PRACTICES OF IOWA KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS
REGARDING RETENTION

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by
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Approved by Committee:

[Signatures]

Dean of Graduate Division
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Each school year great concern is given to promotion and failure procedures. "In our earlier educational history, sometimes as many as twenty per cent of a group were held back because they had not done satisfactorily the work of the present grade." As school conditions became quite overcrowded, educational retention was attacked because of the expense involved. When the situation was examined researchers found that only a few children seemed to profit from being held back. Since that time much study has been done in search of an answer of what to do with the slow learning child.

Some feel as Bode that "Repeated failure and retardation defeat their purpose. They do not stimulate effort, but on the contrary discourage it." Students who experience constant failure eventually feel that the effort put forth is wasted. Some success is necessary to each individual or all interest is extinguished. A sense of accomplishment produces great satisfaction and instills the drive to continue onward.

2Ibid., p. 285.
From the general understanding of the kindergarten program as it is today it would seem that each kindergarten child should be free from tensions in the happy atmosphere of the miniature society.

The keynote to the kindergarten program is flexibility, with each child learning by actually doing. Emphasis is upon total development rather than on various subjects or specific facts. Desirable attitudes toward the child's world, friends, and self are of major concern at the kindergarten level.

As Saucier states, "Even when there is no special provision for a flexible program of education, it has been found that pupils usually should not spend more than one year in a grade."

Various solutions have been tried. In a few places all children are promoted year after year. This 100 per cent promotion is known to create difficulty, for the slow learners are constantly meeting situations which they do not understand.

Many schools are attempting a unit plan where each child progresses at his own rate. Blocks of several years are set up and advancement is automatic until the end of grade three. Each child is helped to make progress in reading, arithmetic, social competency, physical growth and emotional

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adjustment at his own rate. When he reaches grade three his parents and teachers decide together what is best for the child.

Even then the decision is not easy to make. He may be immature in reading but mature physically and socially; he may be shy and immature socially and achieving in his subject areas; or he may be immature in every way and his parents unwilling for him to take longer to catch up. Parents' attitudes are quite important to the results "failure" might have upon the child.

It has been found however, that a child's social maturity is probably the best single indicator of where he will do best. In brief, this means that, regardless of his age, or achievement, it is his ability to associate happily with children in work and play that has most to do with the quality of his present and future growth.  

At the end of this third year in the primary unit, each case is considered. Most children do progress, but a few are retained to spend another year or portion of a year.

What is the solution then? Parents, school personnel and teachers having concern for this problem are seeking the common goal of doing what is most beneficial for the total development of the child.

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1Baxter, op. cit., p. 286.
2Ibid., p. 286.
3Ibid., p. 287.
I. DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

The problem proposed for this study was to determine what practices are actually being followed by Iowa kindergarten teachers in regard to retention.

A challenging year of experiences in living and learning with others should result from a well-planned kindergarten program. The child has completed his first year in the school program and is anxiously waiting to learn to read, to write, count, and increase his many friendships.

Would retaining a child after such a year's program be justified? Would he profit from another year in kindergarten activities? It was the purpose of this paper to find out what Iowa kindergarten teachers are doing in regard to this problem.

II. METHOD USED IN THIS STUDY

The procedure followed in writing this report began when many library sources were investigated to determine: (1) the philosophy of the kindergarten, (2) the kindergarten curriculum, and (3) what authorities in the field of education believe the proper procedure to be for the best development of the individual child.

Following the library research, personal interviews were conducted with various authorities in the field of education. They answered questions from the questionnaire on
page 45 and discussed the problem of retention, presenting their individual viewpoints.

The same questionnaire answered by the authorities was sent to teachers of kindergarten in Iowa to determine their practices regarding retention.

There are many criticisms of the questionnaire method. One is that the same words may be interpreted differently by different individuals. Then, too, the persons rating may not interpret directions or questions in the way intended by the author. In the case of a mailed questionnaire, the experimenter loses personal contact and the chance to explain misunderstandings. The question is also raised regarding the attitude of those who do not respond. These are all unavoidable consequences of the questionnaire study.

The present study was undertaken with full knowledge of the above and other limitations of the method. The method used was the only one that could be used to secure reactions of a large number of teachers from many different sizes and types of schools. It was felt that the reactions of teachers to the questionnaire would give a fairly good indication of their practices regarding retention. The method has been used in previous studies and worthwhile results have been obtained.

Questionnaires were sent to teachers in the Des Moines Public School System, Community Colleges Classes at Drake University, and the Polk County School System. One hundred
fifteen replies were received from 190 requests, which would represent a 60 per cent return.

Some of the questionnaires were mailed to the teachers with cover letters and self-addressed, stamped envelopes. Some were distributed in Community College classes at Drake University. An attempt was made to evaluate the questionnaire, and the results are found in the tables in Chapter IV and the conclusions in Chapter V.

III. SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

This report includes a study of literature pertaining to promotion policies in elementary schools. In Chapter II the philosophy and program of the kindergarten is found, and in Chapter III will be found the opinions of some educational leaders about promotion and retention. Chapter IV presents an analysis of the data obtained by a questionnaire survey to determine the practices of Iowa kindergarten teachers in regard to retention. The summary and conclusions based on the questionnaire are found in Chapter V.
CHAPTER II

KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM AND PHILOSOPHY

The kindergarten room should be a happy place and should be conducive to wholesome living. Shouts of laughter, small interested groups in various parts of the room, and children working alone--all continue uninterrupted as an observer enters the room. Every child has the opportunity to express his own ideas in his own way with guidance and direction when needed.

The primary purpose of the kindergarten program is to help each child develop totally and to his own capacity. To help each child develop in every way possible requires a thorough knowledge of age level characteristics. The first premise a teacher might start with is that there are marked differences among kindergarten children since they do not all develop at equal rates. Expectations or standards must be based on individual differences.

The level of development of each child must be analyzed, and the characteristics of the immature, mature, and average child must be known at four, five, and six years of age. There is much overlapping in any class. "When we can define the trend of these year-by-year differences we can adapt our practices and our expectations to the nature and the needs of
the individual child."

In addition to being familiar with age characteristics it is important to build a good parent-school relationship to better understand each child. Parent relations are begun in the child's first year at school and it is a time when parents seem to display the greatest interest. Often the child coming into the kindergarten is the first child in a family to enter school. The parents are more than likely young and very eager to learn about the school and its program. By working together teacher and parents can help the child in his total development. A parent who is aware of his child's progress from the beginning to the end will want to do everything to help benefit this progress. "The parent plays an important part in enriching the child's life and interests and, in the process, will find he has enriched his own life."  

Helping children to learn to live democratically is one of the important goals of education. Effective group activities have become an essential part of the school program. Each child must work within his own capacity and receive the individual help he needs. Flexible grouping is a helpful


means of seeing that this is possible. Everyone is not ready to join in large group activities at the same time. Some are shy and immature and must learn to participate in a large group gradually after first adjusting to small groups.

He makes beginnings in understanding the world, starts developing attitudes toward society, and discovers ways of constructive participation by first learning to adjust to his immediate group or groups.

The learning program for kindergarten children can be arranged so that every child has the opportunity to work by himself, as a member of a small group, and in a larger group. Children have opportunities to learn the skills of social living through adjusting to the various types of group activities. They learn responsibility, to make thoughtful suggestions, to consider and use the ideas of others, to create, and to cooperate. They also learn to respect property of others by sharing at play.

In forming sub-groups within the class, the teacher takes into consideration the project at hand and its effect on every child. In this way she can improve the social growth of the timid child, the isolated child, and the over-aggressive child.

Part of the day may be spent in the large group, but groups of various sizes and kinds will be doing different

1Ibid., p. 211.
activities in all parts of the room. Groups may be playing house in the doll house, painting at the easel, sawing with wood, working puppets, working with clay or crayons, or carrying on dramatic play.

One may group children in small informal groups, in pairs to help each other, or alone as on a special interest, need, or just a desire to work alone. The more mature ones may learn through occasionally helping individuals or small groups. The class divided into small groups can carry out certain types of projects. A large group may be separated into sub-groups that work separately and then come together to share ideas and information. They meet as a class to listen to directions, make plans, evaluate results, sing, listen to stories, and look at visual materials. They also have opportunities to group themselves, such as at dramatic play, playground, or during creative activities.

The teacher knows what each child is doing, why he is doing it, and she gives him help as he needs it. Children find satisfaction through such experiences and build a foundation for happy, constructive living with others. They are not all required to meet the same group standards or do the same activity, but are given the opportunity to mature at their own rate.

Prominent features of kindergarten activities are freedom, interest, thinking, purposeful activity, and a community spirit. The pupils develop in thinking as they choose and plan; in doing as they construct
and perform; and in living with others, as they converse and cooperate. Thus kindergarten aims at the complete development of the child, emotionally, socially, and intellectually.

The child's physical needs are met through large and small muscular coordination. Playground equipment, games, rhythms, such as walking, running, skipping, and hopping, imitating such things as trees, airplanes, and birds—all help children develop their large muscles. Small muscles of the fingers, hands, and wrists are developed through the use of clay, paint, finger paint, musical instruments, chalk, crayons, and puzzles. He learns good health habits through outdoor play, rest, examinations by the doctor and nurse, and staying at home when ill.

The child's intellectual needs are met through problem-solving techniques, making choices, having to make discriminations, lengthening his interest and attention span, and learning to complete activities he has begun.

Creative expression is shown from the beginning of the day to the end in a kindergarten class. He is able to express himself through the manipulative arts, music, conversation, and dramatization. Almost every activity he engages in during school hours involves various means of self-expression. As

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Foster and Headley said:

We cannot measure the value of creative expression through the perfection of the product, for it is not what the child does to the material or media of self-expression that counts, but it is what the use of the material or media does for the child.¹

A wide range of experiences, both first hand and vicarious, contribute richly to a child's background. They help provide interest in many areas, give him things to discuss with others, and help him associate ideas from his own experiences with the experiences story-book characters are having.

The first instructional job consists of giving to the pupil a wealth of first-hand and vicarious experiences, thereby broadening his field of meaningful concepts which may later serve as media for interpretation of the printed symbols he will read.²

Through kindergarten activities he learns to develop a good speaking vocabulary, a love for books, and are better able to communicate with others.

Socio-emotional needs such as getting along with others, sharing, having good self control, and being courteous are stressed.

Natural sciences are well integrated in the kindergarten program also. Children learn to be more aware of things


around them and their curiosity is stimulated through experiments and observations.

Social living is the total kindergarten program. The areas of interest are considered an integral part of the social studies curriculum. The areas of interest originate from something in the child's experiences that will satisfy the needs of each child within the kindergarten group and challenge the interest and abilities of the mature child. They are easy enough to insure some degree of success for the most immature child. They are practical in the local school situation and they are related to other activities in which the children are engaged. They have social value and relate to the social problems the kindergarten children are expected to solve. In other words each child is being considered when planning group activities for social studies.

Many things done in the kindergarten relate to and prepare children for reading. Reading involves the ability to interpret symbols to get meaning. Each person's background of experiences will determine the meaning he attaches to these symbols. The wide experiences a child receives in kindergarten produce a background of concepts and information which help children to interpret reading materials. Many new understandings are built, curiosity is aroused, and vocabulary is developed from short trips such as visiting a child's home, taking a walk, visiting a zoo, store, hatchery, park or apple orchard.
The kindergarten teacher acquaints herself with the concepts the children will need to interpret the printed material in the first grade. Then she plans firsthand experiences which will develop these concepts.

Science and nature study help the children develop powers of observation and a sense of touch through such experiences as collecting stones, shells, seeds, leaves, and acorns; observing caterpillars, grasshoppers, snails, frogs and birds eggs; caring for pets in the room; experimenting with growing of things such as seeds and plants; learning how plants get food, how seeds travel, using magnets, and finding things that float or sink, or are heavy and light.

Physical fitness is an important factor in developing background for reading readiness. "Of all the physical factors discussed, we recognize vision and hearing as those which most directly and vitally affect the reading process." His eyes must be able to be focused easily at book distance and be able to follow lines of print before he can learn to read. By using books and pictures, the children learn to note details and to go from the left to the right. Any defects in hearing and seeing should be attended to.

Children learn to listen, to match sounds, to build vocabulary, and to memorize from singing songs. Rhythm bands improve muscular coordination and auditory discrimination.

\[1\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 27.}\]
They learn to stop and start with the music and to keep time.

Children are alerted to rhyming words and beginning sounds during story time and poetry time and also during discussion periods. They learn to concentrate and their attention span becomes greater and greater. Dramatization helps children to use a larger vocabulary, increase their memory, and learn to relate a sequence of ideas.

Being able to communicate ideas is important to readiness for learning the printed symbols of reading. Careful attention is given to meaning and pronunciation. They gain ideas, build concepts, and develop meaningful vocabulary. Language accompanies all phases of the kindergarten program.

In summary, total development of the child is foremost in the minds of kindergarten educators. Freedom and flexibility with provision for all areas of growth at his own rate are a major part of the kindergarten philosophy. Success is ever present for the kindergarten child with failure at the barest minimum.
CHAPTER III

RETENTION AND PROMOTION POLICIES:
SOME OPINIONS

Noted authorities in the field of education seem to be of common agreement that retention at the kindergarten level is rarely justified.

Each child has been taken from his stage of development when he entered kindergarten and has developed as far as his potentialities would allow during the year. Necessary planning has to be made so that no child will have to repeat the same class a second year. He must continue on to new and enriching experiences. "It remains for the next teacher to take the child as he is when he comes to her, and to guide him as far as he can during her year with him." ¹

The kindergarten program provides activities in which everyone can experience success. Saucier says there should be no serious difficulty for kindergarten to have practically 100 per cent promotion. He goes further to suggest the first grades follow the same plan both in instruction and in promotion used in the kindergarten. ²


A. J. Gerson tells of a survey testing program conducted by the University of Pennsylvania Division of Research. This survey revealed the fact "that the group of pupils repeating the work of a given grade for a second time is to be found in the lowest achievement quartile." It also indicated, "that these pupils do little if any better so far as test results can indicate, than they did the first time they were undertaking the work of the grade."

Modern studies show that each child seems to grow and develop in accordance with his own individual pattern. The rate and pattern range all the way from very slow to very fast growers in a fairly normal distribution. "Growth in achievement in school is closely associated with growth of the organism as a whole." Exact grade placement has little or no bearing on the educational development of the child during the year.

Repeating grades has no special educational value for children, for the usual practice of repetition is to force the child to take the complete work over again including that

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2 Ibid.

which he has learned and still remembers. This usually results in boredom and little improvement. In many cases this boredom results in social criticism by other children, and causes overt behavior and unhealthy attitudes that control the child's thinking for the rest of his school life and many time beyond. Otto states that "We used to think that repeating a grade would strengthen a child. This supposition has been shown false." He wrote that schools with high promotion rates have the highest standards. He also believes that the threat of failure would have no appreciable effect on educational growth, particularly at the elementary level. He does not feel that grades are necessary to insure proper motivation. No matter what kind of group and promotion plan you have, it will be necessary to meet individual differences.

Helen Heffernan discusses the primary school as planned for children four and a half to eight and a half or nine years old. This would include kindergarten through third grade and is the same idea discussed previously by Baxter, Lewis, and Cross.

She says that this plan tends to minimize the failure of the work in a given grade and it emphasizes placement in which each child may work in comfort. The groups are tentative and flexible and placement is not permanent.

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1Ibid., p. 128.

2Ibid., p. 129.
Hefernan believes the advantages to this plan are:

1. Elimination of grade levels reduces the pressure the learning for reading as a basis for promotion.

2. Freedom for development of many skills and total personality is provided.

3. Four years observation period allows teachers to understand the children and their families before decisions are made.¹

Hildreth also discusses the unit plan in her book Readiness For School Beginners. She states that "the practice of failing beginners and holding them back for another year has largely been given up."² The humiliation of non-promotion for slow beginners at the end of first grade is avoided by the better schools today. Grade lines and fixed achievement promotion standards are done away with. The entire primary period is considered as a unit of progress. Rather than formal standards of achievement they are promoted in terms of development.

No matter what his rate of progress has been, every child should finish his first year with a feeling of success and accomplishment so that he is eager to go ahead with the next school year.³

Some claim that failure has a wholesome effect on the child's personality and that life consists of failure as well.

¹Helen Hefernan, Guiding the Young Child (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1951), p. 249.
³Ibid., p. 222.
⁴Ibid., p. 222.
as success. However, the pupil who does not pass has already experienced failure in various undertakings throughout the semester. Everyone has opportunities to experience failure without the school's providing it.

In Saucier's discussion of drop-outs and those failing to complete their education through high school, he blames retention as the chief cause for withdrawal.

"The plan of continuous progress through the elementary school is for the sake of the large per cent of the pupils who are repeaters each year under the old plan".

When the age limit of the compulsory education law is reached, nearly all of these pupils drop out of school. Scarcely three-fourths of the pupils in the first grade continue to the second and less than one-half the number in that grade progress to the eighth grade. Most of those who do not enter the advanced grades have been retarded one or more years.

This shows that slow progress through the elementary school, resulting in the elimination of a large per cent of the pupils before they reach the upper grades is a serious educational problem.²

Research shows that repeaters do no better than children of like ability who are promoted. Failure to eliminate the causes of retention rather than the repeating of the experience

¹Saucier, op. cit., p. 444.
²Ibid., p. 438.
itself may have been a potent factor in determining subsequent achievement of retained pupils. Lack of readiness for work in a given grade is largely due to a slow learning rate which will not be improved by repeating a grade section.

Recent experimental evidence shows that failing pupils who are promoted to the next grade make a larger growth in achievement during the next year than similar pupils who are required to repeat the work of their present grade, possibly because of the stronger stimulation.¹

General homogeneity is at least undesirable if not impossible. Pupils are non-overlapping in one achievement or phase of a subject, but they may and undoubtedly do overlap greatly in others. Variability of pupil achievement is no less for schools with high rates of non-promotion than for schools with low rates of non-promotion. Non-promotion does not reduce the range of abilities and interest with which the teacher must work, although the philosophy of bringing children together into classes is based upon the assumption that "a class is the most efficient method of satisfying common needs."² The pupils still cannot be treated entirely as a group. Provision must still be made for individual differences. The greatest improvements in this area can be made through increased teacher training and decreased teacher load.


²Otto, op. cit., p. 128.
D. M. Jones brings out the idea that she is "helping children grow and mature rather than teaching reading, spelling, and arithmetic." Her solution to the problem resolves itself into an elongated period of time (six semesters) during which the child continues instruction under the same teacher. She recognized the difficulty, however, that during this long period of time the "extremes" of her class "get farther and farther apart." She must make special provision for each.

She does believe in retaining children; however, she does not call this failing, nor is the child required to repeat the work he already knows. Her explanation is this: "The student has moved along at the rate of speed for which he had the capacity. He has accomplished just so much work, but he has not yet completed the work in this area." (She makes no mention of physical maturity, social behavior, attitudes, and so forth. She says, "It is easier to convince both the parents and the child that the job needs to be finished than that the quality of work is below a standard which is necessary for promotion."

G. R. Wentland argues for social promotion. He says that the "better teacher sees the fallacy of regimenting

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2Ibid., p. 235.

3Ibid., p. 235.
children by grades to conform with standards set up by tradition." He does not fail pupils; instead, he seeks to understand each child for what he is. If a child is not able to do the work of the second grade, should she remain with the six year olds in grade one for the rest of her school days just because she can't read? Or if another child is ahead of his grade should he be advanced a grade or two? He says that "while the three R's are fundamental to a normal life, they are not the only requisites to worthy parenthood, useful employment, and effective citizenship."

Wentland also introduced the consideration of the home and the "Environmental quotient" as well as the "Intelligence quotient." These two factors would determine the "Learning quotient." The "Learning quotient" would be a more valid way in which to judge the capacity for learning of the child. In other words, the child's home environment would have a great deal of influence on the child's learning ability. If a child had an above average I.Q. of

...one hundred twenty-five and an environmental quotient of sixty (poor home conditions) she would have a learning quotient of about seventy-five. (1.25 x .60 = .75. The I.Q. of seventy-five indicates the learning characteristics of a pupil with an I.Q. of seventy-five

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2Ibid., p. 95.

3Ibid., p. 93.
under normal environmental conditions, while a child with an I.Q. of seventy-five and an E.Q. of 133, would have an L.Q. of 100, making her a good normal pupil.¹

H. G. Shane conducted a survey of promotion policies. He sampled thirty-five public elementary school systems of the country. "The consensus among the districts sampled was that children should neither repeat a grade nor be double promoted except under rare circumstances."² As a general rule the superintendents favored 100 per cent promotion. However, they also agreed that this does not connote a mass movement of pupils through eight years. Rather it was a no failure approach to protect the children from feelings of incompetence and insecurity. In some cases provisions were made for the children to finish three academic years in four calendar years by taking a lighter load. Social and physical maturity were important in deciding whether a child was to repeat or not. An effort has been made to challenge the able child by a program of enrichment and at the same time to avoid frustrating the slowly maturing child.

Heffernan states that group organization should be flexible and children should be moved according to their apparent need.

¹Ibid., p. 93.
³Ibid., pp. 59-60.
Placement means rather that the child will work for a time in a certain group and that his relationship with children and his rate of development will determine future placement.¹

With emphasis upon the developmental possibilities of each child and the importance of the continuity of their educational experiences, failure and non-promotion should disappear from education.

In summarizing the foregoing chapter, one finds that promotion policies have been a concern for some time. Authorities seem to feel that retention is not the solution and various other means are being tried. Many ideas were expressed and complete agreement for the best solution has not been reached.

¹Heffernan, op. cit., p. 248.
CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE

Realizing that teachers are continually puzzling over whether to promote or retain youngsters, the author felt an interesting study could be made about what teachers are now doing in Iowa in regard to retention. To accomplish this a questionnaire was distributed to 190 teachers in Iowa. Only kindergarten teachers were selected and distribution included the Des Moines Public School System, Community College classes at Drake University, and the Polk County School System. One hundred fifteen responses were received from these 190 inquiries representing a 60 per cent return.

Tables were made to summarize the results as they were returned. These tables may be found on pages 27, 28, and 33.

Personal interviews were held with Miss Belltromo, head of the reading department for the University of Iowa Laboratory School at Iowa City, Iowa; Miss Neith Headly, head of the University of Minnesota Laboratory School, at Minneapolis, Minnesota; and a letter of inquiry was sent to Miss Edith Sunderlan, head of the Iowa State Nursery School at Ames, Iowa.

These authorities were asked to answer the same questionnaire found in Table I. Their answers and comments are found on pages 32, 33, 34, and 35.
From the 115 questionnaires returned, thirty replies were received from schools with 0-100 pupils enrolled; fifty-four responses were from schools with 101-600 students; and thirty-one were received from schools of 601-1,200 students.

TABLE I
POPULATION OF SCHOOLS SURVEYED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>0 - 100</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 - 600</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>601 - 1,200</td>
<td>31</td>
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Of the 115 kindergarten teachers replying to the questionnaire eighty-six of them taught straight kindergarten classes, while nine had a combined kindergarten and first grade, and twenty were teachers of all six grades in a rural school.

When these 115 kindergarten teachers were asked if grade levels signified rather definite levels of academic achievement, eighty-one responded that they believed this to be true, and thirty-four felt this was false. These data are shown in Table II.

Thirty-two teachers felt that a course of study for a given grade should be administered to all pupils and eighty-three did not agree.
When asked if universal promotion tends to lower the average achievement levels of the various grades, eighty-four said that they felt it did and thirty-one felt that it did not.

Thirty teachers believed that the threat of failure causes pupils to work harder, but eighty-five did not find this true.

In response to the question "100 per cent promotion will lead to relaxed effort on the part of the pupils" the opinions of the teachers were almost evenly divided. Fifty-eight felt it might lead to a relaxed effort, while fifty-seven did not feel it would.

Ninety-nine of these teachers did not feel that continuous promotion is based on sentiment and the desire to coddle the child, while sixteen felt that it is.

When answering the question, "a teacher should be criticized for promoting a pupil who is not able to do the work for the next grade", twenty-one felt she should be criticized; ninety-four felt that she should not be criticized.

Seventy felt that a retarded pupil achieves more in the end than he would had he been regularly promoted, and forty-five felt he would not achieve more.

All but seven of the 115 felt that the same learning goals could not be set for all pupils.

A little over half of the teachers felt that their views reflected the policy of their school system. Sixty-two
### TABLE II
RESPONSES OF 115 IOWA KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS
TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Number of Teachers Who Felt the Statement Was True</th>
<th>False</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Grade levels signify rather definite levels of academic achievement</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A course of study should be administered to all pupils</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Universal promotion tends to lower the average achievement levels of the various grades</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The threat of failure causes pupils to work harder</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 100% promotion will lead to relaxed effort on the part of the pupils</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Continuous promotion is based on sentiment and the desire to coddle the child</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. A teacher should be criticized for promoting a pupil who is not able to do the work for the next grade</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. A retarded pupil achieves more in the end than he would had he been regularly promoted</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The same learning goals can be set for all pupils</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
felt it did reflect their views and fifty-three felt it did not.

One hundred and four of these teachers felt the age requirement date set at September fifteenth would lessen the possibility of failure, but eleven did not feel it would help.

Some of the remarks the teachers added to the questionnaire were:

I am strongly in favor of the raised age requirement.

In some cities (I believe Chicago is one) they have a maturity test they give the children before accepting them for kindergarten. It would be less embarrassing for the parents to say they kept their child home a year than to say he had been retained. In many cases of immaturity, it only takes that extra year for the child to develop.

I feel that the older children usually have a great advantage over those born in December or January for instance. I think September 15 date would be helpful.

Children start to school too young. Six would be a better age of starting than five.
When asked how many children were retained in the last five years sixty-five teachers indicated they had retained at least one child, forty-two teachers had not retained any, and eight were teaching for the first time. One hundred seventy-one children had been retained by these sixty-five teachers over a five-year period. The reasons given for retaining were maturity, intelligence, attendance, and speech or language difficulties. Some children were retained for one, two, or all three reasons. One hundred and eighty-two were retained because of intelligence, 123 for maturity, eleven for attendance, and two because of speech difficulties.

Additional space was allowed for comments by the teachers. Many comments were received as follows:

We shouldn't have grade levels.

I never retain a child who will be physically out of his social group.

I only retain a child if he is physically, mentally, and socially immature.

I can usually tell at the end of six weeks if a child is not ready for our activities in kindergarten. Then I send him home.

I feel that immaturity is the strongest factor for retention in the kindergarten.

If the parents and school have the right attitude toward retention, the child usually profits greatly.

In retaining pupils we have found that if the parents are not cooperative toward retention, little will be gained.

I don't believe in grade levels if we can have a normal load in the group.
I'd much rather see a block form of schooling 1-3 grade levels. Have the children move into another block as unit of 4-6. When they are capable of skills necessary for beginning next unit.

I don't believe children work just because of the fear of not passing.

The ungraded primary school seems to offer much in the way of a solution to this promotion vs. failure situation.

If a child has normal intelligence, but is immature, I feel two years in first grade would be of more benefit to him than two years of kindergarten. However, a very badly socially, maladjusted child might need the kindergarten for two years. So much depends on the child, parents, and teacher.

The school policy is to retain not more than once in the primary grades and that usually it is more helpful above kindergarten.

The real evil of a child being retained, in my opinion, is the sense of failure. It is the attitude against retention we have to fight or change.

The large numbers coming in makes quite a problem when retaining one or two. They need so much help you can't give.

The only two children I have retained were held back because of immaturity. The change in these children has been most rewarding to the parents and to me. The biggest rewards have been those gained by the boys referred to. They are now happy, secure, well-adjusted, and more assertive, individuals.

I feel that a child who needs growth in all areas will make a better adjustment in the long run if retained when he will not suffer from the stigma of retention. It is worse for the child to be pushed than retained if he is not ready for learning skills presented to all in most first grades.

In 1956, while student teaching at Edison School of Waterloo, under supervision of Iowa State Teachers College, one student out of fifty-seven was held back because of maturity.
Two personal interviews and one letter of inquiry were held with educational authorities from Iowa and Minnesota, Miss Belltromo from the University of Iowa, and Miss Neith Headley from Minnesota University, and Miss Edith Sunderland from Iowa State College at Ames, Iowa. Each of these authorities answered the questionnaire found on page Their answers are found in Table III on page

Miss Belltromo and Miss Headley made explanatory comments in answer to the questions.

In reply to question one asking if grade levels signify rather definite levels of academic achievement, both authorities felt they did. "That is one of the purposes for such an organization in American public schools," said Miss Headley. Miss Belltromo felt "this does not necessarily mean that every child must achieve these levels at a particular grade, but it helps to systematize our educational system as an attempt to provide the child with the experiences it is felt he should have."

Miss Headley felt that a course of study for a given grade "could stand as a skeleton, but certainly each individual should approach it in different ways." Miss Belltromo thought a course of study should be administered to all pupils. We don't just develop a child or let him select what he wants to learn. It is our duty as teachers to interest him in what he should learn." She did feel, however, "some children may not be ready to learn some skills as soon as others."
TABLE III
RESPONSES OF THREE EDUCATIONAL AUTHORITIES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Miss Belltromo</th>
<th>Miss Headley</th>
<th>Miss Sunderlan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade levels signify rather definite levels of academic achievement.</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A course of study for a given grade should be administered to all pupils</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal promotion tends to lower the average achievement levels of the various grades</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The threat of failure causes pupils to work harder</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% promotion will lead to relaxed effort on the part of pupils</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous promotion is based on sentiment and the desire to coddle the child</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A teacher should be criticized for promoting a child who is not able to do the work of the next grade</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A retarded pupil achieves more in the end than he would had he been regularly promoted</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The same learning goals can be set for all pupils</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Miss Headley felt that the threat of failure "might stimulate the able but discourage the really slow learners." Miss Belltromo stated that, "If a child can't do the work he may eventually give up no matter how negative the threat may be."

Both Miss Belltromo and Miss Headley felt the attitude of the teacher would be the most important factor in determining if 100 per cent promotion would lead to relaxed effort on the part of the pupils.

These two authorities also felt that continuous promotion is not based on sentiment and the desire to coddle the child. Miss Headley stated further that "it is based rather on the recognition that one's social status is important in wholesome development." Miss Belltromo indicated it "could be at times, but that alone was not the purpose for discouraging so many non-promotions."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Responses of Miss Belltromo</th>
<th>Responses of Miss Headley</th>
<th>Responses of Miss Sunderland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your views reflect the policy of your school system</td>
<td>False</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The age requirement date set at September 15 would lessen the possibility of failure</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>False</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Neither felt a teacher should be criticized for promoting a child who could not do the work for the next grade. They felt many factors are involved in the decision to promote or retain.

Miss Headley emphatically felt it would be "utterly impossible for children with 80 I.Q and 160 I.Q to have the same learning goals. Could you answer the $64,000 question?" she asked. "I couldn't." Miss Belltromo also realizes the same learning goals could not be set for all pupils.

Both Miss Headley and Miss Belltromo felt the age requirement date being set at September fifteenth would lessen the possibility of failure, but each had different ideas about why this would be true. Miss Headley believed we should provide for the four year olds in our schools. She felt that setting the date back "would tend to make the public aware of the need for group opportunities for four year olds." Miss Belltromo thought, "it might help to drive home to parents that it is not always the wise thing to become over anxious about getting their children in school at a very early age.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It was the purpose of the author to determine what practices are being followed by Iowa kindergarten teachers in regard to retention.

Questionnaires were distributed to 190 Iowa kindergarten teachers and 115 replies were received. The same questionnaire was answered by two authorities through personal interview and one authority by a letter of inquiry. Research was also done to determine what noted authorities in the field of education believed to be the best solution in regard to retention.

The conclusions that are drawn by the author are to be considered only as generalizations derived from the results obtained from the authorities and the teachers of kindergarten in Iowa.

While there is much confusion about general promotion policies, there were points of quite common agreement among the authorities. Most authors seemed to advocate these specific points:

1. All children develop at their own rate and therefore grade placement would have little value toward their educational development.

2. Not all students have the same abilities, therefore one should recognize differences.
3. No general rule of promotion can be defined. This problem must be solved on an individual basis. All developmental phases must be considered. The child should be retained only if provision can be made for his special needs. He need not re-study what he already knows. If his lack of maturity is based upon time alone, more time should be allowed him, but the stigma of "failure" should be removed.

4. Each teacher has the responsibility to take each child from where he is; in other words, the teacher should take him at his stage of development and at his own rate.

5. A way of avoiding the failure issue was presented. The plan of blocks of work with each teacher keeping the children for three years with provision for allotment of additional time if necessary had the advantage of retention without requiring the children to take the same work over. He didn't fail. He simply took more time to grow.

The information obtained by the 115 questionnaires which were answered by kindergarten teachers in Iowa elementary schools establishes a few pertinent facts. Most important is the fact that the Iowa kindergarten teachers are in agreement with the authorities as far as retention is concerned.

Only 171 children were retained by 115 teachers in a five year period over the state. This would not indicate a very large percentage of failures in kindergartens considering that these 115 teachers taught at least 25,000 children during this five year period. This would indicate less than
1 per cent of the children were retained in these rooms.

All but seven of these teachers realized that the same learning goals could not be set for all pupils and this was a very important point brought out by the authorities.

Eighty-three did not feel you could administer the same course of study to all pupils and this falls in line again with individuals developing at their own rate.

When asked about 100 per cent promotion, ninety-nine felt it was not based on sentiment and the desire to coddle the child, but eighty-four teachers felt it tends to lower the average achievement levels of the various grades. This would seem then, that the majority were not in favor of this plan as a solution. The authorities have indicated that no child should be forced to repeat a grade or a part of a grade. They favor continuous promotion and would, therefore, be in disagreement with the Iowa kindergarten teachers answering the questionnaire. These teachers need to better understand the importance of success and the effects of retention on children.

Ninety-four teachers would not criticize another teacher for promoting a pupil who could not do the work for the next grade. If a teacher believes in taking the child from where he is, she could not be critical of other teachers for doing what they believe best for the child.

Only thirty teachers felt the threat of failure would cause pupils to work harder. When children are stimulated
to want to learn and are allowed to progress at their own rate, there would be no fear of failure.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

More studies and experiments should be done with the block unit of time discussed throughout this paper.

Teachers need to be presented with as much information as possible concerning the effects of retention on children.

The kindergarten teachers also need to know more about the planning of the daily program for the total development of the child.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS


B. PERIODICALS


APPENDIX
Des Moines, Iowa

Dear Fellow Teachers:

At the present I am a kindergarten teacher in the Des Moines Public Schools. During the past year I have made a study of the practices of teachers regarding retention. Now I must come to you as I would like to carry this study into the kindergartens of Iowa schools to find out what teachers are actually doing in regard to retention.

Under the guidance and direction of Mr. Marvin Fellers of Drake University, I have organized a questionnaire that appears like a test. These questions or statements were designed to find out how you feel about retaining kindergarten children.

Any suggestions that you have to make will be sincerely appreciated.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Respectfully yours,

Mrs. Susan Donelson

Please check the statements that apply to you before answering the questionnaire:

Number of pupils in your elementary school. Grades 1 - 6) _____

Grade or grades taught: Kdg. 1 2 3 4 5 6
1. Grade levels signify rather definite levels of academic achievement?

2. A course of study for a given grade should be administered to all pupils.

3. Universal promotion tends to lower the average achievement levels of the various grades.

4. The threat of failure causes pupils to work harder.

5. 100% promotion will lead to relaxed effort on the part of the pupils.

6. Continuous promotion is based on sentiment and the desire to coddle the child.

7. A teacher should be criticized for promoting a pupil who is not able to do the work for the next grade.

8. A retarded pupil achieves more in the end than he would had he been regularly promoted.

9. The same learning goals can be set for all pupils.

10. How many children have you retained in the last five years?
    Why? Maturity_________ Intelligence_________
    Attendance_________ Other______________

11. Your views reflect the policy of your school system.

12. The age requirement date set at September 15, would lessen the possibility of failure.