Kindergarten Teachers' Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs and Practices and Perceived Problems of Kindergarten Transition

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KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE BELIEFS
AND PRACTICES AND PERCEIVED PROBLEMS OF
KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION

by

K. Marie Sorenson Mecham

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
in
Family, Consumer, and Human Development
ABSTRACT

Kindergarten Teachers’ Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs and Practices and Perceived Problems of Kindergarten Transition

by

K. Marie Sorenson Mecham, Master of Science
Utah State University, 2007

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

This study examined kindergarten teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices, and kindergarten teachers’ perceived problems of children entering kindergarten. The relationship between kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices and their perceived problems of children entering kindergarten was studied, as was the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices and their perception of children’s successful kindergarten entry.

Participants included kindergarten teachers from eight Utah school districts. Teachers were surveyed using both the Transition Practices, and the Teacher Beliefs and Practices Survey. From these surveys, data were collected on kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices, and perceptions of problems children may have upon entering kindergarten.

Findings indicated that kindergarten teachers reported that most often children have problems due to “lack of academic skills,” “difficulty following directions,” and
difficulty working independently." About half of the children were perceived as having a very successful entry into kindergarten. Of teachers who responded, 72% felt that one fifth or more of their current kindergarten class was not ready for kindergarten upon entry.

Overall the kindergarten teachers in this study were considered developmentally appropriate, but teachers' reported developmentally appropriate beliefs were higher than their reported developmentally appropriate practices. The highest reported beliefs consisted of reading daily with children, helping children develop self-esteem, helping children develop social skills, guiding children's behavior in positive ways, and using individualized plans with children who have major behavior problems. The highest reported practices consisted of using music in the classroom, integrating various subjects, allowing children to experiment with writing, using manipulatives in the classroom, and not using time-out as a means of discipline.

The findings show a trend in which teachers with higher beliefs reported that 'lack of academic skills' was a problem less often than the teachers with lower reported beliefs. Teachers with higher reported practices reported that a 'non-academic preschool experience' was a problem for children more often than teachers with lower reported practices. Findings also indicated a trend in which teachers with higher beliefs reported a smaller percentage of children having a 'difficult or very difficult' entry into kindergarten than did teachers who reported lower developmentally appropriate beliefs. The implications of these findings are discussed. (113 pages)
I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who have helped me through this process. Without the help of these individuals this would not have been possible. I am so grateful for their contributions to this project.

I would first like to thank Dr. Shelley Lindauer for all the countless hours helping me accomplish this task. There were many weekends spent reading and rereading drafts of this thesis. I know that without her help and encouragement, none of this would have been possible. I feel immensely grateful that I had the privilege of working with her. I would also like to thank Roxane Pfister for all the time and effort helping me with the statistical analysis. Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Randy Jones and Kaelin Olsen, for their encouragement and suggestions to help better this thesis.

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Marie Mecham
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Kindergarten classrooms have changed immensely since the birth of kindergarten in America in 1856. When kindergarten was first started, the objectives were to help young children get prepared for school by focusing on the development of the whole child, meaning the mind, the body, and the soul. As kindergarten evolved, teachers focused on continuing to help children prepare for school by teaching them social skills such as getting along with others and having fun learning (Bryant & Clifford, 1992).

Many changes have taken place in kindergarten starting in the late 19th century when kindergartens began to become part of the public school system. When kindergarten was introduced in the public schools, there was some tension between kindergarten and first grade teachers. Changes had to be made in both kindergarten and first grade to help smooth the transition between the two. Kindergarten classes began to concentrate more on discipline and neatness, while first grade classrooms relaxed some of their rigid routines (Bryant & Clifford, 1992). As the years have progressed, changes continue to occur; now more emphasis is placed on teaching academic content, with less emphasis on the social concepts, particularly with federal involvement including implementing the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Hyun, 2003).

Increasingly, many teachers are feeling pressure to focus on direct instruction rather than using child-centered methods to teach their students (Stipek & Byler, 1997). Kindergarten, in the attempt to help the less advantaged children reach the same level as more advantaged kindergarteners, has become a watered down version of first grade more than a transition between home and school (Bryant & Clifford, 1992).
The transition from home into kindergarten can be very stressful for young children, especially when demands are put on the children that are difficult to meet (NAEYC, 1990). Often, parents and teachers do not agree what those demands should be (Esparza, 1998; Knudsen-Lindauer & Harris, 1989). Many teachers also perceive that children entering kindergarten have specific problems in the transition into the classroom (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000).

In classrooms that demonstrate developmentally inappropriate practice (DIP), children exhibit more overall stress, especially during times when they have to wait, during transitions, as well as during workbook and worksheet activities. Some stress behaviors including nail biting, nervous laughter, tics or tremors, and physical fighting are apparent. On the other hand, classrooms in which developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) takes place create less stressful environments for the children (Burts et al., 1992). When a teacher understands the developmental stages of a child and takes that information into account, he is going to better be able to meet that child’s needs. When this happens a smoother transition into kindergarten takes place (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

In this study, kindergarten teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices are considered. Teachers’ perceptions of problems children may have upon kindergarten entry are also examined. Finally the issue of whether or not the beliefs and practices of kindergarten teachers are related to their perceptions of the difficulties children have when entering kindergarten was investigated.

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices and their perceptions of
problems that children experience upon kindergarten entry. The research questions which guided this study were, first, what problems do kindergarten teachers perceive in children entering kindergarten? Second, what percentage of children entering kindergarten is perceived by kindergarten teachers as having difficulty, or is perceived by kindergarten teachers as not ready for kindergarten? Third, what are the teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices? Fourth, what is the relationship between kindergarten teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices, and kindergarten teachers’ perceived problems of children entering kindergarten? Finally, what is the relationship between kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices, and their perception of children’s level of success transitioning into kindergarten?
Throughout this literature review, different aspects of kindergarten and developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) will be discussed. The history of kindergarten will be reviewed to give the reader a better understanding of where kindergarten started and what the purpose of it was. The current state of kindergarten will then be addressed to give the reader a better knowledge of what is happening now in kindergarten in the United States. This will be followed by information regarding children’s transition into kindergarten and the factors which affect this process. Finally, throughout the literature review, DAP is discussed, as are the outcomes of implementing DAP.

Kindergarten

History of Kindergarten

Kindergarten has undergone considerable change over the past century and a half. Friedrich Froebel first introduced kindergarten in Germany in 1837. The word kindergarten literally means “children’s garden” which “hints at Froebel’s philosophy of educating body, mind, and soul through play, outdoor experiences, music, movement, spontaneity, creativity, and independence” (Bryant & Clifford, 1992, p. 148).

Froebel recognized and based his educational principles on the idea of unity or inner connection. Froebel saw that an individual’s intellectual, physical, and spiritual aspects were all unified (Brosterman, 1997). Froebel also saw the importance of self-
activity, which was children’s impulse to act and explore purely because of intellectual curiosity (Brosterman). He felt that learning was initiated by the child; the teacher was a guide instead of a lecturer.

The success of kindergarten was founded in play. Froebel recognized the importance of play in the education of young children. He saw play as children’s work. He wrote,

Play is the purest, the most spiritual, product of man at this stage, and is at once the prefiguration and imitation of the total human life,—of the inner, secret, natural life in man and in all things. It produces, therefore, joy, freedom, satisfaction; repose within and without, peace with the world. The springs of all good rest within it and go out from it. (Froebel as quoted in Brosterman, 1997, p. 33)

All of the activities in Froebel’s kindergarten focused on play. This acknowledgment that children were more than small, unknowing, simple people opened the door for acceptance of the study of children at the end of the 19th century (Brosterman).

Another concept that Froebel felt was important was that of object-work. He believed that children would learn the most with hands-on activities. With this in mind, Froebel created object-work with real things. As children handled objects from the world around them they were able to learn and explore. To complete this object-work, the children used what were called “gifts.” These were different items the children would manipulate and explore with. Froebel based this idea of gifts on the idea of a loving mother and child. The gifts were toys for the children to play with and learn from (Brosterman, 1997).
There were about 20 gifts that Froebel created for the kindergarteners. They were items such as balls of yarn, wooden blocks, sticks, instruments for drawing and sewing, and clay. These items were not new to the children, but the way they were to be used was different. Using these items the child’s activities were gently guided as she learned. The use of these gifts was not totally given for free-play. There were certain activities the children were to do with them. These activities correlated with three categories of learning: forms of nature (or life), forms of knowledge (or science) and forms of beauty (or art; Brosterman, 1997).

Froebel’s protégé, Bertha von Marenhotz-Bulow, summarized the purpose of kindergarten when describing the eight concepts of learning that kindergarten achieves.

The kindergarten method satisfies 1. The need for physical movement, through gymnastic games that develop the limbs; 2. A child’s need to occupy oneself in a plastic fashion, through exercises that produce manual dexterity and develop the senses; 3. A child’s need to create through small tasks that develop one’s artistic faculties; 4. A child’s need to know, or natural curiosity, engaging in observing, examining, comparing (which is how intellectual development is brought about); 5. A child’s tendencies to cultivate and care for, through gardening and carrying out small tasks, which result in the development of the heart and conscience; 6. The need to sing, through games and songs, which produce the development of feelings and esthetic taste; 7. The need to live in society, through life in the kindergarten community: this mode of existence produces social virtues; 8. The deepest need of the soul: to find the reason behind things, to find God.

(Marenholts-Bulow as quoted by Brosterman, 1997, p. 30)
There were many who were captivated by the ideas of Friedrich Froebel. Two of those who were interested in the thoughts and ideas of Froebel were the sisters, Bertha and Margarethe Meyer (Brosterman, 1997). These women were converted to the ways of Froebel. After Bertha married, she and her husband emigrated from Germany to England and opened kindergartens there. Her sister, Margarethe, joined them and worked in the English kindergarten until she married. She and her husband immigrated to Wisconsin and opened the first kindergarten in the United State in 1856. Kindergartens were started across the country throughout the second half of the 1800’s, but in 1873, St. Louis was the first American city to offer kindergarten free as part of their public school system (Brosterman).

Current Kindergarten

Kindergarten in the United States has undergone significant change since the first kindergarten was opened in 1856. William James and G. Stanley are credited for refocusing those in education to the belief that “education is a process of development rather than a process of instruction; that play is the natural means of development during the early years; (and) that the child’s creative activity must be the main factor in his education.” (Bryant & Clifford, 1992, p. 147)

Developmentally appropriate classrooms recognize that play is the natural way for children to develop. There are also many classrooms that have moved far from this ideal where direct instruction and structured learning is all that occurs (Bryant & Clifford).
No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

One reason kindergarten classes have moved farther and farther away from developmentally appropriate practices and more toward direct instruction and structured learning is the “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.” In January, 2001, this act was signed by President Bush, who wanted more accountability for schools, more choices for parents and students, and more flexibility for the states and school districts (Executive Summary of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2001).

To achieve these goals there are specific steps that must be taken. First, the states create their own standards and then assess the children yearly on these standards. If the test scores do not continually improve, certain measures will be taken. For instance, the school will have to implement different programs for the children using the district’s money. If the school still does not do well, parents have the option of sending their child to a “better” school at the school district’s expense (Executive Summary of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2001).

Because of the pressure of performance on the end of the year testing, some teachers are focused more on “teaching to the test.” This causes many teachers to resort to direct instruction and more structured teaching, and to move away from developmentally appropriate practices. High demands for student performance are placed on the teacher, and the assessment of students’ success is limited only to standardized test scores (Hyun, 2003). Instead of helping create equality for all children, Hyun voices a concern that, through this new definition, children who have been disadvantaged throughout history will be left even further behind.
Qualified Teachers

With the NCLB Act, teachers who were previously not qualified to teach young children can, through passing a test, become “qualified” teachers. This causes another problem of “qualified” teachers not having a thorough knowledge of young children and how they learn through developmentally appropriate practices. Cochran-Smith (2002) commented on the issue of unqualified teachers becoming qualified teachers through a matter of a test.

For example, a teacher who is “unqualified” because of no experience in the classroom, no courses in pedagogy, no knowledge of cultural differences, no study of how people learn, no knowledge of human development, and so on, may with a stroke of the pen that institutionalized the new federal definition be instantaneously transformed into a “highly qualified teacher,” provided he or she passed a state teacher test. (p. 381)

In an article by Hyun (2003), the issue of qualified teachers was also addressed. As the NCLB Act is put into action, the definition of qualified teachers will change. In this article, the U.S. Secretary of Education suggests that teacher training programs are not adequately producing teachers who will be needed for the NCLB Act.

In Secretary Paige’s report, highly qualified teachers are defined as those who hold higher education degrees, high verbal ability and those who can ‘deliver’ (transmit) a given set of content knowledge to the ‘receivers’ (learners). Learning is defined solely as performance on standardized tests that are based on predetermined content knowledge. (p. 120)
When talking about qualified teachers and the new definition, as stated earlier by the U.S. Secretary of Education, Hyun (2003) comments on the issue of teacher qualification. This new definition, which is troubling to teacher educators, will directly impact the implicit, or hidden, curriculum. This curriculum has a strong impact on children’s learning, more so, even, than the explicit curriculum. Because there are teachers who are now considered qualified who once were not, children will miss out on the more subtle curriculum that has longer lasting effects on the child. These include working with the child as a whole person, helping them develop not only cognitively, but also emotionally, and socially. McMullen (1999) found that the teacher’s education can have a significant affect on how that teacher teaches. In her study preschool, kindergarten, first-, second-, and third-grade teachers were surveyed about their teaching beliefs. They were then observed to determine their actual practices. More of the “high” scoring developmentally appropriate teachers had early childhood or child development education $\chi^2 (1, N = 20) = 7.74, p = .005$.

Another study by Vartuli (1999) found similar results. Teachers from 10 elementary schools and one Head Start program who taught grades ranging from preschool to third-grade were surveyed, observed, and interviewed. Teachers with early childhood certification (EC; $n = 28$) had significantly higher scores than their colleagues with elementary certification (ElEd; $n = 104$) on two separate instruments, The Early Childhood Survey of Beliefs and Practices, which was a self-reported beliefs and practices survey $t (129) = 3.74, p < .001$ (mean for EC = 101.68, mean for ElEd = 87.25), as well as the Classroom Practices Inventory, which was an observation instrument measuring developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom $t (130) = 5.38, p <$
.001 (mean score for EC = 233.11, mean for EIEd = 184.27). These findings indicate a greater belief in, and implementation of developmentally appropriate practices by the teachers with early childhood certification than their colleagues with elementary certification ($n = 104$; Vartuli).

Buchanan and colleagues (1998) also found data pertaining to teacher education. Two hundred seventy-seven first-, second-, and third-grade teachers were surveyed. The survey they completed was a self-reporting survey of the teacher’s beliefs and practices. The survey also asked about the teacher’s education, current work situation, as well as their teaching experience. “Teachers who were certified in early childhood reported using fewer inappropriate activities than teachers who were certified in elementary education only. The teacher characteristics added significant unique variance to the equation, $F(10,261) = 3.10, p < .01$” (p. 475).

Teachers must be trained in more than just the content children are to learn, they must also understand the developing child in all aspects, and they must understand the whole child. Pressures for children to perform start at the youngest grade, kindergarten, where all children enter with different backgrounds and abilities.

One can understand the pressures put on teachers to make sure the children in their classroom are learning skills specified by the core curriculum. States expect teachers to teach their kindergarten children everything from building a strong sense of self to how to read. The state of Utah has a core curriculum that teachers are expected to teach each child before the children exit kindergarten. The core curriculum focuses on having children develop a myriad of skills. Under each of these standards there are objectives that the teacher must cover.
The first standard for kindergarteners is, “Students will develop a sense of self.” Under this standard the teacher must make sure that children are able to “describe and practice responsible behaviors for health and safety,” “develop skills in gross and fine motor movement,” and “develop and use skills to communicate ideas, information, and feelings” (Kindergarten Content, 2003). Some examples of the core language arts objectives that fall under the first standard, “Oral Language - Students develop language for the purpose of effectively communicating through listening, speaking, viewing, and presenting” include: “Develop language through listening and speaking,” “Demonstrate phonological awareness,” and “Read aloud grade level text with appropriate speed and accuracy” (Kindergarten Language Arts, 2003). Some examples of the core mathematics objectives that fall under the first standard “Students will understand simple number concepts and relationships” include: “Identify and use whole numbers,” “Identify and use patterns to describe numbers or objects,” and “Identify measurable attributes of objects and units of measurements” (Kindergarten Mathematics, 2003).

Teachers are expected to make “adequate yearly progress” according to the definition given in the NCLB Act. This begins by setting a starting point that is based on the lowest achieving demographic group in the state, or the schools that are performing the lowest in the state, which ever one is higher. The state then sets the bar for higher student achievement in the next two years. The expectations must be met and the bar raised every three years (Questions and Answers on No Child Left Behind, 2001). If this is not accomplished there are several steps the school must go through.

When a school is not performing to the expectations of this NCLB Act after two years, the school is labeled as “needing improvement.” The school then develops a two-
year plan for improvement. The students at this school are given the choice to transfer
to another public school in the district (including charter schools) that is not labeled as
“needing improvement.” If the school fails to perform the third year, the school must
continue offering transfers to other public schools as well as offer supplemental
programs, such as tutoring, to low-income children. The fourth year the school does not
perform to the expected level, the district must take corrective action meaning that they
must take action to improve the school including replacing staff, implementing different
curriculum or other measures that would improve the school’s performance, all the while
still offering transfers to other public schools as well as supplemental services. In the fifth
year, the school must undergo restructuring. This may include changing the school into a
charter school, replacing the entire staff (or most of it), or giving the school over to the
state, or a private company that has a record of being effective (Questions and Answers
on No Child Left Behind, 2001).

Because of these requirements, many kindergarten teachers have been pressured
to shift their focus from developmentally appropriate practices to more structured direct
instruction. Kindergarten entry is a significant time in a child’s education. This is the time
when the child is introduced to school and all the changes it brings. When teachers are
not able to focus on the whole child using developmentally appropriate practices, that
child suffers, whether more stress is created (Burts et al., 1992), or scores fall behind
children who experience developmentally appropriate classrooms (Huffman & Speer,
2000), or even social skills diminished (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997).
Kindergarten transition is an important issue to study and understand. The entry into kindergarten is a crucial step to beginning education. The National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) statement on school readiness asserts that there are many factors to examine when a child is entering kindergarten. According to the NAEYC “there is a tremendous normal variability both among children of the same chronological age and within an individual child” (NAEYC, 1990, p. 21). It is vital that teachers understand this variability so that they will better be able to help children make a smooth transition into kindergarten.

The transition to kindergarten can be a stressful time for young children and their families. Even the most advantaged child can experience great stress when entering a kindergarten class, especially when the teacher and parents place demands on the child that are difficult to meet (NAEYC, 1990).

Knudsen-Lindauer and Harris (1989) investigated the differing views of teachers and parents regarding the skills children need when entering kindergarten as well as the skills that should be emphasized in kindergarten. In this study, 146 kindergarten teachers and 436 parents were participants. Teachers were asked to choose two children in their class (one girl and one boy) and send home a survey with each for both the father and the mother to fill out. The teachers were also asked to complete a survey. The survey questions concentrated on the expectations of skills the child should possess before entering kindergarten, and also addressed the importance of different skills children should learn in kindergarten. The questionnaires were distributed in January in order to
give the parent and teacher time to create a frame of reference concerning the current kindergarten setting.

In this study, the authors found that, though there were similarities in the way that the teachers and parents ranked different skills, there were also some differences. Teachers and parents agreed that listening, feeling confident, and following directions were the most important skills that a child needed to possess when she entered kindergarten (Knudsen-Lindauer & Harris, 1989). Teachers’ and parents’ priorities then differed as teachers were found to believe that being independent and curious were more important, whereas mothers and fathers were found to believe that writing and reading were more important skills for the child to possess upon kindergarten entry.

Looking at the skills believed to be the most important for children to learn while in kindergarten, teachers and parents agreed that listening and confidence were the two most important skills. After that teachers believed that social skills were of top importance, where parents believed that intellectual skills were most important (Knudsen-Lindauer & Harris, 1989).

This study illustrates that teachers and parents have different expectations for their children entering kindergarten. This may cause added stress to the child as there are different areas of development being emphasized at home and at school. When teachers and parents are concerned about different skills, the child may be confused as to what is of most importance when attending kindergarten. In this study there is a call to “increase parental and teacher dialogue as well as parent education programs to assist parents and teachers in continuing to define similar goals” (Knudsen-Lindauer & Harris, 1989, p. 59).
Another study looking at differences in teacher and parent perceptions and expectations is the study by Esparza (1998). In this study, 101 preschool teachers, 113 kindergarten teachers, and 143 fathers and mothers were surveyed. The questionnaires that were completed focused on finding out what skills the teachers and parents felt were priorities for the children to have upon kindergarten entry, what the role was for preschool teachers in the transition into kindergarten, and the expectation of preschool and kindergarten curricula.

The data show that more kindergarten and preschool teachers, as compared to parents, felt that the preschool teachers should be doing more to help children prepare for kindergarten, particularly in reading and writing skills. Both groups of teachers as well as parents agreed that parents could be doing more for their children in preparing them for kindergarten. The highest recommended activity was reading to the child. Fathers, however also felt that math skills were very important, more so than the mothers or teachers in this study. Fathers in this study continued to rank intellectual concepts higher than the other groups. The kindergarten and preschool teachers were more consistent in their responses on many of the questions than were the parents as compared to teachers (Esparza, 1998).

Esparza’s (1998) study illustrates the differences, not only between parents and kindergarten and preschool teachers, but also between mothers and fathers. Expectations are different between these four groups. Parents and teachers, in trying to make sure that children are ready for kindergarten, may cause undue stress to the child by not agreeing on what is important when children enter and participate in kindergarten. The transition into kindergarten, therefore, may be less smooth.
There have been other studies on the transition to kindergarten, such as the investigation by Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2000). In this study, a large, national sample of 3,595 kindergarten teachers was surveyed. Teachers were given the Transitions Practices Survey (NCEDL, 1996) which asked the teachers about specific problems they observed in their current class of children. It also explored their perceptions of how well children, in general, transition into and out of kindergarten. The researchers found that “up to 46% of the teachers reported that half their class or more had specific problems in any number of areas in kindergarten transition” (p. 147). Some of the problems that the teachers identified were “difficulty following directions, lack of academic skills, disorganized home environments, and difficulty working independently” (p. 155). The highest ranking problem was “difficulty following directions” (p. 155). Out of all the teachers surveyed, 46.16% teachers reported that half their class or more struggled with this problem as they entered kindergarten.

Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell’s (2003) study also focused on the transition into kindergarten. They surveyed 3,305 kindergarten teachers nationwide. The schools that were chosen had to have either kindergarten, transitional kindergarten, or a transitional first-grade. Schools that were un-graded were also part of the study. Each of the public schools had to have at least 24 kindergarten students, and the private schools were required to have 12 kindergarten students in order to qualify for the survey.

The kindergarten teachers completed a three-part survey. The first section asked questions about the classroom and the classroom characteristics. The second section included questions on class organization, evaluations, activities, and teacher opinions. The opinion questions addressed kindergarten readiness, school climate, and the schools
environment. The last section on the survey dealt with the evaluation of the children’s academic performance along with their social skills (Lin et al., 2003).

The researchers were looking at different aspects of a teacher including “teacher age, gender, ethnicity, certification, education level, year of teaching experience, region, percent minority students, community size, and school type” (Lin et al., p. 228). The data show that kindergarten teachers “tend to view preparing children to satisfy social demands of schooling as a higher priority than academic skills development” (p. 233). The researchers also found that not all teachers agreed, but that “readiness expectations were influenced by [teachers’] gender, age, and the geographic region where they were teaching” (p. 225). Almost all the teachers were female (98%), the ages varied from 24 to 58 years (median was 42 years), and the regions were divided into four areas, Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. The younger teachers reported valuing academic skills more than older teachers. Also, the teachers from the South region differed from the rest of the nation by having higher expectations for academic preparedness. Not only did the demographics of a teacher affect the way she taught, the preferences of methods used also contributed to the way a teacher decided how and what would be taught in her classroom.

Stipek and Byler (1997) examined teachers’ preferred method of teaching, whether it leaned more towards a child-centered approach, or more towards direct instruction. A total of 60 teachers from preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade classrooms completed a three-part survey. These classrooms were from both public and private schools. The first section asked the teachers about the goals they had for their classrooms. The second part of the survey addressed whether the teacher endorsed a more
basic-skills classroom or a more child-centered classroom. The last part of the survey asked the teachers different questions pertaining to early childhood classrooms. One question in the last section asked the teachers “whether their program was about right, or more, or less academic and structured than they believe is appropriate for young children” (p. 312).

Their findings showed that “nearly all teachers who reported that they were not able to implement the program they believed was appropriate claimed that their program was too basic-skills oriented: parents were the most often cited source of pressure” (Stipek & Byler 1997, p. 305). The teachers were asked to list changes they thought the parents would like. Even though most of the teachers reported the parents as being usually satisfied, “all of the changes mentioned were in the direction of a more basic skills orientation, including more emphasis on academics, more structure, a quieter classroom, and less playing” (p. 317). Nonetheless, parents are urging teachers to lean more towards a direct instruction method that may not necessarily be the best solution for their children.

Though there has not been any research addressing the outcomes of a smooth kindergarten transition there have been studies focusing on the results of developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom. One such study by Schweinhart and Weikart (1997) examined the High/Scope curriculum, the Nursery School preschool program, and Direct Instruction program longitudinally. This study showed that a child’s early childhood curriculum can have long lasting affects. In 1967-1969 sixty-eight children of low socioeconomic status were randomly assigned to one of the three programs: High/Scope, Nursery School, or Direct Instruction (Schweinhart & Weikart).
The High/Scope curriculum was based on the idea that children and teachers both initiated learning, the open-frame work approach. The children planned, carried out, and reviewed what it was they wanted to do on their own that day. They also spent time outside as well as participated in small- and large-group activities. “Teachers facilitated intellectual, social, and physical key experiences in children’s development” (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997, p. 120).

The Nursery School program used the child-centered approach. This was considered good preschool curriculum in 1967, at the time this study began. Teachers would plan different themes or units and then organize the activities, discussions, and fieldtrips around these themes. The children had the freedom to choose what activities they wanted to participate in. As they moved from one activity to another the children would interact with their peers as well as adults. The main focus was to help children develop social skills rather than academic skills. The children were expected “to show good manners, cooperate, and observe limits” (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997, p. 120). Both the High/Scope and Nursery School programs are what we now consider developmentally appropriate.

Direct Instruction used the programmed-learning approach. Children in this setting were given workbooks and teacher’s had guides. “Teachers led small groups of children in precisely planned, 20-minute, question-and-answer lessons in language, mathematics, and reading” (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997, p. 119). The only materials in the classroom were the children’s workbooks and the teacher’s guide, which were the only materials that were thought to promote the necessary learning. This program would be considered developmentally inappropriate.
Data were collected from these children each year from the time they were 3 until 8, then at ages 10, 15, and 23 (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). There are significant differences in these groups in a number of areas. To begin with the Direct Instruction children initially scored higher IQs on the Standford-Binet Intelligence Test at age 5. By the time the children were 10, however, the children from all the programs had IQ increases. All three programs showed improved academic performance. However, this is where the advantages of Direct Instruction stop. When the participants were interviewed at the age of 23, many characteristics were examined. The data showed that the Direct Instruction group ended up having more years of special education for emotional impairment than the other groups ($p = .004$) When the participants were interviewed at age 23, more of the High/Scope group reported they planned on gaining a higher education (bachelor’s degree) then the Direct Instruction group (70% vs. 36%). The High/Scope group also had more individuals living with a spouse than the Direct Instruction group ($p = .045$). The High/Scope group and the Nursery School group had done significantly more volunteer work than the Direct Instruction group ($p = .047$). The High/Scope group reported significantly fewer sources of irritation than the Direct Instruction group ($p = .014$).

At age 15, the Direct Instruction group reported significantly more acts of misconduct than did the High/Scope group (Direct Instruction group averaged 14.9 on a scale of 18, High/Scope averaged 5.9, $p = .036$). The Direct Instruction group had three times as many felony arrests as either High/Scope or Nursery School, In the Direct Instruction group, 39% of the members had felony arrest records, as compared to High/Scope with 10%, and Nursery School in which 17% had felony arrest records. The
Direct Instruction group also had more arrests for property crime than the High/Scope group ($p = .007$). The Direct Instruction group was cited for assault with a dangerous weapon significantly more often than the other two groups (19% for Direct Instruction vs. 0% for both High/Scope and Nursery School). The Direct Instruction group reported more suspensions from work than the Nursery School group ($p = .033$). There were no variables in which Direct Instruction had an advantage over either of the other curricula (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997).

When talking about Direct Instruction, Schweinhart and Weikart (1997) stated that “this strategy does not appear to have been in the best interests of the children served. This issue persists because of continuing demands from some parents, administrators, and policymakers that early childhood teachers use direct instructional strategies rather than child-initiated-learning strategies. Such demands have been the reason that the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has seen fit to issue...a position statement on developmentally appropriate practice” (p. 138). This study illustrates that there were many benefits for children in developmentally appropriate classrooms, (High/Scope, and Nursery School), as opposed to those children in developmentally inappropriate classrooms (Direct Instruction).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

*What Is DAP? What Does It Look Like?*

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in programs for young children is essential for optimal development. NAEYC asserts that, through DAP, young children are able to learn and adapt in the most effective ways.
Children from low-income families who participated in high-quality preschool programs were significantly less likely to have been assigned to special education, retained in grade, engaged in crime, or to have dropped out of school. The longitudinal studies, in general, suggest positive consequences for programs that used an approach consistent with principles of developmentally appropriate practice. (Bredekamp & Copple 1997, p. 6)

To become adults who can function in today’s world, children need to be able to communicate well, analyze situations, obtain information through a variety of resources, and be able to continue to learn throughout their lives (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). These ideas relate to Froebel’s original purpose of kindergarten. Through the experiences Froebel offered, children were able learn skills that are once again the goals of kindergarten. There are several other theorists from whom much of the philosophy of DAP is gleaned, including Vygotsky, Piaget, and Brofenbrenner, who promoted, interactive, constructivist, and ecological perspectives respectively. NAEYC explains that those who implement DAP are working from a base of three different types of knowledge. These include knowledge of child development and learning, knowledge of knowing and understanding the strengths, weaknesses and needs of each child in the classroom, and knowledge of the child’s cultural and social context along with the understanding that this affects the way the child learns (Bredekamp & Copple). Teachers must understand that these three areas are dynamic and constantly changing, and that they must continue to learn and develop throughout their careers.
Knowledge of child development and learning. The first type of knowledge crucial for the understanding of DAP is that of child development and learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). “In a developmental approach to curriculum design,...[decisions] about what should be learned and how it would best be learned depend on what we know of the learner’s developmental status and our understanding of the relationships between early experience and subsequent development” (Katz, 1995, as cited in Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 9). For instance, teachers who are knowledgeable about child development and learning understand that there are certain human characteristics that are generally associated with different age groups. The developmental areas in each child (physical, social, cognitive, and emotional) are closely related. As a child develops in one area, this affects other developmental areas of the child (Sroufe, Cooper, & DeHart, 1992). Educators, understanding these interrelationships, should be able to plan activities that will help children to develop in all areas to their full potential. They should also be able to make meaningful connections across all areas of development. They are able to do this as the teacher provides activities where the child is able to use a combination of different skills, for example, physical, social and cognitive skills, all in the same activity. When these activities are put into practice in the classroom, the teacher is able to help the child develop not in parts, categorized by sections of learning and development, but rather is able to help the child develop as a whole.

Children integrate information they take in (Sroufe et al., 1992). Even when they are focused on one area, they are also constantly learning in other areas. The capable educator is able to integrate all subjects throughout the day. As the teacher observes and learns about the child, the teacher then puts that information into use as he creates
curriculum. The effective teacher will be able to create a classroom where every child is stimulated and is able to pursue her interests.

Another concept that one must contemplate when implementing DAP is that each child not only develops at different rates than those around him, but the child also develops at different rates within the areas of individual development (Sroufe et al., 1992). Understanding the differences not only between children, but within an individual child, helps the educator’s interactions to become, as much as possible, individualized for each child. Knowing this also allows the educator to have appropriate expectations for students.

An additional component of DAP is concerned with children’s development occurring in a sequence. A child will master simpler activities and skills and then use that knowledge to move on to more difficult activities and skills. As the child develops, there are predictable changes that occur. These changes occur in all cultures, although they are manifest differently and may have different meanings (Bowman, 1994). When discussing this progression, Vygotsky talked about the zone of proximal development (ZPD).

Children are able to learn only so much on their own. When helped by an individual who is more experienced, like a teacher, parent, or more competent child, the child is able to learn and perform tasks she would otherwise not be able to do. This difference in what the child can do on her own and what she can do with the help of another is called the ZPD. Vygotsky believed that children continued learning with the help of others by building concept upon concept, but each child’s ZPD is different. When given help, one child may be able to master the concept with little help from others, while another child may need more extensive help (Crain, 2005; Rieber, 1998).
If children are given tasks at which they constantly fail, they lose the desire to continue trying. Educators become sensitive to this by observing the child. As the child tries to accomplish a task, the teacher can watch to see if he is able to do it, or if he will be able to after a few times practicing. If the child is not able to, or will not be able to perform the task, the teacher knows that the child needs an easier activity and will provide activities the child is able to do. At the same time however, children gravitate to the activities that will challenge them and cause them to work on the edge of the knowledge they already have (Berk & Winsler 1995; Vygotsky, 1978).

Another concept that complements Vygotsky’s ZPD is that of scaffolding. Scaffolding refers to the help that an adult or other knowledgeable individual gives to the child to help the child progress. In the ZPD, the adult uses scaffolding when helping the child progress and learn. In scaffolding the adult (or other child) first gives ample help. As the child starts to learn and progress the adult gives less and less help until the child is able to figure out the problem on her own. These experiences help shape the child as she develops (Crain, 2005).

The educator who implements DAP in his classroom understands the principle that a child needs the opportunity to practice what he has learned in order to incorporate it into his life. Children also need this practice when they experience challenges that are just ahead of their current level of development and understanding (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

“Early experiences have both cumulative and delayed effects on individual children’s development. Optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning” (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 10). Behavior later in life can be affected by
earlier experiences. If, for example, children are motivated extrinsically at a younger age, chances are their intrinsic motivation will be lessened in the future (Kohn, 1993). At certain times in a child’s life different learning and development happen most efficiently. For example, the first years of a child’s life (up to about age 4) is the optimum time for language development (Baron, 1992). If an educator is aware of this, he is able to take these times into account as he plans and works with the child.

A number of researchers point out that development generally occurs in a predictable sequence (Erikson, 1950; Gruber & Voneche, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). Children’s skills move towards more complexity, greater organization (Bruner, 1983), and increases in internalization (Vygotsky). Children first learn behavioral knowledge then can move on to symbolic or representational knowledge. Children must have hands-on experiences to truly gain meaning from their surroundings, before they can understand the symbols that represent their surroundings such as maps and letters. “Children are active learners, drawing on direct physical and social experience as well as culturally transmitted knowledge to construct their own understandings of the world around them” (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 13). When a teacher is developmentally appropriate in his teaching, he will include opportunities for children to gain a greater behavioral knowledge about their surroundings by providing hands-on activities where the child is able to explore and understand his surroundings. The teacher will also provide materials the children can use to represent the concepts they are starting to understand. For example, paint, clay, dramatic play, and other items such as this will allow the children to acquire symbolic knowledge about their surroundings as they express themselves through these tools (Bredekamp & Copple).
The theorist, Piaget, would agree with this principle. He believed that children moved through different periods as learning develops. From the time children are born until about the age of two they use their senses to explore and find out about the world around them. Through the preschool and early elementary school years children are learning to think differently. The child no longer depends totally on her senses. The use of symbols comes in to play. The child is able to understand that one thing can represent another. At this time the child’s thinking is still not systematic or logical; he is trying to figure out what the world around him means (Piaget, 1995).

Another component of DAP that educators must implement is play. “Play is an important vehicle for children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development” (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 14). Interactive processes are how development and learning take place. Through play children are able to better understand the world. They are able to interact with others, develop the ability to control and express their emotions, as well as develop their ability to use symbols as part of their daily life (Berk, 1994). Vygotsky (1978) explained that children have two levels of development, actual development (what the child can do alone) and the ZPD (what the child can do with the assistance of another more capable individual). Through play the educator is able to gain a better understanding of where the child is developmentally because the child is showing where she is through her play and interactions with others. “Play creates a zone of proximal development of the child. In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all development tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development” (p. 102).
Knowledge of understanding strengths, weaknesses, and needs of each child.

The second area of knowledge that one must be aware of when implementing DAP is based on knowing and understanding the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of each individual child (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Every child is different and each child progresses on his own time-table. Some children may have mastered a skill that another child the same age is just beginning to grasp. When a teacher is able to see the strengths and weaknesses of a child, she will be able to provide activities that use the strengths and improve the weaknesses, helping the child grow and progress. The teacher will also be better able to work with the child when she is aware of the child’s strengths and weaknesses, by understanding why that child is developing the way he is. Because every child is an individual, it is important for an educator to understand what he needs and to take that into account when planning activities.

Developmentally appropriate practice includes giving children experiences with decision-making. The classroom should be filled with opportunities for the child to make choices. Because children at this age learn best through sensory activities, taking in the sights, smells, tastes, sounds, and textures around them, it is crucial that the activities available to the children include some sort of sensory component.

When children learn, it is not just from the environment or because of biological maturation, it is a combination of interactions from both of these influences (Scarr & McCartney, 1983). Children are able to learn more as they grow and mature, but they are also learning from the environment which includes the physical aspect as well as the social aspect of the world they live in. When the teacher is aware of and considers the developmental stage of the child, she is going to be better able to understand that child.
and the needs of that child. With children in kindergarten, this means fewer worksheets and more hands-on activities. “It is believed that the use of workbooks, ditto sheets, and academic skill-based instruction that is being pushed down from the upper grades is creating undue stress for young children and placing them at risk for later academic failure” (Burts et al., 1992, p. 298).

*Knowledge of understanding the importance of the cultural and social context.*

The third area of knowledge that is crucial to understand when implementing DAP is the cultural and social context in which the child lives (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained that “human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded” (p. 21). Children are affected by the world around them, and those with whom they interact help mold the developing child whether it is the family, teachers, community, or society as a whole (Bronfenbrenner). When the teacher understands this and takes it into account when planning activities, the child has more meaningful and relevant experiences.

Understanding that the cultural context has significant influence on how a child learns is crucial, as learning is always affected by a variety of social and cultural contexts. The cultural context is often looked at in terms of multiculturalism or diversity; it is often overlooked in children who are considered part of the majority of the population. Every child is affected by the beliefs and patterns of behavior that are passed on from one generation to the next, in other words, by their culture (Bredekamp &
Copple, 1997). “Rules of development are the same for all children, but social contexts shape children’s development into different configurations” (Bowman, 1994, p. 220).

Vygotsky also believed that there were multiple inputs into a child’s learning. He asserted that cultural influences greatly impacted cognitive development. He believed that children develop through intrinsic motivations and promptings, but this only takes a child to a certain point. After about age two a child is influenced by his culture and surroundings, as well as intrinsic motivators (Crain, 2005; Rieber & Robison, 2004).

Finally, DAP educators must understand that children need to be in an environment where they feel valued and safe, where their needs are met both psychologically and physically in order to learn to the best of their abilities (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Maslow (1954) explained this idea by creating the hierarchy of needs. Before a child can focus on learning physical needs, safety needs, and the need to feel loved and valued must be met before an individual can focus on gaining knowledge. Also, according to Vygotsky (1978), the environment or surroundings of the child play a major role in the development of the child. Children need to have positive relationships with the adults and other children they are working with in order to develop and learn best.

*Outcomes of DAP*

The DAP classroom is a positive environment for children, and it is a positive climate for learning and developing. The teacher motivates and guides rather than demanding certain behaviors from children. Children who are exposed to DAP environments are often more comfortable in the classroom because they are accepted and
valued for who they are (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Burts et al. (1992) described
the DAP classroom as a low-stress environment whereas a developmentally inappropriate
classroom (DIP) produces a more stressful environment. “Developmentally appropriate
practice uses the concepts of age appropriateness... and individual appropriateness....
Appropriate practice includes providing experiences that meet the needs of individual
children and promoting self-esteem and positive feelings towards learning” (p. 298).

In the Burts and colleagues’ (1992) study, 204 kindergarten teachers completed a
survey which identified teachers’ beliefs and practices with regard to DAP. The teacher
also indicated how often she perceived children doing various activities that were either
DAP or DIP. Teachers whose scores were one standard deviation above or below all of
the kindergarten teacher’s scores were selected from this group. From that group, 12
classrooms were selected to continue participation in the study. Six were considered DAP
classrooms and six were considered DIP classrooms. These 12 classrooms were then
observed by two different observers on three non-consecutive days. The observers were
looking for DAP and DIP throughout the day. Another set of observers, blind to the
results of the type of classroom it was, observed for signs of stress in the children.

In a developmentally inappropriate classroom there is often the use of:

....highly structured, teacher-directed, large-group lessons; abstract paper-and-
pencil tasks (e.g. workbooks and worksheets) that often must be completed within
an inflexible time frame; rote learning; direct teaching of discrete skills; lack of
opportunities to move around the room and make choices; overreliance on
punishment and extrinsic reward systems; and use of standardized assessment
tests (Bredekamp, 1987, as cited in Burts et al., 1992, p. 299).
In this study, the researchers found a statistically significant difference $F(1, 188) = 3.88, p < .05$ in stress levels between boys who were in DIP ($M = .45$) and DAP ($M = .24$) classrooms. Those in DIP classrooms displayed more stress behaviors than the boys in the DAP classrooms. The data also showed statistically significant differences in the stress level of black and white children in developmentally inappropriate classrooms $F(5, 184) = 3.37, p < .001$ with black children in DIP classrooms showing more stress ($M = .18$) than white children ($M = .12$) in the same classrooms at specific times in the day (whole group, waiting, and transitions). White children in DIP classrooms showed significantly more ($M = .04$) stressful behavior during story time than did their black classmates $M = .02, F(1, 188) = 5.23, p < .05$. In the DAP classrooms there were no differences in stress between races and sexes (Burts et al., 1992).

The authors found that the children in the DIP classrooms exhibited more stress overall than children in the DAP classrooms. This was especially true during transitions, when the children had to wait, and during workbook/worksheet activities (Burts et al., 1992).

In another study by Burts and colleagues (1993), first grade academic outcomes and DAP in kindergarten were explored. They used 166 participants from the 1992 study and completed a longitudinal study. They looked at the first grade report cards of these children. They found that the reading grades of the children from the DAP classrooms were on average higher ($M = 3.02$ on a scale of 0-4) than the children from the DIP classrooms $M = 2.68, F(1, 144) = 4.78, p < .03$. They also found differences in children from high and low socio-economic status (SES). High SES children who had been in the DIP classrooms scored significantly higher than low SES children in all academic areas.
except reading (overall academic average low SES: $M = 2.66$, high SES: $M = 3.36$; Language low SES: $M = 2.43$, high SES: $M = 3.25$; Spelling low SES: $M = 2.61$, high SES: $M = 3.47$; Math low SES: $M = 2.56$, high SES: $M = 3.14$; Science low SES: $M = 2.83$, high SES: $M = 3.49$; Social Studies low SES: $M = 2.97$, high SES: $M = 3.55$; $p < .05$). In contrast, in the DAP classrooms there were no differences between high and low SES students in all academic areas. Also, low SES children in DAP kindergarten classes had higher overall scores ($M = 3.21$) than low SES children who had been in a DIP classroom ($M = 2.66$) as well as higher averages in the specific areas of language ($M = 3.01$ for DAP, $M = 2.43$ for DIP), math ($M = 3.22$ for DAP, $M = 2.56$ for DIP) social studies ($M = 3.59$ for DAP, $M = 2.97$ for DIP), and science ($M = 3.47$ for DAP, $M = 2.83$ for DIP) ($p < .05$) (Burts et al.).

Another study looking at the outcomes of DAP is Huffman and Speer’s (2000) study focusing on the effect of DAP on at-risk children. Sixteen kindergarten and 12 first-grade classrooms were assessed in this study. In total 113 children were tested near the beginning and end of the school year. Most of the children who participated were from low-income families, with the majority being from an ethnic minority (99%; Huffman & Speer, 2000).

The classrooms were observed and determined to be either low-DAP or moderately DAP, no classrooms were considered high-DAP. The children were tested in the fall and again in the spring on letter-word identification (reading), calculation, and applied problems (math). The children who were in the moderately DAP classrooms scored significantly higher on letter-word recognition $F(1,104)= 5.7$, $p < .05$, but there
were no differences for math calculation. This study adds to the growing research on DAP and the benefits, especially for at-risk children (Huffman & Speer, 2000).

Dunn and Kontos (1997) reviewed the research about DAP and found that the majority of research favored DAP over DIP. Higher levels of cognitive functioning were associated with child-initiated environments (DAP). This information along with the information on stress and motivation, brings out a strong case for DAP. This is true “especially for low-income children—the very children whose parents may prefer academically oriented programs. While academic environments sometimes may result in higher levels of achievement, this achievement may come at emotional costs to the children” (p. 12).

DAP has also been shown to correlate with lower retention rates in kindergarten. In an exploratory study by Zepeda (1993), five school districts were examined. The kindergarten teachers were asked to give demographic information on the children in their classes including whether the child had been retained or was being considered for retention. The classroom was then observed for evidence of DAP and DIP by observers using the Children’s Practices Inventory which was created by Marion Hyson and colleagues. Findings indicated that teachers who were working in schools that had a higher retaining percentage had more DIP classrooms. Teachers who were working in schools that had a lower retaining percentage had classrooms that used more developmentally appropriate practices. As Zepeda has pointed out, schools continue to retain children in kindergarten, though according to most research on this subject kindergarten retention does not provide any benefits in school achievement or in personal adjustment.
Conclusion

Kindergarten has evolved over the years, and many more demands have been put on teachers and students. As the expectations have changed, many teachers perceive that numerous children entering their classroom have some problems with the transition into kindergarten. This can be a very stressful time for children, however developmentally appropriate classrooms have been shown to have the potential to create easier transitions into kindergarten. Teachers who understand and consider the child’s needs may be more skilled at helping their students through this transition. Though there have been some studies looking at teacher’s perceived problems of children entering kindergarten as well as their beliefs in developmentally appropriate practices and how often they actually practice these beliefs, no study to date has looked at the relationship between teachers practices and what they perceive as problems children have when entering kindergarten.

This study examined these issues and addressed the following research questions. First, what problems do kindergarten teachers perceive in children entering kindergarten? Second, what percentage of children entering kindergarten is perceived by kindergarten teachers as having difficulty, or is perceived by kindergarten teachers as not ready for kindergarten? Third, what are the teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices? Fourth, what is the relationship between kindergarten teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices, and kindergarten teachers’ perceived problems of children entering kindergarten? Finally, what is the relationship between kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices and their perception of children’s level of success transitioning into kindergarten?
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants in this study were 178 kindergarten teachers from eight school districts in the state of Utah. This study was the first phase of a larger study that will survey every kindergarten teacher in each school district in Utah over a 3-year period, with these data being collected during the 2004-2005 school year. Each year, a third of the school districts in Utah will be surveyed. The eight districts in this part of the study were chosen to represent rural and urban populations with large and small school districts. A list of school districts was initially obtained from the Utah State Education website. Eight of these school districts were contacted by phone to find out how to obtain permission to survey the districts’ kindergarten teachers. Three of the districts approved the surveys over the phone, while five required a letter to be sent to the superintendent (Appendix A), as well as an application to be filled out and approved by the district. After permission was received, a list of kindergarten teachers, along with their mailing addresses, was obtained from the district offices. Of the 381 surveys sent, 178 were returned and coded, a 47% return rate.

Procedures

Between 4 and 6 weeks after the school year had started, surveys were sent to the teachers along with self-addressed stamped envelopes. A letter (Appendix B) was also sent that informed teachers about the study, explained what their participation would be,
and clarified how anonymity would be maintained. The surveys were generally coded before they were sent to each teacher with an indicator of year (in this case 0405), of pre/post test (01 for pretest and 02 for post test), and school district numbered by alphabetical list (for instance, Alpine School District was 01). Because analyses will be conducted using these and additional data obtained at the end of the school year, the teachers created their own personal code so that the data obtained at the first of the year could be compared to the data obtained at the end of the year. Teachers’ personal codes were created using the teacher’s mother’s birth month (two digits) and year (last two digits), and the teacher’s father’s birth month (two digits) and year (last two digits). Four weeks following the dispersal of the surveys, teachers received a postcard reminding them to complete the survey and return it promptly. A second postcard was sent approximately two weeks following the first postcard.

Instruments

Two surveys were used in this study, but were compiled into one booklet (Appendix C). The first survey was the Transition Practices Survey (National Center for Early Development and Learning, 1996; Appendix C, pp. 90-96). The survey was “designed to gather comprehensive information on transition practices used for children entering kindergarten and children entering first grade and to collect information on the prevalence of children’s problems with the kindergarten transition” (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000, p. 151). This measure assessed what kind of problems the teacher perceived regarding children’s kindergarten readiness. It also gathered demographic data about the district and schools, as well as demographic information about the teacher, such as
number of years teaching kindergarten, number of years of teaching experience at all grade levels, grades the teacher had previously taught, and the teacher’s education. A sample question from the Transition Practices Survey (National Center for Early Development and Learning, 1996) is:

Based on your experience, approximately what percentage of the children who enter kindergarten fall into the following categories? Three categories followed: very successful transition, virtually no problems; moderately successful entry, some problems, mostly minor; and difficult or very difficult entry, serious concerns or many problems.

Another example question is: “Based on your experience, for how many children in a typical class are the following characteristics a problem when they enter kindergarten?” Twelve problems were listed:

1) lack of academic skills; 2) difficulty following directions; 3) difficulty working as part of a group, 4) problems with social skills, getting along with other children; 5) difficulty working independently; 6) difficulty communicating/language problems; 7) lack of any formal preschool experience; 8) highly academic preschool experience; 9) non-academic preschool experience; 10) disorganized home environments; 11) immaturity; 12) other.

The teacher marks a box describing how many children had the particular problem including none, a few, about one fourth of the class, about half of the class, or more than half of the class.

The second survey was Burts and colleagues’ (2001) Teacher Beliefs and Practices Survey (Appendix C, pp. 97-105). This survey was divided into two sections.
The first section queried the teachers' beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices. The 43 questions were rated on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (Extremely important). Some sample questions are: “It is ______ for activities to be responsive to individual children’s interests;” “It is ______ for teachers to provide opportunities for children to select many of their own activities;” and “It is ______ to provide the same curriculum and environment for each group of children that comes through the program.”

Higher scores on this section of the survey indicate stronger developmentally appropriate beliefs.

The second section measured how often the teacher performed these activities in his/her classroom. The questions on this section were also rated on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Almost Never [less than monthly]) to 5 (Very Often [daily]). Sample questions include: “How often do children in your class build with blocks?” and “How often do children in your class play with games, puzzles, and construction materials (e.g., Tinker Toys, Bristle Blocks)?” A higher score on this section is an indication of more developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom.

Reliability

There were no reported reliability statistics for the Transition Practices Survey. However, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were calculated for this study. The Cronbach’s alpha for the 11 characteristics in question 26 of the Transition Practices Survey was .75. Reported Cronbach’s alphas for the beliefs and practices sections of the Teacher Beliefs and Practices Survey were .82 and .88, respectively (D.C. Burts, personal)
communication, September 2004). For this study, Cronbach's alphas for the beliefs and practices section of the Teacher Beliefs and Practices Survey were .73 and .69, respectively.

Ethical Considerations

The teachers who participated in this study were sent a letter describing the research project. The teachers were informed that participation in this study was strictly voluntary, and that all data in this survey were anonymous. The teachers who participated in this study created their own identification number to match a pretest (used in this study) to a posttest that could not be identified by the researchers. The school district and school year were coded, but the teachers were left anonymous. The research project was presented to and approved by the IRB at Utah State University to ensure that all ethical considerations were addressed. There were no known dangers associated with participating in this study.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

This results chapter is organized to address each of the research questions. This section includes descriptive analysis of teachers’ responses. Analyses of the relationship between the teachers’ beliefs and practices and their perceived problems of children entering kindergarten as well as between teachers’ beliefs and practices and their perception of children’s level of success transitioning into kindergarten are also examined. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations will be presented, as will one-way ANOVAs and t tests, where appropriate.

Research Question 1

What problems do kindergarten teachers perceive in children entering kindergarten? The data which have been examined to address Research Question 1 are teachers’ responses to question 26 in the Transition Practices Survey: “Based on your experience, for how many children in a typical class are the following characteristics a problem when they enter kindergarten?” This question was followed by a list of potential problems children may have. Using a scale of 1-5, the kindergarten teacher was able to mark whether the specific item was a problem for “None” of the children (1), “A few” of the children (2), “About 1/4 of the class” (3), “About 1/2 of the class” (4), or “More than 1/2 of the class” (5). These items include: lack of academic skills; difficulty following directions; difficulty working as part of a group; problems with social skills, getting along with other children; difficulty working independently; difficulty communicating, language problems; lack of formal preschool experience; highly academic preschool
experience; nonacademic preschool experience; disorganized home environment; and immaturity.

Because this is an exploratory research question, descriptive analyses were used to examine the data. Table 1 and Figure 1 illustrate the percentage of teachers who responded on the 1-5 scale detailed above.

Table 2 and Figure 2 show the means and standard deviations for the 11 characteristics for which children were perceived as having problems. The means were calculated based upon the 1-5 scale above. Therefore, a higher mean indicates teachers perceived more children as having difficulty with the particular characteristic. It is interesting to note that the three items that were reported the most were “lack of academic skills” ($M = 2.30, SD = .94$), “difficulty following directions” ($M = 2.13, SD = .98$), and “difficulty working independently” ($M = 2.06, SD = .97$). Although these three items were reported the most often, the mean is still relatively low, which means, on the average, teachers reported only “a few” to “1/4 of their class” exhibiting problems in these areas. Another note of interest is that these three items were also the only items on the list which all of the teachers reported that at least a few children in their class had a problem, none of the teachers scored these items as a “1” (“none” of the children had this problem”). The three items that were reported least were “difficulty communicating/language problems” ($M = 1.29, SD = .67$), “immaturity” ($M = 1.54, SD = .80$), and “problems with social skills, getting along with others” ($M = 1.55, SD = .76$). These means indicate that teachers reported, on average, between “none” and “a few” of the children in their class had problems with these items.
Table 1

Percentage of Teachers Who Found Each of the 11 Characteristics to Be a Problem for Children Entering Kindergarten

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>A few</th>
<th>About 1/4 of the class</th>
<th>About 1/2 of the class</th>
<th>More than 1/2 of the class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of academic skills</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty following directions</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty working as part of a group</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with social skills</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty working independently</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty communicating</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of any formal preschool experience</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly academic preschool experience</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-academic preschool experience</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorganized home environments</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immaturity</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Percentage of teachers who responded that each of the 11 characteristics was a problem for children on kindergarten entry.
Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of the 11 Characteristics That Teachers Perceived Were Problems for Children Entering Kindergarten

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M(^a)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of academic skills</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty following directions</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty working independently</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorganized home environments</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty working as part of a group</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly academic preschool experience</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-academic preschool experience</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of any formal preschool experience</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with social skills, getting along with other children</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immaturity</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty communicating/language problems</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Higher score indicates higher number of students perceived as having difficulties
Figure 2. A comparison of the means of the 11 characteristics that teachers perceived were problems for children entering kindergarten.
To further examine these characteristics, the responses to the two categories, “about 1/2 of the class” (4 on the scale) and “more than 1/2 of the class” (5 on the scale), were combined. Figure 3 shows the percentage of teachers who reported that half of the children in their class or more had specific problems with one or more of the characteristics listed. About one-third of the teachers felt that half of the children in their class or more had problems due to the “lack of academic skills” (36.3%), “difficulty following directions” (33%), and “difficulty working independently” (31.6%).

The three items reported least changed slightly when looking at just those reporting that ½ their class or more had these problems, these included, “difficulty communicating” (6.3%), “problems with social skills” (8.5%), and “disorganized home environments” (11.5%). It is interesting to note that even though these were the least reported items, “disorganized home environments” was still a relatively high percentage.

Research Question 2

What percentage of children entering kindergarten is perceived by kindergarten teachers as having difficulty, or is perceived by kindergarten teachers as not ready for kindergarten? For Research Question 2, data gathered from teachers’ responses to questions 25 and 27 on the Transition Practices Survey were analyzed. Question 25 reads, “Based on your experience, approximately what percentage of children who enter kindergarten fall into the following categories: make sure these numbers total 100%.” The teachers respond what percentage of children entering kindergarten have a “very successful entry, virtually no problems; moderately successful entry, some problems, mostly minor; difficult or very difficult entry, serious concerns or many problems.”
Figure 3. Percentage of teachers responding that a characteristic was a problem for half or more of the children in their class.
Table 3 shows the ranges, mean percentages, and the standard deviations for the teachers' perceived percentage of children's successful entry into kindergarten. Teachers' responses to the percentage of children who have "very successful entry" to kindergarten ranged from 0% to 100% with a mean of 46.5% (SD=30.2). Teachers' responses to the percentage of children who have "moderately successful entry" ranged from 2% to 85%, with a mean of 37.1% (SD=23.5) having a moderately successful entry. Finally, teachers' responses to the percentage of children who have "difficult or very difficult entry" into kindergarten ranged from 0% to 80% with a mean of 16.6% (SD=14.8) of children having difficult or very difficult time with kindergarten entry. The range and standard deviations are very large for these data.

Question 27 asks, "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. ___%." This question was answered by 155 teachers. Teachers' responses to this question ranged from 2% to 100% of their current class not being ready for kindergarten.

Table 3

| Teachers' Perceived Percentage of Children's Success on Entry into Kindergarten |
|---------------------------------|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| Level of Kindergarten Entry     | N   | M   | Range | SD    |
| Percentage of very successful entry, virtually no problems | 173  | 46.45 | 0-100 | 30.16 |
| Percentage of moderately successful entry, some problems, mostly minor | 173  | 37.09 | 2-85  | 23.48 |
| Percentage of difficult or very difficult entry, serious concerns or many problems | 165  | 16.66 | 0-80  | 14.87 |
(M = 23%, SD = 20). About 60% of teachers felt that one-fifth of their class was not ready for kindergarten. While an additional 12% felt that one-fourth of their class was not. A total of about 72% of teachers felt that 1/5 or more of the students in their kindergarten class were not ready for kindergarten.

Research Question 3

What are the teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices? Like Research Questions 1 and 2, Research Question 3 is exploratory. Teachers’ responses on the Beliefs and Practices portion of the survey were examined. These questions focus entirely on kindergarten teachers’ beliefs of developmentally appropriate practices as well as their reports of what is implemented in their classrooms. Therefore, descriptive analyses (frequencies, means, and standard deviations of teachers’ responses) were used. Overall, the teachers scored higher on their DAP beliefs (M = 3.99) than they did on their DAP practices (M = 3.39). These means are obtained from a 1-5 scale, with 1 indicating the item was not developmentally appropriate, and 5 indicating the item was very developmentally appropriate. On average the teachers in this study had high DAP means and were considered developmentally appropriate.

Table 4 presents the five highest belief statements that teachers reported. The means, ranges, and standard deviations are included. The mean is derived from a scale of 1-5 with 1 being “not important at all” and 5 indicating “extremely important.” The five items the teachers had the most developmentally appropriate beliefs about included: reading daily to their students, helping develop children’s self-esteem,
providing daily opportunities for children to develop social skills, using strategies ("setting limits, problem solving, and redirection") to guide their students behavior, and addressing severe behavior problems with individualized plans.

Table 5 indicates teachers' lowest reported developmentally appropriate beliefs. Although Tables 4, 6, and 7 report the five highest or lowest reported items, this table only shows the three lowest reported beliefs. In Tables 4, 6, and 7, the top and bottom five items stood out from the rest and were easily grouped. Only the three items, instead of five, listed in Table 5 stood out as low responses. These items included: using readiness tests or achievement tests to evaluate children's progress, the importance of letter and word recognition in preschool, and having planned outdoor activities.

Table 6 illustrates the highest reported practices. In this section of the survey, the scale ranged from 1 to 5 with a score of "1" indicating that the teacher "almost never (less than monthly)" implements the activity, and a score of "5" indicating that the teacher "very often (daily)" implements the activity. Therefore, the higher the mean, the more often the activity is reportedly carried out in the classroom. The teachers were asked how often they used music, integrated different subjects, experimented with writing, used manipulatives, and got placed in time-out. For the final item ("get placed in time-out") the mean before reverse coding was .86. This means that this practice, which is developmentally inappropriate, was rarely done by teachers. Therefore, the reverse coded mean (4.14) shows that getting placed in time-out was utilized in a developmentally appropriate way.
Table 4

Teachers’ Highest Reported Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Mean ($M^*$)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation ($SD$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 25: “It is _____ to read stories daily to children, individually and/or on a group basis.”</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 8: “It is _____ for teacher-child interactions to help develop children’s self-esteem and positive feelings toward learning.”</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 29 “It is _____ to provide many daily opportunities for developing social skills (i.e., cooperating, helping, talking) with peers in the classroom.”</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 33: “It is _____ for strategies like setting limits, problem solving, and redirection to be used to help guide children’s behavior.”</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 21: “It is _____ for teachers to develop an individualized behavior plan for addressing severe behavior problems.”</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Higher score indicates more developmentally appropriate beliefs
Table 5

Teachers’ Lowest Reported Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>$M^a$</th>
<th>$SD^b$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 2:</td>
<td>“As an evaluation of children’s progress, readiness or achievement tests are ____.”</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>2.77$^b$</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 11:</td>
<td>“Instruction in letter and word recognition is ____ in preschool.”</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>2.62$^c$</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 31:</td>
<td>“It is ____ that outdoor time have planned activities.”</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ Lower score indicates less developmentally appropriate practice.

$^b$ This item was reverse coded for analysis. The reverse coded mean was 2.23, indicating a low DAP score.

$^c$ This item was reverse coded for analysis. The reverse coded mean of this item was 2.38, indicating a low DAP score.
Table 6

**Teachers' Highest Reported Developmentally Appropriate Practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“How often do children in your class:”</th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>$M^a$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 7: “sing listen, and/or move to music”</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 30: “do activities that integrate multiple subjects (reading, math, science, social studies, etc.)”</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4: “experiment with writing by drawing, copying, and using their own invented spelling”</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 9: “use manipulatives (e.g. pegboards, Legos, and Unifix Cubes)”</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 22: “get placed in time-out (i.e., isolation, sitting on a chair, in a corner, or being sent outside of the room)”</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>.86$^b$</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ The higher the score the more often the item was practiced

$^b$ Item was reverse coded for analysis. Reverse coded mean was 4.14 meaning that this was low DAP and few teachers reported implementing this practice.
Table 7 indicates the lowest reported practices. Each of these items was reverse coded before the analyses were executed. They are reported here without the reverse coding, however, to help eliminate confusion. Each of these items is not considered developmentally appropriate. So, the higher the mean, the more often the teacher is implementing the less developmentally appropriate practice in the classroom. Teachers indicated that participating in whole-class instruction with teacher direction, rote counting, practicing writing on lines, using flashcards, and using “commercially-prepared phonics activities,” were the things they did more often that were the least developmentally appropriate.

Research Question 4

What is the relationship between kindergarten teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices, and kindergarten teachers’ perceived problems of children entering kindergarten? For Research Question 4, separate one-way ANOVAs were run examining the relationship between kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices and the frequency of their reported perceptions of 11 different characteristics that could be a problem for children upon entering kindergarten. There was a statistically significant relationship between the kindergarten teachers’ practices and those who answered that “none or a few” had problems with “non-academic preschool experience” $F(3) = 4.87, p = .003$. Teachers who responded that “none or a few” of their children had this problem had a lower average practices score than those who answered “about 1/4 of the class” or
Table 7

*Teachers’ Lowest Reported Developmentally Appropriate Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“How often do children in your class:”</th>
<th></th>
<th>( M^a )</th>
<th>( SD )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>(mean after reverse coding)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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\( ^a \) For these five items, the higher mean indicates that the item, which is not developmentally appropriate, was practiced more often.
more. There was also a relationship between teachers’ practices and the response of those who marked that “about 1/4 of their class” had “difficulty working independently” $F(3) = 3.91, p = .01$). Although this is statistically significant there is not much meaning behind it. The teachers who responded that “about ¼ of their class” had “difficulty working independently” had stronger beliefs than teachers who reported that “none or a few” children had this problem as well as those teachers who responded that “about 1/2 of their class” had this problem.

To more closely examine the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices and their perceptions of problems children have on kindergarten entry, teachers’ responses to the beliefs sections and practices section of the survey were divided into quartiles. For beliefs, the top quartile’s responses for each of the 11 characteristics were compared to the bottom quartile’s responses using a $t$ test. The teachers in the top quartile ($N = 30$) of beliefs (those who were more developmentally appropriate) reported “lack of academic skills” less often as a problem for children entering kindergarten than the bottom quartile (those teachers who were less developmentally appropriate; $M = 2.35$ meaning between “a few” and “1/4 of the class,” $M = 1.93$, meaning between “none” and “a few” of the class; $t(62) = 1.96, p = .055$). Although this is not considered statistically significant, it is a trend which suggests a possible relationship between kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and their perceived problems of children entering kindergarten.

The teachers in the top (more DAP) quartile ($N = 41$) of teachers’ practices reported that a “non-academic preschool experience” was a problem for children entering kindergarten more often than the teachers in the bottom (less DAP) quartile ($N = 36$) of
teachers ($M = 2.0$, meaning "a few," $M = 1.33$, meaning between "none" and "a few"); $t(75) = -3.26, p = .002$).

Research Question 5

What is the relationship between kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices and their perception of children’s level of success transitioning into kindergarten? To examine the relationship between kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices and children’s transition into kindergarten, correlation analyses were run. There were no statistically significant correlations between the kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices and the children’s transition into kindergarten.

To further investigate if there was a relationship between kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices and children’s transition into kindergarten only the top quartile ($N = 41$) of teachers who reported children had a successful entry into kindergarten and the top quartile of teachers ($N = 39$) who reported that children had a very difficult entry into kindergarten were included in the analyses. There were no statistically significant differences between these groups and their perceptions of children’s transition into kindergarten.

When looking at the top and bottom quartiles of teachers’ beliefs and practices, however, there was one difference that, although was not statistically significant, shows a trend that may indicate a possible relationship between kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and the perceived success level of children entering kindergarten. The responses of top and bottom quartiles to question 25 were compared by a t test. The teachers in the top quartile ($N = 33$) of the beliefs section (higher DAP beliefs) reported a smaller percentage of
children having a “difficult or very difficult” entry into kindergarten than the bottom quartile ($N = 42$) of the beliefs section (lower DAP beliefs) ($M = 13.19\%, M = 19.95\%$, $t(73) = 1.80, p = .077$).

To investigate the relationship between kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices and the percentage of children not ready for kindergarten, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated on teachers’ responses to question 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 _____%,” and the teachers’ beliefs and teachers practices. No statistically significant correlations emerged.

Similar to research question 4, teachers’ responses to the beliefs section and practices section of the survey were divided into quartiles. For the beliefs, the top (higher DAP) quartile’s responses for question 27 were compared to the bottom (lower DAP) quartile’s responses to question 27 using a $t$ test. This analysis was then performed with the top and bottom quartiles of the practices section. No statistically significant differences were found.
The purpose of this study was partially exploratory, determining what kindergarten teachers reported were problems for children entering kindergarten as well as what kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices were. The second part of this study was to investigate if there was any relationship between the teachers’ beliefs and practices and their perceptions of problems that children experience upon kindergarten entry. In order to explore this, 178 kindergarten teachers from eight Utah school districts were surveyed using the Transition Practices Survey (National Center for Early Development and Learning, 1996), as well as Burts and colleagues’ (2001) Teacher Beliefs and Practices Survey.

Using data from these surveys five questions were addressed. First, what problems do teachers perceive in children entering kindergarten? Second, what percentage of children entering kindergarten is perceived by kindergarten teachers as having difficulty? Third, what are the kindergarten teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices? Fourth, what is the relationship between kindergarten teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices, and kindergarten teachers’ perceived level of successful entry and perceived problems of children entering kindergarten? Finally, what is the relationship between kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices and their perception of children’s level of success transitioning into kindergarten?
Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, "What problems do kindergarten teachers perceive in children entering kindergarten?" Descriptive analyses showed that teachers felt that, of the 11 characteristics (lack of academic skills, difficulty following directions, difficulty working as part of a group, problems with social skills, getting along with other children, difficulty working independently, difficulty communicating, language problems, lack of formal preschool experience, highly academic preschool experience, nonacademic preschool experience, disorganized home environment, and immaturity), the characteristics that contributed most to problems for children entering kindergarten was "lack of academic skills," followed by "difficulty following directions," and "difficulty working independently." These items differ slightly from Rimm-Kaufman and colleagues' (2000) study where teachers reported "difficulty following directions" as the highest characteristic with which children had problems. This difference may be due to the fact that teachers are now more pressured by outside sources (Executive Summary of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2001) to make sure academic skills are mastered.

The other items Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2000) found had the highest response, "lack of academic skills," "disorganized home environments," and "difficulty working independently" were similar to this study with the exception of "disorganized home environments." Teachers in this study did not find "disorganized home environments" a problem as often as teachers in Rimm-Kaufman's study. For this study about 11% of teachers reported that half or more of their class had problems due to "disorganized home environments," this is compared to Rimm-Kaufmann's study where over 33% of teachers
reported "disorganized home environments" as a problem for half their class or more. Even though the percentage of teachers reporting this as a problem was lower in this study, the percentage is still quite high.

The items teachers found least likely to contribute to children's problems were similar in both this and the Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2000) study. The least frequently reported characteristics that were perceived as problems for children entering kindergarten were, "difficulty communicating/language problems," "immaturity," and "problems with social skills, getting along with others." The lowest reported item in the Rimm-Kaufman study was also "difficulty communicating/language problems."

To see what problems were perceived to affect the most children, the data for teachers' responses of "1/2 of the class" and "more than 1/2 of the class" were combined. This further examination found that about one-third or more of kindergarten teachers felt that at least half of their class had difficulty with "lack of academic skills," "difficulty following directions" and "difficulty working independently" when they entered kindergarten.

These three characteristics not only address academic items, but also the children's abilities to function independently. It appears that kindergarten teachers want children to have the academic skills and independence skills so that when they enter kindergarten teachers can move ahead with the planned kindergarten curriculum without having to teach these other skills. Teachers may not want to have to teach children how to work independently or how to follow directions. This brings up the question whether their expectations of children entering kindergarten are unrealistically high, and are these expectations developmentally appropriate? There are many stresses for kindergarten
teachers. Some of these may include, first, the NCLB act of 2001. With the implementation of this act children are expected to pass a standardized test at the end of the year. Teachers may feel the stress of making sure the children in their class are able to pass that test. They may feel the pressure to cover more academic curriculum than in the past. Another stress factor may come from the expectations of parents. Parents may be putting pressure on teachers to focus on a more direct instruction or basic skills approach (Stipek & Byler, 1997). Finally, mandates from school districts may be adding stress to teachers. Some school districts mandate programs for specific subjects district wide, such as literacy. Many of these programs are not developmentally appropriate, yet teachers do not have the choice whether or not to implement them. These stresses may contribute to the reasons teachers are expecting children to have more academic skills as well as more independent functioning skills upon entering kindergarten.

Kindergarten teachers reported that letter and word instruction in preschool is not very important, but they are also saying they want children to have more academic skills. The reason for this may be that when thinking about their DAP beliefs, teachers understand that letter and word recognition in preschool is not developmentally appropriate, but when thinking about all they are expected to do in kindergarten, they would find it easier to accomplish these tasks if children already had specific academic and independence skills.

It is also interesting to note that the teachers did not feel that immaturity was a major problem. It was actually reported as one of the least likely reasons children have problems entering kindergarten. It appears that teachers do not to think that the children
are having difficulty in the areas of independent functioning (following directions, and working independently) and academics due to the fact that they are immature.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked, “What percentage of children entering kindergarten is perceived by kindergarten teachers as having difficulty?” In order to explore this question, the percentages of children’s success level (“very successful entry, virtually no problems,” “moderately successful entry, some problems, mostly minor,” “difficult or very difficult entry, serious concerns or many problems”) of kindergarten entry were examined. Each level of entry had a very wide range of responses.

On average teachers felt that about 46% of children had a very successful entry into kindergarten. About 17% of kindergarten children having a very difficult entry into kindergarten. When asked what percentage of children in their current class was not ready for kindergarten, 72% of the teachers responded that at least 1/5 of their current class was not ready for kindergarten.

The ranges for these two questions was very large, some as large as 0%-100% (“very successful entry”). This wide range demonstrates the variability of kindergarten teachers’ perceptions. This also illustrates the large spectrum of kindergarten teachers’ definitions and expectations for kindergarten readiness.

This variance could be to the fact that kindergarten has changed over the years and continues to change. Teachers and parents alike have to constantly be reevaluating what is of importance to the kindergarten child upon kindergarten entry. Perhaps better communication between parents and kindergarten teachers, particularly before
kindergarten begins, may help in the kindergarten transition. If parents know what their child’s kindergarten teacher is expecting and how that teacher defines kindergarten readiness, the parent may be able to better help the child prepare for kindergarten. With that better communication, parents may also be able to understand developmentally appropriate practices better and be more supportive of the teacher’s efforts in implementing these practices.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, “What are the kindergarten teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices?” Using a scale from 1-5 with “1” indicating not very appropriate and “5” indicating very appropriate the teachers mean score was 3.99 for their beliefs and 3.39 for their practices. Because these scores were high, the kindergarten teachers were considered to be developmentally appropriate. This may be the reason that there are not as many differences between the high and low DAP beliefs and practices. There simply was not great variability in their beliefs and practices. Conversely, there was great variability in kindergarten teachers’ responses to the percentage of children’s successful entry into kindergarten and to the percentage of children not ready for kindergarten. This variance illustrates the wide range of definitions teachers have of “kindergarten readiness.” It is difficult to create one definition of “kindergarten readiness.”

In this study, kindergarten teachers’ DAP beliefs were higher than their DAP practices, a finding similar to that of McMullen (1999). Although McMullen’s study was published before the NCLB Act of 2001, this problem may still persist due the
implementation of that act. Teachers find that, “in their quest to produce high test scores, time is being lost implementing more developmentally appropriate curricula for children” (Hyun, 2003, p. 120). Teachers understand the importance of DAP, but may feel forced to teach the things that will be on the test (Hyun). Teachers may also not have the experience in implementing DAP, even if they believe in its principles (McMullen).

Another reason that teachers may not be able to implement DAP as often as they would like in their classrooms is because of mandated curriculum programs that schools or districts insist be implemented. These commercial programs may not be developmentally appropriate. Teachers may also have a hard time implementing DAP in their classrooms because of class size. If the class size is too large teachers may not be able to implement all the activities they would like. When there are a lot of children issues arise such as managing the number of children, not being able to address all their interests, and so on, that make implementation of developmentally appropriate practices very difficult.

For kindergarten teachers, reading to their children daily was their strongest DAP belief. They also felt that it was extremely important for the teachers to help the child develop self-esteem, as well to provide ways for the children to develop their social skills. This was followed by the importance of guiding the children’s behavior through setting limits, problem solving, and redirection. The fifth highest item the teachers reported they believed was very important was to create individualized plans for children with severe behavior problems. These findings indicate that the teachers have strong DAP beliefs as all these items are considered highly developmentally appropriate.

These five items cover a variety of areas including academics (literacy), children’s emotional needs (developing self-esteem), their social needs (developing social
skills), and guidance for the children (guiding behavior, and individualized plans). It is interesting to see how only one of the DAP beliefs dealt with academic skills. Four of the five beliefs focused on other areas of the child's development. This demonstrates how the teachers were developmentally appropriate in a variety of areas, addressing the whole child, which is another principle of DAP.

The three lowest developmentally appropriate beliefs were the use of achievement tests, focus on letter and word recognition in preschool, and “that outdoor time have planned activities.” The first two items in this list were considered developmentally inappropriate. Although these were the lowest developmentally appropriate beliefs, teachers still marked them on the lower end of the scale. Teachers reported that readiness or achievement tests and focus on letter and word recognition in preschool were between “not very important,” and “fairly important” \( (M = 2.77, M = 2.62, \text{ respectively}) \). Because these items are not considered developmentally appropriate, teachers’ responses needed to be closer to “not important at all” in order to be considered developmentally appropriate.

It is interesting, as mentioned in Research Question 1, that teachers reported that they believed letter recognition in preschool is not very important, but also reported that “lack of academic skills” is the characteristic that causes problems for the most children. The discrepancy between the two answers is likely due to teachers trying to make sure each child performs well on the standardized tests that are given. Perhaps this is a problem for children because the teacher has to fit so much academic content into the curriculum. Children with fewer academic skills might fall behind faster. It is interesting to note that standardized tests were the very lowest reported DAP belief. Teachers are,
therefore, preparing the children for tests which they themselves do not perceive as being very important or appropriate. This undoubtedly adds to the stress of teachers as they are trying to prepare children for a test which may not accurately or effectively evaluate the child.

The third item on this list, “that outdoor time have planned activities,” is developmentally appropriate, but was still reported as not very important. This may be due to the fact that kindergarten classes spend most outdoor time at recess where teachers do not plan the activities. This is often a time for teachers to have a little down time. Teachers frequently use this time to regroup and take a break, and often teachers do not even go outside, being replaced by teachers’ aides.

The five items the teachers reported practicing most often in their classroom were all developmentally appropriate. The two items teachers reported doing daily were using music and integrating multiple subjects. Teachers reported that children in their class were able to “experiment with writing by drawing, copying, and using their own invented spelling” and “use manipulatives” about 2-4 times a week. These items both have to do with methods teachers use to teach the curriculum. Even though teachers may have to focus on academics more than they would like, they are able to take some of their DAP beliefs and put them into action while teaching their kindergarten children. As kindergarten continues to change, teachers have to continue to change. As they do, they can continue to use their DAP beliefs to help guide how they teach, even if they have to focus on certain areas that are not considered DAP (standardized tests).

There was also one item (placing children in time-out) that was reported in this section. Though this is not a developmentally appropriate item, teachers reported
practicing it very little ("almost never [less than monthly]") , which indicates that the
teachers' implementation of guidance is developmentally appropriate.

Teachers indicated that participating in whole-class instruction with teacher
direction (2-4 times a week), rote counting (weekly), practicing writing on lines (weekly),
using flashcards (weekly), and using "commercially-prepared phonics activities" (at least
monthly), were the things they did that were the least developmentally appropriate. These
items relate to teaching the children academic skills. Teachers may be falling back on
these methods, although they are not developmentally appropriate, in order to cover more
curriculum, even if children are not understanding it as well, or unable to integrate it as
well. Teachers may also be feeling pressure from parents or the district to implement
some of these practices.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, "What is the relationship between kindergarten
teachers' developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices, and kindergarten teachers' 
perceived problems of children entering kindergarten?"

There were two items that had a statistically significant relationship with teachers' 
practices. These were "non-academic preschool experience," and "difficulty working
independently." Teachers who responded that "none" of their students had problems due
to a "non-academic preschool experience" had lower DAP practices than those who
responded that "about 1/4 of their class" or more had problems. This may be due to the
fact that a "non-academic preschool experience" may not make a difference one way or
another to teachers who are not implementing DAP in their classrooms. Teachers who
responded that "about 1/4 of their class" had "difficulty working independently" had higher DAP practices than both those who responded "none or a few" of their children had "difficulty working independently" and those who responded "about 1/2 of the class" had "difficulty working independently." Although this result was statistically significant, it is not very meaningful.

To further the investigation into the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices and perceived problems of children entering kindergarten, the top and bottom quartiles of the teachers' beliefs and practices scores were analyzed. The teachers who had higher DAP beliefs reported "lack of academic skills" less often as a problem for children entering kindergarten than the teachers who had lower DAP beliefs. This may be due to the fact that teachers who have higher DAP beliefs may understand the developmental level of young children better than teachers with lower DAP beliefs. It also may be that teachers with stronger DAP beliefs understand how they can help the children learn using different DAP strategies. Understanding the children and feeling like you have a way to help them may be enough to perceive fewer children as having problems because of "lack of academic skills."

Those teachers who reported higher DAP practices also reported that a "non-academic preschool experience" was a problem for children entering kindergarten more often than the teachers who reported lower DAP practices. This finding is difficult to interpret. One possible reason for this may be that teachers who are implementing DAP in their classrooms may be focused more on the individual child than teachers who are not implementing DAP. These teachers understand that "lack of academic skills" is not where the problem lies, but more specifically, "non-academic preschool experience" may
be the problem because even if teachers have a DAP classroom, academics may still be the main focus. Children who went to a “nonacademic preschool” may not enjoy this focus on academics as much.

Research Question 5

Research Question 5: “What is the relationship between kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practices and their perception of children’s level of success transitioning into kindergarten?” The teachers who reported higher DAP beliefs reported a smaller percentage of children having a “difficult or very difficult” entry into kindergarten than the teachers who reported lower DAP beliefs. Even if teachers are not able to implement DAP as much as they would like, for whatever reason, their beliefs still influence their perceptions. Understanding the abilities of kindergarten-aged children may help teachers understand that issues children have are not necessarily major, very difficult problems. This may be why teachers who have higher DAP beliefs felt that fewer children have such a hard time entering kindergarten. These teachers may also be implementing practices that are developmentally appropriate which help the children make a smoother transition.

Limitations

There are some limitations with this study that must be considered. The surveys were sent out at the beginning of the school year to determine what the teachers’ beliefs and practices were, as well as their perceptions of problems children have upon kindergarten entry at the beginning of the year. This is a very busy time for teachers. To
try to accommodate for that, the surveys were not sent out until six to eight weeks after school started. However, this is still a busy time of the year, especially if teachers perceive their class as not having adequate academic skills or independent functioning skills. As the time of year affects return rates of surveys (Dillman, 2007), this was most likely the reason the return rate in this study was only 47%. Though this was a disadvantage, there was not another time to do this and still get the data necessary for this study. Another limitation of this study was that the practices portion of the survey was self-reported. There was no way to determine the frequency with which practices were actually implemented. A third limitation is that there were numerous tests run on these data. Because of this there may have been some findings that were statistically significant only by chance.

Implications

There are several implications of the findings of this study for kindergarten teachers, preschool teachers, parents, administrators, and district officers. First, this study helps kindergarten teachers be more aware of the problems kindergarten children are having ("lack of academic skills," "ability to follow directions," "ability to work alone"). If teachers are aware that these things are problems, they may be able to better adjust their expectations of children entering kindergarten. Teachers may be able to focus on developing these skills throughout kindergarten. Gaining academic skills is an ongoing process, but if teachers focus on teaching children to follow directions and work independently, they will be able to better teach the academic skills. Knowing these are
problems for children entering kindergarten parents and preschool teachers can also focus on helping children gain these skills before kindergarten entry.

"Disorganized home environments" was reported by about 11% of teachers as being a problem for half or more of their class. Knowing this, both kindergarten teachers and preschool teachers can teach parents developmentally appropriate ways in which they can work with their children so their children will gain the necessary skills needed upon kindergarten entry.

Kindergarten teachers reported higher beliefs than practices. Teachers can become aware of this and continue to look for ways to implement DAP. This can also help principals and district officers become aware of the discrepancy between DAP beliefs and practices. They can become better partners with teachers in finding ways to implement DAP in the classroom. This will help reduce some of the stress that teachers receive from these sources. Understanding that many of the mandated programs (often for literacy) are often less developmentally appropriate, districts and teachers can help find alternative, more appropriate, teaching strategies.

Another implication of this study for parents and kindergarten teachers, as well as preschool and daycare teachers, is understanding the importance of communicating with each other before kindergarten begins. Preschool and daycare teachers often spend a large amount of time with prekindergarten-aged children. Including these teachers in the communication process will add to the effort of helping children enter kindergarten with the skills they need. Some children are being perceived as having a difficult entry into kindergarten, and having problems with specific characteristics. If kindergarten teachers let parents and preschool/daycare teachers know what problems children are having upon
kindergarten entry, parents and preschool/day care teachers may be able to better prepare children for kindergarten.

Another implication for parents is to understand that there are benefits of DAP. Parents can encourage teachers to continue to learn about, and implement DAP. When teachers have a strong belief in DAP they perceive fewer problems in children entering kindergarten, and perhaps they better understand the development of kindergarten children. This may reduce pressures teachers feel from parents to focus so heavily on academics.

Suggestions for Future Research

One of the limitations of this study was that there was no way to verify the frequency of the actual implementation of DAP in the classroom. It is suggested that kindergarten teachers DAP implementation be verified by a trained outside observer to better determine if there is a relationship between kindergarten teachers’ actual practices and their perceived problems of children entering kindergarten as well as the reported percentage of children not ready for kindergarten. It is also suggested, to better understand what issues kindergarten teachers are facing, to ask these teachers what stressors they feel and where they are coming from. There is much research on DAP and the outcomes of its implementation. There is little research, if any, on the longitudinal effects of kindergarten transition. Another suggestion for future research would be to see if a smooth transition into kindergarten has effects on children’s later education and/or social development.
Conclusion

This study was designed to examine the developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices of kindergarten teachers, along with their perceptions of problems for children entering kindergarten. The purpose of this study was also to discover if there was a relationship between kindergarten teachers’ DAP beliefs and practices and their perceived problems of children entering kindergarten, as well as between their beliefs and practices and the perceived level of successful kindergarten entry.

Kindergarten teachers reported that a “lack of academic skills,” “ability to follow directions,” and “ability to work independently” were all problems of children entering kindergarten. A little less than half of kindergarten children were perceived as entering kindergarten very successfully. The other half had problems, both minor and major.

Kindergarten teachers surveyed in this study were generally considered developmentally appropriate in their beliefs and practices. Kindergarten teachers with higher DAP beliefs reported less often that “lack of academic skills” was a problem for children entering kindergarten than those teachers with lower DAP beliefs. Higher DAP teachers also reported a smaller percent of children having a “very difficult entry” into kindergarten. Teachers with higher DAP practices reported more often that a “non-academic preschool experience” was a problem.

It becomes evident from this study that the kindergarten teachers had strong DAP beliefs, even if they were not always able to implement them. With support from districts and legislators teachers may be able to better implement DAP into their classrooms.
Through this study we also become aware of the need for better communication between parents, preschool, and kindergarten teachers to better prepare children for kindergarten entry. With better communication and support between kindergarten teachers, parents, district officers, and legislators, teachers will be able to better teach and help nurture and enhance development of the children in their class.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
Title of Study: Children's Transition to Kindergarten: A Survey of Utah Kindergarten Teachers' Perspectives

August 15, 2004

Dear Superintendent XXX:

We are researchers at Utah State University who are interested in understanding how kindergarten teachers feel about the transition that children make to kindergarten. We are conducting a statewide survey of kindergarten teachers' perspectives and are asking your permission for kindergarten teachers in XXX School District to participate.

Kindergarten teachers' participation would entail filling out and returning a packet of two questionnaires within the first 6 weeks of the school year, and then filling out and returning the same packet of two questionnaires during the last 6 weeks of the school year. It will take teachers approximately 20 minutes to complete each packet each time.

Teachers' responses to the questionnaires will remain anonymous, identified only by a code number that each teacher individually creates. Reporting of the data will be in aggregated form, not by individual responses. A summary of the study results will be sent to all teachers who participate in this study and to each District office. There are no risks posed by participating in this study, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If you agree to allow XXX School District's kindergarten teachers to participate, we will need a list of the names of kindergarten teachers at each school, as well as their contact information (addresses, e-mails). This is necessary in order for us to distribute questionnaire packets and to send reminders to kindergarten teachers.

Because we are sensitive to your kindergarten teachers' busy schedules and very valuable time, only minimal contact will be made with each teacher:

* Each teacher will receive the questionnaire packet at the beginning of the year and the end of the year through the mail.

* Each teacher will receive two e-mail and two postcard reminders to return the packet at the beginning of the year and two e-mail and two postcard reminders to return the packet at the end of the year.

* Each teacher will receive a summary of the study results through the mail.
No other contact will be made with kindergarten teachers, and all teacher contact information will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

The information we gain from kindergarten teachers is essential in helping us understand their perceptions of kindergarten children's transition challenges. This information is also essential in helping us identify the ways in which parents, preschools, and child care providers can more effectively prepare children for kindergarten entry.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact any one of us. Thank you in advance for your time and feedback.

Sincerely,

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Appendix B. Letter to Kindergarten Teacher
Title of Study: Children's Transition to Kindergarten: A Survey of Utah Kindergarten Teachers' Perspectives

August 15, 2005

Dear Kindergarten Teacher:

We are researchers at Utah State University who are interested in understanding how kindergarten teachers feel about the transition that children make to kindergarten. We are conducting a statewide survey of about 930 kindergarten teachers' perspectives and invite you to participate in this important study. Your name was obtained from a list of kindergarten teachers given to us by your school district office.

Your participation would entail filling out and returning a packet of two questionnaires within the first 6 weeks of the school year, and then filling out and returning the same packet of two questionnaires during the last 6 weeks of the school year. It will take you approximately 30 minutes to complete the packet.

Your responses to the questionnaires will remain anonymous, identified only by a code number that you create. Reporting of the data will be in aggregated form, not by individual responses. A summary of the study results will be sent to all teachers who participate in this study. There are no risks posed by participating in this study, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

The information we gain from kindergarten teachers such as yourself is essential in helping us understand their perceptions of kindergarten children's transition challenges. This information is also important in helping us identify the ways in which parents, preschools, and child care providers can more effectively prepare children for kindergarten entry.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you in advance for your time and feedback!

Sincerely,

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Appendix C. 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.

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<th>Code</th>
<th>Month</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>January</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>November</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>December</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Your personal code number:

```plaintext

Mother's birth month

Mother's birth year
(last 2 digits)

Father's birth month

Father's birth year
(last 2 digits)
```

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?
   1. Urban
   2. Suburban
   3. Small Town
   4. Rural

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 19____ / 200____  Masters 19____ / 200____  Doctorate: 19____ / 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 ______ 5. White, not Hispanic ______
   2. Asian/Pacific Islander _____ 6. Other _____
   3. Black, not Hispanic _____ 7. Multiple Origins _____
   4. Hispanic _____

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 _____ 4. Parent volunteer _____
   2. Co-teacher _____ 5. Community volunteer _____
   3. Student teacher _____ 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 ___________________________________________________________
**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%.

- % 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

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></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>1. Lack of academic skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Difficulty following directions</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Difficulty working as part of group</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Problems with social skills, getting along with other children</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Difficulty working independently</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Difficulty communicating/language problems</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Lack of any formal preschool experience</td>
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<td>8. Highly academic preschool experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Non-academic preschool experience</td>
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<td>10. Disorganized home environments</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Inmaturity</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Other (describe)</td>
<td></td>
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</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.

- 1. Preschool center-based program (private)
- 2. Pre-K program at a school
- 3. Head Start program
- 4. Don’t know
- 5. Other (describe):

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?

- No
- Yes

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.

- Class lists are generated too late
- Requires work in summer that is not supported by salary
- Contacts with parents are discouraged prior to the start of school
- Concern about creating negative expectations
- Funds are not available
- Materials are not available
- Parents are not interested
- Preschool teachers are not interested
- It takes too much time to conduct these practices
- I could not reach most parents of children who need these practices
- It is dangerous to visit student’s homes
- Parents do not bring their child in for registration or open house
- Parents cannot read letters, etc. sent home
- A transition practices plan is not available in school/district
- The school or district does not support
- I choose not to do it
- 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.

- Participating in joint workshops with school staff on issues of interest
- Sharing information about an individual child’s progress
- Providing assistance for children having difficulty
- Talking with children and parents to prepare them for kindergarten
- Children from these programs visiting our school
- 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.

- Interview parents
- Screen child using a formal instrument
- Screen child informally
- 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
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)

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<thead>
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<th>Not at all Important</th>
<th>Not very Important</th>
<th>Fairly Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>To plan and evaluate the curriculum, teacher observation is</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>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>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>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>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>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>
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Continue to next page ➔
9. It is _____ for teachers to provide opportunities for children to select many of their own activities.

10. It is _____ to use one approach for reading and writing instruction.

11. Instruction in letter and word recognition is _____ in preschool.

12. It is _____ for the teacher to provide a variety of learning areas with concrete materials (writing center, science center, math center, etc.).

13. 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).

14. It is _____ for children to work individually at desks or tables most of the time.

15. Workbooks and/or ditto sheets are _____ in my classroom.

16. A structured reading or pre-reading program is _____ for all children.

17. It is _____ for the teacher to talk to the whole group and for the children to do the same things at the same time.

18. 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.

19. 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.

20. It is _____ for teachers to regularly use punishments and/or reprimands when children aren't participating.

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<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Not very</th>
<th>Fairly</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
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<tr>
<td>Important</td>
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<td>1</td>
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Continue to next page →
21. It is ______ for teachers to develop an individualized behavior plan for addressing severe behavior problems.

22. It is ______ for teachers to allocate extended periods of time for children to engage in play and projects.

23. It is ______ for children to write by inventing their own spelling.

24. It is ______ for children to color with pre-drawn forms.

25. It is ______ to read stories daily to children, individually and/or on a group basis.

26. It is ______ for children to dictate stories to the teacher.

27. It is ______ that teachers engage in ongoing professional development in early childhood education (e.g., attend professional conferences, read professional literature).

28. It is ______ for children to see and use functional print (telephone book, magazines) and environmental print (cereal boxes, potato chip bags).

29. It is ______ to provide many daily opportunities for developing social skills (i.e., cooperating, helping, talking) with peers in the classroom.

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.

31. It is ______ that outdoor time have planned activities.

32. It is ______ for parents/guardians to be involved in ways that are comfortable for them.

Continue to next page →
33. It is _____ for strategies like setting limits, problem solving, and redirection to be used to help guide children's behavior.  

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</table>

34. It is _____ for teachers to integrate each child's home culture and language into the curriculum throughout the year.  

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35. It is _____ for teachers to solicit and incorporate parent's knowledge about their children for assessment, evaluation, placement, and planning.  

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36. 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.  

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37. 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.  

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38. 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.  

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39. It is _____ that teachers maintain a quiet environment.  

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40. It is _____ to provide the same curriculum and environment for each group of children that comes through the program.  

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41. It is _____ to focus on teaching children isolated skills by using repetition and recitation (e.g., reciting ABC's).  

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42. It is _____ to follow a prescribed curriculum plan without being distracted by children's interests or current circumstances.  

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43. It is _____ to plan activities that are primarily just for fun without connection to program goals.  

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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 (less than monthly)</th>
<th>Rarely (monthly)</th>
<th>Sometimes (weekly)</th>
<th>Regularly (2-4 times a week)</th>
<th>Very Often (daily)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. build with blocks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</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</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. have their work displayed in the classroom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. experiment with writing by drawing, copying, and using their own invented spelling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. play with games, puzzles, and construction materials (e.g., Tinker Toys, Bristle Blocks)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. explore science materials (e.g., animals, plants, wheels, gears, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. sing, listen, and/or move to music</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. do planned movement activities using large muscles (e.g., balancing, running, jumping)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. use manipulatives (e.g. pegboards, Legos, and Unifix Cubes)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
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*Continue to next page ➔*
### HOW OFTEN DO CHILDREN IN YOUR CLASS:

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>use commercially-prepared phonics activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>work in assigned ability-level groups</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>circle, underline, and/or mark items on worksheets</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>use flashcards with ABCs, sight words, and/or math facts</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>participate in rote counting</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>practice handwriting on lines</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>color, cut, and paste pre-drawn forms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>participate in whole-class, teacher-directed instruction</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>sit and listen for long periods of time until they become restless and fidgety</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>have the opportunity to learn about people with special needs (e.g., a speaker or character in a book)</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>receive rewards as incentives to participate in classroom activities in which they are reluctant participants</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>see their own race, culture, language reflected in the classroom</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>get placed in time-out (i.e., isolation, sitting on a chair, in a corner, or being sent outside of the room)</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>experience parents reading stories or sharing a skill or hobby with the class</td>
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<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>engage in child-chosen, teacher-supported play activities</td>
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HOW OFTEN DO CHILDREN IN YOUR CLASS:

25. draw, paint, work with clay, and use other art media

26. solve real math problems using real objects in the classroom environment that are incorporated into other subject areas

27. get separated from their friends to maintain classroom order

28. engage in experiences that demonstrate the explicit valuing of each other (e.g., sending a card to a sick classmate)

29. work with materials that have been adapted or modified to meet their needs

30. do activities that integrate multiple subjects (reading, math, science, social studies, etc.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Almost Never (less than monthly)</th>
<th>Rarely (monthly)</th>
<th>Sometimes (weekly)</th>
<th>Regularly (2-4 times a week)</th>
<th>Very Often (daily)</th>
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<tr>
<td>25.</td>
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<td>26.</td>
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<td>27.</td>
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<td>28.</td>
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<tr>
<td>30.</td>
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</table>
THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SURVEY!

WE APPRECIATE YOUR HELP!

PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED FORM.