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PREVIEW

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**Early and young kindergarten entrants: Academic and social
outcomes in high school**

Braymen, Rebecca K. F., Ph.D.

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1988

PREVIEW

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300 N. Zeeb Rd.
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PREVIEW

EARLY AND YOUNG KINDERGARTEN ENTRANTS: ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL
OUTCOMES IN HIGH SCHOOL

by

Rebecca K. F. Braymen

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Interdisciplinary Area of Psychological and Cultural
Studies

Under the Supervision of Professor Wayne C. Piersel

Lincoln, Nebraska

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Early and Young Kindergarten Entrants: Academic and Social

Outcomes in High School

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EARLY AND YOUNG KINDERGARTEN ENTRANTS: ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL
OUTCOMES IN HIGH SCHOOL

Rebecca K. Braymen, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1988

Adviser: Wayne C. Piersel

This research examined differences between 133 children with late summer and early autumn birthdays who entered kindergarten relatively young with 105 children who postponed kindergarten entrance for one year and entered as relatively old. Data was also collected on 30 entrants who had been admitted early.

The only significant differences between young and old entrants were the proportion of males to females in each entry age ($p = .00001$) and whether parents' decision as to when their child in kindergarten was influenced by the information gained in the screening process ($p = .001$). Both of these variables focus on differences between parents of young and old entrants rather than on actual differences in performances between the two entry age groups.

No statistical differences were found between the young and old entrants in IQ, preschool attendance, pre-kindergarten screening, academic achievement, retention in grade (however, a trend was noted in which young entrants were retained in early

grades and old entrants were retained in high school), placement in special education, post-high school plans, social competence and participation, nor behavior differences.

The early entrants presented a successful picture with a mean I.Q. of 119, no grade retention, 43% enrollment in gifted or challenge classes, no special education placements, 93% had plans to attend college, and they were similar to young and old entrants on social and behavior measures. Seventy percent had been screened but only two had entered kindergarten on a trial basis. Of those screened, 50% of their parents reported the results of screening influenced their decision to enroll their child in kindergarten.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Statement and Significance of the Problem

When should a child begin his/her formal education in the public schools? For most children, this question is easily answered by law which sets a cutoff date based on chronological age. For example, in Nebraska if a child is five years old by October 15th, the child may begin kindergarten. However, formal education is not mandatory for a child in most states until s/he is six or seven years old. Therefore, a child who has a birthday a few weeks or a couple of months prior to the cutoff date may elect to postpone school entrance for a year and be one of the oldest in his/her class or may enter school as one of the youngest in his/her class. Would postponing school entrance one year be in the best interests of the child? Will children who are relatively young in their class fare as well as their older classmates? A vast amount of research has been conducted to determine the affects of relative age status for children in the classroom. Most of this research has investigated the academic (and sometimes social) status of children in the first and second grades after entering kindergarten as one of the youngest in the class. Very little research reports the academic and social status of these children at the end of their public school education (e.g. upon graduation from high school). Are children who entered

kindergarten relatively young recognizable from their older classmates in terms of academic achievement and social development 13 years later? Do problems, if they exist, compound with age, or does the few months age difference diminish in importance as children become older? What child variables are important to consider in deciding which children would benefit from immediate or delayed entrance into kindergarten?

Some children miss the cutoff date for school entrance by days or weeks. For example, a school district may set a cutoff date that requires a child to be five years old by October 15th. According to these guidelines, a child who has a birthday of October 18th would need to wait until the Fall following his/her fifth birthday to begin public school. Sometimes children are admitted to school as early entrants despite the fact they will turn five years a few days or weeks after the cutoff date. This has been the case especially when parents and school administrators view the child as cognitively advanced. How these children fare in kindergarten, first, and second grade has been the subject of many research reports. Very little research has been conducted to determine how these children fare at the end of their public education. Are these children academically and socially successful? What child variables are important in predicting a successful educational outcome for these early entrants?

Each year parents and educators are called upon to make a decision regarding individual children and the best timing for their entrance into kindergarten. Sometimes the child's maturity is assessed and enters into the decision. Often, general biases and subjective opinions dictate the plan for individual children. One hears comments such as "he turned five at the end of the summer and it's the public school's duty to educate five year olds, so he is going to school" or "he turned five at the end of the summer and is not as mature as the older kids and an extra year of development will give him an edge to insure his success in school." Both of these quotes represent subjective opinions from which many parents and educators base individual decisions. What is needed is a problem-solving approach based upon empirical evidence that can be applied to individual children to determine the best timing for the individual's entrance into the formal education system. The first step, then, is the collection of empirical evidence.

Definitions

Early Entrants

Early entrants were children whose birthday fell later than the school district cutoff date for entrance and who entered kindergarten younger than strict adherence to school

district cutoff would permit.

Young Entrants

Young entrants were children who began kindergarten the first year possible according to school district criteria but whose birthday was within three months of the cutoff date for entry. Statistically, these children should represent the youngest fourth of the class. However, since many children delay entrance into kindergarten for one year, this group consisted of a percentage smaller than one-fourth of the class and their age discrepancy was more extreme than statistically predicted.

Old Entrants

Old entrants were children who postponed their entry into kindergarten one year from the first year possible according to school district criteria. They were children who could have entered kindergarten one year earlier as a young entrant. For example, if a school district began a school year September 1 and age five by October 15 is the age criterion for entrance, an old entrant was considered as a child who entered kindergarten at the age of 5 years and 9 months and 15 days or older. Old entrants were used as a comparison group.

Critical Examination and Delimitation of the Problem

Empirical data was collected on high school seniors who

began kindergarten as early, young or old entrants. The purpose was to evaluate, after 13 years of formal education, young entrants' academic performance and social/emotional status as compared to children who began school as old entrants. Descriptive data for early entrants was also reported. Individual characteristics of the children, such as gender and intelligence quotient, were identified for separate analysis to determine their significance in outcome measures. Environmental variables such as preschool experience and early entrance criteria, such as screening and a trial period in kindergarten, were also analyzed for significant contribution in academic and social/emotional status during the senior year in high school. A contribution is made regarding knowledge of the long-term effects of beginning kindergarten as a young or early entrant and the identification of which variables to consider in making a decision regarding timing for entrance into kindergarten.

Assumptions on Which Research Problems are Based

The hypotheses were based on the assumption that optimal academic performance and personal adjustment are acquired from interaction in and with an appropriate learning environment which meets children's developmental needs. Prior research has identified a number of variables which may be of significance in determining when in a child's development formal education

(i.e., kindergarten) becomes an appropriate learning environment for individual children. These variables included the child's age, gender, intelligence quotient, and prior experience with schooling (i.e., preschool). To determine if a particular child has reached a developmental level for optimal benefit of beginning formal education, assessment procedures such as screening and a trial period in kindergarten are commonly used assessment procedures. The utilization of these variables as well as assessment procedures to predict academic and social/emotional success in school was examined for each entry age group.

Statement of the Problem

This retrospective project examined the academic standing and social/emotional status of young entrants in their senior year of high school as compared to old entrants. Data was also collected for early entrants, but reported in a descriptive format. More specifically, this project investigated the academic standing of early, young, and old entrants as measured by retention in a grade, placement in special education programs, performance on standardized achievement tests, rank in graduating high school class, and plans for continuing education past high school. It also investigated the social/emotional status of young and early entrants as measured by the number of memberships in extra-curricular school

activities during the senior year of high school, number of leadership positions held in school during the senior year of high school, score on a locus of control measure, and score on a self-report behavioral checklist. Independent variables which were considered for the analyses were age at entrance (early, young, or old entrants), intelligence quotient, gender, preschool experience, whether children who were screened prior to kindergarten entrance, and in the case of early entrants, whether a trial period in kindergarten was a criterion for early entrance into kindergarten.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER II

Review of Related Literature

Controversy continues among educators, psychologists, and school administrators as to the optimal age to begin students' formal education in the public schools. Questioned is whether chronological age is an efficient criterion to determine readiness for schooling.

Because chronological age has been shown to be relevant as a general indicator of mental, social, and emotional development (Hammond & Skipper, 1962), developmental psychologists have tried to delineate an absolute age necessary for children to attain academic, social, and emotional success in school. International research (Choppin, 1969; Austin & Postlethwaite, 1974; Pain, 1981), however, has revealed entrance ages for school admission ranging from four years to seven years. Notably, these studies reported that members of the younger group were at a disadvantage as compared to the older children in their class regardless of the minimum entrance age requirement. The older group in one country was the age of the younger group in another country. Therefore, the issue surrounding optimal age for school entrance is not only one of maturation but also one of relative age. Whenever