Utah Kindergarten Teachers' Challenges and Concerns About Teaching Kindergarten

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UTAH KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS ABOUT TEACHING KINDERGARTEN

by

Ruth Jane Liebschutz Moore

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE in

Family, Consumer, and Human Development

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah
2010
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ABSTRACT

Utah Kindergarten Teachers’ Challenges and Concerns about Teaching Kindergarten

by

Ruth Jane Liebschutz Moore, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2010

Major Professor: Dr. Shelley L. Knudsen Lindauer
Department: Family, Consumer, and Human Development

This qualitative study was an exploration of 55 Utah kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of challenges in teaching. It investigated written concerns teachers expressed in a statewide survey of kindergarten teachers. Study findings indicated that two main issues were communicated by teachers: a disparity between their developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices in the classroom, and concerns about children’s kindergarten readiness and transition to school. About 56% of teachers felt a struggle in implementing their developmentally appropriate beliefs about education, for a variety of reasons: large class sizes, district and state mandates, and lack of resources, particularly time. Furthermore, 53% of educators conveyed concerns regarding children’s school readiness and their transition to kindergarten. These teachers articulated transition activities they engaged in and communicated the influence of preschool, both positive and negative, on their incoming kindergarteners. Three other concerns and challenges were also delineated: limited teaching time; feelings that kindergarten curriculum is becoming too academic, particularly that curricular expectations have been raised and an
emphasis placed on literacy; and issues surrounding parental involvement, both in and out of school.

Study findings also demonstrated that most teachers who communicated concerns about implementing developmentally appropriate beliefs had been teaching for more than 7 years. The majority of the educators who shared challenges regarding time had taught for 12 or more years, as was the case for those who spoke about concerns with parental involvement. Limitations, implications, and suggestions for future research are discussed.

(121 pages)
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

With the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, there has been a nationwide transformation of elementary school curriculum, including alterations to the face of kindergarten. It is no longer the children's garden, as envisioned by its founder Friedrich Froebel, nor the learning environment where children can grow and mature in the absence of workbooks and drills (Jeynes, 2006). Kindergarten teachers feel the pressures of the "pushed down" curriculum (Charlesworth et al., 1993, p. 257; Winter & Kelley, 2008, p. 260), and what is taught in kindergarten looks like first grade material, rather than play-based learning activities. Many teachers feel pressure to fulfill accountability standards of a more rigorous academic curriculum in kindergarten through teacher-directed, less child-centered approaches, even though such teaching styles clash with many teachers' beliefs about developmentally appropriate practice and accepted best practices for young children (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006).

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is imperative when teaching young children because it involves teaching and guiding children according to their individual levels of knowledge and growth. DAP embraces the notion that children learn best through hands-on, exploratory play experiences rather than abstract worksheets and teacher-directed instruction, such as that which is currently dominating the kindergarten scene (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In kindergarten classrooms today, less and less time is allotted for children to engage in exploratory play activities (Goldstein, 2007; Jeynes, 2006). Many teachers feel DAP is not always possible as they experience pressure to instruct children according to state and district mandated tests (Goldstein, 2007).
However, many kindergarten teachers continue to favor a more child-centered, exploratory teaching approach. This lack of harmony between teachers’ DAP and developmentally appropriate beliefs (DAB) has been documented by researchers (Hedge & Cassidy, 2009; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Gaining a better understanding of teachers’ challenges in translating their developmentally appropriate beliefs into developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom will aid in understanding some of the rigors teachers face today.

The kindergarten year is foundational in the educational career of the child, traditionally providing a link between home and the formal schooling years. This year of introduction has been a time for children to learn important social skills and, by so doing, ready children for their later school career. Researchers have defended the original Froebelian kindergarten model, suggesting that Froebel’s child-centered exploratory model is more beneficial to the young child than is the now predominant emphasis on test-taking in the classroom (Jeynes, 2006). Spodek (1986) stated that it is an inappropriate practice to focus solely on the academic development of young children in order for them to be successful students later in life. Such a procedure neglects the social and moral development of the child that is one of the foci of DAP, and the development of the whole child (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Understanding that the transition into kindergarten is an important time for young children and their families, and desiring all children to be ready to enter school, the National Goals Panel stated that, by the year 2000, all children would start school “ready to learn” (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008, p. 289). Yet much debate takes place over the concept of school readiness, partly due to the lack of consensus on its definition.
Most researchers assert that readiness encompasses multiple aspects of a child’s life and experience, not solely academic factors. Research also illustrates that many teachers feel a number of children are not ready to enter kindergarten and that they struggle with this transition (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). Teachers themselves often feel barriers to implementing activities that support children in making the kindergarten transition (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). Knowing and understanding challenges and difficulties teachers experience will aid in prompting change, such as the development of practices and policies that help lessen challenges and improve education.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to contribute to the existing body of research about teachers’ challenges and concerns they perceive in teaching. Various studies conducted in the past probing teachers’ concerns about their profession have been quantitative (Charlesworth et al., 1993; Gullo & Burton, 1992; Huffman & Speer, 2000; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006); thus this study adds a new dimension to the existing research by its qualitative nature. In this study, kindergarten teachers’ voluntary written responses to a statewide kindergarten teacher survey were analyzed, focusing on the question, “What are kindergarten teachers’ perceptions about teaching today?” Educators’ articulated challenges and concerns were qualitatively explored and recommendations for action that needs to be taken are addressed in the discussion section.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review encompasses a brief history of kindergarten, specifically, how and why it began and what kindergarten is like today. Current kindergarten practices are explored, particularly considering the impact that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has had on curriculum and testing within the kindergarten year.

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is defined and the importance of such discussed, predominantly in the context of the kindergarten classroom. Current research on the use of DAP and the discrepancy between teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices is investigated. This investigation aids in providing a foundation of kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of challenges in their teaching, relating to this study’s question. Finally, kindergarten readiness and transition is delineated and discussed, again including teachers’ challenges with teaching young children. Preschool and kindergarten teachers’ use of various transition practices is also explored at the end of the concluding section.

History of Kindergarten

The first kindergarten, or “children’s garden,” began in 1839 in Germany and was created by Friedrich Froebel. Educators began adopting his kindergarten model in the United States in the mid-1850s. Froebel intended kindergarten to be a place where children could blossom like flowers in a garden as they were introduced to formal education outside the home (Jeynes, 2006). He believed that the main purpose of pre-first grade education was to guide children in developing moral character and personality
traits conducive to becoming successful citizens in society. He did not believe that worksheets and excessive academic drills were appropriate at this age or in the kindergarten setting. Froebel did support academics in the classroom, in the way we would refer to today as “developmentally appropriate” (Jeynes, 2006, p. 1941). He noted that, if children are pressured at too young of an age with the stress of standardized testing and rigorous academics, they would lose their inherent joy of learning. Froebel also advocated for play in the classroom, and asserted that it contributed to children’s growth and moral development, which was foundational to his original kindergarten model (Jeynes, 2006). Froebel and other early developmentalists recognized and supported ideas such as: children learn in different ways than adults do, children need sensory experiences in order to understand their world, children learn and develop from opportunities to study the world around them through hands-on activities, children are capable of making choices, and children benefit and learn from play (Fromberg, 2006).

Family involvement in the education of the child was another central aspect to the kindergarten program. Froebel believed that kindergartens could thrive only when modeled after the strengths of the family unit. Educators were to look to parental examples and model such in order to produce a safe and loving environment in the classroom setting, as that which was seen in the home. Teachers were to build a strong bond with parents and visit the children’s homes before the beginning of school in order to build a relationship with the child and family and to effectively educate the children (Jeynes, 2006).

The United States began to move away from the Froebelian kindergarten model in the early 1960s. During this time, prayer was removed from the public schools, leaving a
hole in the kindergarten curriculum. This void was filled with more academically-oriented curriculum, including standardized tests. Between 1963 and 1980, America saw a significant decline in the achievement test scores of its students and the nation sought ways to raise them. By so doing, the model Froebel envisioned for kindergarten was rejected and kindergarten began to see more academically-oriented curriculum (Jeynes, 2006).

During the years from 1981 to 1993, the United States became very aware of the Japanese educational system and the corresponding “impressive [test] results” (Jeynes, 2006). Americans began trying to push students to catch up with their Japanese counterparts, but failed to take into account that Japanese students attend school more days, complete more homework, and take more tests. Nonetheless, standardized testing increased in American schools (Jeynes, 2006). In the course of these years, early childhood educators also observed an increase in worksheet and drill and practice activities in the classroom (Charlesworth et al., 1993).

In the time period from 1993 to the present, educators have sought to close the achievement gap present between inner city and suburban children, and middle class Caucasian students and minority students (Jeynes, 2006). In response, President Bill Clinton called for greater educator accountability. President George Bush advocated the use of standardized testing and created NCLB in 2001 to create more accountability of schools and teachers nationwide for the education of children. This has been accomplished in part through the use of excessive standardized testing (Jeynes, 2006).
The face of kindergarten education today is very different from the original model envisioned by Froebel (Jeynes, 2006). Worksheets, standardized testing, and rigorous academics are a frequent sight in the classroom. However, recent research supports Froebel’s thoughts about the foundational purpose of kindergarten in the lives of young children (Goldstein, 1997; Jeynes, 2006). Studies conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s indicate that “the moral, behavioral, and self-regulatory qualities to which Froebel subscribed more accurately determine school readiness than cognitive or academic skills” (Jeynes, 2006, p. 1944). Early standardized testing hurries children through development and represents a “miseducation” (Jeynes, 2006, p. 1945), forcing cognitive development on young children rather than allowing them to develop naturally.

NCLB was originally created to move public schools to greater accountability for the education of the nation’s children (Hyun, 2003; Jeynes, 2006) and to be more accountable for reducing the achievement gaps between various groups of children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The act stipulates that schools will describe their students’ success by their performance on standardized tests (Hyun, 2003). Being accountable for students’ progress is a dominant part of the act (Goldstein, 2007; Hyun, 2003). In order to demonstrate children’s academic progress, the act decrees that they will be tested using standardized measures beginning in the third grade. Although prekindergarten through second grades are not included in NCLB’s standardized testing mandates, educators feel the pressure to prepare students to pass the tests administered in third grade by placing an increased emphasis on academics in the younger grades (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Goldstein, 2007). By so doing, much of the play in
kindergarten has been moved aside to make more time for rigorous academic learning (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Fromberg, 2006).

In the past, kindergarten had been viewed as separate and distinct from the primary grades (Goldstein, 1997, 2007; Graue, 2006; Jeynes, 2006). Today, however, it is viewed as the starting point for arduous academic curriculum, preparing children to achieve in higher grades (Goldstein, 2007; Graue, 2006; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). This view is due in large part to NCLB of 2001. This national act has given kindergarten a new role in education: to prepare children for later academic success on standardized tests that begin in third grade by creating a phenomenon known as the “accountability shovedown” (Hatch, 2002, p. 457), or “pushed down” curriculum (Charlesworth et al., 1993, p. 257; Goldstein, 2007; Winter & Kelley, 2008, p. 260).

Such an academic shovedown produces kindergartens that look like what first grades used to, rather than the children’s garden that Froebel fashioned (Charlesworth et al., 1993; Goldstein, 2007; Graue, 1992, 2006; Jeynes, 2006; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Placing an emphasis on rigorous academic learning and testing at such a young age has been shown to produce stress in young children (Hatch, 2002; Jeynes, 2006).

Despite the fact that so much more is being required in the kindergarten year, kindergarten attendance is mandatory in only 14 states and 7 states do not require that districts provide kindergarten services (Graue, 2001, 2006).

Part of the idea of the pushed down curriculum involves a lengthened, or full, school day for kindergarten children. Some researchers assert that, as children attend more schooling at younger ages, with more rigorous academically oriented instruction, they will achieve higher academic gains and higher test scores (Zvoch, Reynolds, &
Parker, 2008). Full-day kindergarten is seen as a way to better prepare children for the increasing rigor of elementary school curriculum by providing more time in school and more advanced academic content usually not learned until first grade (Zvoch et al., 2008). A great deal of controversy revolves around whether or not children should attend the traditional half-day kindergarten program, or a full-day program, and for which populations full-day programming should be made available (Graue, 2006; Zvoch et al., 2008). Children who are African American, impoverished, or attend a private school have greater access to full-day kindergarten programs than do children of other social and racial groups (Zvoch et al., 2008). As of 2006, only nine states required districts to offer full-day kindergarten classes to children (Graue, 2006) and as of 2008 about 65% of American children attended full-day kindergarten (Zvoch et al., 2008).

Kindergarten has also been affected by many states’ decisions to create academic learning content standards that indicate the knowledge and skills young children need to master by the end of each grade in order for schools to demonstrate their accountability. Such standards were not designed with young children’s learning needs in mind, but, rather, were crafted to reflect the learning needs and development of older students (Goldstein, 2007). Due to the emphasis on preparing children to score higher on standardized testing measures and meet all the standards requirements at the same time, more time has been allotted in the classroom for formal academic learning and less is being devoted to child-initiated learning and play activities. Some teachers feel like they have to “squeeze it [every curriculum and play experience] all in” to one day (Goldstein, 2007, p. 388). The result is teaching practices and activities that are appropriate for
kindergarten children often taking a back seat to teaching to the state or federally mandated standards.

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

**Definition and Rationale**

An outline for DAP was first published in the 1980s and encompassed multiple aspects of the program, teachers, and classroom environment providing standards for high quality early education of young children. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) officially defines DAP through published position statements and includes the rationale for such. Various reasons are cited for DAP, including: the early childhood years are an optimum time for the development of foundational skills, all children have the right to a quality early education, and children in high quality early childhood programs demonstrate positive outcomes, as compared to peers in low quality programs (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

There are 12 basic principles of child development and learning that are based on extensive research and inform DAP (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In brief, these are:

1. The domains of development—physical, social, emotional, and cognitive—are closely related. Development in one domain effects development in other domains.
2. Development advances in an orderly sequence, “with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired” (p. 11).
3. Development and learning proceed at varying rates across children and at unequal rates across areas of development within individual children.
4. Development results from a steady interaction between biological maturation and the environment, including the social context in which children live.

5. Early experiences have profound cumulative and delayed effects on children’s development; “optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning” (p. 12).


7. Children’s development occurs best when reliable relationships with responsive adults and constructive peer relationships are present.

8. Development and learning transpire in many social and cultural contexts and are influenced by such.

9. A broad variety of teaching strategies and interactions are effective in supporting the many ways in which children learn as they continually seek to understand the world around them.

10. Play is a significant medium for children to develop self-regulation skills, promote language development, cognitive skills, and social competence.

11. Development advances and learning takes place as children are challenged to achieve just beyond their current level of mastery and given opportunities to practice newly attained skills.

12. Life experiences shape children’s motivation for learning, and in turn, motivational behaviors affect children’s development and learning.

Three categories of core knowledge exist that an educator must possess in order to create a developmentally appropriate environment for young children: knowledge about
child development and learning and age-related characteristics, knowledge about each child as an individual, and knowledge about the social and cultural contexts in which children live (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Nelson & Smith, 2004). A developmentally appropriate program, whether in a preschool or public school, will focus the curriculum goals on aiding the whole child to develop. This means tailoring activities to help children learn and develop cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally, not solely focusing on children’s cognitive growth by primarily teaching formal academics. Such a program also seeks to meet the individual needs and interests of the children by promoting meaningful learning experiences in which children are challenged by the increasing complexity of the materials. Activities are planned in which children are given choices and during which they can explore and discover materials provided in an open-ended manner (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

An important element of developmentally appropriate programming for young children is that they are given ample time to play and explore through play. Time is allotted in which children are grouped in a variety of ways such as for independent exploration and learning, in small groups, and learning as a whole group. Child-teacher ratios are low, allowing teachers the opportunity to interact with children on a one-on-one basis and with small groups of children. Developmentally appropriate classroom environments are inviting and clean and provide a balance of learning areas for children: loud and quiet, active and engaging. The room is divided into areas in which children can develop varying skills, such as large and small motor skills, practice emerging literacy skills, work to develop basic mathematics skills and understanding, and develop socially
and emotionally. Multiple curricular areas are integrated throughout activities in the classroom (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

The teacher’s role in a developmentally appropriate classroom is to be a “facilitator of learning experiences” (Nelson & Smith, 2004, p. 76), rather than directing instruction and imparting knowledge to children. Materials in such a classroom are concrete, manipulable, and promote child learning by actively doing and constructing (Nelson & Smith, 2004). In developmentally appropriate classrooms, the environment is child-centered, allowing children to be active constructors of their own knowledge and learning (Charlesworth et al., 1993; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

DAP also focuses on involving and educating the family, working as partners in the child’s education. An integral part of DAP is that educators form reciprocal relationships with families, demonstrating respect and shared responsibility for the education of the young child. Teachers recognize that parents have a great deal of knowledge about their individual children and work with parents to acquire this knowledge from them. Parents are welcomed into the classroom and participate in the educational decisions of their children on a frequent basis, not only being included for “scheduled events” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 23) or for special occasions. Educators work to link families with appropriate community resources as the need arises.

**Research on Developmentally Appropriate Practice: DAB and DAP**

Although DAP and developmentally appropriate programming are optimal to help children reach their greatest learning potential, they are not always possible. Early childhood educators and programs face many challenges. Much of the research on DAP
focuses on the inconsistency between teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs (DAB) and their practices, and why such a discrepancy occurs (Charlesworth et al., 1993). DAB can be thought of as teachers’ beliefs about what is most suitable for young children and how best to educate them. Ideally, teachers’ DAB will be consistent with their practices, resulting in DAP, but, for a variety of reasons, this is not always the case. When DAB do not translate into DAP, developmentally inappropriate practices (DIP) ensue. Such practices are characterized by an emphasis on teaching basic skills and teacher-directed approaches to learning (Huffman & Speer, 2000). Numerous reasons exist as to why teachers embrace very developmentally appropriate beliefs, but do not translate them into developmentally appropriate practices. Large class sizes, pressure from administrators and colleagues, assessment mandates, time constraints, parental demands, and local curricular requirements are all various components of the DAB/DAP mismatch (Graue, 2001).

Hedge and Cassidy (2009) conducted a qualitative study in the city of Mumbai, India that demonstrated this observed dichotomy between DAB and DAP. They interviewed 12 kindergarten teachers who were selected from all four zones, or areas, in Mumbai given that each area was demographically and socioeconomically distinct. Three teachers were selected from every zone, with one from each teaching “lower” kindergarten, which children begin at age 4, and two teaching “upper” kindergarten, which children begin at age 5. All kindergarten programs in urban schools were half-day programs, running 2-3 hours in length. The researchers excluded low income schools from their sample selection because such are government schools with fewer resources and generally use languages other than English in which to teach. Hedge and Cassidy
were concerned that teachers at government schools may have had a skewed perception of DAP.

The teachers who participated in the study had between 3 and 22 years of early childhood care and education experience and were 22 to 54 years old. All were female. All had completed the one-year federal diploma requirements to acquire their teacher training. These programs focused on child-centered play ideas, but gave no thought to how feasible the ideas were in the early childhood settings of India (Hedge & Cassidy, 2009).

Hedge and Cassidy (2009) conducted interviews with the participating teachers and used a constant comparison method to refine acquired data. The researchers stated that children in developmentally appropriate programs were “more socially mature, less stressed, more creative, and show[ed] greater affinity towards school, than children who [were] placed in developmentally inappropriate classrooms” (p. 367). They found various themes reflecting DAP versus DIP and DAB from the interviews: “play way” versus “talk and chalk” (p. 371), worksheets as important and essential, various constraints on play, and struggles between beliefs and practices.

The play way classroom was what is known as more child-centered, allowing time for free-play. The talk and chalk classrooms were those in which teacher-directed activities dominated learning time. Hedge and Cassidy (2009) also found some teachers using a combination of the two approaches. Due to large class sizes and endeavoring to aid children in gaining skills for later formal education, many teachers viewed worksheets as an essential element in their classrooms, even though these are viewed as
developmentally inappropriate for young children and the teacher training they received focused on child-centered learning activities.

Most of the teachers felt play in the classroom was difficult to implement, even though they enjoyed it and felt it was an important element for the children’s learning. Parents were often cited as being a hindrance to implementing play-based activities because they lacked understanding of its importance and wanted the curriculum more academically oriented. Also, many classrooms lacked play materials and the funds to buy quality equipment. Another impediment for teachers was class size; they were frequently assigned to teach 50 to 70 children in one classroom and acknowledged that doing activities on a one-on-one basis, or that are developmentally appropriate as outlined by the NAEYC, was impossible, although many wanted to do so. Again, such practices demonstrate the inconsistency between DAB and DAP, noting teacher constraints. Teachers voiced the need for help or classroom assistance, whether it was parental volunteers or classroom aides, in order to implement play (Hedge & Cassidy, 2009).

The researchers further pointed out many of the teachers’ perceptions about teaching kindergarten and the challenges they faced. The teachers in India were taught in their training programs to teach in a child-centered manner, but many did not, or felt they could not, using whole group instruction and worksheets instead. They felt constrained mostly due to large class sizes, yet again demonstrating a discrepancy between DAB and DAP due to factors outside of their control. Hedge and Cassidy (2009) pointed out that many teachers in the United States have also shown this DAB versus DAP discrepancy. They noted that American educators share some of the same concerns with Indian
educators, in that parents often lack understanding of child-centered curriculum. Indian teachers cited low wages and lack of respect for the early childhood care and education field as problematic and a hindrance to implementing DAP, and a similar situation exists in the United States for early childhood educators.

Other researchers have also found this mismatch between teachers’ DAB and DAP. Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) conducted a qualitative study in which they interviewed 34 kindergarten teachers to examine more in-depth factors relating to this apparent disparity. The study took place in a rural, southeastern U.S. school district. All of the teachers in the study were female; about half held bachelor’s degrees (18) and about half master’s degrees (16). All but one identified themselves as Caucasian. These educators represented the entire population of kindergarten teachers within this particular school district. The teachers were interviewed and given surveys by the researchers to determine their beliefs and practices. The date of the research study was not mentioned, so it is unclear whether or not the wave of curriculum and testing mandates and associated challenges that has flooded schools due to NCLB influenced this set of teachers’ DAB and DAP.

Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) pointed out that most teachers admit to holding DAB about their practices due to the fact that DAP is seen as “politically correct” (p. 68) in the educational realm. Often teachers who show a substantial difference between their DAB and DAP are likely to attribute the discrepancy to environmental, parental, or administrative factors. The researchers found three types of teachers among their study participants: those who favored teacher-directed instructional practices (characterized by teacher lecture, worksheets, and little, if any, child choice in the
classroom), those who favored child-centered practices (characterized by child choice of activities, hands-on activities, and active child involvement), and those who favored a mixture of the two. Most of the teachers in the teacher-directed category felt that they had little control over the curriculum that they taught, and that the district mandated what was to be taught and how. In contrast, most of the child-centered group felt that they held total control of their teaching practices. They recognized that there was a specific curriculum the children needed to learn, but felt that they had the freedom to teach it in the way they felt was best for the children.

Another finding that the researchers noted was that teachers whose practice was more developmentally appropriate felt more pressure from educators of higher grades to prepare kindergarten children for first grade (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Teachers who were more teacher-directed and less developmentally appropriate in their teaching did not feel this pressure. One of the largest inconsistencies that Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett found was that most of the teachers in the study felt that all students benefitted from child-centered teaching approaches, regardless of their favored teaching method. Teachers’ beliefs, in this instance, did not always translate into DAP, or child-centered classrooms. The researchers also noted that in order to more accurately portray this DAB versus DAP mismatch, observations of teachers would be needed, in addition to self-report and interview measures, as were conducted in this study.

Despite the push for children to be prepared to take standardized tests, in a qualitative study, Goldstein (2007) found that, for the most part, two teachers effectively balanced DAP and locally mandated learning standards. However, Goldstein also came to some similar conclusions about teachers’ DAB and DAP as Parker and Neuharth-
Pritchett (2006). Goldstein (2007) conducted a qualitative case study involving two kindergarten teachers in Texas during the 2003-2004 school year. She investigated these teachers’ experiences balancing the responsibility to meet the developmental needs of their students with the expectations and accountability standards that accompany recent policies and mandates. The particular district from which these two teachers came held rigorous academic curriculum standards that impacted the content of kindergarten, with the possibility of going against teachers’ beliefs and practices. The two teachers who volunteered to participate had been teaching for 16 years total (9 years teaching kindergarten) and 5 years (4 years teaching kindergarten), respectively. They were both female and Caucasian and both taught full day kindergarten to primarily Caucasian students.

Goldstein (2007) conducted interviews with the two teachers and completed multiple observations of their classrooms. She found that with the wave of district and state curriculum standards came more content these teachers were required to teach, resulting in a fuller daily schedule and a quicker instructional pace. The teacher with more teaching experience relied heavily on an integrated approach in order to squeeze all the content into each day. Such an approach involved imbedding the state mandated knowledge and skills into child-centered, play-based activities. In this way, this teacher was able to balance her DAB and DAP. On the other hand, the teacher who had taught for five years relied more heavily on an approach called demarcation. In this approach, the standards and DAP received equal weight, yet separate time, in the classroom. Even though this teacher felt that play and child-choice were important for young children, she relied on more teacher-directed teaching methods to make sure the children learned the
mandated content, rather than on centers, or a hands-on approach, as the former teacher did. She allowed her students time for free play in the classroom when their work related to curriculum standards was finished.

Both teachers in this study additionally used acquiescence as a strategy. This strategy involved teaching content “using materials or strategies that might appear to be developmentally inappropriate in order to satisfy expectations and desires of students’ parents” (Goldstein, 2007, p. 392). Goldstein found that by so doing, these teachers went against their DAB in order to meet parental expectations; their beliefs and practices did not match. This was often the case in the area of giving kindergarten students homework and, at times, worksheets.

It is noteworthy to mention that not all researchers have found a DAB/DAP mismatch among kindergarten teachers. Stipek and Byler (1997) conducted a study of 60 preschool, kindergarten, and first grade teachers, combined, in part to assess teachers’ DAB and how these correlated with their DAP. Although the terms developmentally appropriate beliefs and developmentally appropriate practices were not specifically mentioned in the study, the researchers surveyed teachers to find out their beliefs, goals, and practices concerning how young children learn best and what they specifically taught in their classrooms, whether by emphasizing “basic skills” (p. 312) or academics or “child-centered practices,” (p. 312) such as play-based learning activities. These two emphases, basic skills and child-centered practices, can be seen as two ends of the developmentally appropriate continuum, with more developmentally appropriate practices at one end, and less developmentally appropriate practices, or DIP, at the other (Charlesworth et al., 1993).
In their study, Stipek and Byler (1997) observed and surveyed teachers from the three grade levels in public and private school settings. It is not mentioned where the study took place or how participants were chosen. For the purposes of this review, only the kindergarten teachers and their responses are considered, as far as it was possible to distinguish their answers from those of the preschool and first grade teachers. Of the 60 teachers in the study, 26 of them taught kindergarten. The majority of the kindergarten educators were either Latino or Caucasian. Among the three grade levels, the average years having taught school was 15. For the kindergarten teachers, their beliefs about best practices for young children highly correlated with their practices; the educators who espoused more child-centered beliefs were very likely to teach in a child-centered, or developmentally appropriate, manner. Also, the teachers who felt that basic skills needed to be taught were more likely to teach the children in their classrooms in this way than using a child-centered approach. Exactly half of the kindergarten teachers favored child-centered approaches. This study was carried out before NCLB was put into place, which may be why Stipek and Byler found such a positive correlation between teachers’ DAB and DAP, whereas others after NCLB have not (see Hedge & Cassidy, 2009; Goldstein, 2007; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006).

Although Stipek and Byler (1997) found that teachers in their study held beliefs highly correlated with their practices, it is significant to point out that eight of the kindergarten teachers felt the curriculum they taught was “a little more” or “much more” (p. 316) academic than they would like it to be. Overall, teachers reported parental pressure as the leading source for teaching in a more academically-oriented manner, rather than a using a more child-centered approach. Three teachers also felt pressure
from other sources, such as administrators, school or state curriculum, and standardized achievement tests which influenced their practices.

Some researchers have surveyed teachers to find out how more college education has influenced their DAP. Nelson and Smith (2004) surveyed a group of 30 early childhood master’s students at a university in Michigan to learn how taking a set of required early childhood classes changed their perceptions and implementation of DAP in their own classrooms. All of the teachers in the group had elementary education certification and some held early childhood certification. On average, they had taught for about seven years. Most of the teachers taught in prekindergarten through third grade classrooms. The researchers gave the educators a survey asking teachers to rate their change in DAP at the end of their master’s classes. The teachers had been exposed to and learned various ways to implement developmentally appropriate activities, materials, and methods over the course of their graduate academic career.

Nelson and Smith (2004) found that the master’s students reported a significant increase in the use of DAP in their classrooms. However, the researchers noted that not all of the teachers were able to implement DAP to its fullest due to lack of support from administrators and upper grade teachers. They did not include whether or not teachers’ DAB changed from taking the early childhood courses, only the hindrance experienced by some of the group in implementing DAP. Due to NCLB and the multitude of district and state testing mandates, public policy in general does not support DAP in the current educational climate that dominates public schools, but limits teachers’ “autonomy in making educational decisions in the best interests of children” (Hyun, 2003, p. 123). In
writing a position statement on DAP supported by the NAEYC, Copple and Bredekamp (2009) further supported this notion, stating:

It is unrealistic, however, to expect that they [early childhood educators] can fully implement those standards and practices [DAP] without public policies and funding that support a system of early childhood education that is grounded in providing high-quality developmentally appropriate experiences for all children.

(p. 23)

**Research on Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Effects of DAP**

Many positive outcomes have been shown by children in developmentally appropriate classroom settings as opposed to children in developmentally inappropriate environments. Developmentally inappropriate practices (DIP) are those in which the teacher’s practices, classroom environment, and/or curriculum are opposite of what is observed and carried out in a developmentally appropriate classroom. There are well-documented links between child stress behaviors and DIP and positive child outcomes and DAP (Burts et al., 1992; Charlesworth et al., 1993; Hedge & Cassidy, 2009). Burts and colleagues (1992) conducted a study involving 204 kindergarten children in developmentally appropriate and developmentally inappropriate classrooms to determine the level of stress the children exhibited in both. The study was conducted in various schools in a southern U.S. school district. Sixty of the sixty-four principals in the district agreed to allow their kindergarten teachers to participate. Of the participating teachers, 94% returned the study surveys. Teachers were then ranked according to their scores of developmental appropriateness to inappropriateness based on their survey answers.
Those teachers whose scores fell at least one standard deviation above or below the mean were asked to further participate. Twelve educators, six classified as developmentally appropriate and six classified as developmentally inappropriate, were included in the final portion of the study. The researchers did not include statistics on teacher ethnicity, gender, or number of years teaching. They did, however, include statistics on the children in the classrooms. The majority of participating children were Caucasian (about 61%) and the rest African American. The overall gender ratio was about half.

Burts and colleagues (1992) gave teachers a questionnaire containing questions about their beliefs and practices and employed raters to observe the teachers in their classrooms to rate them as developmentally appropriate or developmentally inappropriate. As was employed before by other researchers in the field, a continuous, rather than dichotomous, rating scale was used (see Charlesworth et al., 1993; Stipek & Byler, 1997). To measure child stress, observers used a scan sampling procedure along with a child stress behavior checklist. Observers would scan specific children for a 2-second period in a random order and then code their behavior. Behaviors were coded during a number of activities including teacher-directed whole group and small group, music, story time, transition, and worksheet activities.

The researchers found that, as a whole, “children in developmentally inappropriate classrooms exhibited significantly more stress behaviors than children in appropriate classrooms” (Burts et al., 1992, p. 313), particularly while waiting and during transition times and worksheet activities. Another finding suggested that boys in more developmentally inappropriate classrooms exhibited more stress behaviors than did boys in developmentally appropriate environments. There was no difference found among
girls’ stress behaviors across race or SES groupings. Burts and fellow researchers pointed out that some of the stress children were feeling could be due to home and school academic pressures felt at a young age, but also that there are possible long-term effects on children due to stress felt in school. The researchers noted that children in the low SES group and the African American group engaged in more activities that were developmentally inappropriate than did their Caucasian or high SES counterparts. This result was troubling to the researchers seeing as how “children who may be more likely to lack foundational experiences are having fewer opportunities to build necessary skills through appropriate experiences provided in the classroom” (p. 314). Burts and colleagues concluded by asserting the need for children to learn in ways that are developmentally appropriate, despite race and SES.

Despite the research in support of DAP and its positive outcomes, some researchers have found evidence supporting DIP (Huffman & Speer, 2000). Huffman and Speer pointed out that the outcome being measured makes a difference. When considering social and emotional outcomes, DIP has been shown to have negative effects on young children, whereas children in classrooms where basic academic skills learning happens in a developmentally inappropriate way have been shown to gain academically. This has been illustrated especially with children who are at-risk for school failure (low income, minority, urban children). However, studies also exist that support DAP and children’s academic gains. In response to this ambiguity of which program type yields greater academic outcomes, Huffman and Speer sought to test an at-risk population of young children in low DAP (DIP) and moderate DAP programs to determine academic learning outcomes of the two.
Huffman and Speer (2000) recruited their participants from kindergarten and first grade classes in 13 schools participating in a Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Project, the location of which was not stated. Children in the transition project were divided into experimental and control groups by matching them by ethnicity and income level. The children were mostly African American and Hispanic, with a few mixed race and Caucasian participants. The majority of families were eligible for federal aid in the form of AFDC or free lunch. The researchers used a sample of 28 classrooms where 3 or more children participated in the transition project and assessed these using the Assessment Profile to determine the level of DAP the teachers employed. On this particular observation method, classrooms could score as high as 99 (most DAP) and as low as 1 (least DAP, or most DIP). In this particular sample of kindergarten and first grade classrooms, the range of assessment scores was 28 to 35 for low DAP classes and 38 to 48 for moderate DAP classrooms. The researchers had intended to group classes by low and high DAP scores, but due to little variability in classroom scores, and low scores for the higher scoring group, they decided to re-label the high DAP group as “moderate” DAP (p. 181). Such a narrow range of scores on the assessment could support a notion researchers suggest: many educators carry beliefs that children who are low income and minority need more structure, more emphasis on basic academic skills, and more teacher-directed activities, all less DAP (Huffman & Speer, 2000; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Nothing was stated in this article about teachers’ ethnicity, years of teaching experience, level of educational attainment, or gender, nor about where or when the study took place.
Of all the children participating and tested in Huffman and Speer’s research (2000), 66 were in kindergarten (the rest were first grade children). The results reported in the study were mixed between the kindergarten and first grade classes, thus results reported here include assessments of children from both grades. The children were tested at the beginning and end of the school year using the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised (Woodcock & Johnson, 1990) measure to assess children’s learning in reading and math. The researchers noted that standardized testing has been criticized for being a developmentally inappropriate way of measuring young children’s abilities. The rationale used for utilizing such a measure was that children were tested individually rather than as a group and given a prize afterward.

The results of the tests indicated that children in the moderate DAP classrooms showed higher scores in letter-word recognition and applied problems, but there was no difference found between the two classroom types for children’s math calculations scores (Huffman & Speer, 2000). The researchers indicated that the score cut off for “low” and “moderate” DAP (p. 181) classrooms was very close and could have confounded the results of the research. They also noted the use of the standardized testing measure to, ironically, test the effects of DAP on children’s academic outcomes and, that by using such a measure, the full effects of DAP could have been underestimated. Even so, the difference between children’s scores in low and moderate DAP classrooms helps to support the body of research indicating positive learning outcomes from DAP.

In summary, many early childhood educators, both before and after the implementation of NCLB, have been shown to struggle with effectively implementing their DAB and translating these into DAP. Many face this challenge due to parental
expectations, pressure from administrators’ and colleagues, and district and state curriculum and testing mandates. Nevertheless, a good deal of research exists in support of DAP and the positive learning outcomes it has on children.

**Kindergarten Readiness and Transition**

**Kindergarten Readiness**

School readiness is tightly linked with children making the transition from prekindergarten, child care, or the home to the kindergarten environment. Transitioning to kindergarten has been described as the “focal point of readiness” (Dockett & Perry, 2008, p. 274). Yet there is not a set definition of “school readiness” (DiBello & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2008, p. 257), rather the definition is fluid and determined more based on local contexts. Some schools and communities have come to rely on children passing a standardized test to show that they are ready for school (Freeman & Brown, 2008; Graue, 1992). One possible definition is that readiness implies mastery of certain basic skills and abilities that allow children to function successfully in the school environment (Hair, Halle, Terry-Humen, Lavelle, & Calkins, 2006). Despite the lack of overall consensus as to what school readiness is, children’s level of readiness greatly determines and effects their placement in the classroom and the instructional planning that takes place on the part of the teacher (Graue, 1992).

There has been much debate over what readiness implies, whether it is readiness to learn, or readiness for school (Kagan, 2003). Kagan (2003) has pointed out that children begin learning, and are “ready to learn” (p. 115), well before entering formal schooling; such phraseology should not be limited to academic settings. In 1989, and
reaffirmed in later years, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) stated that by the year 2000 all children would begin school “ready to learn” (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008, p. 289; DiBello & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2008, p. 257; Graue, 1992, p. 226; Kagan, 2003, p. 115; Kagan & Kauerz, 2007, p. 15). The panel included in the concept of school readiness “a collective endeavor that includes children’s readiness to enter school, school’s readiness for children, and family and community support” (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008, p. 289; Dockett & Perry, 2008). However, by that year, no clear direction as to how to accomplish such a task had been given, and each state held a unique way of measuring the school readiness of young children.

Recently, NEGP, in connection with numerous scholars, identified five domains of school readiness they believed must be addressed when considering the issue: physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge (DiBello & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2008; Kagan, 2003). DiBello and Neuharth-Pritchett (2008) stated that “children will not enter school ready to learn unless schools, families, and communities work together to provide learning environments and experiences that address the development of the whole child” (p. 257). Dockett and Perry (2008) and Graue (1992) concur with this view that, even though definitions of school readiness vary across communities, readiness should include schools being ready for incoming kindergarten children, and being sensitive to community and family expectations.

Other research conducted also upholds the notion that children’s moral, behavioral, and self-regulatory qualities more accurately describe school readiness than
do solely cognitive and academic skills (Jeynes, 2006). Despite NEGP’s statement including various domains of readiness for both children and schools (National Education Goals Panel [NEGP], 1992; Shore, 1998), many states and districts still rely on standardized testing methods to narrowly measure only one aspect of children’s school readiness: academic knowledge, particularly in the areas of reading or English proficiency and mathematics skills (Lahaie, 2008). Kagan (2003) stated: “It is important to note that all five dimensions constitute the content of readiness; any assessment that reduces readiness to fewer than these five dimensions is inadequate” (p. 118).

On the other hand, some views suggest that readiness, or lack thereof, lies within the child, that it is biologically predetermined and time bound, rather than viewing readiness as preparing school environments for all children, regardless of where they are in their development (Shore, 1998; Winter & Kelley, 2008). Yet, schools themselves are often not prepared to nurture children in environments that promote their learning in developmentally appropriate ways due to curriculum being pushed down from higher to lower grades. In many cases, school readiness initiatives have taken the form of getting the child ready for school, forgetting that readiness is also a family and community endeavor (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Mangione & Speth, 1998; Winter & Kelley, 2008). Clark and Zygmunt-Fillwalk (2008) have pointed out that, because school readiness and transitioning to kindergarten encompasses multiple aspects of a child’s life, “it is necessary to move beyond a model that solely examines a child’s skill level to assess readiness and toward a framework that examines the relationship between multiple contextual factors” (p. 289). Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, and Cox’s work (1999) is
consistent with this view, and they have stated that, in order to understand children’s transitioning to school, the influence of family and community must be considered.

Graue (2006) and Gullo and Burton (1992) pointed out that increased curriculum expectations and the pushed down curriculum phenomena may be leading educators to view incoming kindergarten children as unready to begin school, when in reality the children may simply lack experiences related to the escalated kindergarten curriculum. In addition, it is not uncommon for parents to hold their children out of kindergarten, primarily young boys, generally for social and emotional reasons. Such parents feel that their children are not ready to enter formal schooling, although they have reached the age of five, and would benefit from being the oldest in the class or starting school knowing more (Graue, 1992). However, older, more knowledgeable kindergarteners present a unique challenge for teachers: classes are not always homogeneously composed of such children, but more often mixed with children who come from lower SES backgrounds and have fewer skills than their peers. It can be difficult for teachers to meet the needs of such a wide developmental range of children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Graue, 1992).

**Kindergarten Transition**

The transition to kindergarten is an important stepping stone in the lives of young children and their families. It represents a child’s commencement of their formal academic career and can be a stressful time due to many factors such as heightened academic demands on children moving from preschool to the kindergarten environment (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Many activities have been implemented by schools and professionals to help smooth this transition. However, researchers have found that, in general, teachers and schools use more generic, impersonal, low intensity forms of
kindergarten transition activities to aid children and families with this life transition (Nelson, 2004).

**Teachers’ transition practices.** In order to gain a greater perspective of which kindergarten transition practices teachers used and perceived barriers to implementing these, Pianta and colleagues (1999) conducted a study during the 1996-1997 school year in which they surveyed a nationally representative sample of kindergarten teachers. The researchers created their own survey and sent it to 10,071 randomly selected kindergarten teachers nationwide chosen from a list representing about 98% of all teachers in the US. The response rate was rather low, at 36%. However, due to oversampling in various categories of teachers (such as teachers from urban, high poverty, high minority schools), the researchers stated that the sample was still nationally representative.

The survey employed contained two sections: the first listed 21 transition practices and asked educators to designate which ones they used, and the second listed 15 factors as potential barriers to implementing transition practices and asked teachers to identify which ones applied to them (Pianta et al., 1999). The researchers found that the majority of teachers used impersonal, low intensity, generic forms of contact after school had started as transition practices, employing these types of practices with increasing frequency in school districts that were urban, had higher percentages of minority students, and higher poverty rates. Such practices included talking with parents after school had begun, sending letters or flyers home, and holding open houses. The researchers pointed out that, due to the nature of the survey, they were unsure if some of the generic forms of transition practices (for instance, holding open houses) were specifically kindergarten transition practices, or merely activities conducted school or
district wide at the start of each school year. Research carried out by McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, and Wildenger (2007) also indicated that low SES families reported being less involved in kindergarten transition activities than higher SES families, which could possibly be due to the generic nature of the activities.

Although any form of transition activity and resource can be helpful to families, recommendations by organizations such as the NAEYC suggest that, in order for transitions to be smooth and most positive for the child and family, practices need to be more personal, establish a relationship with the family, and take place before the beginning of the school year, for example, in the form of a home visit or phone call (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Some teachers in the study by Pianta and colleagues (1999) noted that they did visit children in their homes, both before and after the start of classes, however, this practice was rated the lowest in frequency out of all the transition practices named in the survey (on average, less than 8% of teachers reported conducting home visits after the start of the school year and less than 5% reported visiting children’s homes before the beginning of school). Other least utilized practices also included those of a more personal nature and those that occurred before the beginning of school, for instance calling the child on the phone and visiting preschools.

A very interesting finding was that in rating which practices were a “good idea” (Pianta et al., 1999, p. 79), teachers named the more personal, high intensity activities last, like visiting preschools, having preschool children (incoming kindergarteners) visit the kindergarten class, calling children before (or after) school begins, home visits, and meeting the child and family before school starts. The more impersonal, low intensity forms of transition practices, as sending letters home to parents (before or after school
starts), holding open houses, and talking with parents after the start of classes, were rated highest among the practices that were deemed to be good ideas. These results are troubling as it is taken into account that the more personal, intense transition activities are the ones that form the stronger relationship between families and schools and more effectively support the child in making the transition to kindergarten (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008).

The second part of the survey given by Pianta and his fellow researchers (1999) dealt with perceived barriers to carrying out transition practices. The most pervasive were that class lists were generated too late by the school, teachers who work during the summer do not get paid extra for their time, schools or districts have no set transition plan in place, too much time is involved, and there is a lack of funding for transition activities. A smaller number of teachers, yet near 30%, reported family-related barriers, for instance, not being able to contact parents, danger in visiting children in their homes, and parents not bringing their children to school, as issues to implementing transition practices. These barriers were felt more by teachers in urban, high poverty, and high minority school settings.

The researchers pointed out that, even though there are numerous barriers to helping children and families experience a smooth transition to kindergarten, these can be overcome (Pianta et al., 1999). They indicated that administrators and districts can be more supportive in helping to do things like creating class lists earlier, commissioning parents and early childhood educators to create transition plans for schools, and helping community agencies in becoming involved.
**Community-based transition activities.** Other researchers have noted how communities, families, and schools have collaborated to create smooth school transitions for children entering kindergarten. Successful transitions are essential for young children beginning formal schooling because research has shown that the attitudes and behaviors established as children make transitions early in life, like from preschool to kindergarten, follow them through the rest of their academic career. Thus, it is important for children to experience smooth transitions, helping them to develop positive attitudes and behaviors. For example, children who have a difficult adjustment to their first year of formal schooling are more likely to have a hard time adjusting in subsequent years (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

Various states and communities nationwide have adopted a “ready schools” attitude (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008, p. 289), meaning they prepare schools to meet the varying needs of the children entering, rather than requiring that incoming kindergarteners adhere to a certain readiness standard (Freeman & Brown, 2008). In 2004, Indiana and various other states participated in a project to create schools ready to receive new kindergarten children (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008). This initiative included rating schools using the Ready School Assessment (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2007), which contained eight areas of assessment such as diversity, assessing progress, transition, and family involvement. Upon completion of the assessment at each school, the assessment team (made up of administrators, early childhood professionals, parents, and community agency personnel) convened to discuss ways the school could improve. All participating schools scored lowest on the transition
section, particularly in the area of communication between early childhood programs and elementary schools.

Other researchers have also found that early childhood and elementary programs struggle with effective communication about children before the start of the school year (Kagan & Neuman, 1998). Part of Ready Schools programming involved kindergartens making more of an effort to communicate with preschool and other programs children attended before entering kindergarten (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008). Most of the past lack of communication between the two programs has been shown to be due to a lack of understanding of programs and philosophies and the physical distance between them. However, even preschool programs housed in elementary school buildings had limited communication and curriculum alignment with kindergarten classrooms. In the case of Indiana, few public schools had funding for preschools within elementary school facilities, consequently kindergarten teachers did not make the effort to reach out to pre-kindergarten programs outside of the public school system. This result has been found by other researchers as well (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003).

The Ready School Assessment also indicated that teachers from both preschool and kindergarten programs lacked knowledge of curriculum of the other program (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008). In addition, the assessment revealed that schools did not hold formal transition activities for children prior to the first day of school. The most common forms of transition activities engaged in by schools occurred in a generic way, taking place after the first day of class, often in the form of flyers or open houses. Research has shown that, in order to ensure a smooth transition to kindergarten for children, contact needs to be made with the family in a more personal manner before the
school year commences (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In response to research and the Ready School Assessment, all schools participating in the initiative organized events for incoming kindergarten students and their families prior to the beginning of school. Despite the many positive outcomes of the Ready Schools program in Indiana, the authors do not indicate how children and families have benefited from the changes.

Similar initiatives have taken place in other countries, such as Australia. Dockett and Perry (2008) described various actions taken by diverse communities to assist children and families during the time of transitioning to school. The researchers stated that “relationships are the core of successful transitions” (p. 275), and pointed out that supportive relationships need to occur among children, families, schools, and the community. They described how in various Australian communities, educators reached out to families and community members to provide smooth transitioning for young children. Some of their programs included a picnic in the park begun in 2002 for children beginning school where children received a bag of resources and parents were provided with written and verbal information; a School Expo where schools from surrounding areas came and provided information about their school; and regular community meetings, open to whomever desired to attend, of the Transition to School Network, created to facilitate community events around children’s school transition.

Although much has taken place in these communities, Dockett and Perry (2008) did not disclose how effective these transition activities have been, how many families have been reached or have attended the events, or the impact the events have had on incoming kindergarten children, only that these programs have been a way for the
community and schools to provide transition support to families and children. It is significant to note that schools providing transition activities and services to children and families are using a large amount of resources, both of time and money, to help ensure a more smooth transition to school for children. Such a use of resources demonstrates in a way the importance of fostering a smooth school transition for young children.

**Benefits of a smooth kindergarten transition.** Much research has been conducted supporting the view that the smoother children’s transition is to kindergarten, the more positive the benefits, for instance outperforming peers in reading and math. Children who experience a difficult school transition have a difficult time catching up with peers later and are more likely to drop out of school early (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008). Regarding the transition to kindergarten and why it can be challenging for some children, Rimm-Kaufman and colleagues (2000) stated:

> Because of the heightened academic goals associated with kindergarten and because children have had such diverse experiences preceding school entrance, some children are more successful than others in meeting these new demands [in kindergarten]. Thus, the transition into kindergarten poses a challenge to children and produces a wide range of responses to school transition among children. (p. 148)

LoCasale-Crouch and colleagues (2008) conducted a study seeking to examine the association between prekindergarten teachers’ use of transition activities and kindergarten teachers’ subsequent ratings of the incoming kindergarten children’s social competence. The study was conducted during the 2001-2002 school year with participants from six different states. The researchers used stratified random sampling to
select prekindergarten classrooms from four states and random sampling to choose prekindergarten classrooms from two geographically large states. Within each classroom, four children were randomly selected. After the initial sample was chosen and some data were collected, nearly 300 children were dropped from the study due to preschool teachers not providing information about transition activities and kindergarten teachers failing to rate children’s initial adjustment to school. The final sample of children who participated in the study was 722. Upon analyzing this sample of children compared to the original sample chosen, the researchers found that the children who were dropped from the study tended to be poor, have mothers with lower levels of education, and be of minority ethnicity. The difference between the two samples could have affected the results of the study. The teachers in the study in both prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms were predominantly female, held a bachelor’s degree or higher, and were Caucasian.

To investigate the association between transition activities in prekindergarten and children’s social competence in kindergarten, LoCasale-Crouch and fellow researchers (2008) used survey and observation methods. Preschool teachers were surveyed during the spring of 2002 and asked to select which of nine transition activities they had engaged in and/or planned to engage in. This list included items such as taking their class of prekindergarten children to visit a kindergarten class, visiting with parents on an individual basis about their child making the transition to kindergarten, holding a spring orientation with parents and children, and sharing written records with kindergarten teachers. Children in the study were followed into their kindergarten year and kindergarten teachers rated them using the Teacher-Child Rating Scale (Hightower et al.,
1986), a measure used to rate children’s social and emotional competencies. The Academic Rating Scale (Perry & Meisels, 1996) was also used by teachers to measure children’s language and literacy skills, including speaking, listening, early reading, and writing proficiency. The researchers controlled for extraneous variables that could possibly affect study outcomes, for instance child’s sex, race, mother’s level of education, and family poverty status.

Findings of the study supported the idea that the more transition activities prekindergarten teachers engage in, the more socially competent their children are rated in kindergarten (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). The researchers found that the more transition practices employed by teachers of African American students, the higher or more positively their kindergarten teachers rated them on areas of social competence, as compared to the Caucasian students in the study. Also, other minority children whose preschool teachers employed more transition activities were rated less negatively on the scale of behavior problems than were their Caucasian counterparts.

Of the transition practices listed on the survey, nearly 75% of preschool teachers reported taking their classes to visit kindergarten classrooms before the end of the school year. Also, 78% of prekindergarten teachers reported visiting kindergarten classrooms. The most pervasive practice engaged in was the sharing of student records with kindergarten teachers; 79% of preschool teachers indicated that they engaged in this practice. Overall, preschool teachers were shown to engage in an average of almost six of the nine transition practices yearly listed in the survey. On the other hand, kindergarten teachers did not frequently visit prekindergarten classrooms; only about 42% of them reported doing so. It is noteworthy to mention that, in this study, the
preschool teachers were mostly the ones reaching out to kindergarten teachers and hosting or participating in transition activities (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). La Paro and colleagues (2003) also found that a greater percentage of preschool teachers participated in transition activities to help their students get ready to enter kindergarten than did kindergarten teachers. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) pointed out that helping children make the transition to kindergarten is not the sole responsibility of preschool teachers, but a joint effort between preschool and kindergarten teachers, and parents and the community.

Conclusion

This review has summarized the founding of kindergarten and its original purpose in the lives of young children. The Froebelian kindergarten model was intended to assist children in beginning formal schooling, creating a link between the home and school environments, where children could play and begin exploring the world. In more recent years, standardized testing and worksheet use have overpowered this original play-based kindergarten model. Much of this change has been due to NCLB with its numerous stipulations as to what children should learn by certain ages. Other changes in the face of kindergarten include more rigorous academics being taught, resulting in the phenomena of the pushed down curriculum and multiple state and district curricular and testing mandates.

Research has demonstrated that DAP produces positive child outcomes. DAP encompasses many aspects of the learning environment, the ways in which children are taught, and the knowledge a teacher holds about child development. Despite the positive
outcomes from DAP, many kindergarten teachers feel pressure to teach in a manner that is inconsistent with their DAB, in a way that is developmentally inappropriate. Various factors exist as to why many teachers feel such demands, including large class sizes, lack of parental and administrative support, and curricular restraints. Most research supports positive child outcomes from DAP and more negative child outcomes from DIP, although there is some research to the contrary.

The transition to kindergarten is an important event in the lives of young children, their families, and the community. Several states and communities have expended large amounts of time, money, and other resources to aid in this life transition. However, research on large scale transition activities lacks the link as to how such efforts have aided children and families during this transition time. Much research focuses on the smaller percentage of children who do not experience a smooth transition into kindergarten and such children’s tendency to experience lasting outcomes. Research also shows that many teachers feel constraints in helping children successfully make this transition, including lack of time, lack of salary, and children’s familial factors.

This study adds to the body of research knowledge about teachers’ perceived challenges and concerns with educating young children. Kindergarten teachers’ perceptions about teaching today are explored, particularly in the areas of a mismatch between developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices, and children’s readiness and transition to kindergarten.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Extant data from the Utah Kindergarten Transition Practices Study conducted during the 2004 to 2007 school years were used for this study. Each year, surveys were sent to kindergarten teachers in about one third of Utah school districts. Data obtained from kindergarten teachers concerning their developmentally appropriate beliefs (DAB) and developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and their transition practices at the beginning of the school year were previously analyzed using quantitative methods. This study examined teachers’ qualitative comments written at the back of the pre- and posttest surveys from all three waves, and compared common themes about teacher concerns and challenges.

Participants

Study participants were kindergarten teachers from all three waves of the Utah Kindergarten Transition Practices Study. Each year, about one-third of the kindergarten teachers in the school districts in the state of Utah were contacted and invited to participate in the study. Overall, 693 surveys were completed from both the pre- and posttests, out of 1418 total surveys sent out (709 were sent out for the pretest and again for the posttest) with a response rate of 48.87%. Of these, 180 respondents filled out both the pre- and posttest surveys, for a total of 513 participating teachers. However, only 130 questionnaires had written comments at the survey’s conclusion. Of these 130 questionnaires, 62 had responses pertinent to the research question for this study. Remarks not relevant to exploring educators’ concerns about teaching, such as, “This
survey took longer than 20 minutes,” or that were about something other than teachers’
challenges, were not included. Seven teachers wrote remarks on both the pre- and post-
surveys, thus, only fifty-five teachers were included in this study. The teachers’
comments included in this study were chosen on the basis of educators expressing
concerns and challenges about education. Upon analysis, two pervasive categorical
themes were found. These categories had the highest percentage of comments in them
and included teachers’ comments surrounding the topics of DAB versus DAP and
kindergarten readiness and transition. Three less prominent topics were also noted, with
fewer comments made pertaining to them. Comments fitting into these themes
surrounded issues with time, emphasis on academics, and parental involvement. Often,
parts of one teacher’s survey comments pertained to more than one theme and were
coded accordingly. There were a few comments that did not fit into the above five
categories and were excluded due to the small number of teachers, often only one,
expressing thoughts on other topics. The 55 teachers whose comments were used in this
study represent 10.72% of the 513 participating teachers who filled out the entire survey.

**Participant Characteristics**

Respondents to the full survey represented 36 of the 40 school districts in the state
of Utah. Not all district superintendents allowed research within their districts. In this
study, the 130 comments received were written by teachers representing 22 districts in
the state of Utah and the 55 teachers whose comments were analyzed for the study came
from 16 districts. For demographic information, responses on the pretests were used for
teachers who included comments on both the pre- and posttests.
Of the 54 teachers who reported ethnicity, 48 (87.27%) described themselves as White or Caucasian; 2 (3.64%) as coming from multiple ethnic origins; and 1 as coming from each of the following ethnic groups: Asian, Hispanic, and “other” (1.81% each). All teachers had received at least a bachelor’s degree and 11 (20%) reported having received a master’s degree. None of the teachers in this group indicated having earned a doctorate degree. Concerning certification at the state level, most teachers (52, or 94.55%) reported holding Early Childhood certification, 41 (74.55%) reported that they held an Elementary Education (K-6) certificate, and one reported an Education (K-12) certificate. Fourteen educators (25.45%) noted they held an ESL endorsement and seven teachers (12.73%) stated they had a certificate or specialization in special education. Seven teachers (12.73%) also indicated they held a preschool certificate. Four educators (7.27%) indicated certification in reading, two (3.64%) noted a specialization in teaching gifted and talented students, and five (9.09%) indicated a certificate in a category not included above. Educators had, on average, 14.9 years of teaching experience and 9.8 years of experience teaching kindergarten children ($SD = 9.27$ and 8.13, respectively). The range for teaching experience was 0 to 39 years, with 0 years being first year teachers, while the range for kindergarten teaching experience was 0 to 30 years.

**School and Classroom Characteristics**

Of the 55 teachers in this study, 54 noted the type of geographic region in which they taught. Most teachers (25, or 45.50%) indicated teaching school at facilities located in suburban areas or small towns (19, or 34.50%). Only five teachers (9.10%) reported teaching in an urban area, with five others in rural areas. The average number of students enrolled in the schools represented was 600.30, with a $SD$ of 272.88, and range of 62 to
However, only 37 teachers reported school enrollment numbers. All teachers reported how many children were in their classes, the mean being 22.67 students, with a SD of 4.52 and range of 6 to 30 children. On average, within their classroom, teachers reported 18.04 Caucasian children, 3.64 Hispanic children, 1.50 children from multiple ethnic origins, 0.85 Asian/Pacific Islander children, 0.63 American Indian/Native Alaskan children, 0.53 Black-not Hispanic children, and 1.37 children who did not fit into any of the aforementioned ethnic categories.

**Measures**

Two measures combined into one survey packet were used in the original study (see Appendix A). The first, the Transition Practices Survey (National Center for Early Development and Learning [NCEDL], 1996), gathered demographic information about teachers and their students, for example, years of teaching experience and class size. It also examined teachers’ perceptions of children’s transition to kindergarten to gain information regarding teachers’ views of the frequency of problematic issues related to kindergarten transition. An example question from the kindergarten transition section follows:

Based on your experience, approximately what percentage of children who enter kindergarten fall into the following categories? Make sure these numbers total 100%.

___% 1. Very successful entry, virtually no problems

___% 2. Moderately successful entry, some problems, mostly minor

___% 3. Difficult or very difficult entry, serious concerns or many problems.
For this question, teachers filled in the blanks with percentages of children they deemed fit into each category.

The second measure, the Teacher Beliefs and Practices Survey (Burts, Buchanan, & Benedict, 2001), was used to obtain information about teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs (DAB) and the implementation of such (developmentally appropriate practices [DAP] in the classroom). This measure had two parts. Part I of the Teacher Beliefs and Practices Survey consisted of 43 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 meaning “not at all important,” 5 indicating “extremely important”) demonstrating teachers’ beliefs about classroom practices. For example, one question in the survey asked, “As an evaluation of children’s progress, readiness or achievement tests are ____.” The teacher then used the rating scale to indicate the importance he or she placed on this item.

Part II of the Teacher Beliefs and Practices Survey (Burts et al., 2001) consisted of 30 items asking teachers about how often children in their classroom engaged in certain activities. Again, this section was based on a Likert-type scale with 1 indicating “Almost Never” and 5 stating “Very Often.” For example, one question stated, “How often do children in your class build with blocks.” The teacher then rated his or her class using the Likert scale (Darnell, 2008).

The final page of the survey was left blank with the heading “Comments or Reactions” for teachers to voluntarily write further remarks. The information gathered from this section is the basis of this study. Only comments relating to the five main categories of challenges teachers expressed were considered, as was previously explained.
Procedure

The sample was selected by first obtaining a list of each of the school districts in the state of Utah. Phone calls were made and a letter of intent sent to all superintendents of the districts, informing them of the research opportunity and explaining what the study would entail (Darnell, 2008). This letter also included how data would be treated (confidentially) and how often kindergarten teachers would be contacted (four times after initial contact at the beginning of the school year and four times again at the end of the school year). Superintendents were informed of how results would be shared (cumulative results sent to district superintendents and participating teachers) and that the study was voluntary in nature. Upon accepting participation in the study, superintendents were asked to supply names and email addresses of all kindergarten teachers within their district. Survey packets were then mailed to all kindergarten teachers in the participating districts within the first 6 weeks of the school year and during the last 6 weeks of the school year.

Within each packet was a letter of explanation about what participation in the study entailed, how and when to complete the survey form and return it in the postage-paid envelope, and the assurance that teachers would obtain a copy of the study’s results. In the letter, it was also stated that participation was voluntary and that information would remain confidential, as each teacher would create her own personal identification number code. This code aided the researchers in tracking the district in which the teacher taught and which phase of the study the teacher was participating in. Teachers were sent two reminder emails and two reminder postcards within the first 6 weeks of the school year and again within the last 6 weeks of the school year.
Names of teachers were not obtained, nor was any other identifying information requested besides initial contact information, which was destroyed upon completion of the study. Completed surveys are now kept in a locked graduate office in the Family Life building. However, they still contain numerical codes created by participating teachers and are organized by school district.

**Ethical Considerations**

Prior to implementation of the original study, IRB approval was obtained and no foreseeable risks identified. A letter of intent was sent to all superintendents of the districts in Utah, and a similar letter later sent to participating kindergarten teachers, informing them of the research opportunity and explaining what the study would entail. This letter also included information about the confidentiality of data, frequency of contact with kindergarten teachers, how results would be sent to district superintendents and participating teachers, and the voluntary nature of the study.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed following the method outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) detailing the development of a qualitative coding system. First, teachers’ comments were read through and responses pertaining to teachers’ challenges and concerns were marked and considered for further analysis. Those comments not applicable to the study questions were disregarded, such as those regarding survey length. Next, teacher responses that were potentially pertinent were again read through and common categories and themes were written down. Words or phrases were noted representing each category.
The number of teachers who made comments in each category was summed and the topics with the largest percentage of teachers were included in the findings. The comments relating to the mismatch between DAB and DAP, kindergarten readiness and transition, challenges regarding time, curriculum becoming too academic for kindergarten, and parental involvement were analyzed for this study due to the highest number of teacher comments in each of these areas.

After initial analysis of the data, and a coding scheme was written out describing each of the above coding categories (see Appendix B), data were given to another individual for coding of all comments used in this study. This person was familiar with early childhood and had recently received a bachelor’s degree in Family, Consumer, and Human Development. The coding scheme was explained to her in detail and some of the teachers’ comments practice coded with the author. The initial intercoder reliability after all data used in this study were coded by both the author and the second coder was 71%. In order to achieve a higher intercoder reliability percentage, the author compared her coding of the data with the second coder’s and discussed in detail with the coder why she and the author coded comments differently. Concerning most of the comments that had been coded differently, the coder had been unsure as to which coding category they fell under. After discussing the coding and data, the coder recoded the data and the intercoder reliability was 89% for the comments that differed and 97% overall, including all comments made by teachers used in this study.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Upon studying teachers’ comments and grouping them according to common categories and themes, it was found that teachers expressed a variety of concerns and challenges about teaching kindergarten children. However, following analysis and grouping of the comments according to similar categories, two pervasive concerns or challenges were found: a mismatch between developmentally appropriate beliefs (DAB) and developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and challenges relating to children being ready for kindergarten and making this transition. Three less prominent concerns were also noted by teachers with regard to challenges involving time; concerns about curriculum becoming too academic for kindergarten; and matters concerning parental involvement, in and outside of the classroom. These themes are discussed in this chapter from most commonly expressed concerns to least commonly expressed. Most comments made by each teacher fit into more than one theme, with parts classed as more than one subcategory. Each part of the comment was coded accordingly.

A section is provided at the end describing some of the descriptive statistics which pertain to the study. Throughout this chapter, teachers’ overall number of years of teaching experience is reported, with years of kindergarten experience following in parenthesis.

DAB Versus DAP

The majority of teachers in this study (31 out of 55, or 56%) included some kind of remark about how their DAB did not always translate into DAP. Three teachers made
comments falling into this category on both their pre- and post-surveys. Few teachers used the terms developmentally appropriate beliefs and developmentally appropriate practices; most instead used expressions such as, “best practices,” “what is best for children,” and talked about meeting the children’s needs. Educator comments contained a large assortment of reasons for the DAB versus DAP mismatch, the most prevalent being large class sizes, district and state mandates and expectations, and lack of resources. Most of the teachers wrote about multiple reasons they felt impeded the implementation of their DAB.

**Large Class Sizes**

Fifteen teachers communicated that their class was much too large for them to adequately teach material, particularly in a developmentally appropriate manner. The average class size of these 15 teachers was 26.67 students, 4 students more than the average class size of all study participants. One teacher with 12 years of teaching experience (9 in kindergarten) affirmed, “I have 28 students (no aide) this year. . . . There are many things I believe in/would’ve liked to have done this year, but it was difficult with a HUGE class . . . .” Two additional educators spoke about this issue in a similar manner. One, who had been teaching school for eight years (two in kindergarten), stated, “I do my best to teach using ‘best practice,’ now if you could do something about having 26 plus students in a class (with no aide), then that would be something.” The other teacher, who had been teaching children for 22 years (9 in kindergarten), lamented, “Many of my ‘personal beliefs’ on the best, most ideal early childhood education teaching strategies cannot be achieved with such large class sizes! . . . That is one of my biggest frustrations.” She continued on to verbalize how she had changed by
compromising what she thought was best and why, “In order to maintain control [of the] class and a happy safe environment, I compromise on teaching strategies that work but [are] not my first choice of what is the best.”

Other educators solely stated that there were too many children for a kindergarten class, without connecting their comments to their DAB or DAP. One instructor, who taught 29 students in her class and had been teaching for 17 years (only 3 years teaching kindergarten), noted the effect of class size in her statement, “Class size . . . makes a world of difference.” Another teacher who had been teaching much longer (26 years, 23 of which was with kindergarteners) expressed how she felt about the number of children in her class, “28 students who are very needy is way too many! (But I have had years where I had 34 in a class.)”

Some teachers even communicated the need for the state to place an enrollment cap on class sizes. One of these, who had been teaching school for three years (all in kindergarten), expressed her dissatisfaction and frustration with the number of students she was given and the need for change:

I feel that if Kindergarten class sizes were smaller the students who did not benefit from a pre-school program would be better off. It is extremely difficult to work with 28 students at one time. The state needs to do something about regulating the number of students in K-3 classes.

Another teacher with 17 years experience teaching (14 years in kindergarten) also articulated this same thought in her comment, “One class per teacher with 20 or less students. Make a ‘law’ no more than 20 in a class!” This teacher taught 24 students in her classroom.
Mandates and Expectations

Eleven teachers expressed frustrations over not being able to implement their DAB to their liking due to local and state policies and curricular expectations. As one teacher with nine years of teaching experience (four years teaching kindergarten) wrote, “I struggle with providing an early childhood learning environment with the expectations from the district and the state. I see it also as a frustrating experience for the children.”

Other teachers articulated similar thoughts. One, with 18 years of teaching experience (12 years with kindergarten students), stated, “I would love to teach the way that is best for children. But the state regs [regulations], district and public anxiety over reading . . . prevents me from really teaching children the way that is good for them.” Another educator, who was a first year teacher, noted her challenge with implementing her developmentally appropriate beliefs:

In the Teacher Beliefs section [of the survey] I do believe many of those things but they are hard to implement in the public school environment. With everything the district demands, it is sometimes hard to do the practices I believe work. An additional teacher who had been teaching for 13 years (8 years in kindergarten) expressed how the programs and mandates in her district held her back from teaching according to her beliefs:

Many of the practices I do are driven by literacy programs our district has mandated. They require us to do it. I feel it does not meet all of the students’ needs—the fact that they are just young children and need to play are not considered. My beliefs sometimes conflict with these mandates.
Few educators told of how they continued to implement their beliefs in spite of local mandates and expectations. Two did, however, one of which shared her irritation with the pressure she felt to change and stop play in the classroom. She had taught school for 19 years (12 in kindergarten) and shared:

I have become quite frustrated at the mounting pressure to reduce or eliminate play from kindergarten in favor of constant “literacy” experiences. I have kept the dramatic play area, blocks, play dough, painting easel and a time each day when children can choose what they want to do. I can’t eliminate it. It is their favorite thing. When we don’t have it they really miss it and let me know. To me that means they need it.

Lack of Resources

Eleven teachers listed a number of resources they lacked, the influence of which they felt inhibited their ability to translate their DAB into DAP. Some of these resources included time, and other general resources, such as funding, space, and a classroom aide. Two teachers who wrote remarks on the survey commented on both their pre- and post-surveys about feeling the lack of resources in their classroom and how this impeded them from implementing their DAB. Some of the educators mentioned both time and other resources they lacked.

Length of kindergarten day. Seven teachers expressed how they felt the kindergarten day was not long enough in conjunction with comments about their beliefs and what they judged to be best practices for young children. For instance, one new teacher with only two years of teaching experience (one of which was in kindergarten) stated, “It’s so difficult to fit in the best practices within a 2½-hour period, that’s my
biggest problem.” This same thought was communicated by an experienced educator who had taught for 16 years (6 in kindergarten):

With only 2½ hours per day, I have had to abandon practices such as [the] “project approach” and creative movement, to make time for [a] more intense study of phonics, sight words, and handwriting. While my philosophy of Early Childhood Education has not changed, my practices have.

A couple of other teachers conveyed their dismay over the lack of time for playful experiences. One teacher who had been teaching for 29 years (23 years in kindergarten) told of how she had retained some play time in her classroom because her class was an all day kindergarten. However, she affirmed that it was not sufficient due to time constraints, “I am lucky to have my kids all day and they still have a free choice period for play, but not daily. (And I think they need it, but there isn’t enough time!)”

**Lack of other resources.** Eight other comments were made by six teachers stating that they felt restricted from teaching according to their DAB due to a variety of deficiencies. Usually they stated this as lack of help in the classroom, often in the form of an aide, and a general lack of resources, at times specifying which other resources in particular they needed. One instructor with 13 years teaching experience (8 years with kindergarteners) told of how her beliefs clashed with the mandates. She then shared her frustration with what is required when there is little classroom assistance, stating, “I get frustrated when so much is expected of teachers without additional support staff and parent involvement.”

Other educators simply told of their lack of resources in general. One teacher with nine years of teaching experience (seven in kindergarten) articulated, “Teaching in a
real kindergarten class is not like teaching in a university pre-school. In real life . . . supplies, resources, and time is limited . . .” Another educator, who was a first year teacher, summed up many deficiencies she felt with her comment on a pretest survey at the beginning of the school year:

Unfortunately, the reality of public education has not allowed me to practice many of the ideals I wanted to when I left my student teaching. Because of many factors, my classroom is not the “ideal” I hoped it would be. Some factors include: large number of students with only one teacher, limited financial resources, very small classroom (no room for a dramatic play area), and requirements of the school/district regarding curriculum.

This same teacher expressed a similar comment when she filled out the posttest survey at the end of the school year. In her second comment she again emphasized the lack of time and resources and then stated that she wished all kindergarten teachers could have a classroom aide to assist them, demonstrating her need for this specific resource.

**Kindergarten Readiness and Transition Challenges**

Teachers expressing concerns about children’s lack of readiness skills and various elements of kindergarten transition was the second highest subject commented on. Twenty-nine of the 55 teachers in this study (53%) referred to this topic. Teachers’ comments fit into three main categories relating to kindergarten readiness and transition: children being ready to enter kindergarten, namely specific skills they should have or that teachers see lacking; activities and practices teachers engage in to help smooth the
transition to kindergarten for children; and the influence of preschool on kindergarteners. Often, teachers wrote remarks that fit into more then one of the subcategories.

**School Readiness and Related Skills**

Fourteen of the twenty-nine educators who wrote about kindergarten transition and readiness communicated their concerns about children coming into their classroom not ready for kindergarten, listing a variety of reasons. One teacher with 9 years of teaching experience (4 in kindergarten) mentioned that, due to heightened kindergarten expectations, “kindergarten students are not ready for kindergarten.” A couple of teachers included concerns about children beginning kindergarten when they had barely turned 5 years old, indicating that such young children were not developmentally or academically ready for school. One of these, who had been teaching for many years (14, all of which were in kindergarten), articulated her frustration and views on kindergarten readiness by stating:

Too many parents are sending their children to kindergarten, and they are not ready maturity wise and academically. Every child matures at their own rate. Just because they are 5 before the deadline, doesn’t mean they are ready for the kindergarten experience.

In contrast, another seasoned educator who had been teaching for 12 years (5 years in kindergarten), shared the success of parent meetings. Through various parent training sessions focusing on educating parents about what they can do to help ready their children for kindergarten, some parents had realized their children were not ready for kindergarten, even though, chronologically, they were old enough. This teacher felt the meetings were successful because of these decisions parents had made.
Additional teachers described how many children in their classes arrived at school with low academic skills. One educator with 13 years of teaching experience (3 in kindergarten) wrote, “I had 4 this year that, on entry, couldn’t show me the front of a book or even begin to write their names.” Two other teachers expressed comparable remarks, one of whom had been teaching for 24 years (20 with kindergarteners) stated, “Only 2 of my children could write their names—and recognize any letters or numbers. Many did not know colors in English or Spanish.” Other educators with less experience also noted children’s low academic level upon entering kindergarten as a concern. A first year teacher shared, “I also had a vast number of my students come into kindergarten at a very low level academically.”

Only one teacher, who had been teaching for eight years (two years in kindergarten), felt that, as a group, her students were ready for kindergarten, or that they had had some sort of experience(s) that helped them to be ready. She wrote, “As a whole, most students seem to have some preparation for kindergarten which helps greatly!”

**Transition Activities and Practices**

Eight teachers described various activities they engaged in to promote a smooth transition to kindergarten for young children. Some of the results were mixed concerning the types and success of transition activities, various educators expressing the lack of activities and others stating the success of ones they carried out. Along with the activities mentioned, teachers also voiced challenges in accomplishing them.

Five educators shared information about specific kindergarten orientations or parent nights and “training” meetings they held, both before and after the beginning of
the school year. Most only mentioned that these were happening, rather than telling exactly what took place during the meetings or how successful they were. For example, one educator, who had 34 years of teaching experience (26 years in kindergarten), stated in connection with telling about other transition activities and readiness assessments, “We are . . . able to hold a parent literacy night in place of Fall Parent/Teacher Conferences.” Another teacher, who had been teaching for 17 years (14 in kindergarten), mentioned a spring workshop for parents called “Getting Ready for Kindergarten,” but, again, did not mention the success rate of the program.

Four teachers communicated their desire to work more closely with preschools, linking the two and learning more about their incoming kindergarten students. One of these teachers, who had been teaching school for 39 years (30 of which was in kindergarten), wrote about her desire to be a part of transition activities, “Individual Preschool programs such as head start and even the pre-school at my school may do things to prepare P-K [pre-kindergarten] students for K [kindergarten]—but I am not included nor do they visit.” Another teacher with less teaching experience (six years, all in kindergarten) shared a thought on a similar topic, that of linking preschool and kindergarten so as to smooth the transition for children. She stated, “I [would] like to see that changes are being made to link pre-K and K [kindergarten] so that the transition is not so drastic.” She did not mention which transition activities, if any, occurred at her school.

On the other hand, other educators affirmed that they were a part of transition activities with preschools and expressed the success of such. One teacher in particular, with 12 years of experience (5 years with kindergarteners), related, “For 45 min. the pre-
K kids come for kindergarten activities [December thru May]—freeplay, arts and crafts, stories, songs, activities to get them used to the teacher, principal, facilities, and surroundings.” She did not state how often (once a day, once a week, or once a month) these activities occurred, but did affirm the success of the practices. Another teacher who had been teaching for 18 years (all of which were in kindergarten) described in detail how every August before school started she phoned parents, expressing how happy she felt to have their child in her class and informing them of days when she would be in the classroom for them to visit. She stated, “I have had a very positive feedback about this from parents. It helps both them and their child feel more comfortable about beginning the new school year.” She did not indicate how long she had been implementing this practice.

Yet, additional teachers described challenges they were facing in making transition activities successful. Some of the educators felt little support from their school districts and parents alike. The same educator who conveyed the preschools’ lack of coordination with her about transition activities also shared how many families attended the school’s orientation and parent night and the lack of attendance at these. She wrote, “Kindergarten orientation programs are attended by 50% or less of future students. Last year we did a parent meeting on the evening following the first day of school. We received 50-60% of parents.”

**Preschool Influence**

Eight educators described the impact that preschool experiences had on the readiness of children in their classroom. Most of these were positive, or expressing the need for more children to attend preschool and reap the benefits. One teacher who had
been teaching for 13 years (3 years in kindergarten) affirmed, “I highly support preschool education and think it would help every child.” Another teacher with seven years experience (four in kindergarten) shared her optimistic view of preschool, “Pre-schools (most I have seen have been excellent) have a positive influence.”

A couple of educators described negative influences they were seeing from preschools on the incoming kindergarten children, however, these comments were not as prevalent. Some of these teachers asserted that the preschools in their area were not developmentally appropriate and that the incoming kindergarten children would be better off without a preschool experience. Regarding one particular preschool, a teacher who had been teaching for 27 years (20 in kindergarten) wrote:

They “force” 3 and 4 year olds to write on lines and cut on lines and color inside the lines until some become so discouraged it takes us most of our school year to get them to want to try! The children would be much better off with nothing!

**Time**

Of the teachers who made comments in the survey, 17 (31%) of them expressed concerns about time, generally in reference to the lack of time they felt they had to teach all the required curriculum. Teachers who expressed time issues mentioned in this section spoke in different ways than did teachers who told of challenges in reference to the kindergarten day as something that impeded them from fully implementing their DAB. Time in this case was closely linked to the curriculum, especially with regards to the increased emphasis of many districts on literacy and reading, and in a couple of cases, in regard to teaching according to “best practices.” A number of teachers expressed
using a curricular integration technique as one way of dealing with the lack of instructional time in the classroom.

**Lack of Teaching Time**

“Time is my worst enemy,” lamented one educator who had been teaching for 19 years (18 in kindergarten). Thirteen teachers stated that they could not accomplish all they wanted to in a day due to the lack of time they had to instruct children. One teacher with 17 years of teaching experience (3 of which were in kindergarten) conveyed the busyness of the kindergarten day in her comment, “In kindergarten every minute is used.” In conjunction with her comment on the literacy policies and mandates she was seeing, another teacher with 16 years of experience (12 with kindergarteners) asserted, “When you have 2½ hours a day you cannot do it all.” An additional educator with less experience (seven years, with one year teaching kindergarten) also shared her discouragement with the full kindergarten schedule and trying to find time for each part of the curriculum when she wrote:

> I find as a Kindergarten teacher it is so hard to fit everything in each day. There just isn’t enough time for me to do all the components of Balance Literacy, Math, Social studies, science, enough time at centers, art, music, reading stories, p.e., and recess, plus individual sharing. . . . I feel sometimes I can’t keep up.

Two other teachers expressed their desire for more time for activities besides reading and math. One, who had been teaching school for 13 years (6 in kindergarten) stated, “Being a Reading First School, it’s amazing how little time we have for art & music.” The other teacher wrote, “I wish we had more time for the children to play and explore.” She had been teaching school for 26 years (23 in kindergarten).
Four educators conveyed their need for not only more instructional time, but also a lengthened day. They felt that the kindergarten day was not long enough to adequately cover all that was required of them. This thought was characterized by one teacher who had been teaching for 14 years, all of which were in kindergarten, “We need kindergarten to be a little longer so we don’t feel rushed trying to accomplish the state/district requirements and still allow them to be children.” Another teacher, with 29 years of experience (10 in kindergarten), wrote a similar remark about how a longer instructional day would be beneficial in order to teach all that is required. She stated, “The state of Utah needs to extend the Kindergarten day to enable the Kindergarten teacher to retain the traditional K [kindergarten] activities (blocks, playhouse, construction materials, etc.) while attempting to meet all of the academic standards imposed on them.”

Integration

Six teachers wrote comments about integrating subjects in their classroom in order to maximize time and teach a greater variety of subjects. One of the educators who, had been teaching for 13 years, all of which were in kindergarten, succinctly articulated, “I rarely teach a ‘subject.’ I integrate everything.”

Three of the six educators, however, communicated that they felt they still did not have enough time to cover all the material they needed to or would like to, even after using integration. One teacher, who had taught for 19 years (18 in kindergarten), put it this way, “I don’t always have the time to adapt things or integrate like I’d like.” Another teacher, who also had 19 years of experience as an educator (12 years experience in kindergarten), wrote about her daily classroom schedule and the limited time she had to teach everything that needed to be included. She said, “There are more and more other
things I am supposed to cover in a day (*mostly literacy based). I work hard to integrate those things—but I don’t always get it covered.” She continued by listing the daily schedule of six literacy activities with the children, concluding with, “And the list goes on.” Two more educators shared almost the same comment as they wrote about time challenges and constraints and what they were doing to try to face these. One, who had seven years of teaching experience (one year with kindergarteners), concisely affirmed, “I do try to integrate subjects together, but still [it’s] hard.”

Curriculum Is Too Academic

Sixteen of the 55 teachers (29%) who made comments used in this study expressed views that the curriculum for kindergarten was too academic. The majority of these teachers emphasized that there was an added weight placed on literacy and reading in the classroom, particularly curriculum mandated by the district or state, and expressed that kindergarten expectations had been raised. A couple of educators articulated an emphasis on standardized testing.

Emphasis on Literacy

Twelve teachers communicated that they spent the majority of the time with children in the classroom working with them on literacy skills and teaching reading. Along the lines of mandates, one teacher who had taught 13 years (10 in kindergarten) wrote, “[The] district is encouraging us to teach reading most of the day with a little math.” Another educator with 16 years of teaching experience (12 of which were in kindergarten) expressed similar views about local mandates by saying, “Federal, state, and local policies say that literacy/learning to read is top priority now.” A third teacher
who had been teaching longer, for 29 years (23 years in kindergarten), also made a comment about how much of her time was spent teaching literacy according to the district mandated programs and pacing schedule:

I am at a RF [Reading First] school and there are many mandates. Reading and lang. [language] periods. Even kdg [kindergarten] kids have an all morning literacy block. The District makes up pacing guides in math and literacy, and by golly, we’d better be in the right place when they come.

One educator who had taught for 13 years (8 in kindergarten) expressed the heightened literacy expectations placed on young children and teachers by asserting, “Students are expected to leave kindergarten reading.” A different teacher who had been teaching children for a longer period of time (26 years, with 23 years in kindergarten) communicated her frustration about the emphasis placed on literacy when she said:

I am required to have 1½ hours of literacy and ½ hour of math each day. In a ½ day Kindergarten it is virtually impossible. . . . The expectations for Kindergarten and every learning center should not have to be literacy-based, but that is the direction we are headed. Kindergarten should not be a “boot-camp” for reading . . . .

 Raised Expectations

Nine educators spoke about the raised expectations they were seeing in the kindergarten classroom, sometimes in conjunction with reading and literacy mandates. A teacher who had been teaching school for 16 years (6 years in kindergarten) expressed this in her statement, “Since ‘No Child Left Behind’ kindergarten has changed dramatically. We are being pressured by our district to get children reading and writing
independently in kindergarten.” A different instructor with nine years of teaching experience (four in kindergarten) also talked about district expectations for young children with her comment, “In our district the expectation for kindergarten students has been raised—from them knowing the alphabet and some sounds when they leave kindergarten, to actually reading on a beginning first grade level.” Another educator with 10 years of experience teaching (9 in kindergarten) shared the expectation placed on kindergarten teachers now. She wrote, “K [kindergarten] teachers are expected to teach reading [and] math.”

Two more teachers conveyed that kindergarten was becoming like first grade. The first, who had 26 years of teaching experience (23 in kindergarten), wrote that kindergarten should not be a “mini-first grade.” The second, who had much less experience (three years, with two in kindergarten), confirmed that “it [kindergarten] seems to be the new 1st grade . . . expectations are so high for these 5 year olds!” One seasoned educator who had taught school for 29 years (23 of which were in kindergarten) expressed her concern about the heightened academic expectations for young children. She affirmed, “I’m just not sure they [students] should be pushed so hard in K [kindergarten].” Another teacher, who had only taught for two years (one in kindergarten), seemed to hold this same view, and articulated her concerns by sharing, “I worry about the expectations for kindergarten at the end of the year, and how much emphasis there needs to be on their academic skills.” The same instructor who wrote about No Child Left Behind also shared one of her fears about the changes in early education and expectations with her comment, “I’m afraid kindergarten will soon be regarded as Elementary Education instead of Early Childhood.”
Testing Emphasis

Three teachers mentioned that they felt there was an over-emphasis on testing in kindergarten. One rather new teacher, who had three years of experience teaching, all in kindergarten, communicated it this way, “This year I’ve spent so much time assessing my students that I feel like a tester instead of a teacher . . . I worry that we’re spending too much time testing. . . .” The other two teachers shared how tests dominated decisions and other assessments, such as was expressed by a more seasoned teacher with 26 years of experience (23 years in kindergarten), “Test (year-end) scores and Dibel [DIBELS] scores seem to be driving all the decisions in my school.”

Parental Involvement

Teachers who wrote about parental involvement expressed it in two ways: parents helping in the classroom in the form of volunteers and parents helping their children at home. Parental assistance outside of the classroom consisted of thoughts such as parents assisting their children with school work and knowing what was going on at school. Parental help in the classroom was mainly in the form of parents volunteering, or not. Thirteen teachers (24% of educators in this study) described ways that they felt parents were and were not involved in the classroom and with their children at home. One teacher included comments on both the pre- and post-surveys about parental involvement in the home.

Involvement at Home

Nine of the thirteen teachers who commented on parental involvement made references to parents assisting children in the home. One teacher who had 7 years of
teaching experience (4 years with kindergarteners) summed up this point when she wrote, “The single, most important influence on a child is a super home.” A couple of educators expressed the need for parents to assist their children who require the most help in school. However, these teachers stated that such children rarely receive it. In referring to children with low abilities upon entering kindergarten, a teacher who had been teaching for 24 years (8 years in kindergarten) stated, “The parents need to help at home before they [the children] come to school.” Another teacher, with 19 years of teaching experience (6 years with kindergarteners), explained how parental support and home involvement helps children. She wrote, “In my experience most children who struggle are often the last to register for school. They often lack the parent support the successful children have coming into school.”

Other educators told of how they felt parents were not aware of heightened academic expectations in public schools and that they were not adequately preparing their children for entering kindergarten. One, who had taught school for 9 years (4 years in kindergarten), stated, “Some parents are not aware of the new changes and do not prepare their children for kindergarten with preschool experiences, etc.” Another teacher, who had taught school for three years (all of which were in kindergarten), described a similar situation that she observed, “The expectations are higher and parents need to understand that . . . kindergarten is very different now than it used to be. . . . Too many parents think all we do is color and play with clay.” An additional educator, who had 13 years of teaching experience (3 years in kindergarten), conveyed her frustration about the lack of parental support at home and the perceived reluctance on the part of the parents. After writing about the literacy emphasis in her classroom, she communicated, “[I] have to
contend with parents that don’t read to or work with their kids. I am getting frustrated at parents’ lack of responsibility and unwillingness to support higher expectations for their kids.”

**Involvement in the Classroom**

Six of the thirteen teachers who made references to parental involvement wrote about parents in their classrooms. Half of these teachers spoke about how parents were either inconsistent or that the educator felt a lack of support. One instructor, who had taught for 22 years (9 in kindergarten), affirmed, “Parents help but are inconsistent in attendance and abilities.” Another teacher with less experience (11 years, 8 of which was in kindergarten) explained, “I do not have . . . any parent helpers available.” One teacher, with 17 years of teaching experience (15 of which was in kindergarten), was constrained by language barriers, asserting that she wanted parents in her classroom, but that many did not speak English or were illiterate.

The other three teachers told of their success with parental volunteers in the classroom. One in particular, who had taught for 12 years (5 years in kindergarten), shared her positive view, “I have very supportive parents who help me with ‘centers’ and allow me to teach in small groups. . . .” Another educator with 17 years of experience (3 in kindergarten) told of the help that parents in her classroom provided her, “Without parent involvement teachers in kindergarten spend ‘hours’ of extra time trying to fit the needs of the children.”
Four teachers did not indicate number of years having taught school; however, in her later comments, one of these noted that she was a first-year teacher. All of these educators described concerns related to DAB versus DAP. Most teachers (25 of 31, or 81%) who included comments about their DAB versus DAP had been teaching for 7 or more years. The other six teachers all had been teaching for 3 years or fewer. Educators who remarked about DAB or DAP ranged in years of teaching from 0 to 29 (range for number of years taught kindergarten was 0 to 23).

Teachers who commented about kindergarten readiness and transition varied widely in their years of teaching experience. In this category, educators had been teaching for 0 to 39 years (range for number of years having taught in kindergarten was 0 to 30). The majority (17 of 27, or 63%) had taught for 10 or more years.

Of the 17 teachers who wrote about what little time they felt they had, 15 (88%) of these had been teaching for 12 or more years. The other two had each been teaching for seven years. No relatively new teachers made comments that fit into this category. Educators commenting about time ranged in number of years having taught school from 7 to 33 years (1 to 30 years having taught kindergarten).

Teachers who made comments relating to the emphasis on academics also varied widely in their years of teaching experience, from 0 to 29 years (0 to 23 years teaching kindergarten). Most of these teachers (12 of 16, or 75%) had been teaching school for 9 or more years. The other four had taught for 3 years or fewer.

Those educators who wrote remarks about parental involvement were mainly seasoned teachers, with 12 or more years of teaching experience (10 of the 13 teachers, or
77%). The other three teachers had taught for 9 or fewer years. The range of number of years teaching school was 3 to 24 years (3 to 20 years range for having taught kindergarten).
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teachers’ perceptions of challenges and their concerns regarding teaching kindergarten. Data were obtained from 55 educators’ voluntary written responses at the end of the Utah Kindergarten Transition Practices Survey. Comments were qualitatively analyzed and coded. Two main themes along with three less prominent themes were explored in answering the research question, “What are kindergarten teachers’ perceptions about teaching today?” Results of the study’s findings are discussed below, organized by themes. Implications of and limitations to this study are examined, along with suggestions for future research.

DAB Versus DAP

The first main theme found in this study was teachers expressing the inability to teach according to their developmentally appropriate beliefs (DAB) due to a number of reasons. The most prominent reasons why teachers communicated that their DAB was not translating into developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) were due to mandates and expectations of the district and state, large class sizes, and lack of resources, particularly time. Graue (2001) referred to educators who felt the pressure of mandates and curricular expectations hindering their implementation of their DAB, as was found in this study. Teachers here described in more detail the challenges they faced from their districts over mandated curriculum than did Graue, but the concerns were the same.

Hedge and Cassidy (2009) found that educators struggled to teach the way they believed best for young children due to large class sizes. However, the teachers in their
study also communicated that pressure from parents was a very large influence on their teaching style, whereas the educators in this study did not express such pressure as hindering their DAP. Also of note is that the study by Hedge and Cassidy was conducted in India where kindergarten class sizes range from about 50 to 70 children. Although the teachers in this study articulated that their class sizes were too large to effectively teach young children, the average size was about 23 children per class (about 27 children per class for teachers who wrote about how large their class was), less than half the size Indian teachers worked with, but still well above what is recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as developmentally appropriate (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Hedge and Cassidy (2009) did state, however, that the concerns Indian teachers conveyed were shared by many American educators, as is seen in this study. It is also of interest to note that nine of the fifteen teachers in this study who commented about how large their class was came from the same district, which was one of the largest in the state.

Graue (2001) reported that nearly two-thirds of kindergarten teachers have a paid assistant for at least part of the day. Most of the educators in this study did not state whether or not they had an aide in the classroom, but a group of teachers did express the need for a classroom aide as one of the resources they lacked. This could be due to classroom aides only being in the room for part of the day, rather than the full instructional day, possibly due to lack of funding, as one of the teachers in the study pointed out.

It is striking that there is not much research that has been conducted to date concerning teachers and the lack of time they feel in connection with DAB and DAP or
the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB has brought increased mandates and standards, and curricular and testing expectations that have taken much of the classroom time away from teachers and left little, if any, for traditional kindergarten activities and ways of teaching (Graue, 2001; Hyun, 2003). Graue (2001) mentioned time constraints as a challenge for educators in her article, but in passing. Seven teachers in this study felt they could not translate their DAB into DAP because of challenges involving too little time, and more spoke of how little time they had in a day because of the many district and state mandated curricular programs, which issue is discussed further on in this chapter. It is interesting that this topic has not been a matter of significant research as yet.

Another finding that is worthy of note is that all three first year teachers in this study expressed their concern over not being able to implement their DAB in the classroom, due to a myriad of reasons. This could be due to first year teachers coming straight from a college program where they are taught DAP and expect to be able to implement this in their own classrooms. Frustration can arise when their expectations are unmet.

**Kindergarten Readiness and Transition**

Teachers in this study spoke about many aspects of readiness that various researchers have addressed. As a whole, the 14 educators who commented on kindergarten readiness felt concerns about children entering school with low academic and other skills, deeming these children not ready for the kindergarten experience. One teacher expressed a very interesting point of view with her comment about children not
being ready to enter kindergarten due to increased standards and expectations. Graue (2006) and Gullo and Burton (1992) discussed this same belief in their articles. They stated that, in reality, such children who may be viewed as not ready to enter school may in fact be ready, they simply lack experiences related to the escalated kindergarten curriculum. This thought is troubling, keeping ready children out of kindergarten, due to the notion that they are not prepared because of escalated standards. Such practices perpetuate the thought characterized by Graue (2001) that older kindergarteners look like first graders, as does the curriculum. In addition, keeping children out of kindergarten due to heightened academic standards continues to widen the already broad developmental range of children in one class, making meeting the needs of each child even more challenging for the educator (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Graue, 1992).

Eight teachers described specific activities they engaged in to help children make a smoother transition to kindergarten. About half of the teachers reported participating in activities that occurred after the beginning of the school year and the other half reported activities happening before the start of school. This finding is slightly different than most of the literature on kindergarten transition practices, which states that teachers most often engage in generic, impersonal, low intensity forms of transition activities after the beginning of the school year (Nelson, 2004; Pianta et al., 1999). Most teachers in this study wrote about generic, low intensity forms of transition activities that happened both before and after the beginning of the school year. Only two teachers spoke of very personal, more intense transition activities that required more time and preparation that they engaged in before the beginning of school (phone calls and inviting parents and their incoming kindergartner to the classroom before the start of classes, and inviting
preschool children into the kindergarten classroom). It is important to note that, while the results of this study are fairly consistent with most of the literature about transition practices, they are still troubling in that many teachers who engage in kindergarten transition activities do so in a more generic, impersonal manner, in ways that may not be as effective as the more personal activities (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Teachers did not state why they chose to engage in the activities that they did. Their lack of conducting more personal, high intensity types of transition activities could be due to lack of funding and/or time, as was found by Pianta and his fellow researchers (1999).

Another point of import to note is that the teachers in this study who articulated the low success rate of transition practices were those that engaged in the more impersonal, generic forms of activities, whereas the teachers who told of the very personal contact made with children in their families before the beginning of the school year expressed how successful these were and how pleased parents felt to come and participate. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) point out that the more personal types of transition practices are more beneficial for the child and family, helping to ensure a smoother kindergarten transition. This could possibly account for the more positive parental response, seeing as how the more personal activities aid in helping children and families make this life transition smoothly.

Much research has been conducted and carried out on the impact of preschool education on young children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). It is not surprising that some of the educators in this study affirmed that preschool experiences aid children in preparing them for kindergarten and that they felt more of the children in their classes could benefit from a preschool experience. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) stated that
about 56% of 3- and 4-year-olds in the US attend some type of preschool education program, leaving the other 44% without any kind of prekindergarten schooling experience.

Preschool education assists children in becoming acclimated to formal education and classroom routines. Developmentally appropriate programs are especially helpful for young children, while research has shown that developmentally inappropriate practices (DIP) in education can have a detrimental effect on young children (Burts et al., 1992; Charlesworth et al., 1993; Hedge & Cassidy, 2009). The teachers in this study who noted the negative impact of preschool on children in their classrooms expressed the developmental inappropriateness of these programs.

**Time**

A number of teachers in this study articulated that they felt a lack of time to teach all that was required of them. As stated earlier, this could be due, at least in part, to NCLB. Many mandates and heightened standards have entered the public school system as a result of this piece of legislation, taking up much of the classroom instructional time (Hyun, 2003). Nonetheless, as previously stated, little research has been conducted in relation to teachers and the lack of teaching time they feel they have. Again, this is a point of concern as standards and expectations are elevated and instructional time becomes more limited, teachers are more restricted in what and how much they can teach of curriculum, both required and not, such as playful experiences (Fromberg, 2006).

One of the teachers in Goldstein’s qualitative study (2007) told of how she used integration as a technique to maximize time and teach more curriculum in a greater
variety of areas. A group of teachers in this study also shared how they used this
technique to maximize teaching time, which they stated was helpful. Yet, some
expressed that this takes time and they do not always have the time to integrate different
subjects.

It is of interest to mention that 15 of the 17 teachers who made comments about
time had taught school for 12 or more years. None of the newer teachers commented
about this challenge. This could be due at least in part to the rigorous standards and
academic increases taking place more recently, since 2001. Educators with more
experience would have experienced teaching in environments where less time was
required for academic learning and more could be allotted for playful and exploratory
learning experiences characteristic of original kindergarten models (Jeynes, 2006).

Curriculum Is Too Academic

In conjunction with challenges concerning little time, teachers in this study also
affirmed that they felt the kindergarten curriculum was becoming too academic due to an
emphasis on literacy and academics, and raised standards and expectations. Once more,
this is due to NCLB, as one teacher stated. This act mandated testing in elementary
schools in reading and mathematics (Hyun, 2003), which could explain this emphasis that
teachers are articulating.

A group of educators in this study also communicated that they felt kindergarten
looked more like first grade. One of the teachers in Goldstein’s case study (2007) noted
her concern about how she felt kindergarten had morphed into something like the
beginning of first grade. Other researchers have also documented this academic
shovedown (Charlesworth et al., 1993; Goldstein, 2007; Graue, 1992, 2006; Jeynes, 2006; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). While children should and need to be challenged in school, placing too much of an emphasis on academic learning at such a young age and not allowing children enough time to learn through play and exploration can cause undue amounts of childhood stress (Hatch, 2002; Jeynes, 2006). In addition, rigorous, teacher directed, academic curriculum for kindergarten students is not developmentally appropriate (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In the push for accountability, kindergartens across the U.S. have become more first grade like, even though “standards-based accountability systems were not put in place with the intent of eliminating the developmental, child-centered kindergartens” (Goldstein, 2007, p. 379).

It is interesting to note that a number of teachers in this study felt that there was an over-emphasis on standardized testing in kindergarten. Some districts and schools have implemented tests in kindergarten due to NCLB, even though the act does not stipulate that kindergarten children should be tested (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Goldstein, 2007). Administrators could feel anxiety over children doing well and thus require such tests as a means to monitor progress and ensure that children are on track to pass the required exams beginning in third grade.

Parental Involvement

A group of educators in this study conveyed their concerns about parental involvement, both at home and at school. Most of the teachers who wrote about parents articulated that parents need to be more involved in the home. Some of the educators in this study also mentioned that parents did not understand the curricular expectations of
kindergarten and how it is more academic now. In their study, McIntyre and her colleagues (2007) found that most parents did not fully understand the curricular requirements of kindergarten and that 80% of parents wanted more information on academic expectations for their young children. Parental lack of knowledge of school expectations could explain the frustration teachers in this study were feeling regarding low parental involvement at home.

It is interesting to note that most teachers who included comments about parental involvement had been teaching for longer periods of time, mostly for 12 or more years. On account of more teaching experience, this group of educators may have experienced more support in their classrooms and with children at home in previous years.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. First, the nature of the study was self-report, with teachers giving their perceptions of challenging aspects about teaching kindergarten. This presents a possible bias in the results, as no observations by the researcher were made. The section at the end of the survey used for this study did not give a specific question, or questions, for teachers to answer with regard to their challenges and concerns, it solely stated “Comments or Reactions,” leaving the remarks entirely up to each teacher. Because of this, comments made were very broad. In addition, this part was an optional section of the survey, as was seen by only 130 written comments made by teachers. The sample size was reduced further as not all remarks were pertinent to this study’s question. Furthermore, teachers only in the state of Utah were asked to participate in the original study and not all district superintendents allowed
teachers within their boundaries the opportunity. Concerns and policies teachers wrote about may not be exactly the same as in other states, or even in different districts within the state. The small sample size, geographic limits, and voluntary response nature of the comments section limit the generalizability of this study.

Implications

There are many implications of this research. First, there are many challenges that teachers face today. There is an obvious mismatch between best practices of early education for children and practices that are actually being implemented in the classroom. It is necessary to assist teachers in implementing DAP, while at the same time meeting state and district standards. If this cannot be done, public lawmakers should examine pressures and expectations placed on teachers and put into place laws and practices to aid in this endeavor. For example, funding must be allotted for full-time classroom aides, particularly in large classrooms, and funds to reduce class size should be allocated in order to allow educators the ability to work more closely with students and practice more DAP.

Furthermore, teachers are expressing their perception that kindergarten is becoming too academic in nature and not developmentally appropriate for young children. Administrators and public lawmakers need to be made aware of what are developmentally appropriate curriculum standards for young children in order to help enact changes in standards and academic expectations for kindergarten children. By so doing, kindergarten can return to be more like the children’s garden that its founder Froebel envisioned it (Jeynes, 2006).
Another implication of this study is that parents, teachers, schools, and communities need to unite in an effort to assist young children in being ready to enter kindergarten. Teachers need support and assistance in providing personal forms of transition activities before the beginning of the school year to aid children and their families in experiencing a smoother transition into formal schooling. Also, there is a need to educate parents about the importance of a quality preschool education for their young children. By so doing, more children would benefit from this experience, more effectively preparing them for formal school experiences.

Finally, teachers, schools, and parents need to unite in more ways in order to support each other. A number of teachers expressed the lack of involvement and support they felt from the parents, both at home and at school. Parents need to feel like partners in the education of their children and need to be made aware of how they can assist and what they can do specifically at home to help their children succeed in and be ready for school.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The findings of this study were obtained from a small sample of 55 Utah kindergarten teachers. Future research should seek to solicit study participants from a larger sampling frame. One of the limitations of this study was the general nature of the prompt requesting comments from teachers (the survey solely stated “Comments or Reactions”). In order to direct teachers’ remarks, more specific wording is suggested, specifically, questions could be identified based on the challenges and concerns teachers articulated in this study. Educators could then be asked the same question(s) about their
perceptions concerning those specific topics. Additional research could also focus on specific challenges teachers articulated, such as a lack of time due to curricular mandates, large class sizes impeding the implementation of DAB, and parental involvement at home and the effects this has on young children’s lives at school. Administrators could be surveyed as well in order to gain their perspective on the above topics and other issues that are challenging for them, particularly with the flood of standards mandates and expectations within recent years.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to add to the existing body of research the challenges and concerns kindergarten teachers express. This study focused on exploring the question, “What are kindergarten teachers’ perceptions about teaching today?”

The majority of teachers in this study voiced concerns relating to their DAB and challenges with translating these beliefs into DAP. Reasons teachers articulated for this DAB/DAP mismatch were too large of a class size, district/state expectations and mandates hindering implementation of their DAB, and a lack of resources, particularly time, needed to carry these out.

Educators also expressed concerns regarding children’s school readiness and transition to kindergarten. They shared various transition activities in which they engaged and the level of success they perceived from these. Teachers commented as well on the influence of preschool in connection with children’s school readiness.
Moreover, teachers communicated concerns in relation to time and how they felt they did not have enough instructional time to meet all the curriculum demands placed upon them. A group of educators told how they integrated subjects in order to maximize their instructional time.

Several teachers in this study indicated that they believed kindergarten curriculum was too focused on academics, particularly literacy. Some of these educators also felt that the expectations for kindergarten children have been raised, creating classrooms that look more like first grade than kindergarten. A small number of teachers commenting in this category felt that schools and districts place too much of an emphasis on standardized testing in kindergarten.

Finally, educators also expressed challenges with parental involvement, mostly in the home. Teachers conveyed the need for more parents to be involved with their children at home, helping to prepare them for kindergarten and formal school experiences, along with assisting their children as they proceed through kindergarten and their schooling experience. A group of teachers also wrote about challenges and successes with parents in the classroom.

This study demonstrates the complex nature of teachers’ concerns and challenges with teaching kindergarten. Teachers need support in implementing practices they know are best for educating young children. Administrators, teachers, and policymakers must work together in order to establish appropriate curricular expectations for kindergarten. Educators also need support in assisting children and families in making a smooth transition to kindergarten. Finally, communities, schools, teachers, and parents need to
establish collaborative relationships to make this happen and in order to effectively educate young children.
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Transition Practices Survey/Teacher Beliefs and Practices Survey Packet
Utah Kindergarten Transition Practices Study

Dear Kindergarten Teacher:

We are interested in understanding how kindergarten teachers feel about the transition that children make to kindergarten. This information is essential in helping us identify ways in which parents, preschools, and child care providers can more effectively prepare children for kindergarten entry.

To ensure that your responses on this questionnaire are completely anonymous, you will create your own code number. It is necessary for you to have the same code number on the questionnaire you complete at the beginning of the year and the questionnaire you complete at the end of the year. We know it may be hard to remember the individual code you create. Therefore, we are giving you the same instructions for creating a code number on both questionnaires. Simply fill in the spaces with the corresponding numbers.

- 01 – January
- 02 – February
- 03 – March
- 04 – April
- 05 – May
- 06 – June
- 07 – July
- 08 – August
- 09 – September
- 10 – October
- 11 – November
- 12 – December

Your personal code number:

\[\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{Mother's birth month} & \text{Mother's birth year (last 2 digits)} & \text{Father's birth month} & \text{Father's birth year (last 2 digits)} \\
\end{array}\]

Please take about 30 minutes to complete this survey and return it. Feel free to write comments on the survey to let us know, for example, if you have any reactions to the survey's content or format, or think some questions are not clear or relevant. Thank you in advance for your help in this study.
Transition Practices Survey

School Information

1. What is the current total student enrollment in your school? _____

2. Which one of the following best describes the location of your school?

3. Which one of the following best describes your school?
   _____ 1. A public school that draws students from the surrounding neighborhood
   _____ 2. A public school with students from neighborhoods that do and do not surround the school
   _____ 3. A public magnet school that draws students from many neighborhoods
   _____ 4. A public school that draws students from a large rural area
   _____ 5. A private or parochial school
   _____ 6. Other (please describe): ____________________________

4. Check below if your school currently contains any of the following programs. Check all that apply.
   _____ 1. Pre-kindergarten program with open enrollment
   _____ 2. Pre-kindergarten program for "at risk" students (not Head Start)
   _____ 3. Head Start
   _____ 4. Pre-kindergarten program for special education students
   _____ 5. Kindergarten class—full day
   _____ 6. Kindergarten class—half day
   _____ 7. Transitional K-1 program (regular education)
   _____ 8. Combined kindergarten and first grade class (not traditional)
   _____ 9. First grade class
   _____ 10. Combined first and second grade class
   _____ 11. Other programs for kindergarteners and first graders (describe): ____________________________

5. Does your district's policy allow children to remain in the same school despite moves across school boundaries during the academic year?
   _____ No  _____ Yes  _______ Does not apply (private or parochial school)

Teacher/classroom information

6. Did you teach kindergarten last year?
   _____ No  _____ Yes  If yes, answer questions 7-10. If no, go directly to question 11.

If you taught multiple classes last year (morning & afternoon sessions), answer questions for one of those classes.

7. Last year, approximately how many children were transferred into or enrolled in your class AFTER the first two weeks of school? _____

Continue to next page ➔
8. Approximately how many children left your class last year AFTER the first two weeks of school? 

9. Last year, what was the total number of children in your class at the end of the year? 

10. How many children in your class last year were retained? 

11. Check the one category that best describes your race/ethnicity:

- 1. American Indian or Native Alaskan 
- 2. Asian/Pacific Islander 
- 3. Black, not Hispanic 
- 4. Hispanic 
- 5. White, not Hispanic 
- 6. Other 
- 7. Multiple Origins 

12. List the year of degree(s) you have received:

Bachelor's ___ / 200 
Masters ___ / 200 
Doctorate: ___ / 200 

13. Check the area(s) of specialization or certification you may hold. This pertains to state-level certification(s). Check all that apply:

- 1. Elementary Education (K-6) 
- 2. Education (K-12) 
- 3. Early Childhood/Primary Grades 
- 4. Special Education 
- 5. Preschool 
- 6. Other (describe): 

14. Have you had any specialized training to enhance children's transition into kindergarten? 

- No 
- Yes If yes, please describe: 

15. Have you had any specialized training to enhance children's transition from kindergarten to first grade? 

- No 
- Yes If yes, please describe: 

16. List your years of teaching experience at each of the following levels:

1. Below kindergarten level (e.g., preschool): 
2. Kindergarten (includes K-1, K-2): 
3. Above kindergarten (first grade & above, not K-1 or K-2): 

If you teach multiple classes, such as morning and afternoon sessions with different children, answer questions for just one of those classes, for example, your morning class.

17. At this time, how many students are enrolled in your class? 

18. This year, how many children were transferred into or enrolled in your class AFTER the first two weeks of school? 

19. This year, how many children left your class after the first two weeks of school? 

Continue to next page →
20. How many children with special needs (children receiving special education services) are enrolled in your class this year? _____

21. Note the number of children in your current class for each group below. Enter 0 for none.
   1. American Indian or Native Alaskan
   2. Asian/Pacific Islander
   3. Black, not Hispanic
   4. Hispanic
   5. White, not Hispanic
   6. Other
   7. Multiple Origins

22. How many students in your class are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches? _____

23. Are any of the following types of people in your classroom at least 3 times per week? Check all that apply. For example, if an individual parent volunteers on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday each week, or different parents come in for a total of 3 times per week, then check Parent Volunteer.
   1. Teaching assistant/paraprofessional
   2. Co-teacher
   3. Student teacher
   4. Parent volunteer
   5. Community volunteer
   6. College student

24. Which children leave your classroom to receive instruction (not gym) from other teachers at least 3 times per week? Check all that apply and briefly describe the type of instruction received.
   1. Special education students
   2. Non-special education students
   3. Whole class
   4. No students

Continue to next page →
Entering kindergarten

25. Based on your experience, approximately what percentage of children who enter kindergarten fall into the following categories? Make sure these numbers total 100%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% 1. Very successful entry, virtually no problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% 2. Moderately successful entry, some problems, mostly minor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% 3. Difficult or very difficult entry, serious concerns or many problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26. Based on your experience, for how many children in a typical class are the following characteristics a problem when they enter kindergarten? Check appropriate box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>A few</th>
<th>About one-fourth of the class</th>
<th>About half of the class</th>
<th>More than half of the class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of academic skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty following directions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty working as part of group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with social skills, getting along with other children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty working independently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty communicating/language problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of any formal preschool experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly academic preschool experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-academic preschool experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorganized home environments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immaturity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (describe)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27. In your judgment, what percentage of children in your current class were not ready for kindergarten when they entered? Enter zero if all were ready. ________ %

28. Approximately how many children in your current class spent last year in the following? Enter zero for none.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool center-based program (private)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K program at a school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29. If you do not know last year’s settings for children in your class, would it have been useful to know this information to prepare for their transition into kindergarten?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continue to next page →
30. Check any of the following barriers which prevent you personally from implementing the “good idea… but” practices you just identified. Check all that apply, then circle the item numbers of those you consider the most serious barriers, up to a maximum of five.

1. Class lists are generated too late
2. Requires work in summer that is not supported by salary
3. Contacts with parents are discouraged prior to the start of school
4. Concern about creating negative expectations
5. Funds are not available
6. Materials are not available
7. Parents are not interested
8. Preschool teachers are not interested
9. It takes too much time to conduct these practices
10. I could not reach most parents of children who need these practices
11. It is dangerous to visit student’s homes
12. Parents do not bring their child in for registration or open house
13. Parents cannot read letters, etc. sent home
14. A transition practices plan is not available in school/district
15. The school or district does not support
16. I choose not to do it
17. Others? Please list.

31. Which of the following practices are used by any of the Pre-K programs (for example, preschool or Head Start programs) that feed into your school? Check all that apply.

1. Participating in joint workshops with school staff on issues of interest
2. Sharing information about an individual child’s progress
3. Providing assistance for children having difficulty
4. Talking with children and parents to prepare them for kindergarten
5. Children from these programs visiting our school
6. Others? (describe):

32. Approximately how many days before school started this year did you receive your class list?

33. Which of the following screening procedures are performed for at least some of the children in your class? For each item, label with a “T” if you as teacher perform the procedure, “S” if someone else performs, “B” if both you and someone else performs, or an “N” if no one performs the procedure.

1. Interview parents
2. Screen child using a formal instrument
3. Screen child informally
4. CHECK HERE if any of these took place in the child’s home

Continue to next page
34. Who currently has responsibility for practices related to entry into kindergarten in your school? Check all that apply.

1. District
2. Principal
3. K-teacher
4. Preschool teacher
5. Parent
6. Community
7. School counselor
8. Family specialist
9. Behavioral specialist
10. Primary resource teacher
11. Don’t know
12. Other (describe): ____________________________

35. In your school, are any practices for enhancing children’s entry into kindergarten systematically targeted toward any of the following groups of children? Check all groups to which practices are targeted.

1. Low income
2. Racial/ethnic minority
3. Limited English speaking
4. No pre-K experience
5. Children with disabilities/special needs
6. Children who transfer into the school
7. All children

Continue to next page ➔
Teacher Beliefs and Practices Survey

1. Rank the following (1-6) by the amount of influence you believe that each has on the way you plan, or will plan and implement instruction, after considering children’s needs. Please use each number only once. (1 = Most influence; 6 = Least influence)

   ___ parents
   ___ school system policy
   ___ principal/director
   ___ teacher (yourself)
   ___ state regulations
   ___ other teachers

Recognizing that some things in education programs are required by external sources, what are YOUR OWN PERSONAL BELIEFS about early childhood programs? Please circle the number that most nearly represents YOUR BELIEFS about each item’s importance for early childhood programs.

(1 = Not at all important; 5 = Extremely important)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
<th>Fairly important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. As an evaluation of children’s progress, readiness or achievement tests are _____</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To plan and evaluate the curriculum, teacher observation is _____</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. It is _____ for activities to be responsive to individual children’s interests.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It is _____ for activities to be responsive to individual differences in children’s levels of development.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. It is _____ for activities to be responsive to the cultural diversity of students.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. It is _____ that each curriculum area be taught as separate subjects at separate times.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. It is _____ for teacher-child interactions to help develop children’s self-esteem and positive feelings toward learning.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continue to next page →
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
<th>Not Very Important</th>
<th>Fairly Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>It is _____ for teachers to provide opportunities for children to select many of their own activities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>It is _____ to use one approach for reading and writing instruction.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Instruction in letter and word recognition is _____ in preschool.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>It is _____ for the teacher to provide a variety of learning areas with concrete materials (writing center, science center, math center, etc.).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>It is _____ for children to create their own learning activities (e.g., cut their own shapes, decide on the steps to perform an experiment, plan their creative drama, art, and computer activities).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>It is _____ for children to work individually at desks or tables most of the time.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Workbooks and/or ditto sheets are _____ in my classroom.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>A structured reading or pre-reading program is _____ for all children.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>It is _____ for the teacher to talk to the whole group and for the children to do the same things at the same time.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>It is _____ for the teacher to move among groups and individuals, offering suggestions, asking questions, and facilitating children's involvement with materials, activities, and peers.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>It is _____ for teachers to use treats, stickers, and/or stars to get children to do activities that they don't really want to do.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>It is _____ for teachers to regularly use punishments and/or reprimands when children aren't participating.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<p>| | | | | | |</p>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. It is ___ for teachers to develop an individualized behavior plan for addressing severe behavior problems.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. It is ___ for teachers to allocate extended periods of time for children to engage in play and projects.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. It is ___ for children to write by inventing their own spelling.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. It is ___ for children to color with pre-drawn forms.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. It is ___ to read stories daily to children, individually and/or on a group basis.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. It is ___ for children to dictate stories to the teacher.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. It is _____ that teachers engage in on-going professional development in early childhood education (e.g., attend professional conferences, read professional literature).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. It is ___ for children to see and use functional print (telephone book, magazines) and environmental print (cereal boxes, potato chip bags).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. It is ___ to provide many daily opportunities for developing social skills (i.e., cooperating, helping, talking) with peers in the classroom.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. It is ___ that books, pictures, and materials in the classroom include people of different races, ages, and abilities and both genders in various roles.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. It is ___ that outdoor time have planned activities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. It is ___ for parents/guardians to be involved in ways that are comfortable for them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>It is _____ for strategies like setting limits, problem solving, and redirection to be used to help guide children's behavior.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>It is _____ for teachers to integrate each child's home culture and language into the curriculum throughout the year.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>It is _____ for teachers to solicit and incorporate parent's knowledge about their children for assessment, evaluation, placement, and planning.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>It is _____ to establish a collaborative partnership/relationship with parents of all children, including parents of children with special needs and from different cultural groups.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>It is _____ for the classroom teacher to modify, adapt, and accommodate specific indoor and outdoor learning experiences for the child with special needs as appropriate.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>It is _____ that services (like speech therapy) be provided to children with special needs in the regular education classroom by specialist within the context of typical daily activities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>It is _____ that teachers maintain a quiet environment.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>It is _____ to provide the same curriculum and environment for each group of children that comes through the program.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>It is _____ to focus on teaching children isolated skills by using repetition and recitation (e.g., reciting ABC's).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>It is _____ to follow a prescribed curriculum plan without being distracted by children's interests or current circumstances.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>It is _____ to plan activities that are primarily just for fun without connection to program goals.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FOR THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS
PLEASE THINK ABOUT HOW OFTEN CHILDREN IN YOUR CLASSROOM DO THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES

Instructional Practices Survey

Please circle the number that best represents the average frequency of each activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW OFTEN DO CHILDREN IN YOUR CLASS:</th>
<th>Almost Never (monthly)</th>
<th>Rarely (monthly)</th>
<th>Sometimes (weekly)</th>
<th>Regularly (2-3 times/month)</th>
<th>Very Often (daily)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. build with blocks</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. select from a variety of learning areas and projects (i.e., dramatic play, construction, art, music, science experiences, etc.)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. have their work displayed in the classroom</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. experiment with writing by drawing, copying, and using their own invented spelling</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. play with games, puzzles, and construction materials (e.g., Tinker Toys, Bristle Blocks)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. explore science materials (e.g., animals, plants, wheels, gears, etc.)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. sing, listen, and/or move to music</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. do planned movement activities using large muscles (e.g., balancing, running, jumping)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. use manipulatives (e.g. pegboards, Legos, and Unifix Cubes)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Continue to next page →
HOW OFTEN DO CHILDREN IN YOUR CLASS:

|   | Use commercially-prepared phonics activities | Work in assigned ability-level groups | Circle, underline, and/or mark items on worksheets | Use flashcards with ABCs, sight words, and/or math facts | Participate in rote counting | Practice handwriting on lines | Color, cut, and paste pre-drawn forms | Participate in whole-class, teacher-directed instruction | Sit and listen for long periods of time until they become restless and fidgety | Have the opportunity to learn about people with special needs (e.g., a speaker or character in a book) | Receive rewards as incentives to participate in classroom activities in which they are reluctant participants | See their own race, culture, language reflected in the classroom | Get placed in time-out (i.e., isolation, sitting on a chair, in a corner, or being sent outside of the room) | Experience parents reading stories or sharing a skill or hobby with the class | Engage in childchosen, teacher-supported play activities |
|---|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 10. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Continue to next page →
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW OFTEN DO CHILDREN IN YOUR CLASS:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25. draw, paint, work with clay, and use other art media</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. solve real math problems using real objects in the classroom environment that are incorporated into other subject areas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. get separated from their friends to maintain classroom order</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. engage in experiences that demonstrate the explicit valuing of each other (e.g., sending a card to a sick classmate)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. work with materials that have been adapted or modified to meet their needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. do activities that integrate multiple subjects (reading, math, science, social studies, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comments or Reactions:

Continue to next page ➔
THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY!

WE APPRECIATE YOUR HELP!

PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED FORM.
Appendix B: Coding Scheme
Developmentally appropriate beliefs (DAB)/developmentally appropriate practices (DAP)/mismatch

DAB is teachers' beliefs on how young children should be appropriately educated according to their individual developmental needs. DAP is the resulting practices of DAB. DAB and DAP do not always match, due to a number of factors, such as: administrator influence or pressure, programs and curricular mandates from the district/state, teacher preferences and being willing to compromise their DAB, class sizes are too large to effectively teach material, and lack of resources, including lack of time. Within this category also falls teachers who express that their class size is too large in general.

Kindergarten transition

Kindergarten transition is children making the transition from home, preschool, or another environment to kindergarten. Various issues and activities are associated with children making this transition, such as kindergarten readiness (children being ready to enter kindergarten and specific skills teachers feel they should know or that children lack); the influence of preschool on children (whether positive or negative); specific transition activities a teacher or school engages in to help smooth the transition to kindergarten (orientations, parent meetings, prescreenings during the first weeks of school, etc.); and lack of support and funding for transition activities, and challenges from a variety of sources.

Time

Having enough time to implement needed practices and curriculum is a challenge teachers express. This could include not enough time for teachers or children to meet standards, particularly recent mandates; teachers feeling like the kindergarten day should be extended to full day; etc., and teachers integrating subjects so as to maximize time. Teachers whose comments fall into this time category made no connection to their DAB or DAP in conjunction with their comments about having too little time.

“Pushed down curriculum,” or emphasis on academics

The pushed down curriculum phenomena produces kindergartens that look like what first grades used to, with more of an emphasis on academics and less on play and exploration. This can be manifested as an emphasis on literacy in the classroom and through standardized testing, especially too much testing.

Parental involvement

Parental involvement comes in many forms, including in and outside of the classroom. This could take the form of parents volunteering in the classroom (or not), and helping children at home, whether it be to prepare children to come to school or to supplement what is being taught in the classroom by reading to children, etc. (or the lack thereof).