

**A STUDY OF THE PLACE OF A FORMAL READING PROGRAM
in
THE KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM**

**AN ABSTRACT OF
A THESIS
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGE**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF SCIENCE**

**by
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March 1972**

A great deal of interest and effort has recently been directed toward the improvement of reading in American schools. The successful launching of Sputnik I by the Soviet Union in October, 1957, raised questions in the minds of many educators about the quality of education in the United States. Recent emphasis on science, mathematics, and foreign language arising out of the race for world power has caused adults to be aware of their inadequacies as never before. This awareness has precipitated a strong resolution that today's children shall never find themselves in the same predicament. Many adults have begun to feel that children must get an early start in order to enter a profession early, to acquire acceptable status, and to gain sufficient purchasing power to take advantage of the new products resulting from the rapid impact of scientific discoveries and technological change. Attention has been turned toward kindergarten as a time in which more might be done in regard to reading development. Beginning formalized teaching of reading at an earlier age has been interpreted by some as assuring that the desired learning will occur with greater efficiency and comprehension. The problem explored in this thesis has been: Should a formal

reading program be a part of the kindergarten curriculum? The term formal reading program has been used to mean a structured program, usually based on books or workbooks, through which the child is taught to derive meaning from those written symbols which we call words.

The author has surveyed the literature from 1850 to the present, exploring the views of leading educators on the subject of the best time to introduce reading into the curriculum. Particular attention has been given to recent research studies conducted in several sections of the United States where programs of reading instruction have been introduced in kindergarten, and to the views of those opposed to the early teaching of reading.

When literature on the teaching of reading is used to identify current answers about when to begin, diversity and over-simplification are characteristic. Some writers still support the idea that a mental age of six and one-half years is a prerequisite for success in reading. Other writers urge us to believe that children are ready to read as soon as they have an oral command of the language.

Those who favor early reading programs have cited such advantages for the child as: becoming a center of favorable attention; having a more pleasant school experience; gaining greater mastery over his environment; gaining access to a wealth of literature from which to pick what is right for him at any age; providing clues to some serious visual disabilities, lumped under the term dyslexia.

Educators not in favor of early reading programs claim that five-year-olds need this time to gather first-hand experiences, since the individual can read with comprehension only what has been firmly established in his experience. Most kindergarten children have not yet achieved the facility with language which is needed for formalized instruction in reading. Children for whom systematic instruction is delayed learn to read rapidly and successfully when they do begin and soon catch up with those who started earlier. For most children the neurological system has not reached the maturity needed to cope with the symbolization necessary for reading. Pressure on children to do a task which they have not the maturity for can cause psychological problems.

Many experts in the reading field act as if we had only two choices: formal reading or no reading at all for five-year-olds. Although some convincing arguments have been advanced for a formal reading program in kindergarten, the evidence seems to indicate that formal instruction in reading for all five-year-olds on a wholesale basis is questionable. On the other hand, kindergarten programs that are totally empty of opportunities to read will do nothing to stimulate interest in reading. Young children who show an interest in learning to read and request help in reading at an early age should not be deprived of assistance.

The question of the optimum time to initiate reading instruction is a complicated question having no simple, unequivocal answer. Good education is not static. It is ever changing and carrying with it what is sound in past practices, while looking to the future for new developments. It takes time to try out, to evaluate, to discard what is unacceptable, to strengthen what is good.