

Letters

MORE ON ALL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

In advocating the adoption of full-day kindergarten schedules, Nancy Naron [January 1981] emphasized studies with disadvantaged children and then drew conclusions which include all five year olds.

Since middle-class parents are concerned with school success it might be expected they would readily accept the premise that more is better and thus support the all-day format. When asked, however, a significant number of middle-class parents of young children say they prefer the half-day schedule. Several suburban and small-town school districts in Western New York recently conducted surveys and found a surprisingly high proportion of these families opposed to all-day kindergarten.

In a system serving an affluent population, of 505 survey respondents, 40 percent judged the all-day alternative unacceptable (Amherst, New York, Schools, 1980). In a somewhat lower socioeconomic area, 30 percent of 414 respondents opposed a change from the existing half-day schedule (Grand Island, New York, Schools, 1980). In a rural-area college town 40 percent of 159 families preferred the half-day kindergarten and most of that group opposed any change (Fredonia, New York, Schools, 1980).

These were surveys directed specifically at parents of young children. If a significant minority of these citizens, the ones most directly involved, do not support the introduction of all-day kindergartens it would appear that a school system considering such a plan, even if the expense were minimal, would be well advised to move cautiously.

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As both the parent of a pre-schooler and an educator, I also support full-day kindergarten. However, Naron based her conclusions primarily on research rendered invalid by its methodological errors.

A study by Winter and Klein (1970) was used to justify Naron's recommendations. The study dealt with both educationally disadvantaged and advantaged pupils. The following problems

with that study are evident from their report.

1. A sample of 13 students was selected from a class of 65 using criteria including teacher ratings of maturity, personal and social adjustments, and response to learning. These evaluations were made after an average of *less than two contact hours* per pupil.

2. Individualized tutorial, and remedial programs were provided for the extended day pupils.

3. Only full-day students were given a daily lunch period that provided an opportunity for additional conversations with adults and peers—an educational experience in itself.

4. Based on a single paper-and-pencil measure, Winter and Klein reported that extended day pupils had a "more positive self-concept." Most self-concept researchers believe that any such instrument should be validated with other kinds of measures.

5. "Home visits and parental involvement were integral parts of the program" for the advantaged pupils. Would this be feasible with a class of 30 pupils?

6. "Lunch, outdoor play, and rest periods were all under the supervision of parents of extended day pupils." Increasing parental involvement and expectations are in themselves certain to have a positive impact on the student.

7. Parent conferences, home teaching sessions, and instructional materials for home use were provided for most of the extended day pupils.

Full-day kindergarten seems to have merit. But the correct design of a study to determine its benefits is essential for educational policy makers. Winter and Klein did not assess the impact of a longer school day. They assessed a variety of ways to increase academic abilities, including extensively individualized programs, parental involvement and the variable of a longer school day.

ROBERT FRANK
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The recent article on the advantages of a full-day kindergarten program left me with many unanswered questions. Investigation indicates this may be another example of educational research which in no way represents reality in the classroom.

Curiosity led me to look up my September 1979 issue of the *Kappan*.

The research cited from the article by Alper and Wright referred to the full day as a five-hour day as compared with a two and one-half hour day. The experiment involved only 12 children in a classroom.

The full day with which teachers in this area are familiar is seven and one-half hours while the half day is composed of four hours. There are 25 children in each class (sometimes more because of limited space), and some enter school at four years, ten months. Public pre-kindergarten programs are available only to handicapped children and a small group of disadvantaged students.

Empirical research is badly needed in this area as more parents and administrators are pressuring for the longer kindergarten day. However, the specifics of adult-child ratio, the hours involved, and the maturation level of the students are vital components of this type of evaluation.

BETTY LAMBERT
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Nancy Naron replies:

Although many parents, teachers, and administrators have responded very favorably to the concept of full-day kindergarten, I have received some surprisingly negative responses to my article. What surprises me about these responses is that they indicate misconceptions about issues which were directly addressed in my original article but remain cloudy in the minds of some readers. I might assume that the article itself was poorly written, but many more than the few critics have informed me strongly to the contrary. Therefore I assume that the thoughts of some readers were clouded by preconceived attitudes about the potential devastation that full-day kindergarten could possibly bring to our youngsters' childhood.

The simplest criticism to respond to is: "But what about all the (middle-class) parents who don't want full-day kindergarten for their children?" Simple. Don't send them. Nowhere in my article is there mention of the word "mandatory." In fact, according to information from the Educational Research Services, Inc., as of April, 1979, at least 22 states do not require kindergarten attendance at all. My question is: What about parents who *do* want a full-day kindergarten program for their children?

Shouldn't it be available for those children who could greatly benefit from it? Just because some middle-class parents may not desire a full-day program for their child, should the more needy, disadvantaged children of less vocal parents continue to suffer? Let's make programs available to meet the needs of all our children. Or perhaps it is the case that these middle-class parents (and university professors) do not care to lessen the gap between their children's future opportunities and those of the less advantaged.

A second point made by the critics is that the research on which I based my conclusions is methodologically poor, particularly because the extra time used in the experimental full-day program was "special," including individualization and increased parent participation. That is just my point. Contrary to James Beane (Letters, April 1981), the conclusions are *not* "mixed." In fact, the findings are rather clear. The studies which have found no significant differences between the achievement of children in half-day and those in full-day kindergarten are those studies that extended the time but did not use the time in any special way. On the other hand, those programs that used the extended time to individualize according to the children's needs and to increase parent participation all found significant differences between the achievement of children in full-day and those in half-day programs. And even though the number of children included in the Winter and Klein study is quite small, I would like to direct your attention to the Humphrey study, which included about 200 children. So that no one misses it this time, let me be quite specific: I do *not* advocate extended time in kindergarten *without* using the time according to the children's needs and to increase parent involvement. Certainly the university professors who wrote in must be aware of the research on *time on task* and the importance of using instructional time appropriately.

A third misconception centers around the concept of "highly-structured, cognitive-oriented" programs. For those readers such as Beane who somehow missed the section of my original article which directly addresses the merits of such curricula, please re-read the paragraphs entitled "The Significance of Early Childhood Education" in my article. The following should clear up any remaining confusion. I use the term

"highly structured" to refer to the use of activities based on specific skill-oriented objectives. The "structure" is in the mind of the teacher who knows why he/she has planned a given activity at a given time. (The structure is not immediately obvious to an outside observer.) I use the term "cognitive-oriented" to refer to the type of skills being taught—those psychomotor, verbal, and conceptual skills that are necessary precursors to learning how to read, write, and calculate.

Let me pose an example. Before a child can learn to discriminate complex shapes such as the letters of the alphabet, he/she must be able to discriminate simple shapes (circle, square, triangle). In order to teach this skill, the experienced teacher will have the children learn the discriminations through a series of activities (over several days or weeks) which will likely include: matching each shape to a similar one, naming and talking about the features of each shape, sorting the different shapes into piles, tracing the shapes, and so on. From the children's point of view, they are playing games with shapes. From the teacher's point of view, the children are engaged in carefully sequenced activities designed to teach specific skills which build toward learning to read.

One last point addresses a comment made only by Beane—that the rationale for full-day kindergarten is politically-based; that it will create more teacher jobs. At the present time, kindergarten teachers (who are entrusted with preparing our children for the most important task of learning to read) have *twice* as many students and *half* the amount of time with each student as teachers at all other grades. Unless one believes, counter to all the evidence, that kindergarten is a less important time for learning than in the upper grades, this double caseload on our kindergarten teachers seems grossly unwarranted and in fact irresponsible.

Without a doubt, many small details regarding the administration of a full-day kindergarten program remain to be answered—number of hours, how to best schedule the day, the teacher-child ratio, and so on. However, until our state legislatures approve funding for full-day kindergarten attendance, to concentrate on the specifics seems rather futile. Before then, the public must come to understand the important advantages that full-day kindergarten

could bring to a large segment of our kindergarten population. And the evidence clearly indicates that many children, particularly our urban poor, could benefit greatly in terms of school success from a well-planned full-day program. Not only must we shape the school to fit the child, we must shape the school to provide equality of educational opportunity for all. Those who suggest otherwise should examine their own political agendas.

BASIC SKILLS TESTING

The cloud of dust referred to in a letter from a reader regarding testing in New Jersey [May 1981] is made dustier and dustier by such responses. The writer is apparently unaware of the circular process involved in the identification "by educators from all districts in New Jersey." The "basic skills appropriate to the specific grade levels" were identified during faculty meetings, usually held after school closing time, using the textbooks in use in their districts as guides, and other such commercially prepared resources as scope and sequence charts, lists of objectives, and so on. The atmosphere at the time of these skill list searches was heavily laden with pressures and mandates, hardly the stuff of scholarship and academic integrity.

Your respondent has her right to "see the mastery of these skills as the minimum expected"; however, her benightedness combined with her oracular stance regarding "our children" is typical of the pro-state *administrator*—and I use the term in direct contrast and conflict with her term *educator*—who is guided by employment and loyalty interests.

Basic skills testing in New Jersey is known for what it really is by all who care about education: a political and financial issue.

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Editor's note: Readers' comments on our articles are welcome. Address letters to Editor, *Educational Leadership*, 225 No. Washington St., Alexandria, Virginia 22314. Letters accepted for publication may be edited for brevity and clarity.

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