

sound quality and deserving of public support. Schools subscribing to the standards are meeting their broader social responsibility by promoting the pursuit of excellence in a major component of education. □

1. *Standards of Excellence in Business Education* is available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402 (Stock No. 065-000-00236-1, \$4.75).

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Reading

PATRICIA M. CUNNINGHAM

How Should Reading Be Taught in Kindergarten?

The issue of reading instruction's place in kindergarten classrooms sparks immediate and often emotional response from supervisors, administrators, teachers, and parents. Those who are against reading in kindergarten argue that most five-year-olds are not ready for it and that the primary responsibility of kindergartens is to develop social, physical, conceptual, and language abilities. The advocates point out that many children *are* ready, especially those who have attended preschool programs that teach some traditional kindergarten skills.

A common compromise is to begin instruction with children who are ready and not push the others. This seemingly simple solution is difficult if not impossible to carry out in practice. First, the decision as to which kindergarten children are prepared is a complex one. Many children who can indeed begin reading are unable to complete the traditional workbook and skill sheet assignments that are part and parcel of most beginning programs. They often have six-year-old brains but five-year-old attention spans. Second, once parents realize that their child is not in a reading group, they exert tremendous pressure on teachers to begin instruction

prematurely. Third, carrying out reading instruction with children who are ready leaves teachers little time and energy for planning and conducting crucial readiness activities for the other students.

A more appropriate question than, Should reading be taught in kindergarten? is, How should reading be taught in kindergarten? A whole body of research under the umbrella term, emergent literacy, shows that children who come from homes in which reading and writing are promoted and valued begin reading before they come to school. In addition to being read to, these children have "pretend reading" experiences with favorite books in which they figure out how reading works, learn to track print, and grasp some important words. They also have picked up many words such as "McDonald's" and "Pepsi" from the logo print in their environment. The other distinguishing characteristic of children who come to school ready to read is that they usually have experimented with writing by copying words and inventing spellings. The research appears clear that young children whose home experiences immerse them in reading and writing become successful school readers (Teale and Sulzby 1986).

Reading should be taught in kinder-

garten in a way that closely mirrors the natural reading and writing experiences fortunate children have before entering school. In classrooms in which shared reading of big books, language experience, writing with invented spellings, and word banks are a large part of daily instruction, the decision of which children are ready and which are not does not have to be made. Children who come to school lacking readiness develop it by being immersed in reading and writing. Those who come to class ready or actually reading continue their growth as they learn large numbers of words and letter-sound associations through shared reading and writing experiences. For an excellent discussion of kindergarten activities that follow this approach and further readings on this topic, see Mason and Au (1986). □

References

- Mason, J. M., and K. H. Au. "Reading in Kindergarten." In *Reading Instruction for Today*. Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman, 1986.
- Teale, W., and E. Sulzby, eds. *Emergent Literacy: Writing and Reading*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1986.

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Curriculum Capsules

CONRAD F. TOEPFER, JR., SAMUEL J. ALESSI, JR., AND
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Software Improves Access to Special Education Data

Special education teachers and administrators are finding computer soft-

ware programs to help them manage the cumbersome data bases characteristic of programs and services for students with handicapping conditions.

Triennial evaluation of programs that meet the requirements of Public Law 94-142 entails the effective processing of large amounts of data through well-

defined operations.

Speed of processing is important to special education personnel because they need to access student data irregularly in response to requests from school staff, state and local agencies, and parents. Software with general applicability has proven effective in accessing such data for special education programs. PFS:File and dBASE III each offer different advantages for special education personnel.

PFS:File's easy-to-use program permits printing of neatly formatted reports including some or all of the data entered in original data bases. Once these formats have been created, a variety of operations, from searching the data base to find a particular value to generating reports, can be performed. dBASE III permits hundreds of thousands of records with thousands of characters in each. Data may be searched and sorted on any field in the data base, and reports can be generated in a variety of formats. Since dBASE III is programmable, applications are not limited to guidelines developed by others.

PFS:File and dBASE III are sophisticated programs that offer special education personnel an improved means

to track and use the vast amount of information involved in developing programs and compiling reports about their students. □

Reference

Kondruchuck, Dynise, and Brian D. Monahan. "Administrative Uses of Databases for Special Education: A Comparison of Two Software Programs." *Educational Technology* 24 (December 1986): 30-32.

Students Appreciate Biographies by Writing Them

An innovative approach to teaching biography developed in Pleasantville, New York, has captured the interest of secondary English students there. Adolescents learn about biographies by examining the craft and technique used in writing them.

Students select short biographical readings about individuals of their choice. They discuss their subjects in class and then may consult additional newspapers and magazines to find out information they want to know but that was missing from their readings. These activities lead students to develop oral and written reports based on

likable, or even unsavory, qualities they identify about their subjects.

Following study and discussion of these short biographies, teachers ask students to write three- to five-page biographies of classmates, using personal anecdotes to characterize their subjects. This task introduces students to techniques of interviewing. They spend half of the class period interviewing and the other half being interviewed. Teachers act as observers and answer questions.

Students may ask teachers for feedback on their drafts and conduct follow-up interviews, as needed, during class time devoted to draft writing. They examine writing specimens displayed on overhead projectors to learn how to organize and present data in an interesting yet accurate fashion. Final drafts are not shared in class; the teachers alone read and react to them.

Teachers report that the approach has increased students' interest in studying biographies and has helped develop their writing skills. □

Reference

Johnson, Scott. "The Biography: Teach It from the Inside Out." *The English Journal* 75 (October 1986).

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