

A STUDY TO DETERMINE
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE OF EARLY AND LATE ENTRANCE KINDERGARTEN
CHILDREN IN SUBSEQUENT GRADES ONE AND TWO

MASTERS PROJECT

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BY

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I wish to dedicate this book to my husband Zearnie, and to my boys, Brad and Cody, for their patience and understanding; and to my parents Lois and Lew Coe, who instilled in me a love for learning and the knowledge that you can reach any goal if you work hard enough.

Approved by:

Official Advisor

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Justification of the Problem

The Ohio law, as it now stands, permits children to enter kindergarten if they are five years old by September 30 of that school year. Since kindergarten became mandatory two years ago, many parents who kept their young five year olds at home in the past, now feel compelled to send them to school. Are these children being sent to school too early and are they suffering because of it? Elkind (1982) said we are pushing our young children to succeed at all costs. Our children are being pressured into growing up fast in their language, thinking, and behavior. But these children cannot be hurried into growing up emotionally.

Parents also place academic pressures on young children by expecting them to be successful and that often means starting children in kindergarten at a younger age. Many parents felt that the younger a child is exposed to a subject matter, the younger they would be able to master it. They did not take into

consideration that feelings, emotions, and maturity have their own timing with each individual child.

It is the writer's belief that kindergarten children do suffer from being placed in school at too young of an age. Perhaps if they changed the law of the entry date it would be the most beneficial outcome to this problem.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this project is to determine the relationship between the academic performance of early and late entrance kindergarten children in subsequent grades one and two.

Procedure

Setting

The school building is a suburban kindergarten through sixth grade elementary containing 521 students. There is one kindergarten class, four first grade classrooms, three second grade classrooms, one split second-third grade classroom, two third grade classrooms, three fourth grade classrooms, three fifth grade classes, three sixth grade classes, and three severe behavior handicapped classes. The building is in a predominately white, lower middle class area.

Community

Lancaster, located in Fairfield County, is a small town of 35,000 in Southeast Ohio. The majority of the population are factory and blue-collar workers. Many parents have a low income as evidenced by over half of the children qualifying for free or reduced lunches.

Data Collection

Research data, information and experiences were

gathered from:

1. Children's Permanent Record-Folders
2. Children's standardized test scores from kindergarten and first grade

Definition of Terms

Chronological Age- The actual age of the child according to the year and calendar month.

Developmental Age- A measure of a type of development of an individual expressed as equivalent to years of the same type of development of an average child.

Achievement- The scores obtained on the Metropolitan Readiness Test in kindergarten and the Metropolitan Achievement Test in first grade.

Lower Socioeconomic Area- An area where more than seventy-five per cent of the school population is on free or reduced lunches according to the parent's salaries.

SBH Stands for severe behavior handicapped.

Above Average- Students getting grades that are of a C value or higher on a 4.0 grade scale.

Below Average- Students getting grades that are below a C value on the 4.0 grading scale.

Assumptions

The writer assumed that the standardized testing the students were administered was fair and accurate. The writer also assumed the test data was recorded accurately. The writer assumed the students were presented with the same curriculum in grades kindergarten and one.

Limitations

One of the greatest limitations of this study was the size of the group being studied. Only one elementary school was involved, so the sample size was thirty-eight (38) students. Another limitation was all of the students were from the same socioeconomic area.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Problems Faced by Younger Students

The pressure to grow up and quit acting like a "baby", even when they are little more than babies, is a problem faced by all children. It is especially frustrating to the younger child who is constantly being compared to children who anywhere from a few months to a year and a half older. These children are usually smaller in their physical size and their speech and language skills are not usually acceptable for the age group they are in class with. When the norm for that group had speech and language skills that are up to one and a half years more developed than the younger students their speech may be considered handicapped. That in no way means the young student was speech delayed; rather they were normal for their age. If those young children were in a class with older students, they were going to be compared. That does not mean it was the right way to classify children; unfortunately it is the way most school systems work.

David Elkind (1979) states that children vary tremendously in their rates of growth and development. Individual differences are present all through the life cycle, but particularly marked during early childhood periods.

Elkind (1973) also refers to the fact that most kindergarten programs presuppose children to have some problem solving and learning or study skills upon entry. A child who has not matured to this level often fails because this is where most kindergarten programs begin.

Elkind (1979) is dismayed by kindergarten programs in which the young are already in a lockstep program. He contends education needs to give more respect to individual needs and growth processes.

Elkind (1979) states one reason for failure is the too early introduction of formal instruction before the children are perceptually and cognitively mature enough to compensate materials expected. This causes curriculum induced school failure.

For the very young and immature child, the formal school setting may provide a situation of too much information in too short of time.

Research has shown that many problems come from efforts to train preschool age children in cognitive abilities they have not yet attained. The ability to construct the concept of a letter standing for a specific sound requires logic that most children do not attain until the age of six or seven. Visual skills also may not be fully developed until the fourth or fifth grade for some children. Mental abilities that Piaget calls

concrete operations are not fully acquired by most children until the age of six or seven.

Studies cite that not until language is fully mastered, at about the age of six or seven, does a child use language to learn new concepts and for relationships, and to acquire knowledge. It is at this point that logic begins. Children are now able to perform mazes, understand math concepts and comparisons, and understand directional activities. Most existing kindergarten programs, as they now stand, assume that children already have these skills upon entry and spend little time in reviewing them.

Many studies show differences in the achievement of boys and girls in the early years of elementary school. These recognized developmental age differences between boys and girls of the same chronological age is almost always ignored in planning kindergarten programs for young children.

Ames and Illg (1965) cited that this developmental gap is significant between the ages of five and six. This is also the entry age of most children into most kindergarten settings.

Criticisms of Kindergarten Curriculum

Academic achievement is another example of the many pressures adults place on children. As teachers already know, parents often try to hurry children when they insist they acquire academic skills like reading at an early age. This pressure by parents reflects the parental need, not the children's needs or inclinations. (Elkind 1982)

Auditory perception is another skill gained through maturity and it is vital in children learning to read. Some children, especially the younger children, may be too immature to understand or use listening experiences required of them in formal school settings.

To be able to read requires more than just turning printed words into spoken ones. So, for all readers, the ability to understand written text depends as much on experiences outside of school as on the education provided by the school.

Some children do start reading early but they are in the minority. Research indicates that children who become early readers and who show a natural interest in books are likely to come from homes in which parents, siblings and other individuals have read to them regularly. (Strickland 1990)

Studies by Elkind and his colleagues found that only one to three children in one hundred read proficiently

when they entered kindergarten. If learning to read was as easy as some people claimed, many more children would be learning to read on their own.

Despite all the reading drills, fuss, and unpleasantries, children ultimately will learn to read only when they are ready!

An extensive academic program for labeling, classifying, ordering, and comparing are assumed to be present when all children enter kindergarten and pre-kindergarten screenings are used to determine how many of these skills are already learned. Prognosis for success or failure in kindergarten are drawn from the results of the screening program. Although recommendations are made for high risk children, such as keeping them home another year, placing them in a preschool program, or putting them in an extended kindergarten program, parents tend to send their children to regular kindergarten because of their age. In turn, children having difficulty in kindergarten are often sent to first grade by parents to avoid the embarrassment of their child failing kindergarten. Thus begins the chain of failure.

Elkind (1979) is dismayed that educators and parents take children's knowledge or understanding for granted. We must assess where children are before we begin to place

them into programs. Labeling should be used with caution, as it can stay with a child throughout their entire school years. We must begin with what the children already know; not what they don't know.

In today's society educators hurry children because they are pressured to produce results.

This leads them to treat students like empty bottles on an assembly line getting a little fuller at each grade level. When the bottles don't get full the management puts pressure on the immediate teacher, who is now held accountable for filling his or her share of the bottles and on quality control. This factory emphasis is hard on children because it ignores individual differences in mental abilities. (Elkind 1982)

Hymes (1981) states that parents, as well as some teachers, think of teaching in terms of test scores, books, paper-pencil tasks, and children all sitting nice and quiet at their desks. The pressure on young kindergarten age children to perform is sometimes overwhelming. Expectations for success are held by everyone. He also states that the right time to begin the formal teaching of reading is each child's own time. Youngsters pushed into reading too early may later reject it and their attitude for reading may be poor.

Our Impatient Society is Depriving Children

We hurry our children because we hurry ourselves. We are a society of hurried people who are constantly striving to do jobs faster and better and are impatient with waiting. We cannot change the American society for which hurrying is the accepted way of life, but the abuse of hurrying really harms children.

Music, books, films and television increasingly portray children as "little adults." That manipulation is reinforcing the pressure on children to grow up fast in their language, thinking, and behavior. But children cannot be hurried into growing up emotionally. Feelings and emotions have their own timetable with each individual child. Young teenagers may look like adults but they don't feel like adults.

Growing up emotionally is complicated and difficult under any circumstance but may be especially so when children's behavior and appearance speak "adult" while their feelings cry "child." (Elkind 1982)

There is documentation of damaging consequences in the area of emotional and social development in entering school and encountering pressures at too early of an age.

Bloom (1976) states that children are not only judged by their teachers and peers, but also by their family and by comparing himself to others in his class.

Most learning at this age is done in a group situation and judgements are based on very competitive results. He states that students make personal impressions with judgements about the adequacy or inadequacy of his performance on certain tasks that are repeated throughout his school years. The pupil learns to see himself as a success or failure. Most of these personal attitudes are formed in the ages of six to eleven. Therefore, success or failure will have a life-long effect on the individual.

Elkind (1982) feels that the childhood period is one of major psychological conflicts. There is the child's desire to grow up, and to remain a child.

He cites other psychological features that include fears about academic achievement and social acceptance. Because academic achievement is so valued by family, peers, and teachers, it becomes a major area of concern. The child fears failure and resulting rejection if he should fail.

Five and six year olds usually begin school with positive attitudes. However, many may decide otherwise by the end of the school year due to negative experiences.

Gilmore and Uphoff (1984) noted the results of other studies that indicated that demanding kindergarten programs

created stress for children not developmentally ready and conducted a pilot study in Montgomery county in Ohio. The study examined all youth suicides of twenty five years of age and under occurring in 1983 and during the first half of 1984. Summer birth children make up almost thirty five per cent of total births per year in Ohio. Of the male youth suicides, at least forty five per cent were summer children. The percentage of female suicides who had been summer birth children was eighty three per cent. As the study progresses, and if these figures were to hold, the message would be strong for educators and parents.

This researcher feels that if we want our children to do well in school in all areas, they must have successful school experiences. This success is vital to the children no matter what their age when they enter school. Perhaps the younger children do suffer more from entering school at an early age. Studies have shown that the children who have a birthday soon after the cut off date have almost a twenty per cent advantage in their experiences they bring from home to the school environment.

Perhaps moving the cut off date to May 30, might help all children involved.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

Subjects

The study consists of thirty-eight (38) second grade students who have attended the researcher's elementary school from kindergarten to second grade.

Setting

School. The building is a suburban kindergarten through sixth grade elementary school containing five hundred twenty-one (521) students. There is one kindergarten class, four first grade classrooms, three second grade classes, one split second-third classroom, two third grade classes, three fourth grade classrooms, three fifth grade classes, three sixth grade classes, and three severe behavior classrooms. The building is in a predominately white, lower middle class area.

Community. The school system is in a small town of 35,000 in Southeast Ohio. The majority of the population are factory and blue-collar workers.

Data Collection

Construction of the Data Collection Instrument. The research will be an ex-post facto two-way design. Each of the genders will be in a block format, as will the young children and older kindergarten children at entrance age.

The research will use two independent variables:

1. The time between the pre and post test in each

grade level and 2. The age of the child. The block design will be used to keep the younger and older children and the male and female students separate for the purpose of comparison.

The researcher will use the data of variance to examine results from the pre and post tests in kindergarten and first grades.

The following is an example of the design.

KINDERGARTEN

M A L E	Young children at kindergarten entrance	Older children at kindergarten entrance
	Differences in pre and post tests	Differences in pre and post tests
F E M A L E	Differences in pre and post tests	Differences in pre and post tests

FIRST GRADE

M A L E	Young children at kindergarten entrance Differences in pre and post tests	Older children at kindergarten entrance Differences in pre and post tests
F E M A L E	Differences in pre and post tests	Differences in pre and post tests

Administration of the Data Collecting Instrument.

As an apparatus to measure gains in an area of academic achievement, the researcher will use the pre and post test of the Metropolitan Achievement Test in grades kindergarten and one, comparing the Reading Comprehension scores to determine gains made in the first grade.

The validity of the Metropolitan Test used in kindergarten and first grade reflects academic achievement evaluation and information about the pupil's knowledge in the areas of mathematics, reading, and language.

The validity of the Metropolitan is defined primarily in terms of content validity. Content validity refers to the fact that the objective covers the curriculum areas that need to be measured. Since each school district varies in its' curriculum, they must individually establish their own validity.

The kindergarten and first grade Metropolitan Achievement Tests are administered by all the kindergarten and first grade teachers in the researcher's elementary school building.

Procedures. The researcher contacted the head of the district testing department to explain the intended project and see if it was possible to obtain the information of the pre and post tests needed for completion of the project. I assured the supervisor that none of the names of the children would be printed in the project, only their identification number, as this seemed to be the only area of concern.

In the actual gathering of the data, the researcher obtained lists of second grade students who had been in the kindergarten classroom of the researcher. This information included children according to their age at the time of entrance in kindergarten. Only the children who had attended kindergarten, first, and second grades at the researcher's elementary school were included. Students qualifying in terms of age were selected and then further grouped according to their gender. Each student used his or her identification number.

Scores for the students were obtained from the pre and post tests scan sheets which were provided by the testing supervisor. In Appendix A, a diagram shows the difference between each of the subject's

pre and post test scores.

Conclusions were based on the information and significance of the gathered data.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

FIRST GRADE
DIFFERENCES IN PRE AND POST SCORES
ON THE METROPOLITAN ACHIEVEMENT TEST

M A L E	<p>Young children at kindergarten entrance age</p> <p>3.3 2.2 .2 1.0 2.3 1.9 1.0</p> <p>Mean score=1.9</p>	<p>Older children at kindergarten entrance age</p> <p>2.0 2.4 .6 1.3 1.0 1.3</p> <p>Mean score=1.3</p>
	<p>F E M A L E</p> <p>.9 2.6 .6 .3 1.0 1.0 .7 .6</p> <p>Mean score=.7</p>	<p>.6 .6 .6 .6 .2 .6 1.9 .6 .6 .6 2.0 .2 1.0 .6 2.3</p> <p>Mean score=.6</p>

Discussion of Results

The researcher determined that there was no significant differences in pre and post test scores on the Metropolitan Achievement Test caused by age or gender.

However, in examining the children involved in the project, the researcher found that five out of thirteen males qualified and were enrolled in the reading recovery program. Of those five that qualified, all were young entrance age birthdays at the beginning of kindergarten. Eleven out of twenty-three females qualified and were enrolled in reading recovery. Of those eleven, eight were young entrance age birthdays when they entered kindergarten.

The researcher feels that although age and gender seem not to have any effect on the ability to achieve, the younger child does seem to have more trouble in achieving the classroom curriculum and seems to need the extra help provided by the reading recovery program.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The researcher had attempted to determine if a relationship existed between the performance of children in first and second grades because they entered kindergarten at an early age.

The researcher used pre and post test scores obtained through the Metropolitan Achievement Tests administered in kindergarten and first grade. The researcher grouped the children according to their age when they entered kindergarten and their gender. The researcher obtained the copies of the pre and post test scores from the district testing supervisor. The researcher compared the pre and post test scores of each group and found the mean score in each area. From those statistics, the researcher determined that there was not a significant difference in their test scores because of their age at the time of entrance into kindergarten.

Conclusions

However, as pointed out in the project, because of the high number of early age children needing and receiving reading recovery, it does point out that this group of students' needs are not being met with the current curriculum.

Recommendations

The researcher feels that there are many changes that need to take place in the state, local school districts, and in the classroom teacher's expectations in order to help solve the student's problems.

The state could change the cutoff date for entrance into kindergarten from September 30 to sometime in the summer prior to the child entering kindergarten. The researcher feels that May 31 or June 1 would be a better deadline.

The local school districts are going to have to use a better screening system to determine if children are ready to enter kindergarten in the first place. The state now mandates that school systems must screen the children before they enter kindergarten and yet the parents have the final say on what happens to their child. The researcher feels now that kindergarten is mandatory, the school district should have the final say on whether a child is ready to enter kindergarten or not. If the school district determines that a child is not ready to enter kindergarten, then the school must supply some sort of pre-school or early education classes for the child to attend.

The classroom teachers are going to have to use better methods of assessing what the children know.

The researcher would like to see all districts change from a report card system with grades or S and U to a check sheet that would show more of the progress that the child has made during that year. Classroom teachers need to work with what the children know; instead of dwelling on what they don't know.

The researcher hopes that statewide as well as nationally, the educational system will look into the question of pupil entrance age and how it affects all children. It would be interesting to track a group of early entrance age kindergarten children through to their adult life and see if it has any long term consequences. The researcher definitely feels that although my project did not show any significant differences; second grade is not tracking the student long enough.

APPENDIX

RESULTS

Presentation of the results.

<u>Student</u>	<u>Mathematics</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Language</u>
#297909974	95%	93%	90%
#271906090	88%	82%	60%
#288901353	79%	14%	3%
#291903549	99%	93%	90%
#292822965	70%	38%	12%
#292821405	36%	11%	3%
#297825274	88%	38%	36%
#281828991	51%	93%	90%
#290907824	51%	38%	8%
#288820511	43%	22%	16%
#277909491	70%	38%	21%
#297845642	24%	22%	46%
#287883761	60%	22%	27%
#298838313	79%	93%	90%
#270878746	60%	82%	90%
#297900207	60%	38%	12%
#268861463	88%	93%	90%
#277881634	99%	93%	90%
#283880767	79%	93%	78%
#290825873	99%	93%	27%
#274928422	51%	93%	90%

<u>Student</u>	<u>Mathematics</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Language</u>
#310064013	79%	93%	90%
#273903746	51%	14%	78%
#291821777	70%	8%	36%
#298902973	88%	82%	90%
#298841455	99%	82%	60%
#D83055018	1%	6%	8%
#279842983	88%	93%	90%
#292845732	51%	5%	8%
#278886552	51%	14%	12%
#288822490	95%	48%	8%
#296828148	88%	93%	90%
#294849304	79%	14%	12%
#294907914	36%	82%	60%
#276844426	99%	18%	3%
#287829185	95%	93%	78%
#299822040	79%	38%	5%

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