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In the Spring of 1967, two groups of about twenty 4-year-olds from varying socioeconomic backgrounds of a small Midwestern community were subjects in a study to design a preschool curriculum. After an IQ test, individual identification tests (word, letter, and numeral) were administered to determine the children's knowledge. Home interviews and classroom visitations by parents were conducted. The program had a language arts focus rather than a reading focus, used all phases of language arts appealing to children's interests, and developed reading vocabularies through the whole word approach. Letter, word, and numeral identification was stressed. Reading and conversation periods were held at least once a day. After 8 months, tests were readministered. While achievement in some goals was not assessed quantitatively, it was assumed that such achievement would have a positive effect on later school performance. Because this study concerns only the first of a two year project, overall results will be reported later. (DO)

A Two-Year Language Arts Program for Pre-First Grade Children: First Year Report

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From September, 1958, until June, 1964, two longitudinal studies were done, both dealing with children who learned to read prior to entering school (Durkin, 1966). These studies traced the development of the subjects' reading ability during elementary school and found they maintained their lead over comparable bright children who did not start to read until first grade. Although the locations of the two studies were separated by as many miles as lie between the East and West Coasts of the United States, the research data also revealed a striking similarity in the way the two groups of preschoolers learned to read. Such similarity suggested there might be something "natural" about the home learning. Since it had anything but negative effects upon subsequent achievement, a decision was made to try to develop a school program based on what had been learned about the preschool reading.

Because findings from the original studies showed that interest in written language most commonly began at home at the age of four, the new research was designed to start with four-year-olds and to develop a two-year curriculum that would take them through the kindergarten year. This present report describes, with a necessary brevity, certain aspects of the first year of the two-year project.

Locale of the Study

To prepare for the original research with preschool readers, the professional literature of past decades had been carefully studied. One finding which emerged repeatedly was the tendency of researchers and educators to become so completely absorbed with one theory or one type of child or one kind of curriculum that everything else was forgotten, or at least put far into the background (Durkin, 1968). Such a tendency continued during the years in which the research with the preschool readers was being done. In the late 1950's, for example, the intellectually gifted and creative child was winning everyone's interest. Later, in the 1960's, the culturally deprived child took over and received unprecedented attention.

On the assumption that balance on the research scene is not only important but even necessary, a decision was made to try to recruit for the present study children who would be from varying socioeconomic backgrounds and would show the same diversity in such factors as intelligence. The group would then be like the early readers in the original research; however, that was not the main reason for seeking out a heterogeneous group.

With heterogeneity as the guiding factor, the locale chosen for the present research was a small Midwestern community with a range of socioeconomic levels in its population. That two groups of about twenty children each could be recruited for what came to be called

"the four-year-old program" seemed likely from the size of the enrollment in its one elementary school.

Subjects in the Study

In the spring of 1967, a brief description of the program was given to the newspapers, and parents in the community were invited to enroll eligible children. (The one stipulation was that a child would have a fourth birthday by December 1, 1967). After the newspaper articles appeared, interested parents were invited to attend an evening meeting to learn more about the program. (At all times, it was described as one that would go out of the way to avoid pressuring any child to learn.) The result of these two types of "advertising" was a group of 37 children who started school on September 5, 1967. They divided between 16 girls and 21 boys. All were Caucasian with the exception of one Negro boy. With the exception of another boy whose army-sergeant father was transferred to the Far East in December, all remained in the program during the initial year.

The entering group of 37 children, later reduced to 36, was randomly divided into two classes, each with a teacher and teaching assistant. The result was 7 girls and 11 boys in what will be called "Class A," and 9 girls and 10 boys in what will be referred to as "Class B." (In December the children in Class B were reduced to 9 girls and 9 boys. For this reason, all the data reported here describe 36 rather

than 37 subjects.) Information about the children which was available when school began is summarized in Table 1. The intelligence data shown in that table are derived from the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, administered by two psychometrists during the month prior to the opening of school. (None of the intelligence data was given to the teachers.)

Insert Table 1 about here.

Once school began, three types of individual identification tests were administered: word, letter, and numeral. The purpose was to learn what the children already knew in relation to three of the goals selected for the program. *

The word identification test was the one which had been used earlier to identify subjects for the two studies of preschool readers. It allowed for the identification of 37 words. The letter identification test included all the letters of the alphabet, in both lower-case and

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*Development of writing skills (manuscript writing) was another goal. When the school year began, one boy was able to print his first name, in a very immature fashion and only with capital letters. None of the others was able to print at that time.

capital forms. The 52 letters were typed (primary-size type) in random order on a sheet of paper and were distributed over seven rows. The numeral identification test went from zero to 20. These 21 numerals also were randomly selected for placement on a sheet of paper and appeared in three rows. Results of the three kinds of pre-program testing are summarized in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here.

When school began, home interviews also got underway. Among the wealth of information collected were socioeconomic data. These showed that 21 of the 36 subjects came from upper-lower class families. Twelve others could be classified as lower-middle, while the three remaining children came from upper-middle class homes. More than half (58.3 per cent) of the subjects, then, were from backgrounds of the blue-collar class.

First-Year Program

While findings from the earlier studies of preschool readers suggested guidelines for a school program, they hardly prescribed for all of its details. What was learned in the research was used, and the

curriculum which resulted will be described in detail elsewhere.* For now let me mention a little of what was learned and used so that at least a sketchy picture of the program emerges.

To provide such a picture in the briefest way possible, some of the findings from the earlier research will be listed, each followed by a description of how that finding was implemented in the school program:

1. Many of the preschool readers had been more interested in writing than in reading. Their ability to read, at least in part, was a by-product of their ability in writing and spelling. (The school program had a language arts rather than a reading focus. For example, as much attention was given to writing as to reading. As the earlier research suggested, the children appeared more interested in the writing and, as had also been suggested, once they were writing they were also asking questions about the spelling of words.)

2. When learning to read had interested the preschool readers, it usually had a connection with something closely related to themselves. (No published materials were used in the program. Instead, all phases of the language arts were developed by using what was of interest to the children. With the reading, for instance, the selected vocabulary

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*When the two-year project terminates, a written description will be prepared with sufficient detail that interested persons will be able to duplicate the program in their own communities.

generally was comprised of words which related to the children or to what was happening in school or at home. However, other words were necessary (e.g. the, am, see) in order to allow for the reading of sentences.)

3. For the most part, whole-word identification, rather than phonics, had been used at home with the preschool readers. When attention was given to letter-sound relationships, it was related more often to help with writing and spelling than to reading. (In the first year, the school program used the whole-word approach to develop reading vocabularies. However, each time the children learned to print a particular letter, attention was given to the fact that knowing how to make that letter would help write many words. Words beginning with the letter and, with the same sound, would then be written and identified. As the school year progressed most children were able to suggest relevant words, once the teacher had named a few, indicating ability in auditory discrimination.)

4. The preschool readers had been interested in letters and numerals, as they appeared in everyday surroundings. (Two goals established for the program were letter and numeral identification. Letter names were taught in connection with the children's names, titles of stories and bulletin boards, labels on boxes and food packages, street signs, and so on. To teach numerals, the children's ages, birthdates,

addresses, and phone numbers were used. Also taken advantage of were sources like book pages and calendars.)

5. Parents of the early readers had read to them frequently, and also found time to talk with them and answer their questions. (Children in the program were read to at least once a day. In addition, every school day began with a conversation period. For this, each class divided into two groups so that no more than nine children could be engaged in conversation with an adult, either the teacher or teaching assistant.)

Time Schedule for the Program

Even though teachers were discouraged from being "clock watchers," a time schedule was still established for each of the two classes. Periodic changes in scheduling occurred as the children learned to do more, and to do it more quickly. Toward the end of the year, the schedule was as follows:

8:45 - 9 a.m.	Conversation groups
9:00 - 9:30	Attendance-taking; attention to date, weather, etc.; storytime, music
9:30 - 9:50	Academic period for one group Free-choice for other group
9:50 - 10:10	Groups reversed for above activities

10:10 - 10:40	Playtime, bathroom, milk
10:40 - 11:10	Art project
11:10 - 11:15	Preparation for home

To describe the program still further, let me make a few comments about the academic period, the free-choice time, and the art project.

The academic periods dealt with four of the program's goals: (a) reading ability, (b) writing ability, (c) letter identification, and (d) numeral identification and the development of numerical concepts. Each of these goals provided the focus for instruction on one day of each week. On the fifth day, teachers were free to choose from among the four. Decisions could be based either on what needed extra attention or what was of special interest to the children.* At the start of the school year, children were placed together for an academic period simply in terms of numbers. As the year progressed and differences in ability and achievement were apparent, they became the basis for the composition of a group and, too, for what and how much would be taught.

While the teacher worked with an academic group, the teaching

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It turned out that many of the children could not name colors. Consequently color identification sometimes used up the "extra" academic period.

assistant in each of the classes supervised a free-choice period.** At the start of the year, choices divided among various play activities (blocks, trucks, dolls, dishes, telephones, and so on). Usually there were about three choices. As the year passed, choices were altered to include more quiet activities like writing on small chalkboards or slates, working puzzles, or playing games with sequence cards, concept cards, and bingo cards which showed, at various times, colors, numerals, letters, and words.

Art projects were just that, but decisions about them give attention to ways to include written words and numerals. As a minimum, for instance, an art project would be used to establish a reason for learning to write one's name. At other times a picture would grow out of a particular caption. At still other times, objects in pictures would be labeled or, for instance, a project dealing with clay figures of family members might bear identifying cards like daddy or cat.

Content for the academic periods, and sometimes for stories,

**No classrooms were available in the elementary school building, so space had to be rented from achurch. Each class had the use of two small rooms which were used to divide the children for conversation time, the academic period, and the art project. At other times during the morning, each class occupied one room, making for a rather crowded situation.

music, and art, came from three Units: (a) The Child Himself; (b) The Child's Family; and (c) The Child's Community.

Some First-Year Results

In early May, eight months after the school program began, individual identification tests were again administered. The numeral and letter tests were those which had been given in September. Words for the word identification tests (each class had its own test) were selected on the basis of a decision made before the program began. Let me explain that now.

The basic philosophy of the program regarding the teaching of reading stemmed from the earlier research with home readers. Consequently it was one which stressed the exposure of children to words in their everyday surroundings. With this as the guideline, words were identified and discussed when the children went for walks or, for instance, as they looked at and talked about bulletin board displays, book titles, captions for art projects, food labels, and so on. The need for testing required that a selection be made from among the many "exposure words." Consequently, teachers were asked to do the selecting, to keep a record of the words selected and, during the weekly academic period devoted to reading, to make certain the children were provided with practice in identifying those particular words. The end result was two categories of vocabulary for each class: exposure words, which were not tested, and practice words, which were. For Class A, words in the latter category

numbered 55; for Class B, the total was 52. These words, for both classes, comprides the end-of-the-year test. They were typed (primary-size type) in random order on a sheet of paper.

Results of the numeral, letter, and word identification tests are

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Insert Table 3 about here.

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summarized in Table 3. The next table, Table 4, shows the relationship between test scores and the subjects' chronological and mental ages when they entered the program. As can be seen in Table 4, the criterion traditionally used for school entrance (chronological age) shows much less relationship to the measured achievement than does mental age.

Insert Table 4 about here.

Discussion of First-Year Results

Because so little is known about four-year-olds attending a school program which has definite academic goals, it is impossible to make a judgment about whether the accomplishments of these 36 children were "great" or "modest." Some made perfect scores on the three identification tests, even though what was tested received scheduled

attention for only twenty minutes a week.* One boy, however, showed another kind of consistency: he did poorly on all the tests (see Table 3). His IQ was the lowest--92--but he also had energy limitations resulting from some unusual sleeping habits at home.

In considering the results of this particular program, it is important to remember that everything was not tested. For instance, one of its major goals was the extension of listening/speaking vocabularies. Frequent classroom visits, coupled with the comments of parents when they were interviewed at the end of the school year, suggested obvious success with this. However, the lack of a valid instrument for measuring the actual size of these vocabularies eliminated them from the testing. In addition, the children's ability to print was not tested, although periodic samples were kept and progress was again obvious. Color identification was not a specified goal for the program but that, too, was accomplished--with the exception of the boy referred to above. On some says he knew colors; on others, he did not.

While it thus must be recognized that achievement in some of the

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*All three tests, it should be pointed out, evaluated unaided identification making them more difficult than available commercial tests which usually require a child to find a letter (or numeral) named by the tester or, for example, which have the child match words with pictures.

goals of the program was not assessed quantitatively, it is assumed that such achievement (e.g. extension of listening/speaking vocabularies) will have a positive effect on school performance in future years. Because the research described in this report is to be longitudinal, the validity of such an assumption can be examined later on.

Table 1 Data for CA, MA, and IQ, at the Start of the School Year

Variable	Class A		Class B		Both Classes	
	Median	Range	Median	Range	Median	Range
CA, in years	4.2	3.8-4.8	4.3	3.8-4.7	4.3	3.8-4.8
MA, in years	4.6	4.0-5.9	5.0	4.2-5.8	4.7	4.0-5.9
IQ	109.0	97.0-129.0	111.0	92.0-146.0	109.0	92.0-146.0

Table 2 Pre-Program Test Results

WORD IDENTIFICATION Highest Possible Score: 37		LETTER IDENTIFICATION Highest Possible Score: 52		NUMERAL IDENT. Highest Possible Score: 21	
No. of Words Identified	No. of Children	No. of Letters Identified	No. of Children	No. of Numerals Identified	No. of Children
2	1	37	2	13	1
1	4	34	1	9	1
0	31	9	1	8	1
		4	1	7	1
		3	1	4	1
		2	4	3	3
		1	6	2	1
		0	20	1	5
				0	22

Table 3 Data for End-of-Year Achievement

	Class A		Class B		Both Classes	
	Median	Range	Median	Range	Median	Range
No. of Numerals Identified	14	5-21	13	0-21	13	0-21
No. of Letters Identified	46.5	18-52	35	5-52	43.5	5-52
No. of Words Identified	34.5	13-55	21	1-52	28	1-55

Table 4 End-of-Year Achievement and Its Relation to Chronological Age and Mental Age

Variables	Correlation Coefficient		
	Class A	Class B	Both Classes
CA and MA	0.60*	-0.05	0.27
Numerals Identified and CA	0.33	-0.07	0.09
Numerals Identified and MA	0.62*	0.48*	0.48*
Letters Identified and CA	0.25	-0.21	-0.08
Letters Identified and MA	0.51*	0.58*	0.41*
Words Identified and CA	0.34	-0.08	0.08
Words Identified and MA	0.50*	0.61*	0.48*
Numerals Identified and Letters Identified	0.71*	0.87	0.80*
Numerals Identified and Words Identified	0.80*	0.88*	0.83*
Letters Identified and Words Identified	0.73*	0.84*	0.81*

*Significant at the .05 level (two-tailed tests of significance used for all pairs of variables).

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