THE IMPACT OF TRANSITIONAL FIRST GRADE ON STUDENTS' READINESS AND SCHOOL ATTITUDE

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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By

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The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of a transitional first grade program on the attitude and readiness scores of a group of regular first grade students who qualified for the transitional program but attended regular first grade (control group) and a group of transitional first grade students (experimental group). The study utilized a pretest/posttest design. The regular first grade students received formal instruction in all academic areas. The experimental group received no formal instruction.

All students were pretested and posttested using the Minnesota School Attitude Survey (MSAS) and the Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT). The data collected from these tests were analyzed using analysis of covariance.

The results indicated that students in the transitional first grade program developed a more positive attitude toward school than the control group. The analysis of covariance indicated a statistically significant difference at the .05 level toward school subjects and at the .001 level toward self and others as measured by the MSAS. Results also showed that the experimental group was at the same level in readiness as the control group at the end of the school year. There was no significant difference
between or within the groups when the variable of sex was analyzed.

It was evident that the students who were in the transitional first grade developed a more positive attitude toward school, self, and others than the students who qualified as transitional but were in regular first grade. The transitional program provided for the students' academic achievement that equaled the regular student while offering an environment that was relaxed and less stressful. If students have to struggle with school academics at an early age, they often develop a pattern of later school failure.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1940s transitional classes have been utilized as an alternative to non-promotion for youngsters with academic difficulties (Gredler, 1984). The purpose of the transitional first grade is to provide its participants with a strong foundation, academically, socially, and emotionally, that would improve their chances of success in the crucial primary grades (Kilby, 1984).

In many school districts students are evaluated by their success in kindergarten and assigned to reading levels so that first grade classes can be developed. There are usually three reading levels: above grade level (level 1), on grade level (level 2), and below grade level (level 3). The students in level 3 are most likely those students who are developmentally not ready for first grade (Day, 1986). These level 3 students often become frustrated with first grade academics and their attitude toward school becomes negative. Students placed in the transitional first grade classroom have positive school experiences which lessen the possibility of future failure (Mayfield, 1983).

In the 1985-1986 school year a transitional first grade
classroom in a school district located in northeast Texas was studied. The study showed no significant difference in achievement as measured on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The attitude test administered in the study was inconclusive due to the survey being given too late in the school year (Day, 1986). Even though the results of the study were not significant, the positive response of teachers, parents, and students to the program encouraged the school district to expand the transitional classes to three schools.

The school district’s commitment to the transitional first grade needed to be verified by further research. This study focused on readiness and school attitude, which was tested at the beginning and end of the school year. The Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT) replaced the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) which was used in Day’s study (1986).

In Day’s study (1986) the ITBS tested curriculum that was not taught in the transitional first grade classroom. Even though the level 3 students in the regular first grade classrooms were taught material measured by the ITBS, they did not score any higher than the level 3 students whose parents allowed them to be placed in the transitional first grade classroom. Both regular and transitional students scored at beginning first grade level on the ITBS which suggested that both groups were just ready to begin first grade the following year.

The MRT which was used in this study measured readiness
for word meaning, listening, matching, alphabet, numbers, and copying. It is also a predictor of readiness for first grade work and later school achievement. The Minnesota School Attitude Survey was given the first day of school to insure students' attitudes had not been affected by the school setting.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to do an analysis of the impact of transitional first grade on students' readiness for first grade curriculum and on their attitude toward school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to compare school attitude and readiness of students whose parents chose to allow their children to attend a transitional first grade with students whose parents chose to allow their children to attend regular first grade, although they qualified for the transitional first grade.

Hypotheses

To carry out the purpose of this study, the following null hypotheses were tested:

1. There will be no significant difference in the attitude scores on the Minnesota School Attitude Survey of
students whose parents choose to allow their children to attend a transitional first grade class and those students whose parents choose to allow their children to attend regular first grade although they qualified for transitional first grade.

2. There will be no significant difference in the readiness scores on the Metropolitan Readiness Test of students whose parents choose to allow their children to attend a transitional first grade class and those students whose parents choose to allow their children to attend regular first grade although they qualified for transitional first grade.

3. There will be no significant difference in the readiness on the Metropolitan Readiness Test of the boys in the transitional group and the girls in the transitional group.

4. There will be no significant difference in the readiness scores on the Metropolitan Readiness Test of the boys whose parents choose to allow their children to attend a transitional first grade and those boys whose parents choose to allow their children to attend regular first grade although they qualified for transitional first grade.

5. There will be no significant difference in the readiness scores on the Metropolitan Readiness Test of the girls whose parents choose to allow their children to attend a transitional first grade and those girls whose parents
choose to allow their children to attend regular first grade although they qualified for transitional first grade.

Definitions

1. **Readiness**—word meaning, listening, matching, alphabet, numbers, and copying as measured by the Metropolitan Readiness Test.

2. **Transitional First Grade**—a grade between kindergarten and regular first grade that gives the developmentally non-ready child an extra year of growth prior to attending regular first grade.

3. **Child-at-risk**—a child who could not sustain and function with ease. "At-risk" was defined as children who, because of problems of development and/or experience, were least able to meet the expectations of the school unless the teaching/learning expectations were modified or changed (Zeitlin, 1976).

4. **Reading levels**—levels 1, 2, and 3—those children who were working above grade level were referred to as level 1 children; those children who were working on grade level were referred to as level 2 children; and those children who were working below grade level were referred to as level 3 children.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the fact that the population for this study was
limited to populations comprised of level 3 first grade students of similar socio-economic backgrounds, the generalizability of the study is limited only to similar students.

Significance of the Study

The focus of this study was on the significant differences in school attitude and readiness of students whose parents chose to allow their children to attend a transitional first grade and students whose parents chose to allow their children to attend regular first grade but qualified for the transitional first grade program. A school district which was in the second year of providing transitional first grade classes, after a one year pilot transitional class, was the setting of this research. This study was significant in that it will help in future decisions that need to be made concerning placement of the "child-at-risk" in this district, as well as other districts, in a transitional classroom.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Since the mid-1800s schools in the United States have been organized in a graded structure (Ayres, 1909). This system was based on the idea that knowledge can be compartmentalized into a series of hierarchical skills that any child can realistically be expected to master during a given year (Anderson and Ritsher, 1969). Translated into a theory of grade standards, this principle requires every child to assimilate a specified amount of knowledge before he/she can be promoted to the next grade (Caswell and Forshay, 1957).

This chapter will overview alternatives to the graded structure as the norm for school organization. It will include a review of literature on chronological age as a criterion for school entrance, readiness for academic learning, grade level retention, attitude toward formal instruction, and research on transitional first grade.
Chronological Age as a Criterion for School Entrance

In most states the only criteria by which children were allowed to attend school was chronological age. Children who were legally old enough to begin school were often not old enough socially or emotionally to be successful in school. According to Ames (1981) chronological age was not adequate for determining the time to begin school. Using chronological age as a requirement for beginning school meant only fifty percent of any group of students could be considered reasonably ready for school.

Rowland and Nelson (1969) reported that schools should admit children on a flexible basis. In their study they found that fifty-seven districts used a flexible policy for school entrance. Tests were used to determine readiness for school as well as mental ability and social skills. Rowland and Nelson felt that this policy would gain in acceptance as educators gain in knowledge and skill in measurement.

Studies on early entrance to school were mixed as reported by Ammons and Goodlad (1955). Some research showed that early entrance was beneficial to children. There were also reports that stated that children who were allowed to enter school early were at a disadvantage. The implication of these findings were that children should be held back from beginning tasks until they could perform the tasks with no difficulty. According to Ammons and Goodlad, careful screening of children should be done prior to admitting them.
Hymes (1964) argued that the "Right School-Starting Age" was age three. Children at age three blossomed as students because they were ready for intellectual stimulation. Hymes stated that the school must be appropriate for the children. It must have the right program, the right equipment, and the right sensitivity. The type of school along with the above variables were the key to success for the three year old.

Thier (1967) proposed that children be admitted to school on their birthday. The schools would have an ungraded educational plan that would have strong emphasis on individualized instruction. Children could start school as young as three years of age, depending on the district's policy, reported Thier.

Hedges (1978) reviewed literature of research on optimum age of entry into first grade. He noted the inadequacy of chronological age as a predictor. Hedges indicated an optimum mental age of six and one half years for most children as an appropriate entrance age to first grade.

Jernigan (1986) reported that total developmental age is the most important factor when considering admission for school. A closer look should be taken at the requirements for school entrance. According to Jernigan the factors that must be looked at other than chronological age are mental
age, physical maturity, emotional and social maturity, behavior age and sex.

Other researchers have found that age of entrance to school affected the child's achievement. Davis, Trimble, and Vincent (1980) reported that at the first grade level, achievement of six year old entrants was significantly higher than achievement of five year old entrants in their study. The authors stated that policies should be questioned that allowed children to enter school using only a chronological age with no requirements for measures of readiness.

The majority of schools have continued to enroll children on the basis of their chronological age. This age requirement varies a great deal from state to state. The decision often seemed to depend more on legislative moods than on research of the effects on children of age requirements (Ames, 1981; Hedges, 1978).

Readiness for Academic Learning

Children being expected to perform at a level for which they were not developmentally ready has resulted in many school difficulties. Ames and Ilg (1979) and Hedges (1978) reported that chronological age was no guarantee of school readiness. Some symptoms of the lack of readiness that Gesell, Ames, and Ilg (1976, 1979) found in their studies were restlessness, crying upon arrival, short attention
span, struggling to do work, failing to participate in group activities even in the most relaxed settings, and bothering other children.

Heffernan (1962) has investigated the pressures that children experience by starting school too early. She emphasized the importance of readiness assessment for school entrance. Brenner (1957) emphasized the importance of recognizing a child’s school readiness as a matter of total development, based on interactions of factors from all areas of personality.

Hilgard (1957) stated that skills built on developing behavior were most easily learned. Training before maturational readiness brought only temporary, if any, results. Premature training might do more harm than good.

The research on school entrance and reading readiness through 1976 was reviewed by Hedges (1978). He stated that children differed greatly at any given age in their rate of maturation thus a given chronological age was no guarantee that a child was ready to begin school. There was overwhelming evidence to delay school entrance of immature children. Research showed failure in reading was not usually a function of the innate capacity of the child. Hedges concluded that there seems to be a clear correlation between maturity and school success. He noted variations of as much as five years in reading readiness at age six.
Grade Level Retention

The solution for the child who had begun school before he was ready was often grade level retention. Ames and Gillespie (1970) felt that if retention was necessary, that it must be handled properly. The child must be made to feel good about repeating a grade. However, repeating a grade did not necessarily mean the answer for all children.

Problems of what to do when a child did not master the criterion skill for a designated grade have resulted from the graded system (Cook and Claymer, 1982). In some cases grade retention (or non-promotion) was adopted while in others social promotion was the practice.

Ames (1981) reported that retention in grade could be the answer to a child who was immature. Using a child's behavioral age as the basis for placing him in school was the best criteria.

Schools retained students using a decision making process that was holistic, based on multiple criteria reported Sandoval (1984). His study found that the children who were retained appeared to have exhibited an academic incompetence, low cognitive development, and low visual-motor skills. The psychological effect on self-concept and emotional development was not as great on children who repeated first grade compared to students who were socially promoted to second grade and recognized that they were at the bottom of the class. The successfully
retained first graders emerged in the top third academically of their first grade class the second time around.

Reiter (1973) suggested a youngster should be exposed to meaningful learning experiences at a level appropriate to him. Unless the child was emotionally and mentally prepared to handle the experience, the question of whether or not he was promoted should not become an issue. Promoted or not, under these circumstances, the child would benefit very little from school curricula. Reiter found that marks in repeated subjects tended to be lower than those in subjects taken for the first time. Failure caused forgetting of material that was once learned, and the threat of failure did not increase the rate of educational gain of students who were threatened. Repeating the same work did not assure the overcoming of a deficiency in academic achievement. Low self-concept was a concern as was negativeness of homogeneous grouping. He reported some of the problems evident in non-promotion remained uncured by automatic promotion, while others had been merely replaced by a different set of problems. Reiter favored an individualization and/or non-graded setting.

Claflin (1984) reported significant findings which included: kindergarten and first grade teachers accounted for a clear majority of all retentions, teachers holding advanced degrees retained at a greater rate than those holding bachelor's degrees, and teachers with five years or
more experience retained at a greater rate than teachers with fewer years experience. Teachers, principals, and psychologists were most important in the decision of retention. Significant recommendations by Claflin were: instruction programs for parents to provide awareness concerning retention, development of inservice programs for teachers to review the components of retention, and concentrating the practice of retention in kindergarten and first grade (Claflin, 1984).

Retention has been the practice of requiring a student who has been in a given grade for a full year to remain at that level for the following school year (Jackson, 1975). The effectiveness of retention as an academic intervention strategy has not been proven. The literature suggested that there was no reliable body of evidence to indicate that grade retention was more beneficial than grade promotion for children having difficulties in school (Jackson, 1975). Dobbs and Neville (1967) concluded that retention in first grade was not only ineffective but could have long term detrimental effects on personal and social adjustment. Social promotion has been abandoned according to Dolan (1982) because students were unable to advance in academic skill without remediation.

Attitude Toward Formal Instruction

Several researchers have focused on the attitude of
young children toward formal instruction. Elkind (1986b) found young children learn best through direct encounters with their world rather than through formal education involving the inclusion of symbolic rules. Research in child development supported these findings (Piaget, 1953, 1961). Educators should keep in mind the unique modes of learning for young children. Positive attitudes toward learning and the school environment have been developed in young children when these practices are followed (Elkind, 1986b).

Teachers begin the very first day to mold the structure of the classroom. Observations from ninety elementary and junior high schools have revealed that establishment of classroom climate was formed in the first few weeks of school. This climate resulted in either a positive or less than positive attitude toward the learning environment according to Evertson (1981). The first days of school were reported to be crucial to the remainder of the year.

The attitude young children develop toward formal education was influenced by the stress under which they were placed. Elkind (1984) stated that stress was the child's way of indicating that he was not totally ready for formal education, although his intelligence quotient may have indicated he was. Attitude and physical problems result from the stress. Elkind (1986a) argued that exposing the young child to formal education was "miseducation," putting
them at risk for no purpose. These risks were both short- and long-term with stress resulting from short-term risks. Young children learned in a total sense rather than narrow categories, such as reading, math, science, etc. They needed a sound program suited to their learning styles. Such a program should provide an environment that is rich in materials to explore, manipulate, and about which to talk. Given the opportunity to learn in their natural mode of learning encouraged children's self-directed activities and built a positive attitude toward learning and school. When children were allowed to enter school as they were developmentally ready—ready mentally, emotionally, physically, socially and maturationally—they developed positive school attitudes. In some cases those who entered on the basis of age and intelligence quotient were reported to have developed a less positive attitude (Elkind, 1981, 1986a).

The purpose of elementary education has been to provide a high volume of successful experiences, stated Teague (1983). It was the wise educator who built strengths in the early grades rather than risk playing emotional or academic catch-up in the intermediate grades. The power of positive self-concept and school attitude were readily apparent in the elementary school experiences in a class that emphasized time to grow, perceptual motor skills, self-concept, activities to sharpen the senses, listening and oral
expression activities, social interaction and academics for those who exhibit readiness for them.

Mayfield (1983) recommended transitional first grade in order to prevent the development of a pattern of failure for children who were not ready for formal education. A pattern of failure resulted in poor school attitude and poor self-concept.

Research on Transitional First Grade

The transitional program was developed as an alternative to grade retention for young children with academic difficulties (Zinski, 1983). The rationale that underlies the concept of the transitional class drew heavily from the developmental theory of Arnold Gesell (1948). Gesell, a leader in the area of early childhood development, stated that human beings, beginning at infancy, advanced through several developmental stages (Ames and Ilg, 1979 and Haines and Gillespie and Gillespie, 1985). Chronological age was not the only predictor for these stages. The developmental growth pattern could differ dramatically from person to person. Each developmental stage dictated an individual’s readiness to successfully attempt certain tasks. To expose young children to tasks that were above their developmental level was futile. Children should be held back from such tasks until they attained the appropriate stage of readiness. Two or three levels of
schooling prior to entering a regular first grade class might be necessary. Gesell suggested that either a pre-first grade program should be offered to these children or that they be retained in first grade until they are developmentally ready to progress (Ilg and Ames, 1965). Zinski stated that transitional first grade programs had been instituted in several school districts throughout the United States as alternatives to the simple repeating of the same grade.

Gredler (1984) reported transition classes were utilized in a number of large schools in the 1940s, but the concept did not spread at that time. A 1950 study, conducted in the Detroit city schools, found over a period of three years children who remained in the regular class achieved at a significantly higher level in reading than children in the transition class. Gredler found in the Quincy, Illinois schools, children were placed in the transition class for a variable time period. Emphasis was placed on mainstreaming the child back into the regular class without necessarily being held back a year. It was reported that the program was of value in improving the academic performance of many of the children.

A study (Gredler, 1984) investigated the value of a transition room that had been in existence for twelve years in a Washington State school system. Students were placed in a transition room on the basis of a low score on the
Metropolitan Readiness Test and the recommendation of the teacher. The children were promoted from the transition room to regular first grade at the end of the school year. Findings indicated students who had been in a transition room and thus had two years of school were no better in reading achievement than younger students who had had only one year of school.

Another study (Gredler, 1984) on a transition room in a Detroit suburban school district was two years in length. The results noted that children at-risk in regular rooms made greater achievement in reading than did readiness room students. Readiness room students showed a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence compared to the at-risk children who were mainstreamed (Gredler, 1984).

A study which investigated the progress of young children in a Roseville, Minnesota school made a strong argument for the transition room (Gredler, 1984). Transition room students were compared to students who qualified but were placed in regular first grade. No differences in academic achievement were found between the transition room students and "potential" first-grade failures, although scores for reading achievement were in favor of the transition room.

Dobbs and Neville (1987) found the continued promotion of a child who was unable to gain about a year in achievement each school year eventually placed him/her at a
grade level where he/she has difficulty functioning. The needs of the low achiever would not be met until there was an educational setting which provided for maximum academic growth and fostered a more positive life adjustment through satisfying success experiences.

A pre-first grade or transition program was advocated by Carll and Richard (1972) for children who were developmentally not ready to successfully accomplish first grade tasks. There were three major goals or components to the program: experience through which one could make discoveries about the world and about oneself, time to grow and develop at one's own pace, and acceptance without condition—respect for the uniqueness of the human being and concentration on the positive abilities already developed as well as those emerging.

Talmadge (1981) found after controlling for prior cognitive ability the impact of transition room placement appeared detrimental to early reading achievement in comparison to regular first grade. Instead of promoting readiness, transition rooms may simply delay instruction.

A study by Zinski in 1983 addressed the problem of whether participants in a transition curriculum prior to first grade was more effective in enhancing reading development than traditional grade repetition. Language and reading achievement and teachers' perception of student's ability and grade readiness were examined. No significant
difference between transition and non-transition subjects on any of the independent variables measured was found. Zinski stated that students participating in a transitional classroom maintained a forward progression in achievement without ever experiencing failure in the first grade. The transition program prevents failure while grade repetition emphasized it. She reported that confounding variables may have obscured significant differences in the obtained data and that a one year follow-up was too soon to demonstrate the benefits of the program. No significant difference was interpreted to indicate that one treatment had no better or worse effect on a given group than another. Transition students were allowed the time to grow without wasting a year in a curriculum in which they could not succeed. They successfully accomplished in a single year what the retainees needed two years to master. Viewed from this perspective, the effectiveness of the transitional classroom was a viable alternative to first grade repetition.

Solem (1981) studied the junior-first-grade program in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, which had been offered since 1970. Kindergarten teachers identified candidates for the transition classes. The students' scores on the Yellow Brick Road Screening Test and the Metropolitan Readiness Test as well as teacher observation and judgement were taken into consideration. A Pupil Behavior Rating Scale was
completed by the kindergarten teachers also. The junior-first-grade instructional program was designed to develop oral language; to improve reading and math readiness; and to increase a student's ability to follow directions. Activities focused on developing eye/hand and gross-motor coordination. Teachers nurtured self-reliance, social and emotional maturity, self-control, and cooperation. Development of a healthy self-concept was an essential component of the program. The curriculum also included physical education, music, and art. Social studies, health, and science were taught only incidentally, when the appropriate situation arose. Inquiries concerning achievement revealed that in 1978 twenty-five percent of transition youngsters ranked in the top quartile of their first grade classes, twenty-five percent ranked in the lowest quartile, and fifty percent ranked in the second and third quartile. In 1980, twenty-eight percent of the transition youngsters ranked in the top quartile of their first grade classes, seventy percent ranked in the second and third quartile, and only two percent ranked in the lowest quartile.

Kilby (1984) reviewed the transition room program called junior-first-grade in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, which had begun during the 1970-1971 school year. Evaluation findings indicated that the transition program may have had a positive impact in three main areas: grade
repetition, reading achievement, and placement in special education for learning disabilities. It was found that only one tenth of one percent of the children who had attended junior-first-grade had to repeat a grade. According to Kilby, reading scores on the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills* were compared and scores of the transition program participants exceeded those of their counterparts to a significant degree. When reading ability was held constant, reading achievement for program participants over a four year period consistently kept pace with their classmates. A lower percent of program participants were placed in special education programs compared to their counterparts. Kilby recommended the transition program to head off failure before it started. She stated that schools face the challenge of reorganizing to foster academic success in the crucial elementary years. The school should identify children-at-risk of future academic difficulties, provide an appropriate program for intervention, and establish an evaluation program. Kilby believed such a program as the junior-first-grade would reduce the struggle of these youngsters.

Gredler (1984) reported the academic progress of students placed in transition rooms in a Detroit suburban school district. He found that the students who qualified for the transition class but were placed in a regular class made greater gains in reading than did students placed in
the readiness room program. The transitional class had a slower paced instruction with small groups.

Gredler (1984) reported on the effects of transition room placement on a group of children in the Alton, Illinois, school system. A relatively large sample of children involved, careful delineation of the experimental group, and the follow-up of the students over a period of three years all added to the significance of educational findings. Test data indicated that transition room placement did result in achievement in second or third grade similar to that of regular class students.

Dolan (1982) reported that transition programs have emerged based on principles regarding effective early childhood intervention. He recommended early identification and treatment programs which aim at returning at-risk children to the mainstream as soon as possible. An example of a transitional program with a small pupil/teacher ratio, individualized programs centered on the child's specific learning and emotional needs, special services, regular consultation, and opportunities for mainstreaming youngsters who showed partial or full readiness to cope in a regular classroom were suggested. The program had a flexible approach without an academic ceiling which enabled the transitional classroom to accommodate students with varying language, auditory, motor, visual, and social skill deficiencies. Placement in the program was on a voluntary
basis. A detailed individualized treatment plan was developed. Continuous evaluation ensured that placement decisions were constantly under review. At the end of the first year, major decisions were made concerning whether students should be mainstreamed in the second grade or spend an additional year in first grade. Dolan found the transition program met many of its objectives. Affective indices suggested that concern regarding feelings of inadequacy and poor motivation of transition students to be unwarranted. At a time when many authorities were returning to an increased retention rate of students in the later years of schooling, Dolan recommended the transition program as a viable alternative approach to handling potential school failure.

Caggiano (1984) studied the effectiveness of the transitional first grade experience. Students who qualified for the transitional program and participated were compared to students who qualified but did not participate and to students who did not qualify for the program. Behavior variables were also studied. Results indicated significant difference between the three groups in favor of the group participating in the transitional program with respect to behaviors. Caggiano suggested that the results meant that students judged not ready for first grade are more likely to adjust positively and more likely to experience school success if provided sufficient time to mature, an adjusted
curriculum, and acceptance without pressure. These conditions existed for the first grade students in the transitional classroom in this study, who were placed there according to developmental age.

Day (1986) compared a group of transitional first grade students with students who qualified for the program but attended regular first grade. The students were pre- and posttested with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Minnesota School Attitude Survey. The results of the attitude survey were felt to be invalid due to the delay after school started before testing was done. The results indicated that the transitional program was as effective academically for students' achievement as formal instruction. Day recommended that a transitional program be offered for those students who exhibit a need to grow—mentally, maturationally, or physically.

Summary

Since the mid-1800s a graded structure had been the typical arrangement for American schools (Ayers, 1909). This setting required every student to acquire a set amount of knowledge before being promoted to the next grade (Caswell and Forshay, 1957).

Problems resulted when some students were unable to meet the expectations of the graded system (Cook and Claymer, 1982). Social promotion and retention were two methods
used to solve these problems (Jackson, 1975; Dobbs and Neville, 1967; Dolan, 1982).

School districts had attempted various approaches for starting students to school (Ames, 1981; Ammons and Goodlad, 1955; Hymes, 1964). Some of the approaches were a set age for entrance, testing for a mental age prior to admittance, and admitting students on their birthdays which required ungraded schools (Rowland and Nelson, 1969; Thier, 1987; Davis, Trimble, and Vincent, 1980; Hedges, 1978; Ames, 1981).

Readiness for academic learning was studied by Gesell, Ames, and Ilg in 1976 as well as others (Hedges, 1978; Ames and Ilg, 1979; Brenner, 1957; Heffernan, 1982; Hilgard, 1957; Hedges, 1978). Each agreed that children differ greatly at any given age in their rate of maturation and that chronological age was no guarantee that a child was ready to begin school.

The practice of retention as a solution to the failure of achieving expected grade essential elements has been the focus of some studies. Some researchers emphasized the way retentions was approached with a child. Ames and Gillespie in 1970 found the way retention was approached influenced that child's attitude for his/her future success during the retained year. Some studies recommended that the repetition needed to cover new curriculum in order to be effective (Sandoval, 1984; Reiter, 1973).
Transitional first grade is an alternative to grade retention (Zinski, 1983; Gesell, 1948; Ames and Ilg, 1979; Gredler, 1984; Kilby, 1984; Solem, 1981; Carll and Richard, 1972; Dobbs and Neville, 1967; Talmadge, 1981; Dolan, 1982; and Caggiano, 1984). Transitional programs have emerged based on principles regarding effective early childhood intervention for those students who are developmentally unready for academics of their present grade level.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES FOR COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA

This study was designed to investigate the progress of students in a transitional first grade program in the areas of school attitude and readiness compared to the progress of students who qualified for the transitional program but attended regular first grade. The study was a pretest-posttest design using groups with unequal numbers of students. All students had attended the kindergarten program in the school district.

All reading level 3 students in the schools where transitional first grade was implemented were the subjects for testing. In developing first grade classes, a readiness test was used to determine the reading levels of kindergarten students. Level 1 students were students with high reading skills; level 2 students were students with average reading skills; and level 3 students were students with low reading skills.

All parents of level 3 students in the schools where transitional first grade was implemented were notified by letter or phone and given the opportunity of choosing to
allow their child to attend the transitional first grade or regular first grade. The teacher/pupil ratio in transitional first grade was one to twenty-two. All teachers of transitional first grade had had experience teaching kindergarten and regular first grade. The students in transitional first grade were referred to as the transitional group. The transitional first grade teachers were provided with inservice training and a specially designed curriculum.

Included in this chapter is a description of the organization and implementation of the transitional program, a description of the subjects, a description of the collection of data, and analysis of data.

Organization and Implementation of Transitional First Grade Program

For the 1986-1987 school year a large school district located in a northeast Texas metroplex area expanded its transitional first grade program from one to three schools. Enrollment was offered to students who were working in a level 3 reading group at the end of their kindergarten year. In the spring of 1986 parents were notified by letter or phone requesting that they come to the school for a conference. At the conference the program was explained, and they were given the opportunity for their child to
participate in the transitional first grade.

The transitional teachers were selected during the spring of 1986 by the principal of each school offering the transitional first grade. The criteria for being considered was kindergarten endorsement and experience teaching kindergarten and first grade. The teachers selected attended a one week inservice using appropriate curriculum for the transitional classes. This curriculum was expanded after the one year pilot transitional first grade class. They also developed a report card specifically for use in the transitional first grade. Instructional aides were provided for all three transitional classrooms.

Subjects

The subjects for this study were sixty-nine children entering first grade (regular and transitional) in a north central Texas school district in September, 1986. The students in the study were from three schools where transitional first grade classes were established at the beginning of the 1986-1987 school year. In the fall of 1986 the transitional first grade classes were formed after parents of level 3 (below grade level) students had chosen to allow their children to attend the transitional first grade. The transitional group totaled forty-nine students.

All other level 3 students (total of twenty) were equally divided among the regular first grade classes in the
schools that have transitional first grade. Regular teachers then randomly drew for their classes. The balance between socio-economic status of the students in two schools was similar. Both schools had about fifty percent minority enrollment and almost twenty-five percent of the students were on free or reduced lunch. The third school had nine percent minority enrollment and only four percent of the students were on free or reduced lunch. Day's study (1986) found no significant difference for those students who were receiving free lunch and students not receiving free lunch.

All parents of level 3 students in schools where transitional first grade was implemented were notified in Spring, 1986 by mail or phone and given the opportunity of choosing to allow their child to attend the transitional first grade or regular first grade. The parents were required to sign a permission for placement in the transitional first grade.

Permission for Collecting Data

Permission was requested by the researcher to collect data for this study from the participating school district during the 1986-87 school year. The district's research committee reviewed the proposal submitted by the researcher and granted permission before the 1986-87 school year began. Testing was scheduled during the first week of school and in the spring of 1987 during the month of April.
Instruction of the Groups

The curriculum for the transitional first grade class was oriented toward all the senses including tactile-kinesthetic. Concentration on reading readiness was one of the major objectives. Language arts emphasized oral language development, listening skills, and auditory discrimination. Math was oriented toward concrete, manipulative activities. Activities in science, social studies, health, music and physical education based on large motor development of the individual child were incorporated into the program. Another major objective of the program was to develop a strong, positive school attitude and a positive self concept. The transitional program allowed the students freedom of movement within the classroom and placed heavy emphasis on oral language skills and listening skills which are prerequisites to learning to read. There was a minimum use of pencil and small crayons. Most activities centered on large motor development unless the child indicated a readiness to begin fine motor activities (Day, 1986).

All level 3 students not in a transitional first grade were equally divided among the regular first grade teachers in each school. The teacher/pupil ratio for the regular first grades was similar. The regular first grade teachers followed the state adopted curriculum for first grade, in
which the children are expected to be ready to read. These students were referred to as the regular group. Since the majority of level 3 students were in the transitional first grade, there were fewer level 3 students in regular first grade. Therefore, the instruction was aimed toward level 1 and level 2 students with fewer readiness activities being presented in the classroom. The students were expected to do more work independently. Math was in large groups and included instruction in abstract math concepts. Science, social studies, health, and art were taught assuming the children were in concrete operations. Physical education was also taught assuming the children were on a more mature physical developmental level in their motor skills.

Treatment

The students in the regular group were instructed using the state's essential elements for first grade with no special treatment. The transitional first grade group received transitional program treatment based on individual needs, disregarding the state's first grade essential elements.

All students were pretested in the fall, 1986 using the Minnesota School Attitude Survey (MSAS) and Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT). In April, 1987, all students were posttested using the MSAS and MRT. Only test scores of children who entered at the beginning of the school year and
who were pretested and posttested were used in the analysis of data. The classroom teachers administered both tests. The pretest MSAS was given the first day of school and the MRT was given the second week of the semester.

Research Design

The design for this study was pretest-posttest using experimental and control groups with unequal numbers of students. All the students had attended the kindergarten program in the participating school district and were identified level 3 students by the kindergarten teachers.

All identified reading level 3 students in the three participating schools where transitional first grade was implemented were the subjects for testing. In developing first grade classes, the teachers used the district's readiness test to determine the reading levels of kindergarten students. Level 1 students were students with high reading skills; level 2 students were students with average reading skills; and level 3 students were students with low reading skills. All parents of level 3 students in schools where transitional first grade was implemented were notified by mail or phone and given the opportunity of choosing to allow their child to attend the transitional first grade or regular first grade. The students in transitional first grade were referred to as the transitional group.
Instrumentation

The Minnesota School Attitude Survey (MSAS) was administered to each transitional first grade and regular first grade class in the three participating schools. It was given the first morning of the school year by the classroom teacher. The researcher provided inservice for the classroom teachers on administering the test.

Three studies of test-retest reliability have been made on items on the test. The reliability for groups was quite high, with item correlation for grade level averages rarely below .80 and usually above .90. Two studies of internal consistency were conducted on a total of approximately 6,000 students. The appropriate index of internal consistency of cluster scores was the Cronbach alpha coefficient, which was analogous to the familiar Kuder-Richardson #20 reliability for achievement tests (Ahlgren and Christensen, 1983).

The validity of MSAS is evidenced in the many uses of MSAS in published research in educational psychology. No claim was made beyond face validity (Ahlgren and Christensen, 1983).

The Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT) was given by the classroom teacher. Instructions were read by the teacher while the students marked in a hand-scorable answer booklet.

Reliability data, reported for first grade, were computed using both split-half and alternate-form
techniques. Reliabilities for the total test were generally above .90 for pupils tested in early first grade.

The test manual provided expectancy tables to explain the relationship between performance on the readiness test and end-of-first-grade achievement. Another set of tables provided data concerning the probability that a student at a given readiness level will attain a given level of reading, spelling, or arithmetic achievement by the end of first grade.

The validity of the test was discussed in terms of its content validity, construct validity, and predictive validity. The test authors describe the validity of the test by discussing the relevance of the content, by demonstrating the test's relationship with other measures of school readiness, and by relating success on the test with success in later achievement.

Dykstra reviewed the Metropolitan Readiness Test and found the test to be well constructed and to measure abilities commonly believed to be associated with success in early school learning. The MRT has undergone careful development and ranks very high among readiness tests (Buros, 1972).

Singer had similar findings in his review of the MRT. He affirmed the .90 reliability for total test was excellent and sufficiently high for use of the total test score with individual students as well as for group test results.
Data Analysis

Analysis of covariance was used to examine test differences in attitude on the Minnesota School Attitude Survey and on the Metropolitan Readiness Test between the transitional group and the regular group. Variables of sex and group were also examined. Pretest scores on the Minnesota School Attitude Survey and the Metropolitan Readiness Test were used as covariates and posttest scores on these tests were used as the criterion variables.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The pretest and posttest scores on the *Minnesota School Attitude Survey* (MSAS) for transitional first grade students and those students in regular first grade who qualified for the transitional program were analyzed. The *Metropolitan Readiness Test* (MRT) pretest and posttest scores on readiness and math for the same groups were also analyzed. Forty-nine students were in the transitional program. A total of twenty students in the regular first grade who qualified for the transitional program made up the control group. Analysis of Covariance was applied to each hypothesis as stated in Chapter I.

Hypothesis One

**Hypothesis One.** There will be no significant difference in the attitude scores on the *Minnesota School Attitude Survey* of students whose parents choose to allow their children to attend a transitional first grade class and those students whose parents choose to allow their children to attend regular first grade although they qualified for transitional first grade. For purposes of analysis and reporting, the hypothesis was divided into
three sub-hypotheses. The range of scores was one to five. The higher the score, the more positive the attitude was toward the cluster.

Hypothesis 1A related to the first Summary Cluster on School. The mean scores for both groups are reported in Table I. As presented in Table II, the analysis of covariance indicated an F of 4.257 and a significance level of .043 which was significant at the .05 level. The students in the transitional program showed a significantly more positive attitude toward school than those students who remained in the regular first grade although they qualified for the transitional program. Therefore, hypothesis 1A was rejected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE II
ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE RESULTS FOR SUMMARY CLUSTER I (SCHOOL) SCORES OF REGULAR AND TRANSITIONAL GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects</td>
<td>154.93</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>154.93</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>2402.20</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>36.397</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2720.98</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>40.014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates significant difference at or beyond the .05 level.

Hypothesis 1B related to Summary Cluster II - Self.
The mean scores for both groups are reported in Table III. Analysis of covariance results presented in Table IV indicate an F of 19.423 and a significance level of .001 which was significant at the .001 level. Transitional students had a significantly more positive attitude toward themselves than the regular group. Therefore, hypothesis 1B was rejected.
TABLE III

MEAN SCORES FOR SUMMARY CLUSTER II (SELF) FOR REGULAR AND TRANSITIONAL GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE IV

ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE RESULTS FOR SUMMARY CLUSTER II (SELF) SCORES OF REGULAR AND TRANSITIONAL GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects</td>
<td>535.25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>535.25</td>
<td>19.42</td>
<td>.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>1818.82</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>27.558</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2419.16</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>35.576</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates significant difference at or beyond the .001 level

Hypothesis 1C related to Summary Cluster III - Others.
The mean scores for both groups are reported in Table V. As shown in Table VI, the analysis of covariance indicated an F of 13.173 and a significance level of .001 which was significant at the .001 level. The transitional students had a significantly more positive attitude toward others than the regular students. Therefore, hypothesis 1C was
rejected.

### TABLE V
**MEAN SCORES FOR SUMMARY CLUSTER III (OTHERS) FOR REGULAR AND TRANSITIONAL GROUPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE VI
**ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE RESULTS FOR SUMMARY CLUSTER III (OTHERS) SCORES OF REGULAR AND TRANSITIONAL GROUPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects</td>
<td>659.75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>659.75</td>
<td>13.17</td>
<td>.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>3305.64</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>50.085</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3968.55</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>58.361</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates significant difference at or beyond the .001 level.

The **MSAS** also reported summary cluster raw scores for pretesting and posttesting for both groups as shown in Table VII (Basic Skills, Self, School Personnel and Students). Individual clusters raw scores were reported as shown in Table VIII (Learning Arithmetic, Other Subjects, Fine Arts,
Learning Activities, Extra Class Activities), Table IX (Student Roles, Autonomy, Self Expression), and Table X (School Personnel, Other Students).

### Table VII

**RAW SCORES REPORTED FOR SUMMARY CLUSTERS FOR PRETEST AND POSTTEST RESULTS FOR REGULAR GROUP AND TRANSITIONAL GROUP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I. Basic Skills</th>
<th>II. Self</th>
<th>III. School Personnel and Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Pre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary Cluster I (School) raw scores were obtained from cluster scores one through five as shown in Table VIII.
### TABLE VIII

**RAW SCORES REPORTED FOR CLUSTERS ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR AND FIVE FOR PRETEST AND POSTTEST RESULTS FOR BOTH GROUPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cluster 1</th>
<th>Cluster 2</th>
<th>Cluster 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning Arithmetic</td>
<td>Other Subjects</td>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cluster 4</th>
<th>Cluster 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning Activities</td>
<td>Extra Class Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Pre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary Cluster II (Self) raw scores were obtained from cluster scores six, seven, and eight as shown in Table IX.
### TABLE IX

**RAW SCORES REPORTED FOR CLUSTERS SIX, SEVEN, AND EIGHT FOR PRETEST AND POSTTEST RESULTS FOR BOTH GROUPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Student Roles</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Self Expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Pre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary Cluster III (Others) raw scores were obtained from cluster scores nine and ten as shown in Table X.

### TABLE X

**RAW SCORES REPORTED FOR CLUSTERS NINE AND TEN FOR PRETEST AND POSTTEST RESULTS FOR BOTH GROUPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>School Personnel</th>
<th>Other Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis Two. There will be no significant difference in the readiness scores on the Metropolitan Readiness Test of students whose parents choose to allow their children to attend a transitional first grade class and those students whose parents choose to allow their children to attend regular first grade although they qualified for transitional first grade. The pretest was administered the second week of school and the posttest was administered in early April, 1987. For purposes of analysis and reporting, the hypothesis was divided into two sub-hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2A compared the reading readiness of the transitional with the regular group. The mean scores for both groups are reported in Table XI. Analysis of covariance results presented in Table XII indicate an F of 2.032 and a significance level of .159 which was not significant at the .05 level. The hypothesis was therefore retained.
TABLE XI
MEAN SCORES FOR READING READINESS FOR REGULAR AND TRANSITIONAL GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
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<td>60.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>60.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE XII
ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE RESULTS FOR READING READINESS SCORES OF TRANSITIONAL AND REGULAR GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects</td>
<td>100.60B</td>
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<td>100.60B</td>
<td>2.032</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>3268.505</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>49.523</td>
<td>. .</td>
<td>. .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4318.986</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>63.514</td>
<td>. .</td>
<td>. .</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis 2B compared the math readiness of the transitional with the regular group. The mean scores for both groups are reported in Table XIII. Analysis of covariance results presented in Table XIV indicate an F of .641 and a significance level of .426 which was not significant at the .05 level. The hypothesis was therefore retained.
### TABLE XIII

**MEAN SCORES FOR MATH READINESS FOR REGULAR AND TRANSITIONAL GROUPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>17.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE XIV

**ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE RESULTS FOR MATH READINESS SCORES OF TRANSITIONAL AND REGULAR GROUPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects</td>
<td>5.861</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.861</td>
<td>.641</td>
<td>.426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>603.609</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>9.146</td>
<td>. .</td>
<td>. .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>894.638</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>13.156</td>
<td>. .</td>
<td>. .</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis Three

Hypothesis Three. There will be no significant difference in the readiness on the Metropolitan Readiness Test of the boys in the transitional group and the girls in the transitional group. For purposes of analysis and reporting, the hypothesis was divided into two sub-hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3A compared the reading readiness of the males and females in the transitional group. The mean scores for both groups are reported in Table XV. Analysis of covariance results indicated no significant difference existed between the reading readiness scores of the males and females in the transitional group as shown in Table XUI. There was an F of 2.099 and a significance level of .154 which was greater than the .05 level set for rejection. The hypothesis was therefore retained.

### TABLE XV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>57.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>62.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE XVI

ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE RESULTS FOR READING READINESS SCORES OF MALES AND FEMALES IN THE TRANSITIONAL GROUP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects</td>
<td>125.904</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>125.904</td>
<td>2.099</td>
<td>.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>2758.658</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>59.971</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3926.490</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>81.802</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis 3B compared the math readiness of the males and females in the transitional group. The mean scores for both groups are reported in Table XVII. Analysis of covariance results indicated no significant difference existed between the math readiness scores of the males and females in the transitional group as shown in Table XVIII. There was an F of .112 and a significance level of .739 which was greater than the .05 level set for rejection. The hypothesis was therefore retained.
TABLE XVII
MEAN SCORES ON MATH READINESS FOR THE TRANSITIONAL GROUP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE XVIII
ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE RESULTS FOR MATH READINESS SCORES OF MALES AND FEMALES IN THE TRANSITIONAL GROUP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects</td>
<td>1.176</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.176</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>.739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>482.337</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>10.486</td>
<td>. .</td>
<td>. .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>742.980</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15.479</td>
<td>. .</td>
<td>. .</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis Four

Hypothesis Four. There will be no significant difference in the readiness scores on the Metropolitan Readiness Test of the boys whose parents choose to allow their children to attend a transitional first grade and those boys whose parents choose to allow their children to attend regular first grade although they qualified for transitional first grade. For purposes of analysis and
reporting, the hypothesis was divided into two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 4A compared the reading readiness of the boys in the two groups. The mean scores for reading readiness for boys in both groups are reported in Table XIX. Analysis of covariance results indicated no significant difference existed between the boys in the transitional group and the boys in the regular group as shown in Table XX. There was an F of 3.365 and a significance level of .073 which was greater than the .05 level set for rejection. The hypothesis was therefore retained.

TABLE XIX

MEAN SCORES ON READING READINESS FOR BOYS IN BOTH GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular Boys</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>60.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Boys</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>62.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis 4B compared the math readiness of the boys in the two groups. The mean scores for math readiness for boys in both groups are reported in Table XXI. Analysis of covariance results indicated no significant difference existed between the boys in the transitional group and the boys in the regular group as shown in Table XXII. There was an F of .418 and a significance level of .521 which was greater than the .05 level set for rejection. The hypothesis was therefore retained.
TABLE XXI

MEAN SCORES ON MATH READINESS FOR BOYS IN BOTH GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular Boys</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Boys</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE XXII

ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE RESULTS FOR MATH READINESS SCORES OF BOYS IN THE REGULAR GROUP AND BOYS IN THE TRANSITIONAL GROUP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects</td>
<td>3.743</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.743</td>
<td>0.418</td>
<td>0.521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>402.726</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8.949</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>532.567</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11.333</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis Five

Hypothesis Five. There will be no significant difference in the readiness scores on the Metropolitan Readiness Test of the girls whose parents choose to allow their children to attend a transitional first grade and those girls whose parents choose to allow their children to attend regular first grade although they qualified for transitional first grade. For purposes of analysis and reporting, the hypothesis was divided into two
sub-hypotheses.

Hypothesis SA compared the reading readiness of the girls in the transitional program and girls in the regular group. The mean scores for reading readiness for girls in both groups are reported in Table XXIII. Analysis of covariance results indicated no significant difference existed between the girls in the transitional group and the girls in the regular group as shown in Table XXIV. There was an $F$ of .004 and a significance level of .950 which was greater than the .05 level set for rejection. The hypothesis was therefore retained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular Girls</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>60.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Girls</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>57.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis 58 compared the math readiness of the girls in both groups. The mean scores for math readiness for girls in both groups are reported in Table XXV. Analysis of covariance results indicated no significant difference existed between the girls in the transitional group and the girls in the regular group as shown in Table XXVI. There was an $F$ of .307 and a significance level of .586 which was greater than the .05 level set for rejection. The hypothesis was therefore retained.
TABLE XXV
MEAN SCORES ON MATH READINESS FOR GIRLS IN BOTH GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular Girls</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Girls</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE XXVI
ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE RESULTS FOR MATH READINESS SCORES OF GIRLS IN THE REGULAR GROUP AND GIRLS IN THE TRANSITIONAL GROUP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effects</td>
<td>2.972</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.972</td>
<td>.307</td>
<td>.586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>174.149</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9.675</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>352.952</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17.648</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter Summary

In Chapter IV the data were presented, analyzed, and reported in the text and in tables. Each hypothesis was stated and statements were made as to the retention or the rejection of each hypothesis.
Scores reported for hypothesis one indicated a significant difference in attitude for the students in the transitional program. All other scores resulted in no significant differences between the groups.
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of a transitional first grade program by comparing students who attended the transitional first grade with students who qualified for the program but who attended regular first grade. The study was conducted in a suburban school district in northeast Texas during the 1986-1987 school year. A total of sixty-nine students who attended three schools comprised the population.

The students in the transitional first grade were the experimental group. The students who qualified for the transitional program but whose parents chose to place them in the regular first grade were the control group.

The students were pretested for attitude the first day of school in September, 1986, using the Minnesota School Attitude Survey (MSAS). They were also pretested the second week of school for readiness using the Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT). In April, 1987, all students were posttested using the MSAS and MRT.

The data collected from these tests were analyzed using analysis of covariance. The results obtained from this analysis of data were used as a basis for retaining or
rejecting the null hypothesis.

Findings

The findings for the study were as follows.

1. The posttest scores for the transitional group, as measured by the Minnesota School Attitude Survey, were significantly higher than the regular group on all three Summary Clusters (School, Self, Others).

2. Posttest scores from the Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT) for the transitional group was not significantly higher than the regular group on either the reading readiness or the math readiness.

3. Posttest MRT scores for males and females in the transitional group resulted in no significant difference.

4. Posttest MRT scores for the boys in both the transitional and regular groups resulted in no significant difference.

5. Posttest MRT scores for the girls in both the transitional and regular groups resulted in no significant difference.

Discussion of the Findings

Attitude

The results reported using analysis of covariance indicated that the attitudes of students in the transitional program were more positive toward school subjects, self, and
school personnel than those students in the regular program. Day (1986) discovered after giving the MSAS the first week of October the regular students had already developed a negative attitude for school after only four weeks of instruction. Teachers begin the very first day to mold the structure of the classroom—the teaching-learning environment. According to Evertson (1981) this climate results in either a positive or less than positive attitude toward the learning environment. Since the Minnesota School Attitude Survey (MSAS) was administered the first day of school, the findings confirmed that establishment of classroom climate takes place in the first two weeks of school. The type of environment is dependent upon the classroom management of the teacher. The first days of school are reported to be crucial to the remainder of the year.

Individual cluster raw scores in this study revealed both groups to be within .45 on the pretest. On five of the individual clusters (Learning Arithmetic, Other Subjects, Autonomy, School Personnel, Other Students) the transitional group was higher. On three clusters (Fine Arts, Learning Activities, Student Roles) the two groups had equivalent scores and on two of the clusters (Extra Class Activities, Self Expression) the regular group was slightly higher.

When analyzing directionality on the posttest the following pattern was observed. Posttest cluster scores
showed the transitional group had a more positive attitude in all clusters. The gains from positive to more positive ranged from +.01 to +.41. The transitional group did not regress in any cluster. The posttest scores on individual clusters for the regular group indicated a regression toward a negative attitude in nine of ten clusters. While the gain in cluster two (other subjects) was only +.07, the regression in the other nine clusters ranged from -.08 to -.63.

These findings are consistent with similar studies. Transitional first grade was recommended by Hayfield (1983) in order to prevent the development of a pattern of failure for children who were not ready for formal education. A pattern of failure resulted in poor school attitude and poor self-concept.

Elkind (1986b) found children develop positive attitudes toward learning and the school environment when they are allowed to learn through direct encounters with their world rather than through formal education. Research by Piaget (1953, 1961) supported these findings. Educators should keep in mind the unique modes of learning for young children.

When children are placed under stress by formal education, their attitude was affected (Elkind, 1984). Attitude and physical problems resulted from the stress. Elkind (1986a) argued that exposing the young child to
formal education was "miseducation." Children who entered formal education on the basis of age and intelligence quotient were reported to have developed a less positive attitude (Elkind, 1981, 1986a).

Readiness in Reading and Math

The results reported using analysis of covariance indicated that the group of students who were in transitional first grade were at the same level in readiness as the regular group at the end of the school year. There were no statistically significant differences between or within the groups when the variable of sex was analyzed.

These findings are compared with similar studies which are reported as follows. Gredler (1984) reported a transitional program was of value in improving the academic performances of many students to better prepare them for regular first grade. His study of a transitional program indicated scores for reading achievement in favor of the transitional children. His 1984 study in an Alton, Illinois, school system resulted in test data that indicated over a three year period transitional students achieved at the same level as students in regular classes.

Kilby (1984) studied the transitional program in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and found similar results as Gredler's study. However, she found reading scores for the transitional students to exceed students' scores who
qualified for a transitional program but were in a regular program. When reading ability was held constant, reading achievement for program participants consistently kept pace with their classmates over a period of time.

Solem's study (1981) found twenty-five percent of transitional youngsters ranked in the top quartile during their regular first grade year in achievement. Fifty percent ranked in the second and third quartile.

Zinski (1983) discovered students participating in transitional programs maintained a forward progression in achievement without the experience of not being able to compete and consequently fail first grade. She stated that a transitional program allowed the student the time to grow without wasting a year in a curriculum in which they could not succeed.

In a study by Day (1986) of a transitional classroom the students in regular first grade did no better in achievement than the transitional group except in one area. The regular boys did show statistically significant higher scores in reading on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) test when compared to the reading scores of the transitional boys. The regular boys had received formal instruction in reading while the transitional boys received no formal reading instruction. The ITBS measured the formal reading program.
Outcomes of Transitional Program

Fifty-eight of the forty-nine transitional students were promoted to regular first grade. One student made sufficient progress to be promoted to second grade. The transitional program provided him with the opportunity to move at his own pace, which was slow in the fall, and move from readiness activities into regular first grade curriculum about two-thirds into the school year. There were thirty-five boys in the transitional group but there was no difference between their academic achievement and that of the transitional girls. According to a study done by Jernigan (1986) boys would be expected to out number the girls and to not perform as well academically.

Twelve of the twenty regular students were retained in the first grade. Four regular students who were promoted to second grade were just barely passing and were in the bottom quartile of the regular first grade. Most of these sixteen students were not only experiencing academic failure but were also exhibiting social failure. After being tested and found to qualify for special education services, the other four regular students were placed there rather than promoted to second grade.

Teachers' and parents' comments about the transitional program were very favorable. Some parents who declined the transitional program last fall have already signed up their kindergarten students for the transitional program next
year. They expressed a desire to avoid the struggle their first graders had experienced this past year.

It has been easier to convince parents the transitional program is beneficial when they can see the positive atmosphere in the classroom accompanied by the academic success of the children. Sixty-two students have already been signed up for the transitional first grade for the 1987-1988 school year.

Conclusions

Based on findings and subject to the limitations in this study the following conclusions were reached. Students in the transitional first grade program developed a more positive attitude toward school, self, and others than the students who qualified as transitional but were in regular first grade. The transitional program provided for students' academic achievement which equaled the regular student while offering an environment that was relaxed and less stressful.

A program rich in an environment containing many concrete activities attained the same results in readiness for reading and math as a formal instructional program which emphasized the essential elements of a state adopted curriculum. The fact that the regular and the transitional groups were at the same point in readiness for reading and math at the end of the year would indicate the transitional
program to be as effective academically for students' achievement as formal instruction.

The transitional program provided those students who exhibited a need to grow--mentally, physically, and/or maturationally--an opportunity to experience academic success in the early elementary years. The transitional students felt good about themselves. One question on the Minnesota School Attitude Survey asked the students how they felt about children who are not as smart as they are. Several students in the transitional program had marked a smiling face on the pretest and a frowning face on the posttest. When questioned about why they did not like students who were not as smart, the students' replies were comments about feeling sad for the others who were not as smart as they were.

The Minnesota School Attitude Survey showed the students' attitude toward school was almost identical on the first day of school. The transitional students made positive gains in every individual cluster. The regular students scored less in every cluster except one (Other Subjects). If students have to struggle with school academics at an early age, they often develop a pattern of later school failure. The fact that the transitional group developed a more positive attitude toward school while the regular group formed a more negative attitude would indicate the transitional program is more beneficial for the level 3
student than the regular first grade classroom.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that transitional first grade be continued and expanded to more schools in the district through a public awareness campaign rather than relying on word-of-mouth.

2. A follow-up study is recommended in order to determine if transitional students continue to experience positive attitudes toward school subjects, self, and school personnel and if they will begin to show gains in achievement as they conclude second grade.

3. It is recommended that a longitudinal study of achievement gains for the transitional students and the students who were in regular first grade but qualified for the transitional program be conducted.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


**Articles**


Publications of Learned Organizations


Encyclopedia Articles


ERIC Documents


Unpublished Materials


Test Manuals

Newspapers