day programs. Therefore, they have already adjusted to a full day away from home. To then enroll such children in a half-day kindergarten is equivalent to having them take at least one step backward.

The most important child-centered consideration is that the child receive instruction at his or her appropriate level. In full-day kindergarten, the teacher has the time to regularly assess each child's progress, to diagnose deficiencies, and to alter the instruction accordingly. As a result, each child can regularly encounter success, develop a positive attitude about school and learning, and require special education services less frequently. These benefits are immeasurable to the child's later success in school and in life.

An often-stated opposition to expanded-day kindergarten is based on parents' fear that the school will replace the home (Hess and others, 1978). However, full-day kindergarten can actually create a closer cooperation between home and school. When kindergarten was first instituted in the United States, it was a full-day program with the afternoon devoted to home visits and

parent conferences. As teachers were assigned two groups of children, each attending a half-day session, they were forced to eliminate these visits with parents. As a result, the relationship between the kindergarten teacher and the parent suffered (Ross, 1976).

In a reverse trend, the experimental full-day kindergarten programs emerging today emphasize the importance of parental involvement. Two studies that reported significant gains for children attending full-day over half-day kindergarten involved parents extensively in the instructional process (Winter and Klein, 1970; Alper and Wright, 1979). Parents often prefer full-day over half-day kindergarten for reasons of convenience: arrangements for the children's transportation, babysitting, and parents' daily routine are all facilitated.

Kindergarten teachers appear overwhelmingly to prefer a full-day program to two half-day sessions (Ross, 1976). Harris (1969) points out that it is very difficult for a teacher to meet the needs and interests of two groups of children in one day, and that to attempt to do so is physically and mentally exhausting. One teacher in a half-day program commented, "Just as I was getting somewhere with a child, the session would end" (Mouw, 1976). Teachers who taught in the full-day program in that study reported that they were able to use the additional time to work more with individual students, and that they were no longer forced by the schedule to put some children in overcrowded groupings.

Even in the study by Johnson (1974), which reported no significant differences in achievement between kindergarteners in a full-day program and those in a half-day program, the school decided with full knowledge of the results to continue the full-day kindergarten program. This decision was based on the favorable response to the program from both parents and teachers.

To the administrator, cost is the most critical consideration of full-day kindergarten. While the initial expense may be greater, it will be offset by the school district obtaining full state aid for each child (Gorton and Robinson, 1968). Costs for supplies and maintenance will not increase,

WRITING FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

We welcome manuscripts about any aspect of curriculum, instruction, supervision, or leadership in education. Papers should be written in direct, readable style and be as brief as possible (five to ten pages typed double-spaced). We reserve the right to edit for brevity, clarity, and consistency of style.

References may be cited in footnotes but we suggest they be in bibliographic style at the end of the article. If that form is used, references in the body of the text should be APA style, as in: (Jones, 1979). Double space everything, including quotations and footnotes.

Please send two copies. Rejected manuscripts are not returned unless the author provides a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

and may even decrease, because fewer children will be using each room and its equipment. Similarly, cost for meals will not greatly increase, because in the present half-day situation, both groups of children often receive one meal and one snack. In a full-day program the need for snacks may be eliminated. There will also be a savings in transportation costs where buses are used because the noon trip is eliminated. Finally, space for additional classrooms is available in many schools that have been affected by declining school enrollment.

Even more important is the reduced need for special education and remedial services in later years. In fact, a program of early identification and treatment of learning deficits could save a large urban school district such as Chicago as much as a million dollars a year from the reduced need for special education services (Naron, 1978).

Public support for full-day kindergarten has been expressed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the American Federation of Teachers, the Council of Chief State School Officials, and the American Association of School Administrators (Hess and others, 1978). In August 1970, the American Association of Elementary-Kindergarten-Nursery Educators submitted a resolution that "a full-day kindergarten be available to all children, organized flexibly to accommodate the needs of kindergarten children and teachers" (Winter and Klein, 1970). Urie Bronfenbrenner (1976) has recommended that expanded kindergarten be made an "integral" part of the full public schools' curriculum, and that only with the implementation of a massive, publicly administered program can this be done successfully.

The public schools must meet this new responsibility. We can no longer rely on shaping the child to fit the school; we must shape the school to fit the child. ■

References

- Alper, C. L., and Wright, D. L. "Extended Day Kindergarten Plus Parent Involvement: A Combination That Works." *Phi Delta Kappan* 61 (September 1979): 68.
- Bloom, B. S. *Human Characteristics*

and School Learning. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976.

Bloom, B. S. "New Views of the Learner: Implications for Instruction and Curriculum." *Educational Leadership* 35 (April 1978): 563-576.

Bronfenbrenner, U. "Is Early Intervention Effective?" In *Influences on Human Development*. Edited by U. Bronfenbrenner and M. A. Maloney. Hinsdale, Ill.: The Dryden Press, 1975.

Bronfenbrenner, U. *A Report on Longitudinal Evaluation of Preschool Programs*. Washington, D.C.: HEW, 1976.

Campbell, D. T., and Erlebacher, A. "How Regression Artifacts in Quasi-Experimental Evaluations Can Mistakenly Make Compensatory Education Look Harmful," pp. 185-210. In *Compensatory Education: A National Debate, Volume 3, Disadvantaged Child*. Edited by J. Hellmuth. New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1970.

Cicirelli, V., and others. *The Impact of Head Start: An Evaluation of the Effects of Head Start on Children's Cognitive and Affective Development*. Report presented to the Office of Economic Opportunity pursuant to Contract B89-4536, June 1969. The Ohio State University: Westinghouse Learning Corporation, 1969.

Golladay, M., and Noell, J., eds. *The Condition of Education, Statistical Report*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, HEW, 1978.

Gorton, H. B., and Robinson, R. L. *A Study of the Kindergarten Program. Full-Day or Half-Day*. ERIC ED 017 327, 1968.

Harris, C. C. "His Own Hello." *Young Children* 25 (December 1969): 89-95.

Hatcher, B. A.; Schmidt, V. E.; and Cook, J. R. "Full-Day vs. Half-Day Kindergarten: No Difference." *Phi Delta Kappan* 61 (September 1979): 67-68.

Hess, F., and others. *Kindergarten in American Education: A Discussion of Current Questions*. ERIC ED 158 397, 1978.

Humphrey, J. W. *A Study of the Effectiveness of Full-Day Kindergarten*. Evansville, Ind.: Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation, 1980.

Johnson, E. W. *An Experimental Study of the Comparison of Pupil Achievement in the All-Day Kindergarten and One Half Day Control Group*. ERIC ED 115 361, 1974.

Lazar, I.; Hubbell, V.; Murray, H.; Rosche, M.; and Royce, J. *The Persistence of Preschool Effects*. Report to the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families. Washington, D.C.: Office of Human Development Services, HEW, 1977.

Mouw, A. J. *The Description and Evaluation of the Alternate Day—Full Day Kindergarten Program*. ERIC ED 129 435, 1976.

Naron, N. K. "Preschool Screening and Intervention: An Experiment in Early Investment." *Educational Economics* (March/April 1978).

Ross, E. D. *The Kindergarten Crusade: The Establishment of Preschool Education in the United States*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976.

Winter, M., and Klein, A. *Extending the Kindergarten Day: Does It Make a Difference in the Achievement of Educationally Advantaged and Disadvantaged Pupils?* ERIC ED 087 534, 1970.

It's not too late to register



ASCD National Curriculum Study Institutes

Teaching Strategies

Anaheim—Disneyland Hotel
February 9-10, 1981

Leadership Styles

Birmingham—Ramada Inn
Medical Center
February 9-10, 1981

Leadership Styles

Atlanta—Atlanta Hilton
February 11-12, 1981
(precedes AASA convention)

Two Day Institute Fee
\$110 ASCD members; \$140 nonmembers
Team registration for 3 or more persons registering together:
\$80 ASCD members, \$105 nonmembers

To register or for program and housing information contact
Jo Jones, Institute Manager
225 N. Washington Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
(703) 549-9110

Copyright © 1981 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.