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A TWO YEAR STUDY OF CHILDREN
ENROLLED IN A TRANSITIONAL
FIRST GRADE PROGRAM

by
Sharleen Selfridge Johnson

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in Learning Disabilities
in the Graduate Division of Rowan College
1996

Approved by _____
Professor

Date Approved 5-13-96

ABSTRACT

Sharleen Selfridge Johnson

A Two Year Study of Children

Enrolled in a Transitional

First Grade Program

1996

Dr. Stanley Urban

Learning Disabilities

This study focused on a longitudinal followup of the educational status of children years two and three after completing a transitional first grade program. The samples selected for the study were fifteen children from the first and second grades in a southern New Jersey public school system.

Data was gathered through the use of questionnaires. Kindergarten, first and second grade teachers completed survey forms. Parents of previous transitional first grade students were also asked to respond to a questionnaire.

Information noted included: (1) factors influencing the decision to place a child in a transitional first grade (T1) program; (2) attitudes of teachers toward the T1 program; (3) parent attitudes toward the T1 program; and (4) measures used to determine if a child is appropriate for the T1 program. This information was then content analyzed and summarized.

The findings of this study indicate that children who have been enrolled in a transitional first grade program have positively benefited

from the experience. Parents and teachers were supportive of the program while expressing two concerns; (1) the location of the classrooms; and (2) children who need special education services being placed in a T1 program rather than receiving a Child Study Team evaluation.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Sharleen Selfridge Johnson

A Two Year Study of Children

Enrolled in a Transitional

First Grade Program

1996

Dr. Stanley Urban

Learning Disabilities

This study focused on a longitudinal follow-up of the educational status of children years two and three after completing a transitional first grade program.

The results indicate that the program had a positive impact on these students. Parents and teachers were surveyed through the use of questionnaires. The questionnaires were then content analyzed and summarized.

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Chapter I

Introduction to the Problem

Children progress at different rates of speed in all areas of development including emotional, physical, and intellectual. When a determination is made that a child is "not ready" to achieve a particular task this should not be viewed as a pejorative measure in relation to their intelligence, but rather a sequelae of maturation, or the child's total development.

The Gesell Institute of Human Development maintains that behavior is a function of physical structure and that growth is orderly, structured, and predictable. Each child will go through a predictable cycle of developmental states; thus, in this respect each child is like every other child. However, every child's rate and pattern of growth is unique to himself and in this way each child is different from every other child (A Gift of Time, 1982). It is this difference in the rate of growth that extra year programs, like the transitional first grade, attempt to address.

The Transitional First Grade, sometimes referred to as "Junior First," "Pre-First," or "Developmental First," provides a program for the student who has the potential to learn but lacks developmental maturity. This program is designed to allow another year of school for

children who, after their Kindergarten year, are at high risk for failure in first grade. These children display a variety of characteristics including the need for more exposure to reading readiness skills, poor ability to follow directions well, an inability to attend to prescribed tasks long enough to finish them, and generally they do poorly on pencil and paper academic tasks. In addition, development of oral language and listening skills is an important component in the transitional first grade curriculum (Brewer, 1990).

The transitional first grade program should be child-centered, assuring that the individual needs of the child are met. It is generally smaller in size, allowing for more teacher contact time, and success oriented so that the child who has experienced failure in kindergarten will feel that he can achieve and therefore give him a sense of worth and self-esteem.

An essential part of the success of a transitional first grade is the acceptance of the program by the parents. It is important that parents understand that such a program is designed to help the children progress at their own rate. Children placed in this program are not being labeled or considered to be slow learners; rather, they are being given a chance to succeed without frustration and develop at their own idiosyncratic rate.

Attitudes of school personnel toward the transitional program appear to be favorable; however, few schools have gathered any data to follow up on the long term educational status of these children. Statements of faith from school personnel abound, however, few programs

maintain effective monitoring systems to indicate the progress of the children (Jones, 1990). The impact and value of transitional programs can be documented by answering the following questions: What factors influence the decision to place a child in a transitional first grade program? What are the attitudes of parents and school personnel toward this extra year program? What kinds of measures are used to determine who is appropriate for transitional first grade? What is the subsequent status of fifteen children who have been through a transitional first grade program?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a longitudinal followup of the educational status of children years two and three after completing a transitional first grade program.

Research Questions

The overall question to be answered in this study is as follows: What is the subsequent status of children who were enrolled in the transitional first grade during the 1993-94 and 1994-95 academic years? In order to answer this overall question, the following subquestions will be answered.

Subquestion 1. What factors influence a decision to place a child in a transitional first grade program?

Subquestion 2. What are the attitudes of kindergarten, first grade, and second grade teachers toward the transitional first grade program?

Subquestion 3. What are the attitudes of parents of former transitional first grade students toward the program?

Subquestion 4. What kinds of measures are used to determine if a child is appropriate for the transitional program?

Need for the Study

The school system in which the study will be conducted has not completed followup studies on the students participating in the transitional first grade program. The findings from this study will be made available to the Director of the Early Childhood Programs in the district and may contribute to program validation and/or improvement.

Significance of the Study

The school district being studied in this project has had a transitional first grade program for approximately ten years. The children in the program have not been followed longitudinally and therefore this study represents the first such attempt.

Anecdotal statements from educators and parents have expressed positive feelings with regard to the transitional program; however, no formal studies have been completed to measure educator and parent satisfaction as it relates to the transitional first grade program.

Results of studies such as the present one could be utilized in program planning and to provide empirical justification for the continuation of this program. If negative attitudes on the part of the educators or parents are prevalent, or later school success is not

apparent, changes in program planning and/or inservice training should be developed to address these needs.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations inherent within this study which the reader should recognize. Responses from educators and parents will be gathered through the use of questionnaires. These responses are subject to the honesty of the respondent. That is, will the respondent reveal his or her true feelings toward the transitional first grade program? Some investigators have suggested that the subjects tend to respond to the questions in ways which they feel are socially desirable (Smith & Glass, 1987).

A second and perhaps more significant limitation of the present study is the degree of participation of the respondents to the questionnaire. If the response is limited it may affect the results of the study.

Additionally, the sample of the respondents to the questionnaires as well as the sample of transitional first grade graduates who will be followed up, will be a convenience sample rather than randomly selected. Convenience sampling is not necessarily the most appropriate, but rather the most feasible (Cohen, Swerdlik, Smith, 1992).

Summary

The literature reviewed in Chapter II will provide a general overview of developmental readiness and of the measures used to determine eligibility for the transitional first grade program.

Research articles, opinion pieces, and teacher and parent workshops will be utilized to investigate the effectiveness of this program.

This subject is not without controversy. Though educators seem to accept the validity of this program, followup studies are few and far between. Clearly, there is a need for more information in this area.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

This study attempted to determine if the time and experience gained by developmentally young children who were participants in a transitional first grade program had a positive impact on their subsequent academic performance.

Literature for this review was gathered using a computer data search at Rowan College, the Educational Information Resource Center in Sewell, New Jersey, and through a personal collection of articles and books gathered during the past three years. Additionally, information was gained through interviews with administrators, teachers, and parents who have had experience with transitional first grade programs.

The review of literature for this study will include the following:

Historical Perspective

Developmental Readiness

Chronological versus Developmental Age

Gender Differences

Assessment Practices

Transitional First Grade Programs

Historical Perspective

Transition classes were utilized in a number of large city schools in the 1940s, but the concept did not spread widely at that time (Harris, 1970).

Studies were done in 1950 (McDaid) on transitional programs in the Detroit school system. McDaid found that over a period of three years, the children performed no better in regular classes than did those in a control group. McDaid reported that transition room-eligible children who stayed in the regular class performed at a significantly higher level in reading.

Liddle and Long (1958) studied a transitional program in Quincy, Illinois. They reported that the program was of value in improving the academic performance of many of the children.

A study done by Griffin and Reinherz in 1969 (cited in Gredler, 1984) recommended the use of the transition room for children in the Quincy, Massachusetts schools. These transition rooms were devised primarily to help low SES children who were having difficulty with the regular program. "The most important aspect of their study was documentation of a higher retention rate of low SES children in that particular system" (Gredler, 1984). Mixed results of studies caused concern over the effectiveness of the transitional year program. For a time school systems turned away from these programs and toward other issues.

In the 1970s, transitional first grades once again became a viable option to retaining developmentally delayed children. Pauley (1951)

reported that many children are not ready for a traditional first grade experience when they are chronologically approaching six years of age. First grade children who lack maturity are unable to achieve satisfactory progress in the usual first grade curriculum (Carter, 1956). First grade teachers have stated that the lack of maturity of developmentally delayed children causes the failure of the students to meet the academic requirements. "During any stage in a child's life, learning is most successful when tasks are adapted to the mental capacity of the individual at his level of maturation. It is imperative that the relationship between chronological age, maturity, and the school curriculum be clarified" (Carter, 1956).

During the 1980s, there was a trend toward identifying high-risk children at all socioeconomic levels who may not be ready for first grade (Charlesworth, 1989). Many educators looked on the transition class as the white knight of primary school reform. "Transitional classes would, theoretically, stave off school failure (Natale, 1991). The 1990s saw a mixed review of transitional first grade programs. Some research (Natale, 1991) was critical of transitional programs citing problems with the assessment measures used to identify potential students for the program. It was also noted that children who are a year older than their classmates may have self-esteem problems, poor academic performance, and a higher school drop-out rate.

Researchers who looked favorably upon transitional first grade programs noted that bright but developmentally young children do worse in school than their less bright but more mature classmates (Uphoff,

1986). A study of 500 K-12 students in Montclair, New Jersey (Forester, 1955) reported these findings:

...those pupils who were very bright but very young at the time of school entrance did not realize their potential. They tended to be physically immature or emotionally unstable, or they would cry easily. And socially, they seldom showed leadership. From junior high school on, 50 percent of them earned only "C" grades. On the other hand, generally the very bright late-school entrance group excelled throughout their school years.

...in many cases early entry may result in maladjustment in school, and even may have adverse effect on adult life" (cited in Uphoff & Gilmore, 1986).

The general rule holds up that the child who is on the older side has a better chance of doing well in school (Ames, 1978). Many transitional first grade students were among the youngest children in their kindergarten classes. Entrance age to school can have an impact on later school success.

Developmental Readiness

Researchers are now discovering that every child isn't ready to begin school just because he is six years old. A study that was done to compare children who were required to begin formal instruction before six years of age with those who started after six years of age found that children who started earlier made slower progress and did not have positive feelings about school (Ames & Chase, 1975).

Dr. Arnold Gesell began studying human development in 1911. He based his work on the philosophy that humans develop in a patterned and predictable way. Over a period of forty years, Dr. Gesell and his associates at the Gesell Institute in New Haven, Connecticut, developed norms of child behavior (Scoring Notes, The Developmental Test, 1986). Based on his research Dr. Gesell established developmental age descriptions. Each developmental age has characteristic patterns of mental and physical organization, of social and emotional behavior, and of play interests and activities. In 1951, Dr. Gesell retired and his work was continued by his colleagues, Dr. Louise Bates Ames, Dr. Francis Ilg, and Dr. Janet Learned. The Gesell Institute continues to study the concept of developmental age in school placement (Scoring Notes, The Developmental Test, 1986).

Chronological versus Developmental Age

The Gesell Institute does not recommend basing school entrance solely on chronological age. It does recommend placing and promoting children in school based on their developmental age (the age where a child is functioning as a total organism).

Bohl (1984) reported that most of the stresses of first grade are not academic. The stresses lie in social, physical, and developmental areas which are essential for developmental readiness.

In her book, Is Your Child in the Wrong Grade?, Dr. Louise Bates Ames reported that unready children did not, in succeeding years, catch up with the ready ones. If growth is proceeding at an average rate, a child's behavior grows about a year in one year's time. She pointed out

that behavior does not grow more than a year in a year's time, and it would have to do that in order to catch up (page 5).

Sandoval and Fitzgerald (1985) reported that "by spreading the first grade curriculum over three years, the hope is to provide the extra time some children need to master readiness skills and to mature. Use of an entire class reduces the possible stigma associated with kindergarten non-promotions and provides the child with a curriculum geared to his particular needs."

Dr. Francis Ilg (Scoring Notes, The Developmental Exam, 1986), points out the difficulty in using only chronological age as a determination for school readiness or placement. Problems develop when typical behavior at any given age is assumed to be the average, or is used as a guideline as to when that behavior can be expected. Dr. Ilg stated, "This average is too often assumed to be a standard which is desirable and even necessary for all. The whole concept then becomes misconstrued since it lacks respect for the integrity of individual growth. The child's individuality is laid aside when chronological age standards are used for school placement."

Gender Differences

Research consistently reports that gender difference is another critical factor related to readiness and success in school. Ames (1978) reported findings that indicate a discrepancy in behavior level and rate of development between males and females of about six months. On the average boys tend to develop a little more slowly than girls. Sigmon

(1987) states that a boy's average developmental rate is six months behind a girl's average developmental rate.

Sabin (1970) reported "For every girl in an educationally handicapped classroom (children with at least average abilities but unable to make normal progress or adjustment in a regular classroom), there are six boys. For every boy in an educationally handicapped classroom born between December 3 and May 31 (older group) there are two boys born between June 1 and December 2 (younger group)."

Clearly, all of the research supports the claim that boys tend to develop at a slower rate than do girls.

Assessment Practices

There are a number of school readiness or screening instruments devised to determine a child's developmental readiness. Some are primarily intended to assess reading readiness; others are designed to measure a variety of social and developmental skills relevant to a child's performance in school. These tests are given before the child enters kindergarten, at the end of the kindergarten year, and at the end of the child's first grade year. They can include a check of the child's vision, hearing, motor coordination, speech, and language controls.

The Gesell Institute has developed a placement test which provides concrete and objective data to help define a child's developmental strengths and weaknesses. This test, The Gesell School Readiness Test (GSRT) is administered individually and requires twenty to forty minutes. It is primarily a perceptual motor test. Subtests provide

information regarding a child's emotional, social, perceptual, language, and motor development. The information gleaned from this assessment is useful in making placement and program decisions (Senior, 1986).

Shepard and Smith (1986) reviewed the GSRT and reported that the Gesell had a problem with predictive validity. They identified a study in 1972 (Kaufman) which concluded that "the Gesell tests do not meet the standards of the American Psychological Association for validity, reliability, or normative information. Another study (Wood, et al., 1984) conducted to evaluate the predictive validity of the Gesell found that it appeared to have "a creditable agreement rate with teacher judgments (78 percent)." However, when examining "the children identified as potential kindergarten failure...only half were accurately identified. For every potential failure accurately identified there was a successful child falsely identified."

Meisels (1987) stated that the GSRT is a "set of tests with unknown validity and reliability, a theory that is outmoded and unsubstantiated, an unverified notion of developmental age, and a racially and ethnically narrow normative base—for developmental screening and class placement is empirically unjustified and professionally suspect."

A study of transitional first grade programs in Haddonfield, New Jersey, followed the progress of students over a seven-year period (Caggiano, 1984). Significant differences between students assessed as developmentally young who were placed in transitional first grade and students assessed as developmentally young but not placed in

transitional first grade were found. A control group of children whose Gesell Assessments indicated readiness for first grade was also included. Students who attended a transitional first grade exhibited fewer problems with attention, anxiety, withdrawal and classroom behavior than the developmentally young children who did not attend a transitional first grade. Behavioral problems were especially evident in boys who were developmentally young but did not attend transitional first grade. Eyster (1990) cites the above study as an example of student performance confirming the effectiveness of Gesell Assessments when used as part of developmental education programs.

Many school districts are also using standardized tests to obtain an objective measure of children's readiness for kindergarten or first grade (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989). A major problem with these tests is that they are not sufficiently reliable or valid for this purpose. The Metropolitan Readiness Test has the best predictive validity reporting correlations of .70 to .78 with later first grade measures of achievement (Nurss & McGauvran, 1976). Much controversy continues to surround the subject of assessment for measuring developmental readiness.

Transitional First Grade Programs

Most transitional programs are designed to provide another year of school for children who, after their kindergarten year, are predicted not to do well in first grade (Brewer, 1990). This group of children provide a challenge to educators--to find a viable program for those students not ready for the rigors of a traditional first grade. In the

past, retention was the option most chosen for the developmentally young child. Currently, the trend is toward transitional programs.

This program provides children who are developmentally young with an opportunity of time and experience to mature. The program is designed to provide instruction with an understanding of each child's developmental level of functioning in all areas (Senior, 1986).

Participation in most transitional classes is optional. Programs are generally full day programs with a class size of approximately fifteen. The curriculum is modified and combines concrete, hands-on activities with basic academics. Children are encouraged to work individually with concrete objects before moving on to more abstract experiences (LaGrange School System). Readiness is nurtured rather than forced. The transition room program provides what appears to be a very constructive alternative for the developmentally young child (Wilson, 1979).

Research on academic success of early entrants reported by Uphoff and Gilmore summarized findings of major importance to parents and educators.

1. The chronologically older children in a grade tend to receive many more above-average grades from teachers than do younger children in that grade.
2. Older children also are much more likely to score in the above average range on standardized achievement tests.

3. The younger children in a grade are far more likely to have failed at least one grade than are older children.
4. The younger children in a grade are far more likely to have been referred by teachers for learning disabilities testing and subsequently have been diagnosed as learning disabled than are older students in a grade.
5. The academic problems of younger children who were developmentally unready at school entrance often last throughout their school careers and sometimes into adulthood.

Shepard and Smith (1986) reported that "providing an extra year before first grade does not solve the problems it was intended to solve. Children in these programs show virtually no academic advantage over equally at-risk children who have not had the extra year." They go on to report that transitional programs may actually have a negative impact on social adjustment and self-esteem.

This difficult question of how to best confront the diversity of young children continues to be a controversial issue among educational experts.

Chapter III

Design of the Study

Introduction

The purpose of the study is to determine the subsequent status of a child who has participated in a transitional first grade program. The study is designed to assess the attitudes of kindergarten, first grade, and second grade teachers toward this program. The attitudes of parents in regard to transitional first grade will also be examined. The study also seeks to discover the kinds of measures used to determine if a child is appropriate for transitional first grade. Information concerning the educational setting and the sample used for the study is also discussed.

Educational Setting

The research for this thesis was conducted primarily in two elementary schools located in a middle class, southern New Jersey community. This industrial community with a population of approximately 24,000 persons supports six elementary schools, a junior high and a senior high school.

Three classrooms of transitional first grade students have existed in this district for approximately ten years. These classes are held in

three different building, to allow children to attend a neighborhood school when possible.

Class size is limited to fifteen children. This full day program includes special area instruction, such as physical education, music, art, and library classes. Special education services are available, if needed.

Description of the Population and Sample

The population of this study will consist of fifteen children who were participants in a transitional first grade program in the 1993-94 and in the 1994-95 academic years. These children are now in first and second grade.

The children who were identified to participate in the transitional first grade program were assigned to this program as a result of teacher recommendation and parental consent. Results from the Brigance (level one) test and a district checklist were used as a partial basis by the teachers in identifying candidates for this program. A miscue analysis of an unfamiliar reading passage is also considered when a transitional first grade recommendation is made.

Collection of Data

Information collected on each student included academic performance in the areas of reading, mathematics, and language. The student's self-concept and attitude toward learning was also examined.

Testimony was gathered from kindergarten, first grade, and second grade teachers. Attitudes toward the transitional first grade program were explored, as well as teacher conclusions concerning the overall

subsequent academic success of the transitional first grade graduate. A copy of the testimony questions will be found in Appendix A.

Finally, the parents of the students involved in the study were interviewed to determine their level of satisfaction with the transitional first grade program. Specific information was gathered concerning the program's effect on their child. A copy of the parent questionnaire will be found in Appendix B.

Analysis of the Data

Parent interviews, teacher responses, and screening results will be content analyzed and summarized for the children who are participating in this study. Summaries of the data obtained will be presented in narrative form in order to answer the Research Questions posed in Chapter I.

Summary

The present study examined students from a middle class, southern New Jersey town. Fifteen students participated in the study. All of the students involved are presently in first or second grade. This group of children attended a transitional first grade program after kindergarten, but before first grade. A description of the educational setting and population and sample were included. Collection and analysis of the data used in the study were discussed.

The overall question this study will attempt to answer is related to the subsequent academic status of transitional first grade graduates.

Chapter IV

Analysis of Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide a longitudinal follow-up of the educational status of children years two and three after completing a transitional first grade program.

Results

As depicted in Figures 1, 2, and 3, teachers of kindergarten, first, and second grades were surveyed to determine their attitudes and level of satisfaction with the transitional first grade program. Figure 4 represents an average of their responses. Parental views and attitudes of children who attended a transitional first grade program are examined in Figure 5.

The overall question addressed in this thesis was as follows: What is the subsequent status of children who were enrolled in the transitional first grade during the 1993-94 and 1994-95 academic years? In order to answer the overall question, the following subquestions were addressed:

1. What factors influence a decision to place a child in a transitional first grade program?

2. What are the attitudes of kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers toward the transitional first grade program?
3. What are the attitudes of parents of former transitional first grade students toward the program?
4. What kinds of measures are used to determine if a child is appropriate for the transitional program?

The data gathered in this study has suggested answers to these questions. The answers will be discussed sequentially and the data pertaining to these questions are presented in the form of discussion and figures. The Figures are located at the end of this chapter.

Question Number 1:

What factors influence a decision to place a child in a transitional first grade program?

Figures 4 and 5 show that teachers and parents agreed that poor reading readiness skills was the most common reason for a child to be enrolled in a transitional first grade. Both groups indicated that being a chronologically younger child was the second most common influence in a transitional first grade placement decision. The third most common characteristic of this group of children was a poor attention span. A lack of appropriate social skills, gender influences, and poor self-concept seemed to least influence the decision for a transitional first grade placement.

Question Number 2:

What are the attitudes of kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers toward the transitional first grade program?

Figures 1, 2, and 3 represent the individual views of teachers in grades kindergarten, first, and second. Figure 4 presents a collective view of the thirty-four teachers participating in the study. Twenty-nine teachers rated the transitional first grade program as being extremely beneficial, four teachers found the program to be somewhat beneficial. One teacher characterized the transitional first grade program as being mildly beneficial.

Question Number 3:

What are the attitudes of parents of former transitional first grade students toward the program?

Figure 5 depicts the views of the twelve parents who responded to a questionnaire concerning the transitional first grade program. Ten parents were extremely satisfied with the program their child participated in, with two parents being somewhat satisfied with the program. In response to a question concerning the effect of the transitional first grade program on their child, answers were as follows: nine parents felt the program had a very positive effect; one parent indicated a somewhat positive effect, and two parents described the program as having a mildly positive effect on their child.

Question Number 4:

What kinds of measures are used to determine if a child is appropriate for the transitional program?

Figure 4 shows the overall views of the thirty-four teachers who participated in this study. The teachers indicated that observational data and recommendation by the kindergarten teacher to be the most

important measure in determining if a child is appropriate for the transitional first grade program. Review of the child's kindergarten work was considered to be the next measure of appropriateness. Developmental assessment data (including social, emotional, physical, and intellectual) was the third measure considered important in determining an appropriate placement. Observational data and recommendation from the parent and results of a standardized test or portfolio assessment were indicated to have the least influence upon a transitional first grade referral.

Summary

The results of this study indicate that teachers and parents feel the benefits of the transitional first grade program are positive.

Figure 1

Transitional First Grade Questionnaire

Teacher Response
(N=5)

1. What grade to you teach? *Kindergarten*
2. Are you male or female? *5 female*
3. How old are you? *48 average age*
4. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
18 average years
5. Rank the reasons (in your opinion) for a student to be recommended for the transitional first grade program (rank from 5 = most common to 1 = least common)
 - 5... poor reading readiness skills
 - 2... lack of appropriate social skills
 - 4... poor attention span
 - 3... chronologically younger child
 - 1... gender influences (male versus female)
6. Which of the following assessment data have the greatest to the least influence upon transitional first grade referral (5 = greatest 1 = least)
 - 3... developmental assessment data (including social, emotional, physical and intellectual)
 - 5... observational data and recommendation by the kindergarten teacher
 - 2... observational data and recommendation from the parent
 - 4... review of the child's kindergarten work
 - 1... results of a standardized test or portfolio assessment
7. First and second grade teachers, please indicate the current status of students in your class (who were participants in a transitional first grade program) by checking the most appropriate response.
(Does not apply to kindergarten teachers)

Reading	below average	.....
	average	.....
	above average	.....
Math	below average	.....
	average	.....

	above average	.....
Language	below average	.....
	average	.....
	above average	.....
Self-Concept	below average	.....
	average	.....
	above average	.....
Attitude	below average	.....
toward	average	.....
learning	above average	.....

8. Please indicate the statement which most closely parallels your personal philosophy toward a transitional first grade program.

- 4... provides a year of developmental time that will help the child succeed in the first grade
- ... gives the child the opportunity to gain specific skills needed in order to master first grade
- 1... allows for learning activities to match the child's cognitive development and will lead to successful learning

9. Rank the priority of these goals for students upon completion of a transitional first grade program (5 = highest 1 = lowest)

- 5... to improve reading and math readiness
- 3... to develop oral language
- 2... to increase ability to follow directions
- 4... to develop a healthy self-concept and attitude towards learning
- 1... to increase social and emotional maturity

10. Overall, how beneficial do you think a transitional first grade year is for the students who experience this program?

- 5... extremely beneficial
- ... somewhat beneficial
- ... mildly beneficial
- ... not at all beneficial

Comments or suggestions for future transitional first grade program planning or improvement can be addressed below.

Figure 2

Transitional First Grade Questionnaire

Teacher Response
(N=15)

1. What grade do you teach? *First Grade*
2. Are you male or female? *1 male, 14 female*
3. How old are you? *45 average age*
4. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
20 average years
5. Rank the reasons (in your opinion) for a student to be recommended for the transitional first grade program (rank from 5 = most common to 1 = least common)
 - 5... poor reading readiness skills
 - 3... lack of appropriate social skills
 - 4... poor attention span
 - 2... chronologically younger child
 - 1... gender influences (male versus female)
6. Which of the following assessment data have the greatest to the least influence upon transitional first grade referral (5 = greatest 1 = least)
 - 4... developmental assessment data (including social, emotional, physical and intellectual)
 - 5... observational data and recommendation by the kindergarten teacher
 - 1... observational data and recommendation from the parent
 - 2... review of the child's kindergarten work
 - 3... results of a standardized test or portfolio assessment
7. First and second grade teachers, please indicate the current status of students in your class (who were participants in a transitional first grade program) by checking the most appropriate response.

Reading	below average	..... 6
(N=18)	average	..... 9
	above average	..... 3
Math	below average	..... 3
(N=18)	average	..... 10
	above average	..... 5

Language (N=18)	below average	..... 5
	average	.....11
	above average	..... 2
Self-Concept (N=18)	below average	..... 3
	average	.....12
	above average	..... 3
Attitude toward learning (N=18)	below average	.....
	average	.....15
	above average	..... 3

8. Please indicate the statement which most closely parallels your personal philosophy toward a transitional first grade program.
(N=15)
- 6... provides a year of developmental time that will help the child succeed in the first grade
 - 1... gives the child the opportunity to gain specific skills needed in order to master first grade
 - 8... allows for learning activities to match the child's cognitive development and will lead to successful learning
9. Rank the priority of these goals for students upon completion of a transitional first grade program (5 = highest 1 = lowest)
- 5... to improve reading and math readiness
 - 1... to develop oral language
 - 4... to increase ability to follow directions
 - 3... to develop a healthy self-concept and attitude towards learning
 - 2... to increase social and emotional maturity
10. Overall, how beneficial do you think a transitional first grade year is for the students who experience this program?
- 14.. extremely beneficial
 - 1... somewhat beneficial
 - mildly beneficial
 - not at all beneficial

Comments or suggestions for future transitional first grade program planning or improvement can be addressed below.

Figure 3

Transitional First Grade Questionnaire

Teacher Response
(N=14)

1. What grade to you teach? *Second Grade*
2. Are you male or female? *14 female*
3. How old are you? *45.5 average age*
4. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
15 average years
5. Rank the reasons (in your opinion) for a student to be recommended for the transitional first grade program (rank from 5 = most common to 1 = least common)
 - 4... poor reading readiness skills
 - 3... lack of appropriate social skills
 - 2... poor attention span
 - 5... chronologically younger child
 - 1... gender influences (male versus female)
6. Which of the following assessment data have the greatest to the least influence upon transitional first grade referral (5 = greatest 1 = least)
 - 3... developmental assessment data (including social, emotional, physical and intellectual)
 - 4... observational data and recommendation by the kindergarten teacher
 - 2... observational data and recommendation from the parent
 - 5... review of the child's kindergarten work
 - 1... results of a standardized test or portfolio assessment
7. First and second grade teachers, please indicate the current status of students in your class (who were participants in a transitional first grade program) by checking the most appropriate response.

Reading (N=11)	below average	..... 7
	average	..... 4
	above average	.....
Math (N=11)	below average	..... 2
	average	..... 8
	above average	..... 1

Language (N=11)	below average	..... 4
	average	..... 7
	above average	.....
Self-Concept (N=11)	below average	..... 2
	average	..... 7
	above average	..... 2
Attitude toward learning (N=11)	below average	..... 1
	average	..... 8
	above average	..... 2

8. Please indicate the statement which most closely parallels your personal philosophy toward a transitional first grade program.
(N=14)
- 6... provides a year of developmental time that will help the child succeed in the first grade
 - 4... gives the child the opportunity to gain specific skills needed in order to master first grade
 - 4... allows for learning activities to match the child's cognitive development and will lead to successful learning
9. Rank the priority of these goals for students upon completion of a transitional first grade program (5 = highest 1 = lowest)
- 5... to improve reading and math readiness
 - 1... to develop oral language
 - 2... to increase ability to follow directions
 - 4... to develop a healthy self-concept and attitude towards learning
 - 3... to increase social and emotional maturity
10. Overall, how beneficial do you think a transitional first grade year is for the students who experience this program?
- 10.. extremely beneficial
 - 3... somewhat beneficial
 - 1... mildly beneficial
 - not at all beneficial

Comments or suggestions for future transitional first grade program planning or improvement can be addressed below.

Figure 4

Transitional First Grade Questionnaire

Teacher Response
(N=34)

1. What grade to you teach? *Kindergarten, First, Second*
2. Are you male or female? *1 male, 33 female*
3. How old are you? *46 average age*
4. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
17 average years
5. Rank the reasons (in your opinion) for a student to be recommended for the transitional first grade program (rank from 5 = most common to 1 = least common)
 - 5... poor reading readiness skills
 - 2... lack of appropriate social skills
 - 3... poor attention span
 - 4... chronologically younger child
 - 1... gender influences (male versus female)
6. Which of the following assessment data have the greatest to the least influence upon transitional first grade referral (5 = greatest 1 = least)
 - 3... developmental assessment data (including social, emotional, physical and intellectual)
 - 5... observational data and recommendation by the kindergarten teacher
 - 2... observational data and recommendation from the parent
 - 4... review of the child's kindergarten work
 - 1... results of a standardized test or portfolio assessment
7. First and second grade teachers, please indicate the current status of students in your class (who were participants in a transitional first grade program) by checking the most appropriate response. (N=29 teachers)

Reading	below average	..... 6
(N=18)	average	..... 6
	above average	..... 2
Math	below average	..... 2
(N=18)	average	..... 9
	above average	..... 3

Language (N=18)	below average	..... 4
	average	..... 9
	above average	..... 1
Self-Concept (N=18)	below average	..... 2
	average	..... 9
	above average	..... 3
Attitude toward learning (N=18)	below average	.....
	average	..... 11
	above average	..... 3

8. Please indicate the statement which most closely parallels your personal philosophy toward a transitional first grade program.

- 16... provides a year of developmental time that will help the child succeed in the first grade
- 5... gives the child the opportunity to gain specific skills needed in order to master first grade
- 13... allows for learning activities to match the child's cognitive development and will lead to successful learning

9. Rank the priority of these goals for students upon completion of a transitional first grade program (5 = highest 1 = lowest)

- 5... to improve reading and math readiness
- 1... to develop oral language
- 3... to increase ability to follow directions
- 4... to develop a healthy self-concept and attitude towards learning
- 2... to increase social and emotional maturity

10. Overall, how beneficial do you think a transitional first grade year is for the students who experience this program?

- 29... extremely beneficial
- 4... somewhat beneficial
- 1... mildly beneficial
- not at all beneficial

Comments or suggestions for future transitional first grade program planning or improvement can be addressed below.

Figure 5

Transitional First Grade Questionnaire

Parent Response

(N=12)

1. Rank the reasons (in your opinion) which contributed to your child being recommended to a transitional first grade program (5 = greatest influence, 1 = least influence)

- 5... poor reading readiness skills (academic difficulties)
- 2... lack of appropriate social skills (behavior problems)
- 3... poor attention span
- 1... poor self-concept
- 4... chronologically younger child (summer or early fall birthday)

2. Indicate (in your opinion) your child's self-concept or feelings about himself/herself following his/her kindergarten year of school. Check one.

- 4... excellent
- 1... very good
- 6... average
- 1... poor

3. Indicate (in your opinion) your child's self-concept or feelings about himself/herself following his/her transitional first year of school. Check one.

- 6... excellent
- 5... very good
- 1... average
- poor

4. Indicate your overall level of satisfaction with the transitional first grade program your child participated in. Check one.

- 10... extremely satisfied
- 2... somewhat satisfied
- mildly satisfied
- not at all satisfied

5. In your opinion, indicate the effect of the transitional first grade program on your child.

- 9... very positive
- 1... somewhat positive

2... mildly positive
.... negative

6. Please indicate your child's current performance in the following areas:

Reading	<u>3</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>1</u>
	below average	average	above average
Math	<u>1</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>4</u>
	below average	average	above average
Language	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
	below average	average	above average
Self-Concept	<u> </u>	<u>9</u>	<u>3</u>
	poor	average	excellent
Attitude toward learning	<u> </u>	<u>9</u>	<u>3</u>
	poor	average	excellent

Comments:

Chapter V

Summary and Conclusions

Summary

This study focused on a longitudinal follow-up of the educational status of children years two and three after completing a transitional first grade program. The samples selected for the study were fifteen children from the first and second grades in a southern New Jersey public school system.

Data was gathered through the use of questionnaires. Kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers completed survey forms. Parents of previous transitional first grade students were also asked to respond to a questionnaire.

Information noted included: (1) factors influencing the decision to place a child in a transitional first grade (T1) program; (2) attitudes of teachers toward the T1 program; (3) parent attitudes toward the T1 program; and (4) measures used to determine if a child is appropriate for the T1 program. This information was then content analyzed and summarized.

The findings of this study indicate that children who have been enrolled in a transitional first grade program have positively benefited

from the experience. Parents and teachers were supportive of the program while expressing two concerns; (1) the location of the classrooms; and (2) children who need special education services being placed in a T1 program rather than receiving a Child Study Team evaluation.

Conclusions

Based on the information gathered for this study the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Most of the teachers involved in this study found the transitional first grade program to be extremely beneficial.
2. Most of the parents of former transitional first grade students were extremely satisfied with the program.
3. Teachers involved in the study felt that the kindergarten teacher was the most important measure in determining the appropriateness of a child for the transitional first grade program.
4. In the area of reading, eight out of fourteen children who had participated in transitional first grade programs were in the average to above average range currently.
5. In the area of math, twelve out of fourteen children who had participated in transitional first grade programs were in the average to above average range currently.

6. In the area of language, ten out of fourteen children who had participated in transitional first grade programs were in the average to above average range currently.
7. At the completion of the transitional first grade year, twelve out of fourteen children were described as having average to high self-concepts.
8. All fourteen children exhibited a good to excellent attitude toward learning following the transitional first grade year.

Discussion

Educators generally agree that children develop at different rates of speed in all areas. However, disagreement occurs on the most appropriate way to address these differences. One possibility is the transitional first grade program.

There is research to support this extra year program (Gredler, 1984; Uphoff, 1986) and research which disputes the value of transitional first grade (Natale, 1991).

The author of this project did not discover the answer to the dilemma of addressing developmental differences through the research received. However, based on the research reviewed as well as the sample of students studied and teacher/parental responses received, some personal observations are as follows:

1. For this group of students the transitional first grade experience was educationally appropriate.

2. Teachers and parents are supportive of the transitional first grade program.
3. Observations made in three transitional first grade classrooms revealed children who appeared to be happy and actively involved in the learning process.

Although supportive of the transitional first grade program, several teachers expressed the same concerns about the program. Teachers observed that on occasion children with special needs were placed in a transitional first grade classroom. It was suggested that earlier intervention (the kindergarten year) utilizing a Child Study Team evaluation may be more appropriate. A second concern involved the location of the transitional first grade programs. Of the six primary buildings in this district only three have transitional first grade classrooms. Children from the other three buildings who are appropriate for this program must be bused. Parents have expressed to teachers a desire to have their child remain in the neighborhood school.

Implications for Further Research

Several questions that emerged during this research could be the subject of further investigation. They are as follows:

1. What would a long term study of the transitional program students show in relationship to their rate of success as they reach high school?
2. Do students who have participated in extra year programs experience social and/or emotional problems related to being a year older than their peers?

3. Is there any correlation between children who qualify for the transitional first grade program through teacher recommendation/review of kindergarten work and children who qualify based on a screening instrument such as the Gesell?
4. Was this study affected due to the limited response of parents?
5. Did the use of convenience sampling affect the validity of the study?
6. How does the socioeconomic status of a child influence developmental readiness?
7. Would the results of the study differ if an equal number of male and female teachers responded to the questionnaire used?

It is hoped that further research will be conducted to determine the long term effects of participation in a transitional first grade program on a child.

Appendix A

Dear Colleague,

I am conducting a study on transitional first grade programs. Through my research I am attempting to determine the subsequent status of children who have participated in this program.

One component of the study is designed to assess the attitudes of kindergarten through second grade teachers toward the transitional first grade program.

It would be of great help to me if you could take a few moments and respond to this questionnaire. It is in no way marked or coded and all answers are anonymous and confidential. Therefore, your honesty in responding to the questions would be greatly appreciated. The questionnaire should only take a few moments to complete.

I need the surveys returned by March 12, 1996. Please send them by interoffice mail to my attention at Holly Heights School.

Please remember the importance of research to the field of education and the service that you are doing to enhance it by responding to this questionnaire. Thank you very much for your time and assisting me in my research.

Yours truly,

Sharleen Johnson

Transitional First Grade Questionnaire

Teacher Response

1. What grade do you teach?
2. Are you male or female?
3. How old are you?
4. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
5. Rank the reasons (in your opinion) for a student to be recommended for the transitional first grade program (rank from 5 = most common to 1 = least common)
 -poor reading readiness skills
 -lack of appropriate social skills
 -poor attention span
 -chronologically younger child
 -gender influences (male versus female)
6. Which of the following assessment data have the greatest to the least influence upon transitional first grade referral (5 = greatest 1 = least)
 - developmental assessment data (including social, emotional, physical and intellectual)
 - observational data and recommendation by the kindergarten teacher
 - observational data and recommendation from the parent
 - review of the child's kindergarten work
 - results of a standardized test or portfolio assessment
7. First and second grade teachers, please indicate the current status of students in your class (who were participants in a transitional first grade program) by checking the most appropriate response.

Reading	below average	.....
	average	.....
	above average	.....
Math	below average	.....
	average	.....
	above average	.....
Language	below average	.....
	average	.....
	above average	.....

Self-Concept	below average	.....
	average	.....
	above average	.....
Attitude	below average	.....
toward	average	.....
learning	above average	.....

8. Please indicate the statement which most closely parallels your personal philosophy toward a transitional first grade program.

- provides a year of developmental time that will help the child succeed in the first grade
- gives the child the opportunity to gain specific skills needed in order to master first grade
- allows for learning activities to match the child's cognitive development and will lead to successful learning

9. Rank the priority of these goals for students upon completion of a transitional first grade program (5 = highest 1 = lowest)

- to improve reading and math readiness
- to develop oral language
- to increase ability to follow directions
- to develop a healthy self-concept and attitude towards learning
- to increase social and emotional maturity

10. Overall, how beneficial do you think a transitional first grade year is for the students who experience this program?

- extremely beneficial
- somewhat beneficial
- mildly beneficial
- not at all beneficial

Comments or suggestions for future transitional first grade program planning or improvement can be addressed below.

Appendix B

Dear Parent,

I am conducting a study on transitional first grade programs. Through my research I am attempting to determine the subsequent status of children who have participated in this program.

One part of the study is designed to determine how parents of previous transitional first grade students feel about the program.

It would be very helpful to me if you could take a few moments and answer the questions on the attached forms. All answers are confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the study. Your honesty in responding to the questions would be greatly appreciated. The questionnaire should only take a few moments to complete.

I need the surveys returned by March 12, 1996. I have enclosed a self-addressed, stamped envelope for your convenience.

Please remember the importance of research to the field of education and the service that you are doing by responding to this questionnaire.

Your help is greatly appreciated. Thank you very much for your time and assisting me in my research.

Yours truly,

Sharleen Johnson

Transitional First Grade Questionnaire

Parent Response

1. Rank the reasons (in your opinion) which contributed to your child being recommended to a transitional first grade program (5 = greatest influence, 1 = least influence)

- poor reading readiness skills (academic difficulties)
- lack of appropriate social skills (behavior problems)
- poor attention span
- poor self-concept
- chronologically younger child (summer or early fall birthday)

2. Indicate (in your opinion) your child's self-concept or feelings about himself/herself following his/her kindergarten year of school. Check one.

- excellent
- very good
- average
- poor

3. Indicate (in your opinion) your child's self-concept or feelings about himself/herself following his/her transitional first year of school. Check one.

- excellent
- very good
- average
- poor

4. Indicate your overall level of satisfaction with the transitional first grade program your child participated in. Check one.

- extremely satisfied
- somewhat satisfied
- mildly satisfied
- not at all satisfied

5. In your opinion, indicate the effect of the transitional first grade program on your child.

- very positive
- somewhat positive
- mildly positive
- negative

6. Please indicate your child's current performance in the following areas:

Reading _____
 below average average above average

Math _____
 below average average above average

Language _____
 below average average above average

Self-Concept _____
 poor average excellent

Attitude
toward
learning _____
 poor average excellent

Comments:

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