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**Time allotment for
elementary school
subjects**

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Time Allotment For Elementary School Subjects

HERBERT F. SPITZER

College of Education

State University of Iowa

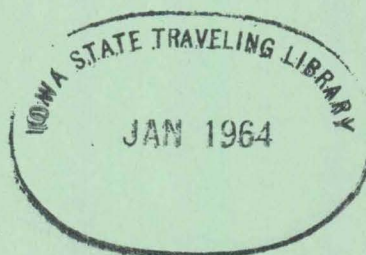
Iowa City, Iowa

ARTHUR C. ANDERSON

Instructional Research and Publications

State Department of Public Instruction

Des Moines, Iowa



STATE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

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INTRODUCTION

"How much time should be allotted to each of the many divisions of the elementary school curriculum?" is a frequently asked question. While an answer to this question is given each year by many teachers, principals, curriculum directors, and others as they go about the work of planning instructional programs, these answers are usually supplied with misgivings. These misgivings about time allotments stem primarily from the fact that little recent information on time allotments was available to those making the decisions regarding the time an area is to receive. Studies on how school time is spent are, for several reasons, no longer popular. First, it is difficult to gather data, due to the freedom that is given individual schools and teachers in a system in making out daily programs. There is emphasis on program flexibility, with much attention given to integration, correlation, and fusion of subject fields. It is therefore almost impossible to determine how much time is given to an area. A second reason for the decline of interest in studies of time allotments is the fact that data from these studies tend to preserve the status quo. Furthermore, the time allotments in typical schools are often affected by such extraneous factors as the availability of the gymnasium, of the special music teacher, and similar factors.

In an attempt to provide data on time allotments that would be forward-looking, representative of best rather than all practices, and less influenced by irrelevant factors, a committee appointed by the Iowa State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1954 collected data on the time allotments preferred by a selected group of school administrators, supervisors, and curriculum directors. The results of this study were published in Resource Ideas for Planning Classroom Programs (1955). (Out of print)

The results of a second study on time allotments sponsored by the Iowa

State Department of Public Instruction are reported here. This second Department study of time allotments, like the first, gathered data on preferred rather than on actual times and from persons representing a selected sample of Iowa schools. The schools from which data were gathered are members of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

A one-page form for securing information was sent to two thirds of the North Central schools of the state. For one half of these schools (one third of the state total) an administrator (superintendent, curriculum director, elementary school principal) was asked to indicate the time per week in a 1650-minute week he would prefer to devote to the various curricular areas in grades one through six. For the other half of the school population studied the superintendent of schools was asked to designate an outstanding teacher from each grade level to supply the desired information on time allotments. The data-gathering form supplied to administrators and teachers listed nine major curricular areas plus such special features as recess and student council. Space for writing in any feature of the curriculum not included in the preceding was also provided.

As has already been indicated, the respondents were asked to supply the preferred time per week for each area, but to work within the framework of a 1650-minute week, or 330 minute-day. The directions clearly stated that "zero minutes" or "no time per week" could be assigned to any of the divisions on the list. The directions emphasized that the time for each area was to be the desirable time to be given to the area, not the actual time being given.

Teacher data forms were received from 51 of the 57 schools contacted and administrator data forms from 48 of the 57 school systems. While not all the

forms could be used because the respondent failed to stay within the 1650-minute weekly time limit, a total of 594 data forms, or about 99 per grade, were used in compiling this report.

From the 594 usable forms received the mean, median, and range of preferred times of administrators and teachers for each grade were compiled. The means, medians, and ranges on the most common curricular areas listed on the form supplied are given in Tables 1, 2, and 3. Attention is called to the fact that some additional curricular areas (e.g., Unassigned time, Weekly Reader, Safety, Milk, Playtime, etc.) were suggested by 36 teachers and 36 administrators, but these areas were not listed in enough schools to warrant reporting means, medians, or ranges for them.

In reading Tables 1, 2, and 3, attention is called also to the fact that some respondents preferred to give a total time for language arts, while others gave time for the separate areas (handwriting, oral and silent reading, spelling, and oral and written English) usually included under the heading of language arts. The total number of administrators preferring language arts was 16 for grade 1, 15 for grade 3, and 14 for grade 6. The corresponding number for the separate language arts areas was 33 for grade 1, 32 for grade 3, and 32 for grade 6. The number of teachers preferring to use language arts was 12 for grade 1, 6 for grade 3, and 21 for grade 6. Teachers preferring the separate areas instead of language arts were 33 for grade 1, 43 for grade 3, and 28 for grade 6.

The form used in gathering data in this study also permitted respondents to list their preferred time allotments either under social studies or under the two most common social studies subjects (geography and history). For grades 4, 5, and 6, 118 administrators reported preferred time for social studies, while 22 reported preferred time for geography and history. One

hundred twenty-five teachers for grades 4, 5, and 6 reported preferred time for social studies and 25 teachers reported preferred time for the separate subjects of geography and history.

DISCUSSION OF HOW THE DATA MAY BE USED

The information presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3 should be useful to those concerned with the problem of "How much time should be allotted to various curricular areas?" The median preferred times supply a bench mark (reference) for use in the study of actual times found in programs. For example, a school study committee interested in giving the status of the current local situation might state that the local time allotted to handwriting is 25 per cent less, is equal to, or is 50 per cent greater than the time preferred by outstanding teachers in the North Central Association schools of Iowa.

On the other hand, those who wish to use time allotments that deviate markedly from accepted practice may find support for their proposal in the wide range of preferred times found in this study. Tables 1, 2, and 3 also present some information on the proportion of practicing educators who prefer such curricular areas as language arts and social studies to the separate subject matter areas. There are probably many other situations of the type cited where the data found in this report will be useful.

The data should also be useful to those interested in critical study of the elementary school program. For example, the data show that for those teachers who indicated a preferred time for reading, the amount of time varied from 250 to 900 minutes per week in grade 1 to from 90 to 300 minutes per week in grade 6. The question might be asked, "Why should some outstanding teachers feel that more than three times as much time is needed for reading instruction as is considered necessary by other outstanding teachers?"

A look at the data in Table 2 raises another critical question. According to this table, the preferred median times for reading are 600 minutes per week in grades 1 and 2, 400 minutes in grade 3, 300 minutes in grade 4, 225 minutes in grade 5, and 200 minutes in grade 6. These recommended times indicate that the outstanding teachers in these North Central Association schools of Iowa feel that a large per cent of the total instructional time should be devoted to reading. In first and second grade the preferred median time of 600 minutes per week seems especially high when it is noted that the combined time for science, social studies, mathematics, handwriting, spelling, and oral and written English is only 525 minutes per week in grade 1 and 555 minutes per week in grade 2. In grade 3 the corresponding amounts are 400 minutes and 760, and in grade 6, 200 minutes and 890. Thus about 35 per cent of the total instructional time devoted to these seven important subjects (reading, social studies, science, handwriting, oral and written English, mathematics, and spelling) should, in the opinion of these outstanding teachers, be devoted to the teaching of reading. Persons interested in elementary school instructional programs that emphasize thinking based on knowledge in the important social and scientific fields might ask, "Why should reading, a skill subject, require so much time?"

A critical look at the preferred time allotments for spelling, especially in the upper grades, will undoubtedly result in the formulation of some additional questions for which those responsible for the way school time is used should have answers. For example, since research has shown that pupils in grades 5 and 6 already know how to spell most of the words in the spelling list for each week and, as a result, learn to spell on the average only about 5 words, why do teachers say they prefer to allot 100 minutes a week to spelling instruction?

While further examination of the data given in the tables would undoubtedly

lead to the identification of other questions of the kind already presented, in a short report such as this the remaining space is probably better used if devoted to consideration of possible reasons for the seeming overemphasis on some areas of the curriculum at the expense of others. The questions and comments that follow may lead to identification of causes for this situation.

CONSIDERATION OF POSSIBLE REASONS FOR THE SEEMING OVEREMPHASIS
ON SOME CURRICULAR AREAS

1. Do teachers and administrators put such great emphasis on reading as is indicated above because they believe that reading is basically as important as this emphasis would indicate? It could well be that the great emphasis given to reading in the pre- and in-service education of teachers in the last 30 years plus the publicity reading receives in the news and in professional literature has led elementary school teachers and administrators to the conclusion that reading is so important that it warrants far more time than any other elementary school subject. Whether other leaders in education, in the professions, in politics, and so on agree that such large amounts of time should be devoted to reading is a matter that should be of concern to all who are interested in elementary education.

2. Did the teachers and administrators in this study give greater emphasis to reading because they know many techniques and procedures for directing instruction in this subject while possessing only limited knowledge of procedures for teaching other curricular areas? As has already been stated, there is great emphasis on reading in the pre-service and in-service education of teachers. This emphasis probably provides teachers with more instructional know-how in reading than they have in other areas, and naturally they tend to give most time to that area where they have the most skill in terms of techniques.

3. Could the fact that reading and spelling are skill subjects, where knowledge of content is of minor consequence, create a teaching situation where the teacher is most confident? Since the elementary school teacher instructs in many fields of knowledge, she can hardly become adequately prepared in all. There are, then, many times when lack of knowledge of the content (especially in such subjects as history, science, mathematics, geography, and literature) is a handicap in teaching and may lead to embarrassing or at least uncomfortable situations. On the other hand, in such subjects as reading and spelling the teacher is familiar with the content and is likely to be master of the procedures being used. This makes for confidence and security in teaching.

The three preceding questions, while an outgrowth of a time allotment study, point to a need for extensive and thorough study of the elementary school curriculum. For such study to proceed, much information is needed. It is hoped that investigations to supply this needed information will be undertaken soon.

TABLE 1

MEAN WEEKLY PREFERRED TIME OF ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS
ON THE MOST COMMON AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM

		Arts & Crafts Music	Foreign Language	Language Arts	Handwriting	Oral & Silent Reading	Spelling	Oral & Written English	Library	Literature	Mathematics	Physical Education	Science & Health	Social Studies	Individual Study	Recess	Starting Period	
Grade 1	Administrator	70	76	--	643	69	599	54	97	41	75	121	75	95	94	86	153	67
	Teacher	72	76	--	622	75	597	74	78	36	79	141	68	82	87	75	135	61
Grade 2	Administrator	65	71	--	660	71	511	86	103	44	77	146	76	98	97	70	148	63
	Teacher	61	75	--	385	63	602	79	116	39	71	155	66	95	90	55	136	46
Grade 3	Administrator	69	72	--	620	70	424	86	131	46	63	180	66	103	136	74	140	58
	Teacher	60	69	--	644	67	413	90	138	40	63	200	66	113	139	79	129	41
Grade 4	Administrator	70	74	61	516	55	291	82	154	46	68	207	82	129	191	96	122	50
	Teacher	63	71	69	517	48	286	94	154	42	66	226	72	140	200	79	107	42
Grade 5	Administrator	71	74	91	460	50	226	83	162	43	63	221	86	142	225	102	110	54
	Teacher	62	71	71	483	41	254	90	157	43	58	233	77	150	247	97	103	41
Grade 6	Administrator	65	75	77	428	50	225	78	174	41	63	228	86	147	242	114	93	48
	Teacher	66	74	109	454	43	210	91	160	36	54	225	81	167	237	113	104	38

n = 594

TABLE 2

MEDIAN WEEKLY PREFERRED TIME OF ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS
ON THE MOST COMMON AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM

		Arts & Crafts	Music	Foreign Language	Language Arts	Handwriting	Oral & Silent Reading	Spelling	Oral & Written English	Library	Literature	Mathematics	Physical Education	Science & Health	Social Studies	Individual Study	Recess	Starting Period
Grade 1	Administrator	60	75	--	750	75	600	50	100	30	75	120	60	90	100	75	150	50
	Teacher	60	75	--	800	75	600	60	75	30	75	150	60	75	90	70	150	50
Grade 2	Administrator	70	75	--	750	75	600	75	100	30	75	150	60	60	100	60	150	50
	Teacher	60	75	--	300	60	600	75	80	30	75	150	60	100	90	50	150	50
Grade 3	Administrator	70	75	--	675	75	450	85	125	50	60	150	60	100	150	70	150	50
	Teacher	60	60	--	645	70	400	90	150	40	60	200	60	100	150	60	150	50
Grade 4	Administrator	60	60	60	500	60	300	75	150	40	60	200	90	125	200	70	120	50
	Teacher	60	60	75	600	50	300	100	150	30	75	225	60	150	200	65	100	45
Grade 5	Administrator	60	60	60	450	50	220	80	150	40	60	215	90	150	225	100	100	50
	Teacher	60	60	75	500	40	225	100	150	30	60	225	60	150	225	75	100	40
Grade 6	Administrator	60	60	60	450	50	220	75	175	40	60	225	90	150	250	100	80	50
	Teacher	60	60	100	475	40	200	100	150	30	50	225	80	150	225	95	100	30

n = 594

TABLE 3

RANGE OF WEEKLY PREFERRED TIME OF ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS
ON THE MOST COMMON AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM

Gr.		Arts & Crafts	Music	Foreign Lang.	Lang. Arts	Handwriting	Oral & Silent Rdg. Spelling	Oral & Writ. English Library	Lit.	Math.	Phys. Ed.	Sci. & Health	Soc. Studies	Ind. Study	Recess	Start. Period		
1	Adm.	30-150	40-150	0-60	0-1000	0-150	0-750	0-150	0-100	0-180	75-225	0-150	0-175	0-225	0-150	50-300	0-150	
	Tchr.	0-260	0-125	0-100	0-1050	0-125	0-900	0-120	0-175	0-100	0-150	60-225	0-160	0-210	0-300	0-200	0-200	
2	Adm.	0-100	40-100	0-60	0-835	0-100	0-675	0-150	0-150	0-90	0-150	75-275	0-150	0-200	0-250	0-130	0-300	0-125
	Tchr.	0-150	40-150	--	0-870	0-150	0-875	0-225	0-600	0-100	0-150	50-300	0-150	0-150	0-150	0-125	0-275	0-80
3	Adm.	30-100	40-150	0-60	0-885	0-100	0-600	0-120	0-205	0-100	0-150	100-300	0-150	0-150	0-340	0-150	0-250	0-100
	Tchr.	0-100	40-150	0-100	0-750	0-120	0-600	0-150	0-250	0-100	0-100	130-300	0-150	50-230	0-300	0-320	0-275	0-75
4	Adm.	30-125	45-125	0-80	0-750	0-80	0-450	0-125	0-200	0-100	0-135	100-300	0-150	60-250	0-300	0-500	0-225	0-100
	Tchr.	0-150	0-150	0-100	0-675	0-100	0-450	0-190	0-300	0-150	0-150	150-300	0-150	0-250	0-300	0-150	0-200	0-75
5	Adm.	35-125	40-150	0-150	0-750	0-80	0-400	0-125	0-250	0-100	0-190	150-300	0-150	0-250	0-300	0-280	0-200	0-75
	Tchr.	0-100	40-120	0-100	0-750	0-120	0-425	0-150	0-225	0-150	0-150	100-375	0-225	0-300	0-375	0-600	0-180	0-100
6	Adm.	0-125	40-150	0-150	0-750	0-80	0-400	0-150	0-300	0-100	0-190	0-300	0-180	0-250	0-320	0-500	0-200	0-75
	Tchr.	0-120	0-150	0-200	0-645	0-75	0-300	0-150	0-300	0-75	0-120	150-300	30-150	75-300	0-350	0-330	0-250	0-75

n = 594

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