

NORTH CAROLINA KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS AND DEVELOPMENTALLY
APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY

A dissertation presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of
Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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June 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to my director, Dr. Eleanor Hilty, for her encouragement and high expectations. I was fortunate to have Dr. Jane Perlmutter, and Dr. Mary Jean Herzog serving on my dissertation committee. I thank them for the guidance and support they graciously extended to me.

I appreciate the unwavering support provided by my family and friends during challenging times. I send a special message up to Daddy thanking him for his love and encouragement throughout my life.

To Maxine McCall, Wayne Honeycutt, Ann Demiter, Beverly White, Dr. Vanessa Howerton, and all those educators who have inspired me to keep learning and growing, I thank you for your support and continue to be awed by you. You have made me a better person—both personally and professionally.

To Tony, my hero, who has displayed incredible patience and unconditional love, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your support and your kind willingness to do whatever was needed to help. You made all the difference. I truly could not have accomplished this without you.

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ABSTRACT

NORTH CAROLINA KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS AND DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Western Carolina University (June, 2010)

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The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of kindergarten teachers as they worked to implement a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching. Their stories included details related to the support they receive as well as detailed descriptions of the many barriers faced during a time when accountability is very high. As teachers with a high value for developmentally appropriate practice, they experienced cognitive dissonance when circumstances arose to limit their ability to use the best practices they favored. These practices included differentiation of instruction; provision for active and meaningful learning experiences; small group instruction; the use of centers that supported language development; problem solving; development of social skills; literacy and numeracy skills; as well as learning through play—all practices carefully planned to recognize and honor how children learn best.

Mandates requiring the teachers to use scripted curriculum programs were a strong source of the dissonance. These programs were designed to reflect a more academically structured approach to teaching. Instruction was required to be delivered in a whole group setting, with little effort to differentiate instruction. Learning was more

passive in nature with children being required to sit for long blocks of time working at tables or desks completing worksheets. The teachers found creative ways to tweak the mandated curriculum to make them more age and grade appropriate.

Other barriers reported by teachers included the lack of professional development aligned specifically to their needs, the lack of collegial collaboration, and the inappropriate expectations of parents and first grade teachers. Teachers indicated that they wanted their administrators to be knowledgeable about early childhood education and child development. They wanted to receive meaningful feedback to help them improve their instructional practice. The teachers reported feeling that kindergarten did not appear to be a highly valued component of the educational program. It did appear to them that more attention and more resources were regularly aimed at tested grade levels. The teachers were also concerned about not having a voice in decisions that directly affected them.

The major source of support for the teachers came from a group organized by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction known as The Power of Kindergarten. The teachers in the study were among the members of this group. Strong collegiality, gaining a sense of professional empowerment, and focused professional development were reported by the teachers as being important outcomes of their experiences with Power of K.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 1989 my school system's Elementary Education Director asked me if I would allow my kindergarten classroom to become a demonstration site for implementing a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching kindergarten. I was provided the instructional and financial support needed to refine my practice and to obtain resources. Teachers and administrators from the school system in which I worked and from surrounding systems visited my classroom during this three-year project. I had the great opportunity to meet other educators, demonstrate instructional practices that I valued as being best for children, and led professional dialogue about those practices. The visitors observed my children engaged in active learning experiences, many of which the children initiated and others that I directed. My classroom contained open-ended learning centers including blocks, dramatic play, sand, water, art, puppetry, music, and woodworking. There were also centers for math, science, reading, and writing. My teaching assistant and I facilitated children's learning through the use of intentional conversations related to what they were doing in the centers. Child-initiated learning projects were in various stages of completion. There were no worksheets or workbooks used for instruction. Anecdotal notes were recorded to document children's progress. Reactions from the visitors ranged from being eagerly enthusiastic to being politely skeptical.

During this time I was frequently invited to provide professional development related to using developmentally appropriate practices in teaching kindergarten. One session at our regional technical support center left a lasting impression on me. The session ended with all teachers saying their good-byes and leaving except for one. She

approached me very slowly and then I noticed that she had tears in her eyes. She began telling me of her intense belief and interest in teaching in the way I had been discussing. She went on to say that as much as she wanted her classroom to be an active learning environment for children, she was not allowed to do so. Her administrator had removed all centers from the kindergarten classrooms in the school. Workbooks in reading and math had been purchased for instruction. She was now teaching the class as a whole group with all the children seated at tables for most of the day. She went on to describe the effect her instructional practice was having on her children. Many of the children could not sustain attention for any significant length of time; some of the work assigned was too easy for some children and too hard for others. She believed the children were stressed by the expectations she felt forced to impose upon them. Her feelings of distress and frustration were obvious as she spoke. The scenario she described opened my eyes to the dilemma some kindergarten teachers faced when they received no support for moving their teaching practices toward being more developmentally appropriate. It also made me feel most fortunate and appreciative of the encouragement and support that I experienced in my own school.

Seventeen years later, I sat in a conference room filled with over thirty-five North Carolina early childhood educators including private and public school kindergarten teachers, administrators, as well as representatives from community colleges and university departments of education. These educators, representing all regions of the state of North Carolina, had gathered at the invitation of the Early Childhood Section of the Elementary Education Division in the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and the North Carolina Birth Through Kindergarten Higher Education

Consortium to be members of the North Carolina Kindergarten Task Force. The purpose of the meeting was to find out what was happening in kindergarten classrooms across the state. Discussion would focus on both the successes and the challenges experienced. After a full day of intensive dialogue the group generated lengthy lists related to instruction, environments, assessment, scheduling, and overall concerns held about the varied and inconsistent practices in kindergarten classrooms across the state.

The Task Force members expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to share their experiences as early childhood educators. They left the meeting with a sense of satisfaction that their voices had been heard by authorities they trusted to act on the information and suggestions they had provided.

As I listened to this group of educators talk with obvious passion about their educational beliefs and their work with young children, I remembered that teacher who had talked with me at the workshop years ago. The concerns she had expressed over fifteen years ago were in many ways no different from the ones these teachers had just described. It occurred to me that there was much more depth to the experiences these kindergarten teachers shared. This realization led me to the decision to conduct this study to investigate those experiences, noting both the celebrations and the frustrations in the professional lives of those educators teaching kindergarten.

The Face of Kindergarten

As North Carolina schools become more intent on preparing students to become successful and productive citizens in the Twenty-first Century, attention has been given to what happens in the classrooms of the youngest children being prepared to be "future-ready" (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2007).

What *is* happening in kindergarten as this process begins? This question has been often debated over the years. From its inception in the late 1800s when kindergarten was considered to be the place and time to socialize poor and immigrant children, American kindergartens have undergone many transitions in purpose and practice (Bryant & Clifford, 1992). "Kindergarten suffers from the middle-child syndrome, caught between early education and public education, because it shares features of both educational levels" (Graue, 2006, p. 4). Today's kindergartens bridge the gap between early education programs like Head Start and pre-school and the more formal elementary school program. Depending on the prevailing philosophical, social, political, or economic climate of the country, kindergarten programs have ranged from being wholly child-centered and based on child development to being highly academic in nature. Kindergartens using a more academic approach are structured and organized to operate more like traditional first grade classrooms. A swing toward more academic programs occurred in the United States when kindergartens first became integrated with the public school system in 1873 (Bryant & Clifford, 1992). "Getting the children ready for first grade" became an important outcome for kindergarten.

As curriculum changes occurred, so did the roles and responsibilities of kindergarten teachers. Teachers were viewed to be either dictators of learning using a highly structured didactic instructional approach or facilitators of learning that was meaningfully constructed by children. One could reasonably argue that the kindergarten debate regarding its purpose and practice has lasted well over a hundred years and continues to be an issue.

Reasons for the changing roles and responsibilities for today's kindergarten teachers relate to the current climate of accountability for student achievement as well as the move toward national educational standards. The North Carolina State Board of Education has created a new mission statement aimed toward ensuring that students will graduate from high school with all the requisite skills necessary for the "globally competitive environment of the Twenty-first Century" (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2007). A list of these skills can be found in Appendix A. Rigorous academic standards have been established for North Carolina students in grades K-12 (North Carolina State Board Of Education, 2005). Two major school reform movements—the North Carolina ABCs of Education (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1997) and the federally mandated No Child Left Behind Act (2001) have left school administrators and teachers scrambling to balance the intense pressure to increase student achievement while maintaining the integrity of a meaningful learning program for their students. Though formal testing does not begin until grade three, kindergarten teachers feel the burden of accountability. Garner (2007) found that kindergarten teachers in North Carolina felt pressure to teach their students skills and information that would be tested in third grade. This practice was done at the expense of ensuring that students had rich opportunities to develop social skills and problem solving skills. Kindergarten teachers in North Carolina are held accountable for having their students meet specific academic benchmarks established by the state or by the local education agency.

Hatch (2002) described the phenomenon of "accountability shove-down" in kindergarten. This occurs when standards-based accountability is felt at the kindergarten level. The North Carolina Kindergarten Standard Course of Study identifies the required

content for all curriculum areas to be taught. The curriculum areas include English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Healthful Living, and Arts Education. Each curriculum area identifies rigorous performance standards. "The performance standards shall align, whenever possible, with the student academic performance standards developed for the National Assessment of Educational Progress" (The Excellent Schools Act, 1997). Though common curriculum standards exist, each school system in North Carolina sets its own promotion standards for kindergarten children. These promotion standards vary widely across the state. One system may require a kindergarten child to be reading at a much higher level than another in order to go to first grade. Consequently, the number of kindergarten children being retained in some areas of the state is high. One school system in North Carolina planned to retain 30 percent of its kindergarten students in 2006 (L. Roberts, personal communication, 2008). The retention rate for North Carolina kindergartners rose from three percent in 1992 to almost seven percent in 2002 (Kindergarten Readiness Issues Group, Partners in Research Forum, 2003). More young children may face the prospect of failure as a result of not meeting the new academic standards.

Changes in the kindergarten curriculum leave many feeling that kindergarten has assumed a new identity—that of being a watered down version of first grade. Graue (2009) observed:

The value of learning through play was emphasized in yesterday's kindergarten, but the value of what was learned became less clear as the rest of the elementary curriculum was clarified through standards and curriculum alignment. Today's kindergarten is more focused on literacy and numeracy. (para. 6)

In his book, *Teaching in the New Kindergarten*, Hatch (2005) has described what he believed to be the new roles teachers must assume to meet the demands of the “new” kindergarten:

I see effective kindergarten teachers as those who possess the knowledge, intelligence, and analytic ability to systematically study the settings in which they work, to know the strengths and needs of their students, families and communities, to understand the constraints and supports of the systems around them, to make sound decisions based on an examination of a variety of options, and to monitor the results of those decisions and adjust accordingly. (p. 71)

At a time when all teachers are feeling a loss of professional identity, kindergarten teachers are feeling the pinch acutely. Given the existing demands for rigor, meeting new standards, and high expectations for student performance even at the kindergarten level, these teachers are finding themselves caught in a position where their philosophical beliefs related to how best to teach young children run contrary to how and what they are required to teach in their classrooms.

The philosophical beliefs of many of these kindergarten teachers are firmly grounded in the concept of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has created guidelines for implementing DAP. Developmentally appropriate practices are those teaching and decision-making practices which take into account how each child learns, each individual child’s growth and development, as well as the child’s cultural values (Copple & Bredekamp, 2006). When the guidelines were first introduced in 1987, NAEYC contrasted DAP with those practices the organization designated as developmentally

inappropriate practice (DIP). Examples of both types of practices were provided to help teachers clearly see the differences (Bredekamp, 1987). Teachers who embrace DAP place a high value on these practices as they plan for instruction, make instructional decisions, and create nurturing and engaging learning environments (Egertson, 2004). They believe that their use of these practices ensures optimal learning for children—not failure.

Developmentally appropriate classrooms are thoughtfully designed to include learning centers, movement, exploration, meaningful hands-on learning experiences, and projects that support children’s curiosity, interests, and natural eagerness to learn. The teachers serve as both *guides to* and *directors of* learning (Copple & Bredekamp, 2006; Katz, 2000; Rushton, 2001). The teacher works intentionally to ensure that purposeful learning occurs. This practice defines a teaching role that many kindergarten teachers value and the one they believe is best suited to meet the needs of children.

Some kindergarten teachers, however, are not encouraged to establish, maintain, or strengthen an existing developmentally appropriate classroom. Instead of being supported to implement DAP, expectations for implementing developmentally inappropriate practices (DIP) are imposed upon them by their local or system administrators. For example, in some schools teachers are expected to teach young children by using a highly academic teacher-directed approach throughout the school day. This didactic approach is more aligned with the traditional teaching practices used in first grade. Children are expected to sit at tables for long periods of time passively engaged in listening to the teacher, memorizing, coloring, or doing workbook pages. There are no choices available to children, limited or no hands-on learning experiences, and no

opportunities for collaboration with peers (Parker, 2006). These kindergarten teachers are expected to teach skills in isolation, often using scripted commercial literacy or math programs, without regard to individual children's needs or abilities. Teachers must assume the role of being the sole director of all the learning that takes place in the classroom. This is *not* the type of teaching practice some kindergarten teachers can support, nor is it the kind of professional role they want to fill.

Purpose of the Study

Given the Twenty-first Century pressures for accountability, this study sought to describe and understand the experiences of North Carolina kindergarten teachers as they worked to implement developmentally appropriate practices in their classrooms. Teachers who were strong advocates for DAP had the opportunity to

- describe how they felt about implementing a DAP classroom,
- describe their beliefs relative to DAP and the degree to which their practice reflected their beliefs,
- describe any existing constraints or barriers, and
- describe any resources that supported their practice.

Importance of the Study

This study strove to understand the challenges, barriers, and available support that affected the teachers' ability to establish, maintain, or improve developmentally appropriate practices in their classrooms. The study discovered how the teachers coped with and managed any barriers they experienced. The results of this study will inform administrators and central office personnel of the needs and concerns of teachers committed to a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching kindergarten. These

needs could inform system-wide or local school improvement plans, including professional development and allocation of resources.

North Carolina has a great need for developmentally appropriate kindergarten classrooms to be supported at all levels—state, local education agency (LEA), and at the local school. Faculty members of higher education institutions are concerned that finding developmentally appropriate kindergarten classrooms for student teacher placement is becoming more difficult. Bryant, Clifford, and Peisner (1991) found that only 20 percent of the 103 randomly selected North Carolina kindergartens they studied were considered to be developmentally appropriate. The researchers found high use of worksheets, workbooks, and teacher-led large group instruction to be more the norm of kindergarten instruction in the classrooms they observed. The Primary Section of the Elementary Education Division of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction shares a similar concern. The Primary Section has received numerous e-mails and phone calls from kindergarten teachers related to the non-support or disappearance of DAP (E. Phillips, personal communication, 2005). In 2006 the Primary Section of NCDPI joined with the North Carolina Birth through Kindergarten Higher Education Consortium to sponsor a meeting of selected kindergarten teachers, administrators, and teacher educators from all regions of the state. This group, known as the Kindergarten Task Force, met "to identify successes and challenges in kindergarten classrooms today and to develop strategies and support systems to expand developmentally appropriate practices in all kindergarten classrooms across our state" (E. Phillips, personal communication, 2005). From their lively and passionate discussion it was evident that these teachers were hungry for support and for more information on how to be even more developmentally

appropriate in their practices. As a result of this meeting, NCDPI invited eight educators to become members of a Kindergarten Think Tank. Its purpose was to analyze the data generated by the Kindergarten Task Force and to formulate a plan for systematically addressing their issues and concerns.

The Think Tank began to create a plan for moving North Carolina kindergartens toward being more aligned with the standards for early childhood education established by NAEYC. This movement was named The Power of Kindergarten (POK). A position statement was composed in support of educational practices that align with those recommended in the NAEYC guidelines. This statement, known as *The Power of K: North Carolina Position Statement on Kindergartens of the 21st Century*, was endorsed by the North Carolina State Board of Education in 2007 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2007). A copy of the position statement can be found in Appendix B. Members of the Think Tank also developed the idea of bringing together a group of kindergarten teachers to be designated as North Carolina Kindergarten Teacher Leaders. These teachers would be chosen through an application process. Thirty-four teachers from more than two hundred applicants were selected. A three-year staff development plan was designed to increase their professional knowledge related to DAP and to develop and strengthen their leadership capacity. These teachers attend weeklong institutes each summer as well as quarterly mini-conferences. Over time they will create demonstration classrooms and lead professional development sessions at state, regional, and local levels.

Given the high support for DAP at the state level, this study sought to discover the support existing at the LEA level and the local school level for implementing, sustaining,

and strengthening DAP in kindergarten classrooms. This information will serve to inform teachers, policy makers, and administrators of the ways and means of support that are meaningful to kindergarten teachers. This support is critical if developmentally appropriate classrooms are to thrive and increase in number.

Studies have been conducted to discover the degree of congruence between teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to DAP (Charlesworth, Hart, & Burts, 1991; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Moseley, & Fleege, 1993; Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Jones & Gullo, 1999; Jones, Burts, & Buchanan, 2000; Parker, 2006). These studies have found that positive beliefs about DAP reported by early childhood teachers are often stronger than what is indicated by their practices. That is, while teachers expressed a high value for developmentally appropriate practices, their actual use of DAP in their classrooms was low in comparison. Explanations for the misalignment ranged from parental pressures to lack of professional knowledge. However, other studies (McMullen, 1999; Stipek & Byler, 1997) have found the reverse to be true—specifically that a strong positive correlation existed between beliefs and practices. These teachers did in fact, as described by Stipek and Byler (1997) "practice what they preached" (p. 305). The studies mentioned here involved teachers who taught children in pre-school through grade one. My study focused specifically on kindergarten teachers who are strong advocates for the use of DAP. They are members of a select group of teachers dedicated to their own professional development, who will ultimately lead others to grow in their knowledge and use of DAP. Hopefully, the results of this study will add a greater depth of understanding of what it means to teachers to have a strong alignment between their beliefs in the value of DAP for children and its implementation in classrooms.

The misalignment of educational beliefs and practices due to outside pressures causes high stress and job dissatisfaction among kindergarten teachers (DeVault, 2003; Goldstein, 1997, 2007; Jones, et al., 2000; McDaniels, Issac, & Hatch, 2005; Parker, 2006). It is reasonable to believe that teachers who experience a high sense of professional autonomy and respect tend to remain in their workplace more so than teachers who feel they have no voice in what happens in the classroom. Indeed, studies support this fact (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Council of Chief State School Officers, 2000; Danielson, 1999; Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003). At a time when areas of North Carolina are facing a critical teacher shortage, recruiting and retaining quality teachers is high priority. Every step must be taken to address these pressures in order to attract and retain effective teachers in the classroom. The first step is to identify and understand the pressures and challenges faced by kindergarten teachers.

Theoretical Framework

Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance served as the theoretical framework for this study. Introduced in 1957, the theory related to the alignment and misalignment of one's cognitions. Defining and clarifying some terms related to Festinger's theory will be helpful:

1. Cognitions: an individual's knowledge, ideas, values, beliefs, opinions, and behaviors.
2. Consonance: the psychologically content state that exists when cognitions that are related to each other exist in harmony with each other.
3. Dissonance: the psychologically uncomfortable state that exists when related cognitions oppose each other.

4. Dissonance reduction: an individual's natural drive to eliminate or to reduce the dissonance being experienced.
5. Forced compliance: the result that occurs when an individual is required to publicly behave in a way that is in direct opposition from private beliefs.
(Festinger, 1957).

Festinger theorized that when an individual encounters two cognitions—ideas, knowledge, beliefs, values, or practices—that are related to each other but are the opposite of each other, dissonance is created (Festinger, 1957). The individual is then compelled to find a way to resolve the dissonant situation. According to Festinger, the process of dissonance reduction can occur in several ways:

- The individual could change one of the cognitions so that there is a higher degree of congruence between the two conflicting elements.
- The individual could seek additional cognitions that serve to reconcile the conflicting cognitions.
- The individual could reduce the importance of dissonant cognitions.
- The individual could increase the importance of consonant cognitions
(Festinger, 1957).

Festinger discussed the creation of dissonance when forced compliance occurs. "Public compliance without an accompanying change in private opinion occurs when a reward is offered for compliance or when some punishment is threatened for failure to comply. Dissonance inevitably follows such a situation" (p. 97).

If a teacher has a strong belief in developmentally appropriate teaching practices, yet teaches in a way that runs contrary to her beliefs, she will likely experience cognitive

dissonance. Set within this theoretical framework, this study is designed to explore the existence of both consonance and dissonance experienced by North Carolina kindergarten teachers. Questions were designed to provide teachers the opportunity to describe the congruence between their belief and practices. For those individuals who experienced cognitive dissonance, the dissonance reduction process described in Festinger's theory provides some insight as to how some teachers might find a way to harmoniously balance their beliefs and practices.

Data Collection

General background data was collected from each participant relative to her educational experiences, number of years of teaching experience, grade levels taught, and educational preparation. A semi-structured interview was conducted in order to gain the kindergarten teachers' perspectives on the implementation of DAP in their classrooms.

The following open-ended questions guided the interview:

- Describe your experience as a kindergarten teacher?
- Describe your use of developmentally appropriate practice in your classroom.
- Describe practices in your classroom that you consider to be developmentally inappropriate and talk about why you include those practices.
- What changes would you like to make? What is the likelihood that you will be able to implement the changes?
- Describe any existing factors that affect your efforts to implement a developmentally appropriate classroom?

Other data collected included photographs of the classrooms depicting room arrangements and displays, descriptions of materials and centers, written statements of educational philosophy and classroom practices.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of kindergarten teachers as they work to implement a developmentally appropriate instructional approach to teaching their young students. For this study, it was necessary that participants be limited to teachers who hold positive attitudes toward this instructional approach and work to implement this approach in their classrooms.

This study focused only on the experiences of kindergarten teachers currently identified as North Carolina Kindergarten Teacher Leaders. By their membership in this group, these teachers met the criteria for participation.

The results of this study would be meaningful to other kindergarten teachers who embrace these same beliefs and practices as they cope with teaching young children in an era of high stakes testing and strong accountability. It would also be meaningful to administrators and policy makers who understand and work toward providing optimal developmentally appropriate educational experiences for young children.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To better understand the current complexities faced by many kindergarten teachers it is important to know about the historical evolution of kindergarten with regard to the changes in its purpose, expectations of children, and teaching practices that have occurred over time. The literature contains much information that compares these practices and their effects on young children. This review will show that the instructional approach supported by many researchers and other experts in the field of early childhood as being best for children, as well as being the preferred practice of many kindergarten teachers, is not always the approach that can be fully implemented within the classroom. Also important is knowing how teachers feel when faced with the dilemma of not being able to align their practices with their educational beliefs.

Kindergarten—Historical Overview of Its Purpose and Practice

The first kindergarten or "children's garden" was established in Germany in 1840 by Friedrich Froebel (Bryant & Clifford, 1992). In response to the existing highly academic-based practices in German schools which focused on reading, writing, and memorization, Froebel created an active-learning program for young children that encouraged singing and moving, care of plants and animals, finger plays, and intensely structured play with his specially designed manipulatives (Ross, 1976; Weber, 1969). Froebel's educational philosophy and methods were a major influence on the development and expansion of kindergartens in the United States. Between 1850 and 1870 many kindergartens were opened for German immigrant children living in large cities of the United States. These private kindergartens were organized to educate the

children using Froebel's approach as well as to preserve the German culture and language (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000). In 1859 Elizabeth Peabody, a teacher from Boston, met Margaret Shurtz, a teacher trained by Froebel, who had opened the first kindergarten (German-speaking) in the United States (Bryant & Clifford, 1992). This meeting with Shurtz led Ms. Peabody in 1860 to open the first English-speaking and largely successful kindergarten in the United States. (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000). "The curriculum was well organized, following daily routines that included reading, arithmetic, singing, writing, and French" (Seavey, 2005, p. 51). She became a much sought-after expert in the field and published a book, *The Moral Culture of Infancy and Kindergarten Guide*, detailing how to set up and teach kindergarten. Ms. Peabody eventually realized that her kindergarten program was not truly aligned with the purpose and methods used in Froebel's German kindergartens. She traveled to Europe to observe what she termed to be "authentic" kindergartens (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000, p. 240). She returned to the United States with a deeper understanding of Froebel's vision and became dedicated to the mission of correcting mistakes she had made during her initial efforts to organize kindergarten. She worked hard to see that the Froebel's philosophy and methods became known and implemented by giving lectures and setting up a training school for teachers (Seavey, 2005). She revised the book written earlier. "The primary change in the second edition was Peabody's opposition to teaching academic subjects to young children instead of using the child's play and properly guiding it as the basis for true learning, as Froebel intended" (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000, p. 240). It can be said that Ms. Peabody pioneered the first reform movement in the United States to make kindergartens more child-

centered. In fact, it was her own initial design for kindergartens that she worked to change.

Stemming from Elizabeth Peabody's efforts, the number of private and charity Froebelian kindergartens grew over the years. Under the supervision of Susan Blow, public school kindergarten began first in St. Louis in 1873 and then spread throughout the United States (Weber, 1969). During this period the major purposes of kindergarten were to socialize the hundreds of poor children in the slums of industrialized cities and to develop within them strong moral character (Bryant & Clifford, 1992). Thus kindergarten played an important role in the social reformation movement going on at the time.

By the turn of the century, some teachers began to move away from the traditional Froebelian approach, believing it to be too formally structured. Influenced by John Dewey's educational reform efforts known as the Progressive Educational Movement, many kindergarten teachers began to make changes in the curriculum (Bryant & Clifford, 1992; Gordon & Brown, 1993). Patty Hill, a former kindergarten teacher and a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, was one of the strongest advocates for the progressive approach to teaching kindergarten (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000). Dewey envisioned the purposes of kindergarten as that of providing children opportunities to problem solve together within a shared community and allowing appropriate social skills to develop as a result of this interactive process (Weber, 1969). Embracing Dewey's philosophy, Mrs. Hill "proposed a curriculum that was relevant and child-focused, allowing for initiative and creativity" (Bryant & Clifford, 1992, p. 150). Though Dewey valued Froebel's philosophical views related to educating young children, he did not agree with Froebel's teacher-directed approach in the classroom. He believed teachers

should serve as facilitators of learning versus being dictators of learning (Gordon & Browne, 1993). Thus, Dewey directly influenced kindergarten to become a more active learning environment for children and teachers to become facilitators of learning.

The pedagogy of kindergarten continued to be discussed over the next several decades. "Since pupils entering the first grade, who are prepared for reading, make satisfactory progress in learning to read, kindergarten teachers should adopt as one of their aims the development of those attitudes and habits which make for reading readiness" (Weber, 1969, p. 199). Attempts were made to standardize the materials and content of the kindergarten program (Weber, 1969).

During the decades between the twenties and the sixties two very strong viewpoints of kindergarten developed. Some educators believed that unless kindergarten included a more or less formal reading readiness program it asked too little of children and featured only play. A survey published in the early sixties reported that principals held that formal reading readiness work was expected to supply the "intellectual" stimulus of the kindergarten program. A second group firmly opposed this viewpoint on the grounds that it asked too much of young children in a way that ran counter to their developmental needs (Weber, 1969, p. 203). Clearly, there still existed the divide in philosophy about the best way to teach the children—academic approach or child-centered approach?

By 1930 the number of children enrolled in the country's kindergartens was at an all time high. Four years later, enrollment dropped dramatically due to the effects of The Great Depression (Weber, 1969). Schools either reduced their number of kindergarten teachers or eliminated kindergarten programs altogether to save money. Class sizes were

increased, resulting in overcrowded classrooms. Instructional quality was diminished in many of the classrooms. Weber suggested other reasons for the demise of kindergarten during this time, including a lack of value for kindergarten by school administrators and the general public. "To many taxpayers the objectives of public kindergarten seemed vague and the results nebulous" (Weber, 1969, p. 195). Both the economy and the lack of public understanding about the need of kindergarten seriously impeded the program's growth.

Changes, however, were on the horizon. In 1957 the Russians launched a satellite known as Sputnik. Russian dominance and their lead over the United States in knowledge and technology had a major impact on the American educational system. The Progressive Educational Movement was blamed for the academic shortcomings of the American schools (Berube, 1994; Hayes, 2007; Roopnarine and Johnson, 2005). Heavy demands were made on schools to improve student achievement in the areas of math and science. There were also concerns about the extreme poverty and high levels of illiteracy that existed in the country during the 1960s (de Cos, 2001). It became important to reach children at the earliest age possible to teach them the skills needed to increase their academic achievement. The number of public school supported kindergartens increased dramatically. "As in the later 1800s kindergarten was again expected to be an agent of social reform. In an attempt to help children 'catch up,' many kindergartens became watered down versions of first grade" (Bryant & Clifford, 1992, p.151). "The kindergarten came under pressure from all sides to 'change with the times'" (Rudolf & Cohen, 1984, p. 5). Sputnik's influence on the American education system, and specifically kindergarten, has had a lasting effect.

The trend towards a more didactic/academic—back to basics—approach in kindergarten that began in the 1960s gained even greater support after the publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* in 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Spurred by rising unemployment in the United States, high levels of illiteracy, inflation, the business community's growing inability to be globally competitive, a seventeen-year span of decreasing Scholastic Aptitude Test scores of high school students, and a poor showing of the academic achievement of American students when compared to students of other countries, Terrel Bell, the United States Secretary of Education, appointed a taskforce known as the National Commission on Excellence in Education (Berube, 1994; Hayes, 2007). The purpose of the Commission was to study the American school system to identify its weaknesses and make recommendations for improvement. In the report detailing their findings, the Commission described the dismal plight of the American educational system. Major reform efforts to improve teaching, learning, and student achievement began to take place. For kindergarten this reform eventually translated into the implementation of learning standards in all curriculum areas. In North Carolina the learning standards became known as the Kindergarten Standard Course of Study (North Carolina State Board of Education, 1985). Once again, the country's economy and the perception that the American education system was failing to produce a competent workforce led to more rigorous academic expectations for children.

In the years following the *A Nation At Risk* report, growing concern rose among early childhood educators about the stress endured by children who were pressured to engage in highly academic programs requiring them to learn skills well beyond their

developmental capacities. In contrast to the popular academic approach in kindergarten, the constructivist approach to learning gained attention and favor by many early childhood educators in the later part of the twentieth century (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005). Based on the work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, the constructivist approach allowed children to learn in a way that honored their cognitive and social developmental levels (Gestwicki, 1999; Hayes, 2007; Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000; Nagar & Shapiro, 2000; Weber, 1969). For the purpose of this study, an in-depth review of constructivist learning theory is not included.

Whereas traditional or academic programs relied on the teacher's controlling all dissemination of knowledge, "the constructivist viewpoint rests on the assumption that children mentally construct knowledge through reflection on their experiences" (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005). Like the teachers who embraced progressive educational practices suggested by Dewey, constructivist teachers take on facilitator roles in the classroom rather than being the sole dictators of learning. Through active learning experiences, interactive discussion, and questioning, teachers guide students to create their own personal understanding of concepts.

A kindergarten teacher implementing a constructivist approach offers children meaningful opportunities to make choices based on their interests. "With constructivist learning, the motivation to engage in intellectual tasks is greatest when tasks are challenging but achievable, and when individuals are given autonomy in selecting and completing tasks" (Parker, 2006, p. 70). Teachers interact with children to plan projects, to assess progress, and to encourage high-level thinking (Hayes, 2007; Katz, 1995; Nagar & Shapiro, 2000; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005). The constructivist approach in

kindergarten also supports the use of play as a process for learning that is child-centered and eliminates the stress of inappropriate learning expectations. Those who advocate for the constructivist approach in kindergarten often find themselves in conflict with others who believe that it does not meet the rigorous standards characteristic of a more traditional academic program.

The difference in philosophies that existed in Froebel's time as to what constituted a good kindergarten program continues to exist today. The latest educational reform movements have strengthened the foothold of the academic approach in kindergarten pedagogy. North Carolina's ABCs of Education (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2005) and the federally mandated No Child Left Behind Act (2001) have led to strong accountability for high student achievement that includes high-stakes testing. Simply stated: To meet the requirements for high academic achievement, many kindergartens have become highly academic.

From reviewing the history of kindergarten since its beginnings in Germany over 150 years ago, it is clearly evident that clashes between those advocating for a formal academic program and those advocating for a program that is more child centered in its approach have been an on-going phenomenon. The knowledge of past conflicts and the contexts in which they occurred does help us to understand the current differences of opinions in how best to teach young children. The perception that American schools are failing to adequately educate their students have led to various reform movements. These movements have had a direct impact on kindergarten curriculum. The purpose of kindergarten has ranged from being the vehicle for socializing poor children, to increasing children's cognitive abilities via highly structured teacher-directed learning

experiences, to, finally, meeting children's needs and abilities to actively construct their own learning through problem solving and play. The role of the kindergarten teacher has toggled between that of being a facilitator of learning and that of being a dictator of learning. The age-old question of kindergarten's purpose and how that purpose is to be carried out continues to be debated in the arena of public school education. It is a recurring theme that requires more attention if any kind of consensus might be reached.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

In response to the formal, highly academic, and skill-based instruction of young children in the 1970s and 1980s, many early childhood experts became worried about the effects such practices could have on children. In his book, *The Hurried Child*, Elkind (1981) expressed strong concern about the tendency of schools to rush students to achieve. For example, he described the stress of kindergarten children being required to learn to read. Elkind suggested that many schools operate much like factories. "When school is looked upon as an assembly line, and children as empty vessels to be filled, there is a temptation to speed children up the assembly line, to increase production. Why *not* put in as much at kindergarten as at first grade" (p.48). First-grade curriculum trickled down to kindergarten in order to teach basic skills to young children earlier. This trend toward more formal, academic, skill-based kindergartens led professional educational organizations to compose position papers in support of child-centered learning practices (National Association of State School Boards of Education, 1988; National Council for the Social Studies, 1989; National Council of Teachers of Math, 1989). In 1987 one of the most respected and well-known early childhood professional organizations, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), published a

document that provided clear guidelines for establishing a quality early childhood program. The document, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8* (Bredekamp, 1987) assisted early childhood educators seeking to have their programs accredited by NAEYC. It also served as a powerful position statement opposing educational practices such as standardized testing and passive learning experiences that led children to experience stress in the classroom. This landmark document provided concrete examples of both developmentally appropriate and developmentally inappropriate practices (DIP) so that teachers would have a better understanding of what was and was *not* considered to be appropriate in the classroom.

In light of the trend at the time to push children to learn basic skills as early as possible, studies began to be conducted comparing the classrooms incorporating DAP to those incorporating DIP to see the effects of both practices. Indeed, much evidence was found to support the implementation of DAP.

Several studies focusing on the academic achievement of children in developmentally appropriate classrooms (Burts, et al., 1993; Huffman & Speer, 2000; Marcon, 2002; Pfannenstiel, 1998) found that children who learned in developmentally appropriate programs achieved at higher levels than children in more traditional classrooms that were considered to be developmentally inappropriate. Huffman and Speer (2000) specifically studied minority at-risk children from an urban setting and found that "These children learned more over the course of a year in classrooms rated as more developmentally appropriate" (p. 182). A study by Neuharth-Pritchett (2001) found that fewer children were retained in kindergartens where the teachers used a more child-

centered developmentally appropriate approach to teaching. Other studies focused on the stress-related behaviors of children learning in developmentally inappropriate settings (Burts, Hart, Charlesworth, & Kirk, 1990; Burts, et al., 1992). In both studies fifty indicators of stress were identified; they included such behaviors as nail biting, aggression, ripping up worksheets, tics, etc. Males in highly structured classrooms were found to show more stress-related behaviors than males in more developmentally appropriate settings. "As was found in the initial study, findings from the present study indicated that children in developmentally inappropriate classrooms exhibited significantly more overall stress behaviors than children in the more developmentally appropriate classrooms" (Burts, et al., 1992, p.313). These studies clearly illustrated the value and importance of establishing and maintaining a developmentally appropriate learning environment for children—children performed better in classrooms where teachers took into strong consideration their level of readiness for various learning experiences.

NAEYC revised its position statement in 1997, presenting a less dichotomous relationship between appropriate and inappropriate practices (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Developmentally appropriate practices were defined in the following terms:

Developmentally appropriate practices result from the process of professionals making decisions about the well-being and education of children based on at least three important kinds of information or knowledge:

1. What is known about child development and learning—knowledge of age-related human characteristics that permits general predictions within an

- age range about what activities, materials, interactions, or experiences will be safe, healthy, interesting, achievable, and also challenging to children;
2. What is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group to be able to adapt for and be responsive to inevitable individual variation; and
 3. Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families. (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p.8)

The position statement was recently updated to build on the content presented in the second revision and to address current issues relevant to the education of young children. It reflects the new research on how children learn and discusses how that research impacts the importance of reducing learning gaps and supporting student achievement. It calls for stronger coordination of Pre-K and K-3 educational programs, so that appropriate expectations are set and continuity is established. The new statement also makes clear the importance of the teacher's role in making knowledge-based instructional decisions for children. Teachers must be highly intentional as they go about teaching in a developmentally appropriate fashion (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Though DAP has been shown to have positive effects on young children's growth and learning experiences, many teachers do not always choose to implement, nor are they encouraged or supported to implement DAP in classrooms (Bryant, et al., 1991; Dunn & Kontos, 1997; Oaks & Caruso, 1990; Sherman & Muller, 1996). In a recent study of the practices of U.S. kindergarten teachers, 53.6 percent of the teachers reported

implementing rigid teacher-directed activities for over two hours daily (Zeng, 2005). While some teachers may purposefully choose to implement developmentally inappropriate practices, other teachers report feeling outside pressure to implement formal academic kindergarten programs in order to meet expectations for high student achievement (Hatch, 2005; DeVault, 2003). Goldstein (1997) described a situation that involved parental pressure to implement a more academic-based kindergarten program at a school renown for its developmentally appropriate pedagogy. Parents of kindergarten students demonstrated high values and expectations for "academic achievement, academic acceleration, and for the idea of seeing their young children engaged in 'real work'" (p. 9). Other teachers reported pressure stemming from the implementation of state standards and standardized assessment practices (Cress, 2004; Wien, 2004). Sagor (2003) reported dire effects of that pressure on teachers:

The thrust of the standards movement is now placing many teachers at risk of losing their sense of usefulness. In too many places, the implementation of standards-based education has led teachers to feel that they are supposed to leave their creativity at the door. Often they are handed a canned, sometimes even scripted, curriculum. And, in some locales, teachers are given a pacing chart that tells them what to teach and when to teach it. This type of institutional response to standards sends the message that standards-based teaching can be automated to a point that it is teacher proof.

In these settings, teachers interpret the new job expectation as being "do as you're told." The clear implication is that if you aren't willing to do things the way

your supervisor demands or in the manner stipulated by the district, they can find someone who will. (p. 82-83)

Under these circumstances, teachers feel a loss of the autonomy enabling them to make their own professional decisions regarding instruction. They are mandated to implement "whole-group" instruction using commercially produced workbooks that pay little attention to the individual needs of children. A real dilemma is created for kindergarten teachers who do want to be developmentally appropriate in their instructional practice but do not know how to do so.

The literature is beginning to indicate, however, that where there is a will, there is a way:

Every pedagogical dilemma can be resolved using any number of suitable and appropriate approaches, and different teachers will develop idiosyncratic solutions that reflect their own beliefs and personal practical knowledge, the needs of their students, and the multiple demands and constraints of their professional contexts.

(Goldstein, 2005, para. 3)

Kindergarten teachers and researchers are beginning to speak out to offer encouragement to other teachers and to share suggestions for how to remain faithful to their philosophical ideologies relative to DAP given the reality of the time and place in which they teach. DeVault (2003) advises fellow kindergarten teachers to be able to articulate *why* they do *what* they do in the classroom. She emphasizes the importance of keeping parents and administrators advised of the connections between the learning experiences in the developmentally appropriate classroom and the resulting outcomes related to student achievement. She also advises teachers to stay informed of current instructional trends, to

seek out the support of other teachers, and to be smart advocates for DAP. Goldstein (2005; 2007) conducted a case study of two kindergarten teachers, Jenny and Amy, who taught in an environment highly supportive of DAP. Goldstein wanted to know how teachers could balance the demands for meeting the state of Texas' learning standards with using a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching kindergarten. Strategies used by the teachers were coded as follows:

1. Maintenance—some content standards were already strongly aligned with the typical kindergarten curriculum and needed no change in practice.
2. Integration—some standards were taught by thoughtfully setting up the learning environment to include games that captivated children's interest and motivated them to continue to play. Thus skills were practiced and reinforced in meaningful contexts.
3. Demarcation—some standards were taught during a scheduled skill-based center time when learning activities were dedicated to teaching content standards. A separate free-play center time was also scheduled during the day.
4. Acquiescence—some content standards were taught through the use of developmentally inappropriate activities and materials such as worksheets. These concessions were made to meet the expectations of parents who expected to see work products. (Goldstein, 2005).

Both teachers were able to maintain the integrity of a child-focused instructional program and meet the demands of the state standards. However the researcher was careful to note:

Jenny and Ann's reflections portray today's kindergarten—in the most privileged, supportive circumstances—as a frenetic, high-pressure work environment.

Teachers are afforded less freedom, given fewer choices, and expected to do more, to do it more quickly, and to do it more effectively than ever before.

(Goldstein, 2007, p. 48)

In discussing the results of her study Goldstein (2005) pointed to the fact that she focused on only two teachers who happened to be teaching in a highly supportive environment. She recommended that involving more teachers in varied school settings could lead to the identification of additional strategies for implementing developmentally appropriate classroom practices within a standards-based educational climate. Certainly there exists a great need for this knowledge based on the experiences of other kindergarten teachers who have successfully implemented developmentally appropriate practices in their classrooms. My study sought to add to the limited amount of this type of information currently available to support and guide North Carolina's kindergarten teachers.

Teacher Beliefs and Practices

Pajares (1992) described the direct effect teacher beliefs have on classroom practice: "Few would argue that the beliefs teachers hold influence their perceptions and judgments, which in turn, affect their behavior in the classroom" (p. 307). It is problematic for some teachers when their educational beliefs run contrary to what they are required to do in the classroom.

There is evidence in the literature to suggest that many teachers' beliefs related to DAP are not always aligned with their actual practice (Bryant, et al., 1991; Charlesworth, et al., 1993; Dunn & Kontos, 1997; Hatch & Freeman, 1988). Although many teachers report a strong belief and value for DAP, they do not apply their beliefs in their day-to-

day teaching practices. Causes for this discrepancy between beliefs and practice can be attributed to factors such as lack of teacher knowledge for implementation strategies and lack of support from administrators, colleagues, or parents (Charlesworth, et.al., 1991; McMullen, 1999). "When beliefs and practices are consistent, teaching is less stressful, and having less stress can reduce teacher burnout" (Vartuli, 2005, p. 83). My study explored strategies used by kindergarten teachers to better align their classroom practice with their value for DAP.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Leon Festinger, a social psychologist, was well known for his innovative theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). His theory stated that "people are driven to achieve consistency and are motivated to make changes in the wake of inconsistencies" (Cooper, 2007). He introduced the idea that two cognitions—that is two beliefs, values, attitudes, bits of knowledge, opinions, or behaviors—can be related or non-related to each other. When a pair of cognitions is related to each other, they can have either a consonant relationship or a dissonant relationship. A consonant relationship is harmonious as there is no discrepancy or inconsistency between the two cognitions; a dissonant relationship exists when the two cognitions are at odds or inconsistent with each other.

In their review of Festinger's theory, Wicklund and Brehm (1976) described situations in which cognitive dissonance is created. The first situation occurs when an individual must make a choice between several equally attractive alternatives. The individual is caught between living with the choice actually made versus whether a different choice should have been made. Another dissonance-causing situation occurs

when an individual is required to behave in a way that is uncharacteristic for him given his personal beliefs, attitudes, or values. Festinger (1957) called this situation "forced compliance." The promise of a reward or the threat of some punitive action is used to put pressure on the individual to comply. It is that situation that most closely guides this study.

Festinger believed that when a state of inconsistency or "cognitive dissonance" is created within an individual, the individual is driven to try to eliminate or reduce the inconsistency (Festinger, 1957). The effort used to lessen the dissonance is related to the magnitude of the dissonance—the greater the degree of cognitive dissonance, the greater the pressure to reduce the dissonance (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999). The more uncomfortable an individual feels, the greater will be his attempt to find consonance.

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance has found both support and criticism since it was first proposed over fifty years ago (Cooper, 2007; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976). Researchers have both extended and revised the theory. Aronson (1999) believed the theory to be more about self-expectations. Cooper (2007) has redefined cognitive dissonance as being

a state of arousal that occurs when a person acts responsibly to bring about an unwanted consequence. The measuring rod for deciding if a consequence is undesired can be the internalized standards of one's society, culture, or family, or it can be very personal standards that have been generated by what one thinks about oneself. (p.182)

Still others believe that Festinger's original premise continues to be valid and needs no changes (Beavois & Joule, 1999). As the framework for this study, the original premise

will be used to determine the existence of consonance and dissonance in the professional lives of kindergarten teachers in North Carolina.

Summary

By reviewing the evolution of kindergarten since its inception, it becomes clear that its purpose and pedagogy have, like a clock's pendulum, swung back and forth over time. The changes have occurred due to the both the political and social climate of the day. Moving from being highly structured and teacher directed to being more child-centered, the pattern began years ago and continues today.

Characteristics of both instructional approaches have been discussed. The highly structured, didactic approach features direct instruction. Learning becomes a passive event, with emphasis on workbooks, drill and practice, and isolated skill instruction. The teacher directs all learning. In contrast, the constructivist approach, grounded in the work of Piaget and Vygotsky, honors the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive developmental levels of children. Using developmentally appropriate instructional strategies, the teacher intentionally designs an environment that provides children opportunities for active and meaningful learning experiences. The teacher acts as a knowledgeable facilitator of learning.

Teachers are much more satisfied and less stressed when there is congruence between beliefs and practices—when they can do what they believe is the right thing to do. The research on teacher beliefs and practices indicates that teachers' practices are not always aligned with their beliefs for a number of reasons. Teachers report numerous variables responsible for the lack of congruency, including mandates from administrators as well as pressure from colleagues and parents.

The theoretical framework for the study is Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is experienced when an individual has two cognitions that are opposed to each other. The study will discover if kindergarten teachers experience this phenomenon as they work to use a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching and how they try to reduce or eliminate any dissonance experienced. This information will add to the limited research on teacher voice about classroom practices.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand kindergarten teachers' perspectives related to the phenomenon of implementing a developmentally appropriate kindergarten program. The study also sought to understand factors that affected the implementation process. Few studies currently exist to describe teachers' perspectives regarding their teaching practices (Cuban, 1993; Seidman, 2006). This study was designed to hear and learn from the experiences of practicing kindergarten teachers as they work to implement and sustain a developmentally appropriate instructional program for children. A qualitative method of inquiry was used to gather the data necessary to gain this understanding.

Qualitative studies seek to address questions that relate to life experiences and the meaning derived from those experiences (Patton, 2002). Merriam (2001) describes basic or generic qualitative study as the process researchers use to "seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (p. 11). The information gained from qualitative studies does not come in the form of cold hard statistical facts that are associated with the results of quantitative studies, but rather from the rich detailed descriptions obtained through in-depth interviews with each participant.

A phenomenological approach to this study was chosen because of its focus on identifying and understanding the meaning of experiences shared by participants.

This requires methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it,

judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others. To gather such data one must undertake in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest; that is, they have lived experience as opposed to secondhand experience (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

This approach best suited the purpose of the study, which required active listening as kindergarten teachers shared their experiences.

Selection of Participants for Study

Participants in this study were ten of the thirty-four kindergarten teachers currently identified by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) as Kindergarten Teacher Leaders. In order to be designated as a Kindergarten Teacher Leader (KTL), the state initiated a rigorous selection process in 2007. Part of the selection criteria included demonstrating a strong belief in using developmentally appropriate practices in kindergarten classrooms. These teachers are passionate in their beliefs and desire to be as developmentally appropriate as possible in their teaching practices. They are located throughout North Carolina.

It was important that the participants in this study were strong advocates for developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in theory and in practice. While other studies related to the implementation of DAP exist, most of the samples in those studies include all teachers regardless of their professional value for DAP. This study sought specifically to understand the experiences of kindergarten teachers in North Carolina who value and implement DAP. Thus purposeful sampling was used.

The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting *information-rich* cases for study

in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling (Patton, 2002, p.46).

Ten "informational-rich" North Carolina Kindergarten Teacher Leaders participated in the study. I chose to include ten participants in the study as that number represented roughly a third of the Kindergarten Teacher Leader group.

Contacting Participants

A letter was sent to the entire Kindergarten Teacher Leader group informing them of the purpose of the study and inviting them to participate. The first ten teachers who responded became the participants. A copy of the letter is located in Appendix C. Once a kindergarten teacher returned the letter of interest indicating her willingness to participate, a phone call was made to confirm participation. A letter of informed consent was also sent to each participant. A copy of that form is in Appendix D. Principals of the participants received a letter describing the study and requesting permission to visit classrooms after school hours. A copy of that letter is located in Appendix E. Once all permissions were obtained, arrangements were made to schedule the interviews and classroom visits. Classroom visits were conducted after school hours once students had been dismissed or on teacher workdays. Several visits had to be rescheduled because of weather conditions. Principals and teachers were emailed or phoned to re-confirm the meeting times. Most interviews lasted for sixty to ninety minutes. I was able to take photographs of the environments in all classrooms visited.

Interviews

The following open-ended questions guided the interview:

- Describe your experience as a kindergarten teacher.
- Describe your use of developmentally appropriate practice in your classroom.
- Describe practices in your classroom that you consider to be developmentally inappropriate and talk about why you include those practices.
- Describe the changes would you like to make. What is the likelihood that you will be able to implement the changes?
- Describe any factors that exist to affect your efforts to implement a developmentally appropriate classroom.

I began the interview by explaining to participants that confidentiality would be ensured. Teachers would be referred to within the dissertation as letters of the alphabet. I also explained that I would be transcribing the tapes and the teacher would receive a copy to review. As the interview progressed, follow-up questions helped to clarify responses. The participants were also given the opportunity to share any additional information. At the end of the interview, I thanked the participants for their participation.

Data Collection and Analysis

The dominant data collection strategy for this study was the use of in-depth interviews, as advocated by Seidman (2006):

In-depth interviewing's strength is that through it we can come to understand the details of people's experience from their point of view. We can see how their individual experience with powerful social and organizational forces pervade the context in which they live and work, and we can discover connections among people who live and work in a shared context. (p.130)

Nine of the ten interviews were conducted in the participants' classrooms. One interview was conducted off-campus to accommodate the schedule of the participant. These interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts of the tapes were mailed to the participants for review and approval. A copy of the letter that accompanied the transcript is located in Appendix F. One transcribed interview appears in Appendix G.

Data were analyzed using a phenomenological approach described in Creswell (1998). Described as "a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method" (p. 147), this approach contains the following steps:

1. The researcher begins with a full description of his or her own experience of the phenomenon.
2. The researcher then finds statements (in the interviews) about how individuals are experiencing the topic, lists out these significant statements and treats each statement as having equal worth, and works to develop a list of nonrepetitive, no overlapping statements.
3. These statements are grouped into "meaning units," the researcher lists these units, and he or she writes a description of the "textures" of the experience—what happened—including verbatim examples.
4. The researcher next reflects on his or her own description and uses imaginative variation or structured description, seeking all possible meanings and divergent perspectives, varying the form of reference about the phenomenon, and constructing a description of how the phenomenon was experienced.

5. The researcher then constructs an overall description of the meaning and the essence of the experience.
6. This process is followed first for the researcher's account of the experience and then for that of each participant. After this, a "composite" description is written. (Creswell, 1998, p. 147-148)

A written summary of each interview is located in Appendix H.

Additional information was obtained for the purpose of verifying the interview data. This process is known as triangulation. "In general, triangulation refers to the idea that multiple sources bring more credibility to an investigation" (Lichtman, 2006, p. 195). Patton (2002) described two other sources of data for collection in qualitative studies: direct observation and written documentation. Data from direct observations of the teachers' classrooms were collected including photographs of classroom environments and descriptions of the centers/materials located there. Written documents reviewed included daily schedules, assessment instruments, and statements of educational philosophy and practices.

Researcher's Biases

As a former kindergarten teacher with a high regard for developmentally appropriate practice, I began this study with a keen interest in learning about the experiences of the participants. I felt a certain kinship with participants, believing that we were all "on the same page" philosophically.

My teaching experience was very different from that of most participants. I taught during a time when there was less pressure related to high stakes testing and accountability. I was free to teach in a way that was fully congruent with my beliefs

about how young children should learn. I was given strong support by my building and system administrators. Instructional supplies were abundant. I also personally purchased whatever I wanted to support the educational experience of my students.

The participants in the study were familiar to me as I am a member of the North Carolina Kindergarten Think Tank group. This is the group that organized the Kindergarten Teacher Leader initiative and creates the plans for on-going professional development. I see these participants only four times a year, but I have developed a high respect for all the teachers. Given this level of familiarity, I wanted the participants to feel free to describe their experiences openly without restraint. I feel that goal was accomplished.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Results

The purpose of this study was to hear and understand the experiences of practicing kindergarten teachers in North Carolina as they work to implement and sustain a developmentally appropriate instructional program for children. I used a qualitative method of inquiry in order to gather the data necessary to gain this understanding. A phenomenological approach to this study was chosen because of its focus on identifying and understanding the meaning of experiences shared by participants.

Participants in this study were ten of the thirty-four kindergarten teachers currently identified by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) as Kindergarten Teacher Leaders. These teachers strongly support the use of developmentally appropriate practices for educating young children and desire to be as developmentally appropriate as possible in their teaching practices. The teachers are part of a group led by NCDPI that has become known as the Power of Kindergarten (POK). The Power of Kindergarten, through its position statement, has established important expectations for how kindergarten children should be taught and how kindergarten teachers should be supported.

A letter describing my study was sent to each Kindergarten Teacher Leader (KTL) and invited them to participate. The first ten who volunteered to participate were included in the study. The participants in the study were from nine different counties ranging from the western region to the eastern region of North Carolina. There was much diversity in terms of ethnicity and the socio-economic levels of students served by the ten

schools. Several schools served children of extreme poverty while others served a more affluent population of children. Ethnic diversity within the schools ranged from majority Caucasian to majority African American. A full description of the classrooms and demographics is limited to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

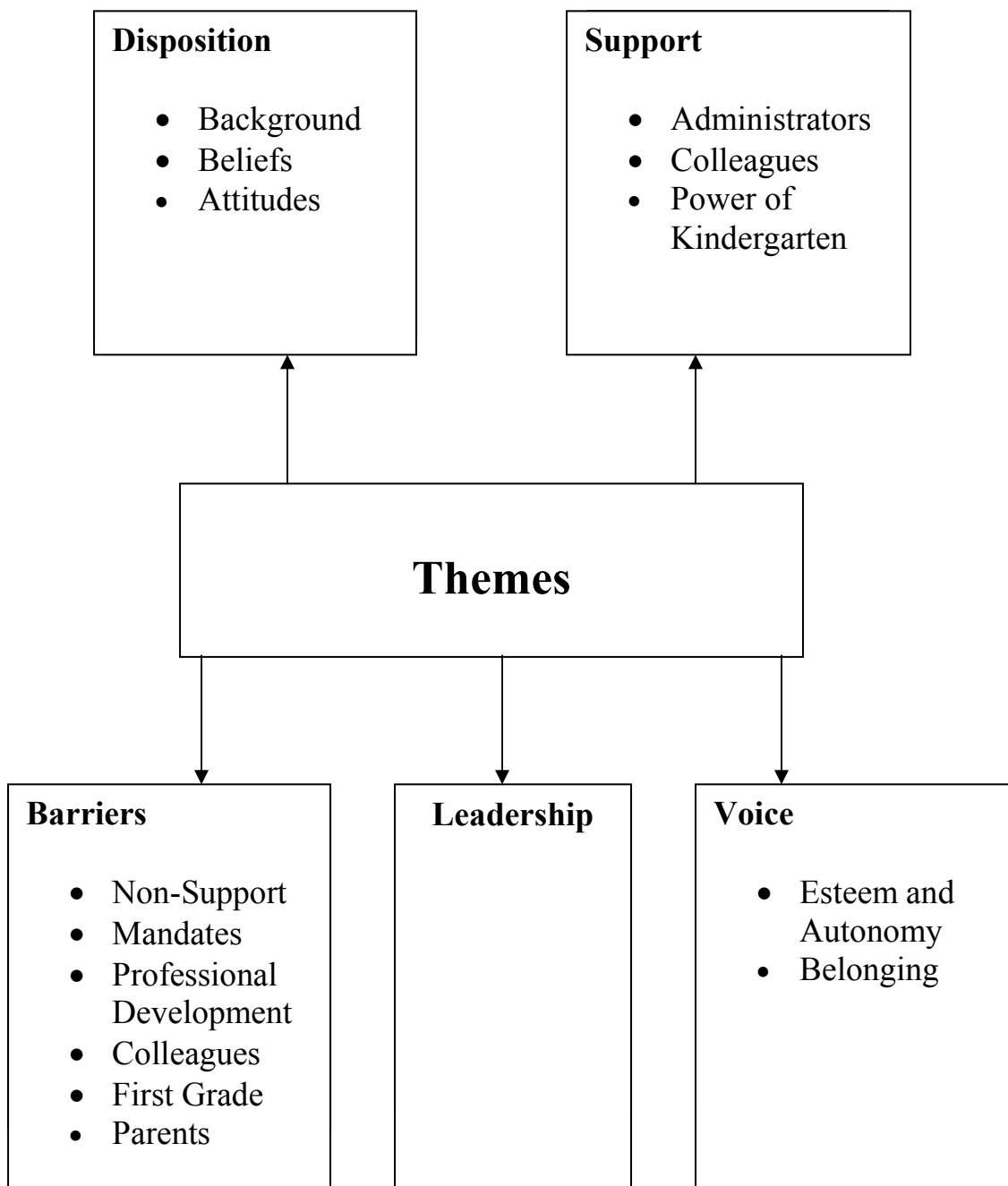
After obtaining permission from each participant's principal, I met with nine teachers in their classrooms after school hours. One interview was conducted off site for the sake of convenience. The following open-ended questions guided the interview:

- Describe your experience as a kindergarten teacher.
- Describe your use of developmentally appropriate practice in your classroom.
- Describe practices in your classroom that you consider to be developmentally inappropriate and talk about why you include those practices.
- Describe the changes would you like to make. What is the likelihood that you will be able to implement the changes?
- Describe any factors that exist to affect your efforts to implement a developmentally appropriate classroom.

The interviews were taped and transcribed. I sent each teacher a transcription of the interview for review. The teacher responded indicating her written approval of the transcription.

As the interviews with the teachers were reviewed and analyzed, several predominant themes relating to developmentally appropriate practice emerged. Figure 1 identifies both the themes and the sub-themes found.

Figure 1: Themes and Sub-themes



Disposition

Disposition relates to the teachers' beliefs and attitudes held about teaching kindergarten and implementing a developmentally appropriate instructional approach. These beliefs and attitudes were so closely connected to the educational background and previous experiences of the teachers in the study, that I considered them to be part of their overall disposition. The teachers were very explicit about their beliefs in favor of a developmentally appropriate teaching approach to teaching kindergarten. They shared experiences about how they sought to creatively maintain a developmentally appropriate approach even when an alternative approach was expected or mandated by their school system. Teacher attitudes about working with young children were entirely positive. Teacher attitudes about mandates or practices that they believed were not in the best interest of children were quite different. The teachers appeared to be angry and frustrated under those circumstances. Their attitudes were much more negative in nature.

Background.

Half of the teachers interviewed had direct experience working in pre-kindergarten programs. They developed strong background knowledge in the areas of child development and developmentally appropriate practice through their college coursework at undergraduate and/or graduate levels. Teacher A compared her opportunity to teach Pre-K in a National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited university lab center to that of teaching in an ivory tower. Her value and appreciation for developmentally appropriate practices were strengthened from this teaching experience that occurred under the best of circumstances.

Teacher H stated,

I found it to be a tremendous struggle coming from pre-kindergarten where you are mandated to be developmentally appropriate—you are not allowed to do things that are deemed developmentally inappropriate for four year olds—into a kindergarten where developmentally appropriate is thrown out the window or is not necessarily known. I got extensive training in the development of children, as my college background was child development and family relations—things like that. So I was just a huge advocate for it anyway. And when I came to kindergarten I realized very few people on the K-6 level acknowledged development or understood development. [For] a lot of them, it is just core academics.

Though the other teachers did not initially major in early childhood education, their professional journeys led them to becoming kindergarten teachers. Eight of the teachers have earned National Board Certification in the area of early childhood.

Beliefs.

All ten participants in the study demonstrated strong positive beliefs about implementing and maintaining a developmentally appropriate approach for teaching kindergarten. They believed they knew well the needs of the children in their classrooms; they were also keenly aware of how their children learn best. The consensus was that a developmentally appropriate teaching approach best met the children's needs.

Teacher A stated,

I feel like I preach the message [developmentally appropriate practice] all the time. I have a separate job in the mall and when I am selling clothes to children with their parents, I talk to them about developmentally appropriate practices. . . .

I just live and breathe it. I sleep it. I eat it. I just, I just think it does make a difference. Because, I think if you are teaching them in developmentally—like I said to Lilian Katz—if you are establishing that disposition for learning and you are creating that life-long learner, you can't help but impact how they are going to do in the future.

Teacher C said, "I use hands-on activities and manipulatives—things that will help students understand different concepts—things that are on their level. We need to see them using manipulatives, counters, before they can understand the abstract."

Teacher E said, "If you use developmentally appropriate practice in a consistent intense manner, children love to learn and feel successful."

Many of the teachers stated their beliefs about kindergarten as well as their educational philosophies on the application forms they completed for selection as a Kindergarten Teacher Leader.

Teacher D wrote:

Children enter the classroom full of experiences from their past and learned behavior from their environment. As a teacher, I try my best to provide a warm and nurturing environment that will foster my students' academic and social growth. This type of classroom atmosphere encourages the children to take risks and participate in the classroom.

Teacher J wrote:

Children need educational experiences that are concrete, hands-on, age appropriate, relevant, and engaging. I believe kindergarten teachers need to offer

love and support to new young students and their families while providing high, realistic expectations for each individual child.

Each teacher clearly communicated her commitment to implement teaching practices they felt best honored and respected their children's learning needs. This commitment was evident in the schedules established and the classroom environments that were set up to provide active learning experiences during the school day. As nine of the ten interviews were conducted in the teachers' classrooms, I had the opportunity to see how effectively some beliefs were translated into practice. All classrooms contained block centers, dramatic play centers, math, books, writing, science, and art centers. Many of the classrooms also had puppets, puzzles, manipulatives, sand, and water centers.

As teacher H stated,

I develop the whole child rather than just the reader or the mathematician, which causes them to be more successful in first grade. I do not believe in silent learning. I believe that kindergartners need to talk and think and get out of their minds what they are thinking. So, there's a lot of talking in my room.

An examination of the schedules of each teacher's instructional day indicated that a combination of child-initiated learning time and teacher-directed instructional time was in place. The teachers placed a high value on providing children free-choice center time and tried to protect that time from decreasing. Teacher A stated, "There are days when I know that my kids have not had enough center time. They have not had enough free-choice time." Teacher I felt that free-choice time was a hallmark of her program as far as being developmentally appropriate. Her children have an hour and a half each morning to work in centers. She said that the children learn to plan and to be accountable for what

they will accomplish. She provides an additional, but shorter, choice center time in the afternoons.

Teacher B stated:

And then I think for me, it [developmentally appropriate practice] is a lot environment. It is also what you set up. I mean, I always think about freedom within a structure...allowing kids to have choice. . . .I know that they are still going to make progress...they are still going to be challenged.

Attitudes.

All participants in the study expressed extremely positive enthusiasm for working with young children. On her KTL application form, Teacher F wrote,

Teaching young children is my calling. Striving to use developmentally appropriate practices with my students is my passion. Collaborating with other educators to improve the quality of my teaching and the subsequent sharing of my experiences with other teachers are my professional duties.

Teacher J stated:

I love teaching kindergarten! It is absolutely my favorite grade and I've taught kindergarten, first, and second. I taught first grade for 17 years and was given the opportunity to back up . . . so kindergarten is where I landed and I am thrilled that I did. It certainly has its challenges, but I love it! I wouldn't be anywhere else. . . I feel strongly that kindergarten is the most important year.

Teacher C stated:

I said I would never teach kindergarten (laughs) because they were all over the place. You know, it was really busy and I really didn't understand that age. So

when I came back to XXX County and applied for a job, the only opening they had was kindergarten at this school. So I said, "I am going to try it." And so I have been here for, this is my thirteenth year. I really, I really enjoy it. I like this age level. And it is so open and warm and loving. You know, they want to learn; they come with a desire to learn, so I really like it.

When teachers shared experiences about working with other people who did not share their philosophy or when faced with situations where outside influences limited their ability to make decisions and/or do what they believed was right, there was a significant shift in attitude. Some teachers' attitudes hardened to become somewhat bitter, defensive, or tenacious.

Teacher E shared several experiences that left her feeling quite angry. One experience related to the selection process of a new math adoption for the whole system. Teacher E's school piloted one program that she grew to dislike. She and other teachers shared their opinions, which identified major weaknesses in the kindergarten version of the program, with system-level curriculum staff. Their concerns included:

It [math program] moves at a bizarre rate. Then it also is supposed to spiral but it's more plotchy than spiral. Their English Language Learner piece does not pull out the critical vocabulary. It doesn't differentiate well. It uses incorrect wording.

There is no hands-on. The very first lesson isn't even hands-on. The lessons are an hour long from day one—whole group.

After many hours spent in meetings, the system announced that it was adopting the program. There were no plans to make to make the program more developmentally appropriate for kindergarten. Teacher E believed that the decision had been made before

input had been solicited. She felt that the system had wasted her time and ignored the important input she and other kindergarten teachers had provided.

Teacher E also expressed great anger that stemmed from her experience of teaching in a different school where there was a lack of leadership and knowledge about early childhood education. She said with great emotion,

When I ended up finally going back into the classroom, the school I went into was in improvement (the school had failed to meet performance standards for at least two consecutive years) and it was just chaos. Nobody was in charge! Nobody was on top of anything! So you had to be on your own. . . . It's an elementary school! We're not talking high school with guns. We're talking little kids! That's just wrong—and illogical! It didn't have to be that way. There were clear non-costly steps to take to fix that school. Put in an administrator with elementary background! Put in an administrator with experience! Put in a competent administrator who can plan and follow through! Don't tell me those people don't exist in North Carolina. They do. They just didn't put them in the right schools. That's where it was really helpful to know other teachers who you could work with—who could help you find information and help you become a better teacher and help you reach your students. But then, again, we hit that problem where we had people in charge who didn't know elementary or early childhood!

Teacher E shared that she often thinks about quitting because of her experiences. Teacher A also said that she was looking to leave her school. She was unhappy due to the lack of support from her principal. She compared her feelings to a popular television

commercial featuring Jimmy Dean sausage: "There's the sunshine and a cloud. And the rainbow comes in and she's all gray. I feel like I'm the rainbow."

Several teachers described their actions of tweaking inappropriate expectations and mandates to be more appropriate. They stubbornly held fast to their own beliefs when it came to being forced to engage in practices they could not support. Teacher G began her interview saying that her passion for teaching was not what it used to be because of the many challenges she was facing. Her most pressing challenge was that she was being required to follow, to the letter, a scripted literacy program. She believed the program was highly inappropriate for her children. She eventually went to her principal and said:

I just can't! I gotta [got to] let you know that I just can't. I don't have any problems with the objectives cause [because] I know what, you know, here's our state objectives [that] you have to do. And I don't have any problem with the objectives that are being taught. It [It's] just [following] the script exactly! Some of the stories are just not quality literature and—I just can't. So, I'm going to close my door and I hope that you know I am going to do my thing.

Support

Support was identified as those practices that allowed the kindergarten teachers to carry out their instructional program effectively and that served to build their esteem. Support came in the forms of trust, instructional materials, and positive feedback. The teachers talked about the varied levels and sources of support they received as they implemented a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching. The support they described came from some administrators and some colleagues. The most overwhelming source of support came from their involvement with the Power Of Kindergarten (POK).

Administrative support.

Not surprisingly, the strongest administrative support came from administrators who had early childhood or elementary level teaching experience and from administrators without early childhood or elementary level training who made a dedicated effort to learn about kindergarten-aged children.

Teacher F stated:

Yes, I know I am [fortunate]. We have one hundred percent support from our principal, XXX, because she taught kindergarten through grade 3 before she went into administration. And she remembers. She is not so far out of the classroom that she doesn't remember how it was, (pause) and she believes in the developmental approach, as far as what is good for children. So, we have her backing. It's wonderful, it is. It's an ideal situation to be in.

Teacher C, whose principal was also a former kindergarten teacher, said:

She [her principal] used to teach kindergarten. I don't know if she had blocks or housekeeping in her classroom, but she seems real supportive of what I am doing. We were going to have Kindergarten Academy and she wanted me to teach it after school. She emphasized that I was going to be using developmentally appropriate practices.

Teacher J described strong support from a previous principal with a middle school background:

That was her dream—for kindergarten in this whole county to be developmentally appropriate. For a person with middle school background, that was amazing. . . . Her first year as being principal, she came in one afternoon and she said, "I just

have to tell you, I never thought that I would learn so much about five year olds!" Just in her little drop-in visits, coming in, sitting down, having conversations with children, you know. Being the one in the hairdresser's chair, just *being* with the five year olds, because she had always been with the middle school. Her first year, she was absolutely blown out of the water by the changes that happened between August of kindergarten and the end of the kindergarten year. So, she knew in her heart what was right and was very supportive of us doing the right things.

Teacher H also has a principal with a middle school background. She reported that he was very open to learning about kindergarten. He comes to her with questions and asks for related research.

Other teachers described the support of administrators in terms of having a trusting relationship between teacher and principal. Teacher I stated,

I have a lot of freedom; I have a very supportive administrator. Her background is not early childhood, but she does have the elementary, strong elementary background. She is very open and interested in teachers following their interests. You know, she is not a real controlling kind of administrator and really gives teachers a lot of freedom to do what they think is best for their children. She respects you as an expert.

Teacher D expressed a similar idea:

They [administrators] know that I work very hard, and I definitely try to get my children where they need to be at the very end of the year. So, my principal has even told me, 'I trust you to do what you need to do.' You know, she leaves me

alone; she lets me try new things and she lets me, without being at my door [asking], "What are you doing? What are you doing?" You know, it's like if she comes in and I am doing something, I'll explain it to her. . . . They understand how passionate I am about it.

Several teachers mentioned having the support of their system's curriculum director or elementary supervisor. The support was not tangible in the form of funding or supplies, but those administrators gave the teacher opportunities to share information with other teachers in the system.

As part of the KTL application process, principals and district administrators were required to sign a letter of agreement indicating their support of the teacher's participation by approving five days of professional leave per year to attend POK meetings, attending half-day POK meetings with the teacher each year, and using the teacher as a professional resource within their district.

Colleagues.

Only two teachers were able to identify their colleagues as sources of strong support for their teaching practices. This occurred as a result of the whole teaching team sharing a common teaching philosophy. Teacher F described the practice of her principal allowing the teachers to be on interview teams when hiring new team members. The teachers interview the candidates first and make recommendations to the principal based on the responses they get to their questions, many of which are related to developmentally appropriate practice. They feel they have a strong voice in who joins their team. As a result, the teachers who work with Teacher F are very much on the same philosophical page. Teacher J also reported working with a team member whose

philosophy aligns with her own. The teachers on both of these teams are able to plan together and support each other's efforts to implement developmentally appropriate practices for their children.

Support also came from several first grade teachers. Teacher H reported hearing a first grade teacher say, "I don't know how she [Teacher H] does it, but her children come out of her room knowing more than the others."

Power of Kindergarten.

Every teacher interviewed talked at length about her involvement in the Power of Kindergarten group as a source of significant support. The group is guided by the POK Position Statement that outlines the state's expectations for kindergarten in the Twenty-first Century. This position statement can be found in Appendix B.

The teachers used the word "empowered" many times to describe the impact of the POK on their professional lives. From POK, the teachers reported gaining the confidence to openly engage in developmentally appropriate practices in their kindergarten classrooms. All of the teachers felt that POK served as a strong source of validation for their philosophical beliefs related to developmentally appropriate practices in kindergarten. The teachers also reported that they were now better able to articulate the rationale for developmentally appropriate practice to administrators, parents, and other stakeholders as needed. Teacher F stated:

It has meant for me that I've been able to move from not doing very much [intentional teaching] to doing more intentional teaching. I'm more verbal and less intimidated where my convictions are concerned because I can stand up and say, "This is what the state says we should be doing." I've always tried to teach

this way, but now I can actually stand up and say, "This is the way we're supposed to teach, and the state says this is the way we're supposed to teach." So for parents, administrators, I just feel I can boldly stand up and say, "I am doing the right thing."

Teacher C shared similar feelings. She stated:

I guess it [POK] makes me feel empowered. I know this is the right thing and I can explain why if somebody comes into my room, I can tell them what we do in blocks [block center]. They are learning math, science—all those things—integrated [from] the block center to housekeeping [center].

Teacher A felt that POK has empowered her to stand up for what she believes is best for children. It has allowed her to create a microcosm where she can do that.

Teacher J stated:

Power of K is amazing. Power of K is bringing me right back to where I started, to where I knew in my heart, I need to be. I wish every teacher could do something like this. It has reaffirmed everything I believed. It has given me the courage to say "No" to the Fast Track Letter Land [literacy program], because I know that's not what my children need.

Teacher D stated:

Each time I come back from those [POK] meetings, I am so rejuvenated. . . . Finally, you know, you hear people at DPI [Department of Public Instruction] who say, "We understand this." POK...reaffirms that what I'm doing, what I believe, is right. And it's so great because now I boldly stand up to my principal and say, "You know, look, this is what I am going to do. This is in the best

interest of the children; they're going to get it; they're going to grow at their own rate."

Some participants shared experiences of how their involvement with POK permitted them to step outside the box of typical or expected practice at their school.

Teacher H stated:

I feel like POK has made my life as a kindergarten teacher easier, and without it I don't know if I would have stayed. It gave me the chance to say, "Well, I'm POK and I have the superintendent's signature to support my endeavors." It gave me the key to do it; to do what I knew was right, and kind of break the rules.

For Teacher H, "breaking the rules" meant not following the protocol of a scripted commercial reading program. She was able to organize instruction in a way that was more appropriate for kindergarten children. Her approach engaged children in more active and meaningful literacy-based learning experiences instead of having them sit for long blocks of time for isolated skill instruction.

Teacher E reported being questioned frequently by colleagues as to how she "gets away with" certain practices. The practices include having more traditional kindergarten centers instead of having only literacy stations, not spending large blocks of time teaching reading groups, and having a daily rest time for the children. Teacher E feels she does "get away with" these practices due to her participation in POK.

She stated, "It [POK] always challenges my thinking. . . . Power of K pushes me to be better. . . . Power of K gave me strength to do home visits. I definitely get to do more things in my classroom because I have POK behind me."

The participants also acknowledged support from POK in extending their professional growth and knowledge related to developmentally appropriate practice. The teachers were especially appreciative of the individual feedback they received following a daylong classroom observation conducted under the direction of Dr. Sharon Ritchie. Ritchie, a researcher from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, developed a process that documented and evaluated the classroom activities observed in each classroom. The minute-by-minute experiences of four children in each classroom were recorded for the entire day. The feedback provided included the amounts of time children spent in whole group and small group settings, the amounts of instructional time spent in each curriculum area, and the amounts of time that were teacher directed and teacher facilitated. Ritchie reported that the data shared with the teachers generated much reflective dialogue. As a result, the teachers saw the areas that needed attention and were quick to set goals designed to improve their practice (S. Ritchie, personal communication, June 22, 2010).

Other support from POK has been provided in the form of resources. A large volume of professional literature related to all areas of the curriculum, as well as child development and teacher leadership, has been distributed to all the POK members. Early childhood experts Dr. Lilian Katz and Dr. Dominic F. Gullo have been featured presenters during summer conferences.

Teacher B stated:

I think it's kept me in teaching. It has been that powerful professionally. Graduate school renewed me. At the end of graduate school, [I] became involved with Power of K. So that kept me going on the path. I think I may have gone back to

teaching...and felt frustrated without that continued support to do what I thought was right. It fed me professionally.

Teacher F stated:

It has impacted me tremendously because it has allowed me to move forward more quickly in my reflection and my changing of practice in order to fine tune it and make it better. The training we have gotten through POK has been tremendous! I like the fact that we focus on specific areas as we move along, and the experts they have brought in have been wonderful! The collaboration has helped me tremendously.

Other teachers mentioned the support of teachers within the group as being especially meaningful to them. Teacher E reported calling on a POK colleague to come and help reorganize her classroom environment to be more appropriate. Teacher A was part of a team that went into another POK teacher's classroom to rearrange her environment. She was impressed that the teacher had trusted the others enough to come in and help. Teacher F said, "The sharing of ideas and getting to know all these teachers has just been incredible."

Barriers

When asked whether there existed any challenges or barriers that affected their professional practice, the kindergarten teachers were quick to share their experiences on this topic. Barriers can be described as any event, action, or practice that impedes teachers' abilities to teach in a way they believe to be best for children. Barriers are also presented when professional relationships with others are weak.

The predominant barriers described by the teachers included incidents of non-support for the teachers and developmentally appropriate practices in general, developmentally inappropriate mandates related to curriculum, lack of meaningful professional development, professional relationships with colleagues, expectations from first grade teachers and parents, as well as availability of resources.

Non-support by administration.

Teachers described feeling non-supported by administrators when contact with their principals was limited. Several teachers reported that their principals did not regularly visit their classrooms. Teacher E reported, "Nobody comes in to check on me. Nobody comes in. I can do whatever I want, really." When visits did occur, the principals were in and out very quickly. No teachers reported having lesson plans reviewed by their administrators. Some teachers believed that lesson plans were checked only if a teacher was marginal in practice. Teacher A shared that her first principal in North Carolina would come into her classroom often and give her productive feedback related to what she observed. They could discuss together how to make practices more developmentally appropriate for children. Teacher A loved getting feedback on lesson plans from this principal. She wished her current principal would demonstrate the same level of interest and support for her and her instructional approach by being in her classroom more frequently and providing feedback.

Teacher A felt that kindergarten was not looked upon by the principal or the school system to be an important part of the school. She said,

I get frustrated with the powers that be, as a professional, that they just do not see the importance of how early learning fits into the scheme of things. How it—if

you don't start at the ground grassroots [level] then you are not going to get those scores in fifth grade. So I just don't feel supported.

Teacher B had a similar opinion. She found it to be disconcerting that pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first, and second grades were ignored by her large school system in favor of heavy emphasis and attention being placed on the tested grades. Other teachers agreed with Teacher B indicating that they felt kindergarten was treated as if it was at the bottom of the educational totem pole. Teacher H stated, "I think they [school system] realize the importance of kindergarten, but if they're going to sacrifice a grade, county-wide, which grade would they sacrifice? Kindergarten."

Mandates.

The most difficult barrier faced by the teachers was related to some mandate, expectation, or policy issued by the school system that teachers believed to be developmentally inappropriate for children. Mandates included the implementation of literacy programs, math programs, or writing programs. Inappropriate expectations for all children to master the kindergarten-level math skills existed for one teacher. Expectations that all children would be reading by the end of the kindergarten year and would reach specific reading levels caused other teachers concern. Excessive assessments were required in several school systems. One teacher was concerned about her system's policy against implementing a staggered entry program for in-coming kindergarten students. Systems who use a staggered entry program allow children to take turns coming to school in small groups. As a member of a smaller group on the first day of school, each child receives more individual attention from the teacher as he begins to become familiar with

and learn the routines and procedures of kindergarten. When the child returns to school as a member of the full group, he does so with more knowledge and confidence.

Five teachers struggled with their school systems' decisions to require kindergarten teachers to use a specific literacy program. Teacher G and Teacher H faced almost identical circumstances and shared common concerns. Both of their systems implemented highly structured, scripted reading programs. Though these programs were different, their format was basically the same. Children were expected to sit passively in a whole group for long periods of time listening to the teacher read from the script. Paper and pencil tasks in workbooks and worksheets were an important part of the program. With their background in child development, these teachers understood how children learn best. They both felt the programs did not honor the needs of young children. There was little opportunity to differentiate instruction according to the needs of the individual child—the "teach-to-the-middle" concept prevailed. This idea of "teaching to the middle" was mentioned by other teachers as being an inappropriate approach to teaching.

Teacher G took her concerns to her system's elementary coordinator. She described the meeting as follows:

I said, "Tell me about your reasoning for doing Open Court versus learning through play." And she touched my shoulder and she said, "XXX, we know you're a great teacher, but what about all those teachers who aren't great teachers? That's why we have scripted text." And I said, "This is how I feel about that—we have great students and we help them learn and [we have] students who aren't great. We don't bring all our high students and mid students down to their level," I said. "We work with them one on one," I said. "As a county office, could you work

with those teachers one on one and help them become better and not make all the good teachers have to come down to the scripted text level?" She just kind of looked at me, like, "That would be too much work." I never got an answer.

Teacher H faced a mandate that the literacy program in her system had to be taught exactly the way it was scripted. There could be zero variance from the script. It appeared to be an experiment to see if direct instruction was effective for teaching the high-risk population of students served by her school. Teacher H tried to implement the program, but had so many concerns that she eventually went to her principal to say she could not be faithful to the script. She said that her principal understood and just kind of shook her head.

Teacher J faced a mandate to implement a boxed literacy program designed to teach letters of the alphabet and letter sounds. After using the program for a short time as it was designed, she saw that it was not appropriate for the children in her classroom. She later selected and used only the materials from the program she thought were developmentally appropriate.

Teacher C's system also mandated a literacy program that required small reading groups to be taught everyday in kindergarten. Many hours of staff development were attended to learn the procedures the system wanted teachers to follow. As she implemented the program according to the protocol, she found that her children had less and less time to engage in centers. She did not have the time to work with the children in centers. She said:

It seemed they [the district] really wanted us to push academics, and I was really frustrated because I knew it wasn't right. And so I was looking for a way out of

the classroom. I really hated my job. I was miserable because it [kindergarten] had changed so much."

All five teachers eventually tweaked their implementation of the programs mandated by their school systems to make them more appropriate for children. Teachers G and H still use some components of the programs, but add movement and literacy centers to teach the skills using a more active and hands-on approach. Teacher H reported, "I still follow it [literacy program] but I spend a lot of extra time planning, a lot of extra time creating activities that will give them the same foundation but in a child-friendly way." Teacher J picks and chooses what she wants to use from the alphabet program, using it more as a supplemental resource to her own plan for teaching the letter identification and letter sound skills. Teacher C says she helps develop children's literacy skills in whole groups, small groups, and in centers. Her children learn what they are supposed to learn.

Two teachers are faced with the challenge of implementing math programs that they do not like. Teacher E was very familiar with the weaknesses of the program for kindergarten and shared them with the system's curriculum staff. However, the system chose to adopt the program. Teacher E was hopeful that the system would offer support to make the math program stronger for kindergarten. However, no action has occurred toward that goal.

Teacher G recently learned that kindergarten in her system would have a math book for the first time ever. Kindergarten teachers had been free to pick and choose their own resources to teach the state standards. Teacher G said:

We've just adopted this new math thing, math curriculum through the county where we found out that we've got to use math books next year. Kindergarten [teachers] was saying, "What? We like using Math Essentials from the state; we like integrating our math; we like pulling our math activities." They are taking more of our creativity away and giving us more scripted texts because of the EOGs [End of Grade Tests]. The children need to be "ready" for the EOGs, and in this new math curriculum, it has kindergartners doing multiple-choice questions—picking [answers] A, B, C, or D. And when I asked them about hands-on, they said, "You can add hands-on."

Some teachers felt that districts' expectations for student mastery of math skills and reading achievement were inappropriate. Teacher F was very concerned that some of the math concepts in kindergarten were much too abstract for her students. She also reported that her system holds kindergartners to the expectation to be reading at levels four and five by the end of the kindergarten year. Teacher D reported that her system had once required kindergarten children to be reading at levels five and six. They have since lowered the expectation to levels three and four. She indicated that a lot of pressure was eased as a result. Most of the other teachers reported that their systems require children to be reading at levels three and four.

Teacher D says she focused on the growth children made, not the end of year level. She said, "I know what he or she could or could not do when they stepped through the door. They may not be where you want them to be, but they made progress." She also made the point that because she is under contract with the school system, she is obligated

to teach as mandated. Though she may not agree with the system's expectations, she knows that to keep her job she must follow the system's policies and guidelines.

Teacher E considered the more long-range effects of inappropriate expectations: Many third grade kids hate school. Why do kids hate school? Because we have shoved reading down their throats—because we have made it painful. It doesn't mean there's not a developmentally appropriate way to teach reading and get them to grade level. It does mean that has not been our focus. And we've hurt ourselves in the process and we've hurt our children.

Teacher B and Teacher J were struggling with inappropriate expectations for assessing kindergarten children's writing. In Teacher B's school, the children receive a quarterly writing prompt. The children are given paper with lines and a space for drawing. She considered it to be "outrageous" that the whole class has to sit at tables for thirty to forty minutes without talking. Teacher J considered her school's writing program to be the most developmentally inappropriate practice she uses:

I have a problem with the writing because when I taught first grade, we were just introducing those things; the pressure wasn't there. I find myself now sometimes, just yelling. Seriously, I will say (strikes table with fist), "We've been over this! You know a sentence! Stop sign at the end of the sentence and the sentence begins with a capital letter!" Then I say, "Okay, just forget it. Put it up." I'm losing it. I've got to stop because I get so frustrated and I have to say [to myself], "XXX, they're five and six! They shouldn't even be required to do this!"

Teacher D has been trying for several years to change her county's policy that does not allow for children's staggered entry into kindergarten. Teacher D feels that this

practice honors children's need to feel safe and secure in the new school environment. She has not been successful in her attempts.

Limited professional development.

Teachers indicated that there were limited professional development opportunities at the school and system levels to support their growth as early childhood teachers. The teachers value and actively seek out opportunities to learn and grow professionally

Teacher F remembers a time when staff development in her system was plentiful. She said:

We used to have a lot, back in the eighties. There must have been a lot of money because we were offered and able to take staff development that we wanted to take. Like the Reading Recovery training, we used to have to go to those kinds of trainings to help us in our classrooms. Now it's pretty narrowed down to new teachers [who] have to be trained how to do this and how to teach what we're being asked to teach.

Teacher F reported that most of this "catch-up" training is conducted by the school's Instructional Resource Teacher or another teacher on staff.

School-wide professional development occurred most frequently when new programs were implemented in the school system. Teachers attended the sessions to learn procedures and how to use the materials.

Several teachers described a real need for professional development for kindergarten teachers—actually for all teachers—to be based on the needs of teachers.

Teacher B stated:

I think professional development should be catered to teachers. You know, we talk about differentiating our instruction for children, but we don't do that for teachers. So, just like I was saying, I like to read [professional] books. I like this job and in my spare time I read about this job. I don't need training on how to use the Houghton Mifflin math series. I mean, that is just not for me. Maybe a first year teacher that's truly going to open that book and use it, great—that's the training they need. . . . Thirty-year veterans get frustrated with things like that and just need something for them. So yeah, I think that could really help because I think the teacher is ultimately what makes the difference in a child's life, so we need to be finding out what they need.

After spending years teaching Pre-K and attending numerous system-wide professional development sessions focused on developmentally appropriate practice, Teacher G found professional development opportunities to be very slim once she moved to kindergarten. She talked about kindergarten teachers being required to attend a writing session about teaching fourth graders the writing process. "Do we need to spend eight staff-development hours learning how to get fourth graders to write correctly or should we spend eight staff-development hours learning how to get kindergartners to begin to write?" Teacher G has advocated for grade level specific staff development in her system.

Non-support of colleagues.

All but two teachers reported that colleagues presented challenges at times as they worked to implement a developmental approach to teaching kindergarten. Several of the teachers felt excluded by their team members when they first joined the team. These teachers reported that most of the other kindergarten teachers on their teams used

structured academic approaches to teaching. This means engaging the children in whole group instruction, teaching with a heavy dependence on teachers' manuals, assigning a great deal of paper and pencil work in workbooks and worksheets. Some teachers said they "followed the crowd" for a while, delaying the process of becoming developmentally appropriate in their practice. Teacher B said,

I fell into the trap of a new teacher doing what everybody else was doing. [It] took a couple of years to sort of crawl out of that and to start to find who I am. . . . I didn't feel confident enough as a first-year teacher to say, "I don't think this is right."

Even Teacher I, a twenty-five year veteran teacher who considered herself to be highly self-confident, reported that she succumbed to peer pressure during her first year with a new kindergarten team. She said she was initially swayed to do what they were doing. However before the year was over, she stepped away from their overuse of worksheets and went back to what she thought was the right thing to do for children.

Teacher H, an experienced teacher with a strong background in child development, began to second-guess her teaching practices after joining and working with a team of kindergarten teachers who had a teaching philosophy much different from her own. She remembers thinking,

Am I really making the right choices here? Are my children going to get what they need? Are they really going to be prepared for first grade? Am I harming them by allowing them to play and not sit all day? Am I going to make it harder for them in first grade? Are they going to be the child stuck behind the door

because they can't sit down at a desk all day? Then I would have to stop myself and think, 'Yes, yes, you can.'

She then resumed those practices she believed to be best for children, which included small-group instruction along with intentional teaching using the centers in her classroom.

Teachers reported having end-of-year student achievement results as good as, or in most cases, higher than those of their colleagues. They believed their children left their kindergarten classroom being more independent, better thinkers, and better problem solvers than children in the less developmentally appropriate classrooms.

Most of teachers in the study found their team members resistant to making major changes in their teaching practices toward using a more developmental approach. When asked to give an opinion as to the reason for this resistance, the teachers had varied responses. Teacher A thought the resistance was due to laziness. She explained that a developmental approach to teaching is demanding work and requires much planning time. Teacher C stated, "I think it is easy to do a worksheet and keep them [children] quiet. I guess they [teachers] think *that* is learning." Other teachers thought the resistance was due to their colleagues' lack of knowledge of child development and how to intentionally teach in a center-based kindergarten classroom with an emphasis on individualized instruction. Teacher B pointed out the significant void between Birth through Kindergarten (BK) teacher preparation programs and regular kindergarten to grade six (K-6) teacher preparation programs in their emphasis on child development. Teacher J suggested that there should be a class specifically on kindergarten in both BK and K-6 teacher preparation programs.

Several teachers believed the reason for others not embracing a developmental approach related to fear. Teacher A stated, "They are scared. . . . They are worried they are not going to meet someone's expectations."

Some teachers did report observing some small changes being made in their team members' classrooms. They viewed that adding a rest time to the schedule or providing some centers in the form of literacy stations was a small but significant step to becoming more developmentally appropriate.

Several teachers expressed the desire to have cohesive teams that worked in tandem rather than in isolation. Teacher B said, "[I wish] that someone else were on the same journey as me, right here within this building, so that I could have that sort of collegiality and that kind of support. . . . I wish there were more people that kind of understood where I was coming from, and so that we could work together more collaboratively.

First grade expectations.

Seven kindergarten teachers in the study felt challenged by first-grade teachers' expectations for children. They described how these expectations impacted developmentally appropriate practice in their kindergarten classrooms.

The teachers said they have felt pressured to have their kindergarten children reading on specific levels set by the school system. Teacher C stated:

I felt that pressure of No Child Left Behind. All of us know—it trickles down to even kindergarten. We have to get (pause), because the first-grade teachers, they complain, "Your child, your students aren't reading on level four or above!" But,

I'm like, "You don't see these children when they come in. They haven't been exposed; they don't have different experiences."

Teachers described what changes they made to ease the transition into first grade.

Teacher J said:

I have a hard time sending kids on to first grade knowing that they are going to fail—I mean not be successful. There are times when I still do things that I know in my heart are not developmentally appropriate, but I know I have to get them ready for next year, to, so I try to balance what I am doing. It's tough.

Teacher B shared a similar experience:

I always feel pressure to be doing more pen-and-paper things by the end of the year. I bring that on myself because I know what they're going to in first grade. I feel like I want to be preparing them for that so that they know what a worksheet is and just kind of show how you accomplish those things.

Parental expectations.

Several teachers indicated that parents presented challenges to implementing developmentally appropriate practices in their classroom. The challenges came from parents holding extremely high and inappropriate expectations for student achievement as well as from parents with limited skills who were uninvolved in their children's education.

Teacher F teaches in a school that serves a very affluent community with highly educated parents. She reported that most of her students enter kindergarten already knowing their alphabet letters and a few do come in reading. The parents wanted their children to begin reading in kindergarten—even above grade level. They expressed these

expectations to Teacher F, who then spent time with the parents, assuring them that she would meet each child's needs. She explained, "Parents who aren't educated about child development have to be informed and reassured."

Other teachers reported that they felt they had to use worksheets in kindergarten to satisfy parents who want to see evidence of work. Teacher D said that she does not like to use worksheets. She went on to say:

But the parents want stuff on paper, you know. "What are they doing?" And that is another thing I talk about on Parent Nights. If the parents would just let the children be children and stop pushing them so, they'll get it!

Teacher B worked with a different sort of parent expectation. She explained:

I feel more pressure with social, emotional, and behavioral things from parents than academics, and that goes right along with developmentally appropriate practices. I feel the pressure because I don't use behavior systems, color charts. I feel pressure to be more regimented with behavior, but not academically. I haven't felt it academically.

Teacher C and Teacher G both taught in high poverty schools and experienced low parental involvement. The culture of Teacher G's school is such that parents grant teachers signed consent to use corporal punishment. Teacher G was quick to let parents know that she would not be using that method as a behavioral consequence.

Teacher C said:

I want my parents to be more knowledgeable. I want the resources to help me help them. See, a lot of our parents are illiterate, and they don't know how to help the children. I feel like I need help or assistance showing them how.

Leadership

The theme of leadership emerged as teachers discussed their experiences of affecting the instructional practices of other teachers within their school and school district. The teachers in the study have been placed in a position of leadership in their schools, in their school systems, in their regions, and in the state. They have received professional development designed to develop and enhance leadership skills through their involvement with Power of Kindergarten. The Kindergarten Teacher Leaders were encouraged to participate on committees at the local school level as well as district and regional levels. One teacher reported that she is going to become the chairperson of the School Improvement Team at her school. The teachers were also encouraged to lead or facilitate professional development sessions for kindergarten teachers and others who would be interested in attending.

Several teachers in the study have taken the initiative to plan and hold meetings or to get on the agenda of established meetings. Teacher F worked with members of her kindergarten team to bring together pre-school teachers in her area. The meeting was designed to address the myths about academic expectations for incoming kindergarten children. The pre-school teachers had heard that children should come in knowing many literacy and numeracy skills. Some tried to teach these skills in pre-school so that the children would be "ready" for kindergarten. These teachers were relieved to hear the presentation by Teacher F and her team. The pre-school teachers were told that assessments were done at the beginning of kindergarten, but only for diagnostic purposes. There was strong assurance that the children were not expected to come to kindergarten

having mastered skills such as beginning and ending sounds, syllable blending, and syllable segmentation.

Teacher J had the opportunity to share information at each of her system's monthly kindergarten grade-level meetings. Recognized for her expertise about kindergarten in her school system, Teacher J was also asked to mentor a new teacher just beginning to teach kindergarten. Teachers from other schools came to observe in her classroom for short periods of time.

Some teachers reported running into roadblocks when they tried to share information with their teams or with other teachers in their systems. Teacher H found the protocol in her school district to be a barrier in setting up a meeting or forum with other kindergarten teachers to discuss topics of interest. She described a "chain of command" that had to be followed. She was not allowed to set up a meeting without first talking to her principal, who would then present the idea to someone in the district office for approval.

Teacher C encountered a different problem:

It's really frustrating, because I feel my principal wants me to—she hasn't come out and said it—but I think she wants me to guide them [team members], and I can't make them do what I'm doing. I tried to share with them and it seems to go in one ear and out the other.

Teacher A shared her experience with kindergarten teachers when, during a meeting with them, discussion began about developmentally appropriate practice:

One of the teachers threw her hands up and shouted: "I am so sick and tired of hearing that! I just can't deal with it anymore. I don't want to hear anymore of you

all talking about developmentally appropriate practices!" I was like, "Whoa!"

Why would you want to be a kindergarten teacher if you don't want to hear about developmentally appropriate practices?'

The other teachers, more commonly, reported instances of leading by example rather than by speaking to groups or leading professional development. Teacher H said, "POK helped me realize not to go to my kindergarten team and say, 'We really need to do it this way.' Just slightly show them by the things that are happening in my room."

Teacher I took a similar approach. As the newly elected grade-level chair, she held the team meetings in her classroom. Since the teachers have been in her classroom for these extended meetings, she has observed them expressing more interest and asking more questions about what she is doing.

Voice

The theme of voice emerged as teachers talked about their experiences of feeling neglected, ignored, or unimportant. One aspect of the theme related to self-esteem: teachers desired to have more recognition for their work and a more collaborative relationship with colleagues. Another aspect of the theme related to autonomy: teachers wanted to have greater control in making decisions that affected their teaching practices, and to find opportunities for professional growth.

Esteem and autonomy.

Two teachers shared their desires for more personal recognition for their work. They also believed more value should be placed on kindergarten itself as an important part of the educational process. Teacher A was very adamant about needing to feel that she makes a difference. She stated: "I feel like the number one thing that I need as a

teacher is feedback, and I don't feel like I get enough feedback. . . . I guess I am the kind of teacher who needs to feel wanted." Teacher A reported that her principal would not allow the school staff to honor her success in earning National Board Certification to avoid hurting the feelings of another teacher who had not been successful.

Teacher B also reported getting little feedback. Though she feels supported by her administrators, she considers it passive support. "I would really like to have them involved and able to help me grow. And I think when administration takes that hands-off approach it is not helping me grow."

Many teachers felt that kindergarten was de-valued by others. Some teachers had administrators at school and district levels with little knowledge of early childhood education or child development. They believed this fact had a negative effect on the attention and support administrators aimed at kindergarten. As Teacher G said, "They just don't understand the land of the little people." Teacher C said:

So we are not appreciated. And they think, like, all we do is play—like play is a dirty word. But it's not! . . . We do challenge students, but we make it fun. We want them to have a solid foundation.

Teacher B shared her experience of participating in a meeting with her superintendent, whose background she categorized as high school. The meeting included members of the School Improvement Team. She reported:

When we got to the kindergarten-through-second-grade section, they were completely not interested. Looked like he [superintendent] was falling asleep. [I] spoke about Ready Schools. and you could just tell that he was like, "Okay, moving right along." Yeah, so that was very upsetting.

Teacher H wanted to bring kindergarten teachers in her system together to form a support group. She felt that as a group the system would more likely hear their "great big kindergarten voice" and give kindergarten the attention it deserved.

Autonomy related to the teacher's experience of having the opportunity—if not full—control to make decisions they believed to be in the best interest of the children they taught. Every teacher interviewed had experienced some significant event when they felt their professional input had been largely ignored or had never been sought. For example, Teacher G's school district mandated a new literacy program. She reported that six to seven thousand dollars worth of literacy materials were purchased for kindergarten classrooms without asking teachers what their needs were. She said:

I do not need another rhyming game; I do not need another beginning sounds game—I do not need another one of these. But thank you anyways. If you would have asked me, I don't have a listening center. I would love to have a listening center with headsets. Would you give me one of those? How about some dry erase markers?

Teacher E's school system was engaged in the selection process of a new math adoption. Her school piloted one of the programs under consideration. Even though she and other kindergarten teachers provided extensive feedback on what needed to be improved in the piloted program at the kindergarten level, the system chose that program and made no effort to correct the problems identified.

Belonging.

Teachers reported experiences of not being accepted by their team members when they initially came to kindergarten. Some teachers continue to feel isolated from their

teams because of the differences in teaching approaches. Almost all teachers reported feeling like the "Lone Ranger" in their professional relationships with their kindergarten colleagues. Teacher C stated:

We meet on Mondays. We have a planning time. We are supposed to share ideas and that kind of thing. I share ideas. . . . My principal encouraged them to come in here; she knows what I am doing. They haven't come yet.

Some teachers did report having colleagues who were using or beginning to implement a more developmentally appropriate approach to teaching kindergarten, but none felt that she had a colleague who practiced at her same level of implementation.

Each teacher indicated keen interest in improving her practice to be at her personal professional best. They were quick to apply to become Kindergarten Teacher Leaders for this purpose. They believe the Power of Kindergarten initiative has given each of them the encourage and support—the voice—they needed to be able to articulate their beliefs and explain to any stakeholder—principal, parent, central office staff, school board member, and the community at large—why they use a developmentally appropriate teaching approach for teaching kindergarten. One teacher described POK as the group of people who might have the power to change things.

Other Findings

This study revealed two other factors affecting the implementation of developmentally appropriate instruction in kindergarten: class size and availability of resources. Teacher J reported having an unusually large class size. She began the year with twenty-six kindergartners. She had twenty-five at the time of the interview. Sixteen children were in her class the previous year. Budget cuts in her school system affected the

number of teachers assigned to her school. The school had four kindergarten teachers the previous year. Now, there are only two kindergarten teachers—both with large class sizes. Teacher J said that the increased class size has affected her ability to operate her classroom as she normally would. She explained that she usually does not limit or assign children to free choice centers, but resorted to doing that to make management easier. She felt that she did not record as much weekly anecdotal information about each individual child as she has been able to do in past years.

The availability of resources to the participants in the study varied widely. Resources are defined in terms of teacher assistants and volunteers, as well as funding. Depending on the school, resources were either a source of support for participants or presented major barriers when they were limited.

All kindergarten teachers in the study had teacher assistants for the greater part of the school day. Some assistants have responsibilities outside the classroom, including bus duty, breakfast, or lunch duty. Some teacher assistants leave the kindergarten classroom for up to an hour per day to serve as tutors in other grade levels. Three teachers in the study were especially adamant about the importance of the teacher assistant to the success of their kindergarten program. Teacher F stated:

XXX is the absolute best assistant I have ever had. . . . She is a certified teacher actually, although it [teaching license] is not up to date. She is in the process of trying to get her certification brought back up to date. She has taught both kindergarten and first grade. She happens to have the same philosophy that I have, this developmentalism, and even the management that we do. And so it is really like there are two teachers in here. And she can read my mind; she picks up where

I left off. If I have to dash out of the room, she knows what to do. . . . It is just wonderful, absolutely wonderful, and she handles the children beautifully.

Teacher D also considered her teacher assistant as another teacher or partner in the classroom. She appreciates the relationship they have been able to establish. She reported that they get along very well together to the point that they know each other's habits and moods. She valued her assistant's ideas and contributions in planning the kindergarten program.

Teacher H and Teacher J are working to change some practices of their teacher assistants' deemed to be inappropriate. Teacher H's teacher assistant tended to yell at the children. She believed the children have come to fear the assistant. Teacher J reported that her assistant was strong in clerical duties, but stayed at the computer for extended time when she should be engaged with children.

Four teachers reported having extra people on a regular basis to help with children in their classrooms. Two teachers reported having a strong group of parent volunteers. Teacher D had worked with parents to show them how to tutor children who needed extra practice in academic skills. Teacher F had parents who came in and assisted children as they reflected on and recorded information about what they did during the school day. Teacher H had the help of a local high school student in her classroom each day. This student worked with assigned children on specific skills. Because of her large class size, Teacher J's school hired a tutor to work with kindergarten students. The tutor worked in Teacher J's classroom for two and a half hours each afternoon.

No teacher reported any special funding for the kindergarten program at the school or district levels. Teachers working in wealthier school systems had ample access

to a wide range of instructional supplies. In contrast, those teachers working in low-wealth school districts had a very limited supply of basic resources available to them, such as construction paper, pencils, charts, and markers. Those teachers reported spending much personal money to buy those types of supplies for their classroom.

Almost all teachers talked about the personal expense involved in having a developmentally appropriate classroom. The teachers wanted to provide hands-on, active learning experiences for the students, which sometimes required materials and equipment not provided by the school system. Teacher D had recently purchased an area rug for two hundred dollars. Teacher C and Teacher E reported buying many books for their classroom libraries.

Other Data Sources

While visiting the teachers, I took the opportunity to photograph their classrooms, taking care to document room arrangements, the materials and learning centers that were in place, as well as displays on the classroom walls. Daily schedules and assessment instruments were observed.

As part of the application process for becoming a Kindergarten Teacher Leader, each teacher recorded her philosophy related to teaching young children and described her classroom practices. I read each of those documents.

Analysis of Results

The teachers in this study could best be described as a highly passionate group of early childhood professionals with a great deal of what Lortie (1975) would consider to be "craft pride" (p. 121). In talking with the teachers, it was evident that each teacher had a very nurturing and caring attitude toward the children they served. These qualities could

be heard in their voices as they talked with enthusiasm and pride about their successes with children and their teaching practices. Identified by the state as Kindergarten Teacher Leaders, their passion for teaching young children led them to do everything within their power to teach in a way that honored children while meeting outside expectations and standards.

Support from administrators and colleagues.

The teachers experienced varied levels of support in their role as kindergarten teachers from their administrators and colleagues. Many administrators extended great trust towards the teachers and did not interfere with their classroom practices. One teacher expressed concern about this passive style of support. Though glad to be able to use the teaching approach she thought best, she and others would have welcomed input and feedback from an informed principal, strong in the knowledge of child development. The teachers' most significant source of support came from a group in which they all belonged known as the Power of Kindergarten (POK). POK was organized by NCDPI to help guide and support the use of developmentally appropriate practice in North Carolina kindergartens. The teachers in this study had attended intensive professional development offered by POK and credited that group with empowering them to better articulate their beliefs about a developmental approach to teaching.

Barriers.

The teachers faced a myriad of barriers as they worked, including little support extended to them from administrators and colleagues, mandated use of commercial instructional programs and assessment procedures, no meaningful staff development related to kindergarten at their school and system levels, and unreasonably high

expectations from first-grade teachers and parents. For some teachers basic teaching supplies were quite limited.. These barriers caused the teachers much frustration and, at times, anger. These reactions can be categorized as cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance.

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance served as the theoretical framework of this study. Festinger theorized that when an individual encounters two cognitions—ideas, knowledge, beliefs, values, or practices—that are related to each other but are the opposite of each other, dissonance is created (Festinger, 1957). The individual is then compelled to find a way to resolve the dissonant situation. According to Festinger, the process of dissonance reduction can occur in several ways:

- The individual could change one of the cognitions to achieve a higher degree of congruence between the two conflicting elements.
- The individual could seek additional cognitions that serve to reconcile the conflicting cognitions.
- The individual could reduce the importance of dissonant cognitions.
- The individual could increase the importance of consonant cognitions (Festinger, 1957).

Festinger discussed the creation of dissonance when forced compliance occurs. Forced compliance occurs when an individual is required to publicly behave in a way that is in direct opposition from private beliefs. "Dissonance inevitably follows such a situation" (p. 97).

The teachers in this study experienced cognitive dissonance most directly when confronted with various mandates made by their school systems. The teachers described

acute feelings of dissonance when forced to comply with mandates such as the specific scripted literacy and math programs they were expected to use in teaching kindergarten children. The teachers considered the teacher-directed instructional approach required by these programs to be in direct opposition to their beliefs related to teaching using a child-centered developmentally appropriate approach. The teachers knew that the skills were part of the state standards for kindergarten and had no objection to them. They were alarmed at the thought of children being passively engaged in whole-group, isolated skill instruction for long periods of time. The teachers wanted to be able to teach the state's curriculum standards in contexts that were interesting and meaningful to children—using centers in their classrooms, child initiated projects, as well as hands-on learning experiences. Direct-teaching mandates took away that control along with their creativity. The teachers were also concerned by the way these scripted "one-size fits-all" programs focused on "teaching to the middle" instead of differentiating instruction for each child.

Strong frustration was evident among these teachers. Several were unhappy enough to consider leaving the classroom. The teachers did seek ways to reduce the dissonance they experienced by trying to create a balance between following mandated inappropriate practices and maintaining the integrity of the developmental approach to teaching kindergarten. There was a constant search for balance between mandated procedures and those practices the teachers believed to be best for children. They reported many examples of how they "tweaked" the mandated practices to make them more developmentally appropriate. Festinger would consider their "tweaking" to be the practice of changing one of the cognitions to find a higher degree of congruency between beliefs and practices.

Some teachers reported feeling guilty when they engaged in what they considered to be developmentally inappropriate practices to order to prepare their students for the rigors of first grade. As Festinger suggested in his theory of how dissonance could be reduced, the teachers reconciled their feelings of guilt or dissonance by adding cognitions. These cognitions related to the idea that kindergartners needed to learn to learn how to do worksheets, needed to know how to work in large groups, and needed to self regulate their talking because of the more stringent expectations they would face in first grade. The kindergarten teachers felt their inappropriate practices could likely have a positive effect—making the transition from kindergarten to first grade easier for the children. The teachers could then accept the whole-group, teacher-directed practices more—reduce the dissonance—if they thought of them as being protective in nature.

In her study, Goldstein (2007) coded teachers' strategies for finding a balance between teaching Texas' learning standards and maintaining a developmentally appropriate learning environment. The strategy Goldstein coded as integration, where by teachers taught standards within meaningful contexts, was the goal of most of the teachers in my study. The teachers in my study knew that they were held accountable for teaching the North Carolina curriculum standards and wanted to teach them in a way that integrated the skills into classroom activities and centers, the routines of the kindergarten classroom, through child-initiated projects, as well as teacher-directed instruction. Few of them, however, had been able to reach that level of instruction.

Goldstein coded another strategy as demarcation, by which the instructional day was segmented into periods of time—one block of time for skill instruction and another block of time allotted to free-choice center time. Most of the teachers in my study had

organized their instructional day in this fashion. Most teachers had times designated for literacy, math, and writing instruction and additional times when children could engage in free-choice centers. However, the teachers tried to engage children appropriately during those skill times—using hands-on activities, frequent movement, and making the instruction as meaningful as possible for the children. Those teachers who implemented longer blocks of choice center time reported being able to intentionally teach skills with a higher degree of integration as children worked in the centers.

Teachers also expressed feelings of dissonance when working with colleagues who did not approach teaching young children in the same way as they did. Several teachers in the study actually adopted the practices of their colleagues for a while in order to reduce the dissonance. Or, in Festinger's terms, the teachers were driven to change their behaviors as a dissonance reduction strategy. Their decision to follow the crowd can also be understood as the teachers' way to initially gain acceptance by their colleagues.

In addition to Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory, I realized it would be helpful to better understand some causes of dissonance experienced by the teachers and the teachers' motivation to resolve cognitive dissonance by considering a theory proposed by Abraham Maslow. Just as Festinger theorized that individuals are driven to have harmony in their lives, Maslow proposed a similar theory, known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow suggested that individuals are also driven to have harmony in their lives by having specific physical and psychological needs fulfilled. Maslow's theory fits well within Festinger's theory when considering the needs of teachers. As the teachers described the barriers experienced in their jobs and the resulting feelings of dissonance

that stemmed from not having their needs fulfilled, it was likely that Maslow's theory could help to understand their dissonance.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Maslow identified five basic human needs: physiological needs; safety needs; love, affection, and belonging needs; esteem needs; and self actualization needs (Simons, Irwin, & Drinnien, 1987). Physiological needs are those biological needs to sustain life, including food, oxygen, and water; safety needs relate to feelings of physical security; belonging needs relate to affection, being loved and belonging to a community; esteem needs relate to being respected and valued by one's self and others; and self-actualization needs relate to the goal of reaching one's full capacity to be his or her best. This latter need involves having a high level of creativity, independence, and the ability to resolve problems and conflict with a high degree of competence.

According to Maslow, there exists the strong need to belong. When a few teachers first joined their new kindergarten team, they were warmly welcomed. Others, however, reported feeling avoided or shut out by their grade-level team. Their need to be accepted by the teachers—to belong to the group—drove them to alter their preferred instructional practices. It worked for a while, until the dissonance created by their not staying true to their beliefs forced them to step away from the group on their own terms. They tried to maintain collegial ties, but they still reported feeling isolated in terms of philosophy and practice.

The teachers' needs to be accepted and to belong were met most strongly through their participation in POK as Kindergarten Teacher Leaders. This acceptance explains one reason why this organization is so revered by the teachers in this study. In this group

members extend much affection to each other; they share common beliefs; and they share common struggles and common goals. An extremely strong and successful network of support has been established for one another. There is indeed strength in numbers as they have worked collaboratively to improve instructional practice in North Carolina's kindergarten classrooms.

The unmet need for esteem appeared to be at the root of many of the teachers' struggles. Esteem issues for them related to self-worth, being valued and accepted by others, feeling competent, having self-respect, and receiving respect from others.

Many teachers reported feeling as though their voices were not heard or valued when their opinions were expressed on issues of importance to them. Curriculum decisions made at the system level often did not take into account input provided by the kindergarten teachers. Some shared experiences indicating that no attempts were ever made to seek out their teacher voice. When mandates were issued requiring that teachers follow scripted teachers' manuals, the kindergarten teachers felt they were being given the message that the school system did not consider them competent.

The lack of feedback from administrators was of concern to several teachers. Some teachers had administrators who had early childhood experience; others did not. Teachers working with principals or district curriculum coordinators who were knowledgeable or who expressed an interest in becoming more knowledgeable about early childhood education felt extremely fortunate. One teacher whose principal was not familiar with early childhood and made few visits to the kindergarten classroom was very angry about the lack of attention she received. It is understandable that administrators with no background or experience in early childhood education would be limited in their

ability to provide effective feedback. One teacher connected to this fact. Teacher B said, "I used to think, 'Gosh, these administrators are crap.' But then I started to realize they haven't had that training, you know. They don't have that background as well. So, it's somewhat not their fault that they don't know anything about developmentally appropriate practices." However, the teachers want principals, supervisors, and superintendents in their classrooms, as illustrated by this comment from Teacher H:

I think all teachers want to please. Everybody will shut their door and do what's right but they also want to please their principal, and the grade above them, and the grade below them. I don't think there are too many teachers that really like to break the rules—those unspoken rules. So it's a huge struggle.

The teachers believed there were people even at the district level who viewed kindergarten as being less important or having less status than other grade levels, especially the tested grades. Many felt that their school and district resources were aimed toward those grades. The teachers felt neglected when professional development never met their needs.

Some teachers have had the experience of first-grade teachers telling them that all they do is "play." Teacher E talked about a time when a first-grade teacher came to her and said, "No offense, but that developmental crap you do, I'm going to fix it next year."

Such experiences have not served to build the esteem of these teachers. For the important work they do for children, the teachers want to be recognized and respected by principals, first-grade teachers, and by all other stakeholders. They want their developmental approach to teaching to be recognized as the best teaching practice for kindergarten.

Leadership.

One experience that did serve to build the esteem of the teachers in the study was the opportunity for the teachers to step forward into leadership roles. Being designated as Kindergarten Teacher Leaders, carries with it the expectation by the POK group that the teachers will serve on committees, support others in their practices to use a developmental approach to teaching, and provide professional development where needed. While some teachers have embraced this role and have made presentations, taken steps to initiate focus groups, and have taken leadership roles in their schools, others have assumed a less assertive leadership style. Schlechty (1993) described five roles that emerge as efforts are made to undergo change: "trailblazers, pioneers, settlers, stay-at-homes, and saboteurs" (p. 47-50). The roles are briefly defined as follows:

"Trailblazers" are those who take the first leap into unexplored territory that change brings. They are guided only by their personal vision; they are eager risk takers and seek support for their journey. Trailblazers need constant attention, recognition and praise to sustain them. They feel threatened by anything that interferes with their journey. They require special freedom to access any and all resources needed to accomplish their mission. They are the super stars and require star treatment (p. 47). No teacher in this study was observed to be in this category.

"Pioneers" are the second wave. They also willingly take risks. However, pioneers need to know that the journey toward change being taken has worth; they also need proof that the journey is feasible. The proof comes from the stories and experiences of the Trailblazers. Pioneers work more collaboratively with others along their journey toward

making necessary changes (p. 48-49). The participants in this study exhibited more pioneer-like behaviors.

"Settlers" make up the third wave. They follow in the footsteps of the pioneers, but only after learning everything they can possibly learn about the journey, including why it is really necessary. They need constant reassurance that they are capable of making the journey and that the journey will be justified (p. 49). The Kindergarten Teacher Leaders will have the greatest opportunity to influence many teachers in this category.

"Stay-at-homes" will move forward toward change only if motivated by a severe threatening need to do so or by an incredible reward. They are comfortable just in the spot where they live. Those of this mindset may present problems for those who want change. Efforts to talk them into moving toward change may be a waste of time. It is probably best to leave them alone in the beginning (p. 49-50). This category highly reflects the characteristics of the colleagues of the teachers in this study.

The "Saboteurs" will who do everything possible to prevent change. They actually appear to thrive on the blocking process. They are troublemakers and should be watched carefully.

Of these five categories, the Kindergarten Teacher Leaders in this study tended to assume the role of pioneer. They were risk takers; they trusted that the journey they have made was research-based and in the best interest of children. They looked forward to a continuation of their journey and would be willing collaborators with anyone who is on their path. The teachers did not appear to be comfortable being in the limelight and were nervous about appearing to others as being "know-it-alls." It is their work with those

people in the roles of stay at homes and saboteurs that make their professional lives somewhat challenging.

Other data sources.

The interviews with the teachers yielded rich information about their experiences teaching kindergarten. Other data sources—including photographs of the classrooms, schedules, and written statements of philosophy and practices—added to the information shared during the interviews. I observed that most classroom arrangements reflected a developmental approach to teaching. Student desks or tables were not clustered together, as is typically found in more academic classrooms. Tables were available, but were located throughout the classroom and incorporated into activity centers. One teacher had several tables grouped together, but was quick to explain that she did not use them for whole-group instruction. Whole-group meeting spaces on the floor or on carpets were found in each classroom. These areas usually featured an easel for books or charts and seating for the group leader.

The environments were rich in print. Teacher-and/or-child-produced print sources included children's self-labeled work projects; charts detailing classroom rules, daily news, special events and discussions; procedural charts for self-checking attendance, completing tasks, and making center choices; daily schedules; child-made books; and word-walls. One teacher was required by her administrator to post daily learning objectives. Commercially produced print sources included: daily calendar charts; alphabet and numerals charts; colors and shapes charts; letter-sound charts; poetry posters; and collections of books. Other commercial material from mandated literacy and math programs were also displayed in some classrooms.

Each classroom contained some type of block center, though the amount and type of blocks varied from classroom to classroom. Other learning activity centers included dramatic play, math, books, writing, science, and art. Many of the classrooms also had puppets, puzzles, and a variety of manipulatives. Some classrooms contained sand and water centers.

Written documentation included posted schedules, assessment instruments, and written statements of philosophy and descriptions of classroom practices. The posted schedules directly matched the teachers' descriptions of their daily activities. Assessment tools observed reflected the teachers' descriptions of them during the interviews. The teachers' essays about their educational philosophies aligned with their responses during the interviews. Their written statements had been composed a year and a half earlier, but still conveyed their current level of passion for using a developmental approach to teaching. The teachers described how they worked to make learning meaningful and individualized for each child despite inappropriate expectations from their school systems. Teacher F wrote:

My educational philosophy is based upon developmentally appropriate practices for the early childhood classroom. I attended the Kindergarten Task Force meeting last year with other kindergarten teachers from across the state anticipating the sharing of ideas. Our time together was exciting and rewarding for me as we found a common bond in our beliefs, and discussed the direction of kindergarten instruction in our state. The discussions made me painfully aware of the struggles those of us who hold to this philosophy of education face on a day-to-day basis in this era of test-driven accountability for both students and teachers.

However, I came away from the meeting...affirmed in my beliefs. I also felt encouraged that the NC Department of Public Instruction and the NC Birth Through Kindergarten Higher Education Consortium supported this philosophy, and acknowledged the need for positive changes in programs across the state.

No discrepancies were found as I compared the interview data, data from classroom observations and photographs, as well as the information gleaned from the written documents.

Summary

Ten kindergarten teachers shared their experiences of teaching kindergarten in North Carolina during a time when educational emphasis is aimed at developing those attributes that help students become productive citizens of the Twenty-first Century. The teachers described their teaching experiences using a developmentally appropriate approach, which served to meet the individual needs of children, and ultimately gave children many opportunities to begin to develop those Twenty-first Century skills in a meaningful context. They were given opportunities to make choices, to be independent workers, and to problem solve.

The teachers had a high value for this approach and were willing to work around the barriers that often stood in their way to prevent full implementation of developmentally appropriate practices. In their case, the old adage, "Where there is a will, there is a way," aptly fits. These teachers continually sought ways to balance inappropriate expectations and meeting standards with honoring the ways children learn best.

Despite the barriers faced, these teachers found much joy in their work and planned to continue teaching. Clearly evident was their love of working with young children and commitment to becoming their professional best. The study showed them to be self-motivated to learn and to use their knowledge to improve their own practice. They willingly offered to support other teachers in their efforts to become more developmentally appropriate in their practice.

The classrooms I observed obviously took a great deal of time and effort to design and maintain. Though resources varied greatly from school to school, depending on the socio-economic level of the area, each teacher had used the resources available to her to provide opportunities for developing children's inquiry and problem-solving skills, creativity, language skills, literacy and numeracy skills, and social skills within a nurturing and developmentally appropriate learning environment.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

As North Carolina schools become intent on preparing students to become successful and productive citizens in the Twenty-first Century, all teachers are challenged to make their instructional programs rigorous and relevant for students. This study focused on the experiences of kindergarten teachers as they worked to accomplish this goal through the implementation of a developmentally appropriate teaching approach. Developmentally appropriate practices are those research-based teaching and decision-making practices which take into account how each child learns, each individual child's growth and development, as well as the child's cultural values (Copple & Bredekamp, 2006).

Purpose.

This study sought to understand the experiences of kindergarten teachers as they worked to establish, sustain, or improve developmentally appropriate practices in their classrooms. It served to identify sources of support for these teachers as well as any barriers they encountered in their jobs. The study also served to discover how teachers coped with or resolved any challenges they experienced. The results of this study were intended to inform administrators and central office personnel of the needs and concerns of teachers committed to a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching kindergarten. These needs could inform system-wide and local school allocation of resources, professional development plans, teacher recruitment and retention strategies, and school improvement plans.

Kindergarten teachers in this study were acutely aware of the academic standards for which they are held accountable. They wanted to be able to teach those standards in ways that were relevant to children; they wanted children to be engaged in rigorous, challenging, active learning experiences that honor the ways children learn best. The teachers in this study did not believe that a more academic approach, often favored by other kindergarten teachers in their schools, was the best practice. That approach placed children in learning environments that resembled traditional first-grade classrooms. Those settings placed a heavy emphasis on teacher-directed learning, isolated skills, whole-group instruction, and worksheets, with children spending extended time sitting at tables or desks. Children had little opportunity to engage in problem solving, decision-making, or self-initiated projects within authentic contexts.

Developmentally appropriate classrooms, which the teachers in this study highly regard, are thoughtfully designed to include learning centers, movement, exploration, meaningful hands-on learning experiences, and projects that support children's curiosity, interests, and natural eagerness to learn. The teachers serve as both *guides to* and *directors of* learning (Copple & Bredekamp, 2006; Katz, 2000; Rushton, 2001).

Theoretical framework.

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance served as the theoretical framework for the study. Given the existing demands for rigor, meeting new standards, and high expectations for student performance even at the kindergarten level, many kindergarten teachers are finding themselves caught in a position where their philosophical beliefs related to how best to teach young children often run contrary to what and how they are required to teach in their classrooms. Festinger theorized that when an individual

encounters two cognitions—ideas, knowledge, beliefs, values, or practices—that are related to each other, but are the opposite of each other, dissonance is created (Festinger, 1957). The source of cognitive dissonance most relevant to this study was what Festinger described as forced compliance. "Public compliance without an accompanying change in private opinion occurs when a reward is offered for compliance or when some punishment is threatened for failure to comply. Dissonance inevitably follows such a situation" (p. 97). Teachers who do not publicly comply with their school system's policies and directives put their jobs at risk. Festinger believed that when a state of cognitive dissonance is created, people are driven to find ways to eliminate or reduce dissonance.

Set within this theoretical framework, this study was designed to explore the existence of both consonance and dissonance experienced by North Carolina kindergarten teachers. Questions were designed to provide teachers the opportunity to describe the congruence between their belief and practices. For those individuals who experienced cognitive dissonance, the dissonance-reduction processes described in Festinger's theory provide some insight into how some teachers found ways to harmoniously balance their beliefs and practices.

Methodology.

A qualitative method of inquiry was used in order to gather the data necessary to gain understanding of the kindergarten teachers' experiences. Qualitative studies seek to address questions that relate to life experiences and the meaning derived from those experiences (Patton, 2002). Merriam (2001) described basic or generic qualitative study as the process researchers use to "seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a

process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (p. 11). Data gained from qualitative studies do not come in the form of cold hard statistical facts that are associated with the results of quantitative studies. Rather, qualitative data come from the rich detailed descriptions obtained through in-depth interviews with each participant. This approach best suited the purpose of the study, which required active listening as kindergarten teachers shared their experiences.

Participants.

Participants in this study were ten kindergarten teachers currently identified by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) as Kindergarten Teacher Leaders. Part of the criteria for being selected included the demonstration of a strong belief in using developmentally appropriate practices in kindergarten classrooms. These teachers were quite passionate in their beliefs and desired to be as developmentally appropriate as possible in their teaching practices.

It was important that participants in this study held a high regard for developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in theory and in practice. While other studies related to the implementation of DAP exist, most of the samples in those studies include all kindergarten teachers regardless of their professional value for DAP. This study sought specifically to understand the experiences of kindergarten teachers in North Carolina who value and implement DAP. Therefore purposeful sampling was used.

Interview questions.

The following open-ended questions guided the interview:

- Describe your experience as a kindergarten teacher.
- Describe your use of developmentally appropriate practice in your classroom.

- Describe practices in your classroom that you consider to be developmentally inappropriate and talk about why you include those practices.
- Describe the changes would you like to make. What is the likelihood that you will be able to implement the changes?
- Describe any factors that exist to affect your efforts to implement a developmentally appropriate classroom.

Strengths and limitations.

The qualitative methodology was a particular strength of the study. It allowed for rich descriptions of the teachers' experiences. The same depth of understanding would not have been possible using survey data. My direct contact with the participants and the time spent together in their classrooms encouraged them to tell their stories in great detail; it also allowed me to see the environments in which they worked, their materials, and resources as way to verify information the teachers shared. I was also able to hear the deep emotion in their voices as they described the joys and challenges of being kindergarten teachers.

The study was limited to ten Kindergarten Teacher Leaders in North Carolina. Because of the small size of the sample, the results of the study cannot be broadly generalized.

Implications for North Carolina

Several implications for administrators and teachers in North Carolina can be drawn from this study. These implications relate to understanding and supporting the needs of teachers as well as providing them with meaningful professional development.

Administrators.

The ten North Carolina kindergarten teachers in this study were quite adamant in their belief that using a developmentally appropriate teaching approach was the best practice for educating young children. These teachers truly need the help and support of administrators to be most effective in their practice. Teachers in this study found that help to be lacking or reported passive support from their administrator at best. Passive support occurred when administrators basically left the teachers alone, trusting them to do what they thought was best. Though the teachers appreciated any kind or means of support, they preferred active support from informed administrators. Active support included having the administrator in their classrooms frequently and for extended lengths of time; receiving meaningful feedback related to their practice, with suggestions for improvement; and recognition or praise for worthy endeavors.

It would not be a stretch to say that the number of North Carolina principals who are highly knowledgeable in the areas of early childhood education and child development is relatively low. If administrators are to be true instructional leaders in their schools, they must know and understand what is going on at every grade level and in every classroom and why. Being well-informed is the only way they can meaningfully coach teachers to improve their practice. This level of knowledge also informs the administrator when celebrations of success are warranted. I have illustrated this point with principals during a professional development session with them. Using the analogy of a golf game, I described a scenario that included unheard of practices in the game of golf, but "golf-like" enough to someone not familiar with the game. These practices included driving the golf cart up on the green and placing a tee on the putting green. At

the end of the scenario I asked the audience of principals if they saw any problems with the scenario I described. Only two principals, the golf-pros of the group, raised their hands wildly. "Don't ever drive your cart on the green!" one exclaimed. The other one said, "You don't use tees on the putting green!" The analogy was then applied to observing a kindergarten classroom. An administrator who is not knowledgeable about what is observed, cannot tell the difference between appropriate practice and inappropriate practice; can make no meaningful suggestions for improvement; and has no idea what to consider praiseworthy.

Principals must have available to them some means for gaining knowledge about child development and early childhood education. They must learn how the practices used in a developmentally appropriate kindergarten classroom impact a child's success beyond kindergarten. They should know what to look for in developmentally appropriate kindergarten classrooms—what teachers should be doing and what children should be doing—so that the integrity of this teaching approach is upheld. Administrators in North Carolina are required to earn five renewal credits during each five-year renewal cycle. The credits must be related to the principal's role in teacher effectiveness, teacher leadership, teacher empowerment, evaluation of teachers, support for teachers, and teacher retention. Courses related to child development or early childhood education for the purpose of supporting teachers' instruction would qualify as renewal credit for licensure. On-line courses could be established to facilitate access to the information.

Many administrators in North Carolina practice classroom "walk-throughs" designed to collect and document information about what teachers and students are doing. The administrator is looking for evidence of specific researched-based strategies

proven to have a high impact on student achievement. It would be helpful to administrators to have the checklist of practices "translated" to explain how the practices might appear in a developmentally appropriate kindergarten classroom. It is highly interesting to note that many of the research-based practices administrators are to look for in all classrooms at elementary, middle and high school levels are the very practices they would find in a developmentally appropriate kindergarten classroom—differentiation instead of whole-group instruction, student learning projects, small-group instruction, cooperative learning, and active, meaningful learning experiences.

A new state teacher evaluation instrument will be fully implemented during the 2010-2011 school year. A small group of educators is actually working on a principal-support document for this instrument—a document specifically designed to inform principals of how the new evaluation instrument aligns to practices in Pre-K and kindergarten classrooms. Principals who are new to the instrument and not strong in early childhood knowledge will be grateful for this information. They need to make all efforts to secure and use the document once it become available.

Teacher recruitment and retention.

Recruiting and retaining quality teachers in North Carolina schools is a high priority for school systems. Once excellent teachers are recruited for specific positions, it then becomes important to retain those teachers for as long as possible. It is helpful to know what factors keep teachers in the classroom.

In this study, four teachers at one time or another considered leaving the classroom because of high levels of dissatisfaction. In terms of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the teachers experienced low levels of esteem and belongingness. If North

Carolina is serious about keeping good teachers who have the knowledge and disposition to dedicate their lifework to young children, then school systems and local schools must act to meet their needs. Administrators must demonstrate by word and action that they believe kindergarten has a valuable place and purpose within the school program. Kindergarten and kindergarten teachers cannot be relegated to a lower level of importance when it comes to providing resources, making schedules, and offering teachers support in terms of professional development. They cannot be ignored to accommodate the needs of teachers and students in tested grades.

Teachers want to have a voice in making decisions at school and system levels that will affect them. Teachers want their input to be seriously considered rather than just being a moot exercise. When their ideas are taken seriously, teachers' esteem is raised; their sense of autonomy is increased; they feel their opinions are valued and appreciated. School systems and schools would be very smart indeed to make it a standard practice to solicit opinions from and involve teachers in decision making as much as possible. Decisions are more likely to be supported if a feeling of ownership and involvement has been established.

Professional development.

The teachers in this study felt a high level of support, esteem, and belongingness through their involvement with the Power of Kindergarten. All school systems in North Carolina should use this model to organize and support their kindergarten teachers as a professional learning community. Regularly scheduled meetings would afford teachers the opportunities to network and learn from each other. Meetings would be regularly scheduled to offer teachers professional development designed to meet the needs of

kindergarten teachers and to provide teachers the opportunity to share and discuss concerns with central office staff.

Power of kindergarten.

The Power of Kindergarten should be recognized and respected for what it truly is—an effective researched-base plan for reforming kindergartens in North Carolina. The Power of Kindergarten Position Statement outlines the expectations of quality developmentally appropriate classrooms. The North Carolina Kindergarten Teacher Leaders could not be more glowing in their descriptions of the positive effect the initiative has had on their professional lives. There needs to be funding available to extend its effect to many more kindergarten teachers in the state.

The current participants are at the end of the three-year initiative, as it was first designed. Plans are underway to sustain the powerful network that has been established. The Kindergarten Teachers Leaders are available to provide support and professional development for teachers in their regions. Administrators need to seek out these leaders and use their expertise to support their own kindergarten teachers.

Recommendations for Further Study

The experiences of the participants led me to consider several questions not included in my study. I was quite interested to hear the kindergarten teachers' perceptions of first grade. The teachers took a most protective stance when talking about the need to shield their children from the approaching rigors of first grade. Further study is suggested to examine first-grade programs in North Carolina and in general. How strongly does the concept of developmentally appropriate practice transfer to first grade programs? What

does developmentally appropriate practice look like in first grade? How prevalent is its practice there?

I was also interested in the varying expectations that determined kindergarten grade-level achievement across the state. Some school systems had established higher reading levels than others as benchmarks for children to reach by the end of the kindergarten year. As there are no standard criteria established for retention or promotion of children, it would be interesting to collect and compare the varying criteria that school systems across North Carolina establish for children to be considered on grade level. How much is a kindergartner's success or failure in North Carolina determined by geography—where he lives?

A final area that needs further study is the inequity of resources available to kindergarten teachers across the state. I observed schools with a plethora of supplies and other schools with a pitiful supply. The major reason for the difference related directly to the level of wealth of the school system. Teachers in both wealthy and poverty-affected schools reported spending much of their own personal money on their classrooms. The differences appeared to be that teachers in lower wealth districts were buying basic materials and supplies that teachers in wealthier districts took for granted—scissors, crayons, sentence strips, and paper. It would be interesting and quite informative to see the amount of money allotted for kindergarten instructional supplies across the state and the types of materials purchased with that money.

Conclusion

Much of the previous research on the positive effects of developmentally appropriate practice was affirmed by the results observed in this study. The behavior of

children in more developmentally appropriate classrooms appeared to be better than the behavior of students in more academically-structured classrooms; some first-grade teachers who received students from the participants' classrooms saw a higher level of academic performance when compared to children who came from more academically-structured classrooms.

The findings of this study also supported previous studies that found a positive correlation between teachers' beliefs and practices (McMullen, 1999; Stipek & Byler, 1997). Even when faced with barriers, the teachers in this study worked diligently and creatively to keep their beliefs and practices aligned. Their actions might well spur other kindergarten teachers facing similar barriers to act accordingly.

The North Carolina State Board of Education has communicated the expectation that students are to graduate from high school proficient in the skills necessary to be successful in the Twenty-first Century. Teachers in elementary school are expected to lay the groundwork for these skills to be developed. There is a group of kindergarten teachers who willingly accept that challenge using a developmentally appropriate teaching approach. They want their instructional program to be rigorous and relevant, not by assigning stacks of worksheets, not by teaching to the middle, not by totally directing the learning that occurs, but by paying attention to the individual needs of children in the social/emotional, physical, and cognitive domains. These teachers want to provide children choices that help to hone their decision-making skills and problem-solving skills; to make instruction meaningful to the children; to make learning an active, hands-on, minds-on process; and to support the development of creativity and inquiry.

The teachers in this study would be quick to argue that if the teaching approach they begin in kindergarten, with individual attention given to each child, is continued and supported throughout the child's educational career in North Carolina Public Schools, that child will indeed graduate highly competent in those prerequisite skills that will ensure his success in the Twenty-first Century

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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A

Attributes of a "Future Ready Citizen"

Attributes of a "Future Ready Citizen" as identified by North Carolina

Department of Public Instruction These attributes, which begin to be developed at the elementary school level, include:

- Self-directed responsible worker
- Multi-lingual
- Effective communicator
- Critical thinker
- Relationship builder
- Health-focused life-long learner
- Financially literate citizen
- Creative/Innovative thinker
- Knowledgeable global citizen
- Strong team contributor
- Proficient reader
- Science savvy
- Literate consumer of media
- Capable technology user
- Effective problem solver
- Curious researcher
- Skilled mathematician (NCDPI, 2007).

APPENDIX B

Power of K: North Carolina Position Statement on Kindergartens of the 21st Century

June 2007

T h e P o w e r o f K

North Carolina Position Statement on Kindergartens of the 21st Century

The Mandate

The guiding mission of the North Carolina State Board of Education is that every public school student will graduate from high school, globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and prepared for life in the 21st Century” (N.C. State Board of Education, 2006)

Kindergarten professionals are charged with the responsibility of leading the journey of learning and growth for N.C. students by providing the social and educational foundations necessary to prepare students for life in the 21st Century. While fostering collaborative connections with families and communities, these educators also must develop positive relationships with each child; provide safe, supportive, and inviting environments; offer differentiated and rigorous curriculum and instruction; and deliver meaningful and authentic assessments of a child’s potential. In order to ensure the success of this charge, kindergarten professionals must be empowered by a supportive and knowledgeable administration that provides the necessary infrastructure, essential resources, and on-going, high quality professional development.

The Power of K

The early childhood years, birth through age 8, are the most powerful years for learning, growth and development in the life of a child (Jensen, 1998). Currently, kindergarten holds a position in education as one of the starting points for attitudes about learning, teachers and schools that children and families will carry throughout the years of schooling and beyond.

It is critical that kindergarten programs:

- Utilize evidence-based practices.
- Help children achieve the knowledge, skills and dispositions that promote ongoing success.
- Provide indoor and outdoor environments and experiences that reflect appropriate practices for children of varying abilities.
- Represent a community of learners.
- Include families in meaningful ways.

- Value diverse cultures.

Kindergarten Today

In the 21st Century, educators must meet multiple demands from national, state and local levels. These expectations are based on federal No Child Left Behind regulations, guidelines from state and local boards of education and district mandates and expectations. Teachers at all grade levels feel the pressure of this increased accountability and stringent expectations for their students.

Kindergarten teachers are caught between what research supports as effective environments and experiences based on knowledge of how young children learn and develop, and the promotion of scripted programs and practices that typically do not respond to children's individual needs nor take into account the view of the whole child as a learner. Based on kindergarten's unique position in education, this critical grade level "suffers from the middle-child syndrome [and] straddles the worlds of preschool and elementary school" (Graue, 2006). Because of this precarious place in education, many kindergarten teachers struggle with implementing federal, state and local standards while attempting to remain true to the learning styles and developmental needs of their increasingly diverse 5 year olds...a delicate balancing act for these dedicated educators.

Kindergarten Children Today

Kindergarten programs of the 21st Century must reflect both the experiences of 5 year olds and changes to society. Many young children today:

- Live in a fast-paced world.
- Are technologically savvy.
- Use television and the Internet as a primary means of communication.
- Are exposed to more dangers and threats than their parents were at their age.
- Spend more time inside than outside.
- Are more overweight than the generation before.
- Spend less time with their families than they do in child-care.
- Live in increasingly diverse communities.

Although the 21st Century brings many new experiences for young children in a technologically based world, their developmental patterns, rates and ways of learning have not changed. Recent brain research shows that children in their kindergarten year are still in a very sensitive period for brain development. As young children actively interact with the environment, "the synaptic connections of stimulated neurons become increasingly elaborate" and "the brain is especially responsive to stimulation" (Berk, 2006). Experts in neuroscience and child development agree that "young children need a wide variety of ordinary experiences during this phase" with opportunities to explore their world through their senses (Gullo, 2006; Jensen, 1998). Kindergarten children must be appropriately challenged to progress academically and socially; however, "when

classroom experiences are not attuned to children's developmental needs and individual characteristics, they undermine rather than foster children's learning" (Berk, 2006).

Kindergarten classrooms of the 21st century must be places where children of all circumstances and all learning abilities can thrive. North Carolina must continue to prepare students for the future while honoring the original kindergarten program objectives of providing both "a garden *for* children, a location where they can observe and interact with nature, and also a garden *of* children, where they themselves can grow and develop" (www.froebelweb.org, 2006). Educators of young children must ask, "How do the kindergartens of the 21st Century support the developmental needs of all children while providing challenging and meaningful educational experiences?"

Kindergarten Programs of the 21st Century: Intentional and Learning

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the N.C. Birth Through Kindergarten Higher Education Consortium support kindergarten programs in our state that respond to the complex needs of children by linking instructional practices, the physical environment, and learning opportunities to the unique characteristics of 5 year olds. In this age of accountability, kindergartens must be designed to address the academic, physical and social/emotional domains of education for young children. According to Elizabeth Graue, former kindergarten teacher and professor of early childhood education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, "It is absolutely reasonable to expect that kindergarten is about playful learning and learningful play, and about academic socialization and social academics. To make the most of the kindergarten experience, a teacher must be a master of knowledge about specific curriculum content, about children in general, and about her students in particular" (Graue, 2006).

Kindergarten classrooms in North Carolina must be appropriate places for young children to learn through engaging and interactive experiences guided by trusted and nurturing adults. These adults also must provide challenging, yet achievable learning experiences for each individual child. This is no easy task. It requires:

- A dedicated and knowledgeable teacher.
- A dedicated and knowledgeable full-time teacher's assistant.
- Support of the school administrator, who is knowledgeable about the education of young children.
- Purposeful planning based on the N.C. Standard Course of Study and children's interests and needs, all of which build upon a child's previous knowledge and experiences.
- Support for children with special needs.
- Intentional child and teacher interactions.
- A broad repertoire of instructional practices that strike a delicate balance across a continuum of child-initiated experiences and teacher-directed instruction;
- Child-initiated and teacher-supported play.

- A variety of learning contexts within an integrated day, including whole group, small groups, learning centers, outdoor experiences and daily routines.
- Partnerships with families and the community.
- Culturally relevant curriculum that is designed with learners' cultural values, knowledge, and ways of learning taken into account (Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005).
- Ongoing, authentic assessments that drive instruction.
- An inquiry approach to ongoing professional development for teachers.

The debate around the definition of play and its benefit to a young child's education remains ongoing and unresolved. Some say that play is compatible with and necessary to the young child's education. Others believe play is at odds with education. The N.C. Department of Public Instruction believes that play is at the core of a kindergartner's learning and development and that it is an essential element of a child's education in the 21st Century.

Play is “a dynamic, active and constructive behavior. It is an essential and integral part of all children's healthy growth, development and learning across all ages, domains, and cultures. ... The absence of play is an obstacle to the development of healthy and creative individuals” (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002). Through an interactive, play-based curriculum, children develop cognitive skills as they “explore, imagine, imitate, construct, discuss, plan, manipulate, problem-solve, dramatize, create, and experiment” (Nebraska Department of Education, 2001). All the while, teachers intentionally weave goals and objectives from the N.C. Standard Course of Study for kindergarten into each experience. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, “Play is integral to the academic environment; ... it has been shown to help children adjust to the school setting and even to enhance children's learning readiness, learning behaviors, and problem-solving skills” (AAP, 2006). Numerous studies have shown a direct link between play in young children and “memory, school adjustment, oral language development, improved social skills, and self-regulation” (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Researchers believe that play provides a strong foundation for intellectual growth, problem solving and creativity. These are necessary skills for the 21st Century where “creative problem solvers, independent thinkers, and people with expert social acumen will inevitably surpass those who have simply learned to be efficient at getting the right answers” (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003).

North Carolina's Charge

The N.C. State Board of Education has charged that “all students will graduate from a rigorous, relevant academic program that equips them with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to succeed in both postsecondary education and 21st Century careers and to be participating, engaged citizens. Instruction and learning must include commitment to a knowledge core and the application of that knowledge core to solve complex, real-world problems. Schools must ensure rigor and relevance and guarantee supportive relationships for each student in the public school setting” (North Carolina School Board policy HSP-F-016).

Kindergarten students are innately curious and natural problem solvers. Recognizing these qualities, effective kindergarten teachers provide a rigorous and relevant curriculum. They intentionally create opportunities for:

- Interactive, challenging, and relevant learning experiences.
- Inquiry-based learning.
- Construction of knowledge.
- Solving of real life problems.
- Emotional/social growth and development.
- Physical growth and development.
- Language growth and development
- Collaboration.
- Creativity, imagination and innovation.
- Decision-making.

It is through these types of experiences that kindergarten students develop and demonstrate the 21st Century life skills of critical thinking, communication, leadership, collaboration, contextual learning, global awareness, information and media literacy and citizenship.

Recognizing that experiences in the early childhood years can have a powerful impact on the children of North Carolina, the importance of high quality kindergarten programs and practices becomes apparent. North Carolina has been a leading proponent of public school reform for many years, especially in the field of early childhood education. Continuing this tradition of innovation, North Carolina has the opportunity to once again take the lead in supporting excellence in the kindergarten programs for the young children of our state. Through a culturally respectful, inclusive and appropriately challenging curriculum, coupled with a broad repertoire of instructional approaches, kindergarten children will grow and develop into independent, critical thinkers empowered to succeed in their future school endeavors and to become productive citizens in the global world of the 21st Century.

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APPENDIX C

Letter of Invitation to Participate in Study

Southwest Elementary School

1580 32nd Street SW

Hickory, North Carolina 28602

Sherry R. Willis, Principal

828-324-8884

November 12, 2008

[REDACTED] North Carolina Kindergarten Teacher Leader

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]:

I am a doctoral student at Western Carolina University, Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations. I would like to invite you to participate in a study that seeks to describe and understand the experiences of North Carolina kindergarten teachers who work to implement developmentally appropriate instructional practices in their classrooms. I believe that the findings from this study will serve to better understand your work in the classroom and to inform school-based and system-wide administrators, and policy makers of the needs and concerns of teachers committed to a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching in kindergarten. This information will be helpful to teachers and school and school system administrators in developing plans for staff development and allocation of resources.

Participants in this study will be interviewed using open-ended questions related to their value for developmentally appropriate practices and their experiences in establishing and maintaining a

developmentally appropriate classroom. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss the support received for their efforts as well as any challenges encountered. Interviews will be tape-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. I will make every effort to schedule interviews for the convenience of the participant. Interviews should last about 90 minutes. Participants will receive a copy of the transcription to check for accuracy.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. All information obtained during the interview is strictly confidential. No real names will be used in the study. If you decide to participate you may discontinue participation at any time. A copy of the study's findings will be made available to any interested participant by contacting me at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED].

If you would like to participate in this study please read and complete the attached Informed Consent Form. Please mail it back to me in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope by November 22. [REDACTED], I so appreciate your consideration and would love to have you participate in this study.

Sincerely yours,

Sherry R. Willis

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

North Carolina Kindergarten Teachers and Developmentally Appropriate Instructional Practices: A Phenomenological Study

I volunteer to participate in this qualitative study and understand that:

1. Sherry R. Willis will be interviewing me using open-ended questions related to my experiences as a kindergarten teacher implementing developmentally appropriate instructional practices.
2. My name will not be used in the study. No other identifying information will be used.
3. The purpose of the study is serve to better understand experiences of kindergarten teachers implementing developmentally appropriate instructional practices. The study also seeks to inform school-based and system-wide administrators, and policy makers of the needs and concerns of teachers committed to a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching in kindergarten. This information will be helpful to teachers and school and school system administrators in developing plans for staff development and allocation of resources.
4. The interview will last approximately 90 minutes. Follow-up interviews may be scheduled. Interviews will be scheduled for my convenience.
5. The interview(s) will be tape recorded and transcribed.
6. I will be given the opportunity to read the transcribed text of my interview(s) to check the accuracy of my responses.
7. Information obtained in this study may be used for multiple purposes. Tapes of interviews will be kept locked in for three years at the home of the interviewer, then destroyed.
8. I may discontinue participation in this study at any time.
9. No negative consequences will result from my decision not to participate.
10. Ten teachers will participate in this study.
11. I can direct any questions regarding my participation in this study to: Dr. Meagan Karvonen, Chair Institutional Review Board, c/o Research Administration, WCU, Graduate School and Research, 109 Cordeilia Camp Building, Cullowhee, NC 28723 or at 828-227-7212.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Principal Investigator:
Sherry R. Willis, Doctoral Student at Western Carolina University

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Eleanor B. Hilty



250 Killian Building
Western Carolina University
Cullowhee, NC 28723

Appendix E

Letter of Introduction and Consent Form to Participant's Principal

Sherry R. Willis

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

December 12, 2008

[REDACTED], Principal
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]:

I am a doctoral student at Western Carolina University, Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations. I am conducting a study that seeks to describe and understand the experiences of North Carolina kindergarten teachers who work to implement developmentally appropriate instructional practices in their classrooms. [REDACTED], one of your teachers and also one of the North Carolina Kindergarten Teacher Leaders, has volunteered to participate in my study. I would like to get your permission to visit her classroom after school hours to observe the classroom environment and to conduct an interview.

The interview will last approximately 90 minutes. The interview will be scheduled at the teacher's convenience after school and will not cause any disruption to the instructional day. All information will be highly confidential. No identifying information of the teacher or your school will be included in the study. I have enclosed a consent form for you to complete and mail back to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided.

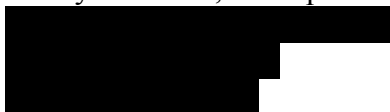
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me at any of the following numbers:

Home: [REDACTED]
School: [REDACTED]

I appreciate your willingness to allow me to visit your school campus.

Sincerely yours,

Sherry R. Willis, Principal



Consent Form for Visit to School Campus

___ Sherry R. Willis, a doctoral student at Western Carolina University, has my permission to visit my school campus for the purpose of conducting an interview with [REDACTED] and observing her classroom. This interview is related to Mrs. Willis' study of North Carolina's kindergarten teachers' experiences as they implement developmentally appropriate instructional practices.

I understand that the interview will not disrupt the school's instructional day. I will be informed of the day and time when the interview is scheduled to occur.

___ I do not wish to give permission for Mrs. Willis to visit the school's campus.

Name of School

Principal's Signature

Date

Please return this form to me in the envelope provided by January 5, 2009.

APPENDIX F

Interview Approval Form

Dear _____,

Here is the verbatim transcription of our interview. If you remember, I am studying the experiences of kindergarten teachers in North Carolina. As a Kindergarten Teacher Leader, I know you have a high value for developmentally appropriate practice.

I'm interested in the support you receive as you seek to teach in the way you believe to be best for children. I'm also interested in the challenges you encounter that prevent you from teaching, as you believe to be best. I'm especially interested in how you handle these challenges

Please read through the text of our interview.

Highlight or cross out any information/comments that you do not want me to include.

You are also free to add any information/comments.

I am enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Please mail this document and the cover sheet back to me by August 1st.

I so appreciate your help! Don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions!

Home: [REDACTED]

Cell: [REDACTED]

School: [REDACTED]

Most sincerely,

Sherry R. Willis

COVER SHEET

To: Sherry R. Willis

I am returning the transcription of our interview. I have read this document carefully.

(Check all applicable statements)

The document correctly reflects the interview. I approve your use of the content.

I have crossed out comments that I prefer not to be used.

I have added additional comments/information to the transcript.

I understand that all information provided will be kept highly confidential.

Teacher Signature

Date

APPENDIX G

Sample Interview

Interview with Teacher H
March 6, 2009

"I" represents the interviewer.
"T" represents the teacher.

I: So, just to get started, describe your experience as a kindergarten teacher. What is it like teaching kindergarten?

T: Okay, well, this is my third year of teaching kindergarten after nine years as a pre-kindergarten teacher. I found it to be a tremendous struggle coming from pre-kindergarten where you are mandated to be developmentally appropriate—you are not allowed to do things that are not deemed developmentally appropriate for four year olds—into a kindergarten where developmentally appropriate is a lot thrown out the window or maybe not necessarily known. Um, I got extensive training in the development of children as my college background was child development, family relations, things like that. So I was just a huge advocate for it anyway. And when I came in to kindergarten I realized very few people on the K-6 level acknowledged development or understand development. A lot of them, it is just core academics, do you know what I mean? And so my first year in kindergarten, it was kind of a National Board thing—to leave pre-K and come into kindergarten and figure out why all the kindergarten teachers would say, “I don’t have time for centers. I don’t have time for play in my classroom.” I thought, “How can they not have play? How can they not have time for centers? That’s when you get the meat of your instruction in.”

So, I moved up, with the understanding that I needed to find out why. If I’m going to preach to them about doing it, then I need to find out why they don’t have time and when I came into kindergarten I was AMAZED at what our county puts on kindergarten students. And how the teachers, the kindergarten teachers, they knew in the back of their minds about development, they knew about five old children and what they need. but the county put—I don’t know that they put direct pressure on them—but the county somewhat caused the kindergarten teachers to feel pressure. It was never said, but to do it this specific way, to follow scripted texts that aren’t necessarily developmentally appropriate research based. It is a research-based text, but it is more on the research base of exposure. Their research states if you are exposed to something 100 times then you would probably be successful at it. And to me that’s like beating a dead horse. If you know that their learning style is kinesthetic, then you teach them the kinesthetic way—activities. And you can’t say that, that child who’s not aural, if they hear it 100 times that child is

not going to get it. And my understanding of development shows that, or learning styles, that very few children are aural learners and in the curriculum that our county adopted, it's a completely aural teacher- directed, teacher- centered curriculum. It's not very much child centered at all. They listen and they reiterate and they repeat.

I: What is it that you use?

T: Open Court. And so I'm in the process of trying to—and Open Court is great for first and second and third—but we're not first, we're not second and we're not third. It does somewhat make, it does somewhat present to the children, "Well, I'm going to teach you 1st grade things by just making you say it (snaps fingers) and listen to it 100 times, then you'll get it when you get to first grade." And that goes against my belief in how to teach.

So, I struggled really hard as a kindergarten teacher meeting the requirements of the county, making it child friendly and teaching in a developmentally appropriate way. And I had permission because of Power of K—I applied for that my first year in kindergarten. And that was accepted and our superintendent and my principal were very supportive and excited about it, and I don't think they actually knew what they were signing in that contract that said, "We will support you." And so that gave me the freedom to step away a little bit from the Open Court. I still follow it, but I spend a lot of extra time planning, a lot of extra time creating activities that will give them the same foundation but in a child-friendly way. And it seems to have started to spread.

The Power of K helped me realize not to go to my kindergarten team and say, "We really need to do it this way!" Just slightly show them by the things that are happening in my room. Um, I have noticed that now they have implemented a rest time in their classrooms, which they had let go of. They had taken all their sand, water, play, all their blocks, all their role plays—all centers out of their rooms. There were none when I got to this school. Now, every teacher does have centers. You know what I mean? And it may not be the same kind of center time that I have where it's free choice, child centered, teaching responsibility, learning through play; because I've had so much training in that, but at least it is getting there and it's coming. Um, now that I'm in my third year of kindergarten and I've gotten more understanding of how to make Open Court more appropriate for my teaching style, um, I'm a lot more comfortable and relaxed. I don't feel nearly as stressed.

I noticed that other teachers are starting to use, kindergarten teachers, are starting to use developmentally appropriate language and they are starting to feel supported because, ah, it kind of relieves them to know, "Oh my gosh, even though my kindergarten brain tells me to do it this way, but my county is making me feel like I have to do it this way, it's okay to do what I know is right." I'm starting to see them relax. Like, there was a big misunderstanding that Open Court presents one hundred nine high frequency words to kindergarteners. And they were holding their kindergarteners accountable for a hundred and nine words. And they were not getting a "three" on their report card if they could not read a hundred out of a hundred and nine words by the end of the year. And I, said, "That's not okay for kindergarten." My upper level children can

do it, but my middle to my low children will never get there, no matter how much I do with those words. That is too much for their little kindergarten brains.

I: Um-hmm.

T: So I went and I did some surveys through the county. I did some surveys through Power of K with other counties in the state to find out, "What is everybody else doing?" And my kindergarten teachers, when I came back and reported to them, they were like, "Give me more, give me more information about what others are doing!" Because I feel like this is not okay, but we've been doing it because we thought we had to. We thought we would get in trouble if we didn't. So, next year they have vowed to present thirty-four words and hold them accountable for those. We will continue to present the hundred and nine words to them, and do games with them, because in this school—not like other schools in our county—we do have more upper level students because of our clientele.

I: Um-hmm, um-hmmm.

T: Our clientele, we have a huge middle class to some upper, a larger upper class than the other schools that I've worked in. The other schools that I worked in were very poverty stricken, very low performing. The clientele that you got was a lot different than the clientele here. So I had to kind of change and make myself move up to meet their needs and also meet the needs of some of my lower level students.

I have, as a kindergarten teacher, have struggled with retention. A lot of your first grade teachers will say, "That child is not ready for first grade!" And I say, "That child is not supposed to be ready for first grade—first grade supposed to be ready for the child. Send them back to me and let's do some enrichment. Let them come and play in the kindergarten room for an hour a day if they need some extra letter sounds but let them move up with their peers, let them stay with their peers." In presenting the research of what happens to them—not in elementary school—but in middle school and high school, what our effect, what our choices, how that affects them. And it is starting to catch on. They are starting to notice it more. My principal is starting to speak to them about, when they may argue, "Tell us about the child that was put in first grade."

I: Um-hmm.

T: He is starting to use that language, "Well are you ready for it? Are you ready to get them where they need to be? Are you ready to differentiate your teaching?" Things like that, and so I'm seeing that, um, my quiet influence, and giving the research to back up what I may say or do, is having a big effect on my school.

I: Okay.

T: So, I'm enjoying being a kindergarten teacher more than in the past. The first two years it was a struggle. And. I contemplated leaving it and going back to Pre-K! But now I'm staying and I love it.

I: Um, one thing that you just said interested me. How seriously did you think about leaving kindergarten that first year?

T: Well, the first year that I was in kindergarten, it's funny, because my child was in kindergarten; she wasn't in my room she was in another teacher's room who was willing to work with me, and willing to learn or, or take information that I would give her, she wanted it. But she [daughter] would come home and say, "Mom, I'm so tired! We didn't get to rest today." And their resting was "lay their head on their table for 5 minutes." And my little kindergartener was exhausted. The information that she was getting, she was a high level child, but some of it, I feel like was great for her when she went into first grade. But she would come home and cry and say, "I don't want to go to first grade mama! I'm scared of first grade!" Because you've got a lot of, "You better learn this or you're not going to do good in first grade. You've got to do this because you're getting ready to go to first grade. You can't act like this in first grade." And it was never her, but other children. And she developed this really big fear of first grade from being in kindergarten. There was no play in her room and there was no—it was a fun class, but it wasn't. There was no teaching them how to think. It was, "Just listen, I'm going to present you a lot of information."

So, I stayed because she was in kindergarten. And I don't think I ever seriously thought about quitting the profession, but I seriously thought about going back to a grade that would support me and my developmental practice. And that would support me by the staff development that I, that we, received. It was on developmentally appropriate things and so I thought it was so much easier. And then when I would start thinking about quitting and going back, I would think, "Wait, wait! I'm losing my cause. I'm losing the reason why I went up to kindergarten." I went to kindergarten to make a change. And I went to kindergarten to find out their struggles and see exactly how hard it was. And it is hard to implement play if you're going to cover all of the things that your county expects you to cover—or our county expects us to cover. But, I made it work, and that made me feel successful; and I was determined to stay because it was one of my self-goals.

I: Um-hmm.

T: And I knew the struggle before I went in, I just didn't know this was how it was going to be. Does that make sense?

I: Yes. Talk about that experience you had of—here you've got your set of beliefs and what you think is right for children, and then you hit expectations that go against what you believe in. How did you handle that initially?

T: Um-hmm. It was really hard to handle because I didn't have a lot of experience in kindergarten.

I: Um-hmm.

T: So when I was working with a team who felt differently and taught differently than I did, I second-guessed myself a lot and I thought, "Am I really making the right choice here? Are my children really going to get what they need? Are they really going to be prepared for first grade? Am I harming them by allowing them to play and not sit all day?" Do you know what I mean? "Am I going to make it harder for them in first grade?"

I: Um-hmm.

T: "Are they going to be the child stuck behind the door because they can't sit down at a desk all day?" Then I would have to go back and I would have to stop myself and think, "Yes, yes, you can!" And then there was one day in the Power of K when Lucy said, and this has been my mantra for the rest of my teaching career, and it was my first year of teaching kindergarten, "If there is going to be a famine next year and you know that there is going to be a famine next year, do you starve the children this year to prepare them for it?"

I: Um-hmm.

T: And when I heard that I said, "UHH! That will help me stay!" That will help me not feel self-conscious and that will help me be secure in my decision, be secure in my decisions to know that my children, learning through play, will be successful. This year I did get a compliment from one of the first grade teachers that said, um, "I don't know how she does it, but her children come out of her room knowing more than the others." And I don't teach the way the others teach. And I make my children become thinkers and they are capable of thinking. They are not presented with the same exact things, but they can think.

I: Um-hmm.

T: They learn responsibility for play. There are so many things that they learn about. Developing the whole child, I develop the whole child rather than just the reader or just the mathematician, which causes them to be more successful in their first grade room—which I didn't get that until my third year in kindergarten, that confirmation that what I'm doing is okay.

And I do have a few children who do end up, um, struggling with discipline the first part of first grade, because we do have a lot of movement. We do have a lot of talking. I'm a big language-based classroom. I do not believe in silent learning. I believe that kindergartners need to talk and think and get out their minds what they're thinking, so there's a lot of talking in my room. And in the first grade rooms—the majority of them—there's is no talking; it's a lot of learning and there are times for talking. So from that, when I saw some of my children sitting behind the door, or always holding their head down because they were in trouble, I changed a little bit and said, "Okay boys and girls, we've got to learn 'a time to talk and a time not to.'" But not as much as first grade. Do you know what I mean?

I: Right.

T: So we *gradually* went to the point of: “This is a learning moment, we’ve got to respect our friends. And if you have to say something you have to say it to your hand, or some how or another, respect that they are thinking.” And that’s coming about from me learning the first grade—what happens there. But I didn’t take away from my play, and I didn’t take away from my learning through play.

One thing that I dislike about my kindergarten room that I’m still trying to figure out [is] having such a long group time where they have to sit on the floor and do the Open Court stuff.

I: Um-hmm.

T: And so I’ve been doing more small groups and more moving, more literacy workshops and stations, things like that. But I’m still not happy with having to meet those mandates from the county and do the Open Court script.

I: Do you have an early childhood coordinator or an elementary coordinator?

T: We have an early childhood coordinator and she just deals with pre-K.

I: Oh, okay.

T: She is not involved with kindergarten very much. But, because of my relationship with her from pre-K, and now that I’m a kindergarten teacher, and I am a Power of K teacher, I’m working with her. And I’ve talked to her about [how] us pre-K teachers got so much training. We got to meet with all the pre-K teachers in the county once a month; we got a lot of talking; we learned a lot from each other, this and that. There’s so many kindergarten teachers in our county. We don’t have monthly meetings; we are school-based. And so I talked to her about her and I trying to work through getting more developmentally appropriate training for kindergarten teachers. Getting kindergarten teachers together in a forum is something I would like to try; to do that allows them to talk about their struggles. And all of us get together as a group and say, “We are all struggling with this,” and present that to the county.

I: Um-hmm.

T: And let the county hear our great big kindergarten voice and not let us fall under the first grade. Because they don’t really feel that—I think they realize the importance of kindergarten, but if they are going to sacrifice a grade—our countywide—which grade would they sacrifice? Kindergarten.

And so we need to let them know the importance. And show them research and show them the information of how the children, if they are in a developmentally

appropriate classroom, if they are taught in the correct way that gears towards their learning style that gears toward the best way for a 5 year old to learn, showing the growth that those children get, compared to the ones that are in that scripted text of listening in a teacher centered classroom. And I think if I can get that information to them, that they will believe it but I've got to have it. I've got to have proof. I've got to have numbers. I've got to show that the children from my room are just as prepared for first grade as the children in the more "county expected" room. Um, and to show them the difference. And so, I'm still working on planning on how to get that actually shown.

I: Do you know much about the other kindergarten classes in the county?

T: This is my third year in kindergarten, so I haven't gotten the county to support me in going and observing different rooms. I have had a few principals find out about me and ask if their teachers could come—that was principal level. And that has worked out great and those teachers are really appreciative. But every opportunity that I get to interact with kindergarten teachers—maybe it be a committee member on the pre-K to K transition thing—anything where I get the opportunity to say, "Yeah, yeah I'll do it," and I get to network of kindergarten teachers—I take that. And afterwards I talk, and I ask and I say, "What are some of your struggles? What are some of the things you're seeing?" And I'm seeing that they all kind of feel the same way. Not very many kindergarten teachers in our county like Open Court. A lot of them feel like it is unrealistic to have their children doing a lot of what is asked of them to do.

I: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

T: Most of them understand developmentally appropriate teaching, but are fearful of getting in trouble for doing it. And I found that a lot of it is misinterpretation. I don't think that our county necessarily says, "You have to teach straight by the book."

I: Um-hmm.

T: But we have Open Courts reps come in and say, "Your cards are turned over before January? You mean you're teaching letter sounds before January? No, no, no! That is not what Open Court says!" Well, we finally got an assistant principal at our school that said, "We can please them [Open Court reps] and turn the cards the way they are supposed to be when they come, but as a school, we know it is okay to teach the way we teach."

I: Um-hmm.

T: You know what I mean? And they will tell us, "It's their job to come in. They are paid by Open Court to come in and let you know what you're not doing according to Open Court. Don't take that as the principal or the county—take that as Open Court and it is okay to do it differently." We luckily have a new assistant principal who is putting that out there for us.

I: Um-hmm

T: She is making our other ones feel okay about that. There are other principals or assistant principals who say, "You do exactly what they say, this is what you want." Like, our principal is a middle school principal; he has not had any education in early childhood or K-6, but he is really, he will come down and he will say to me, "XXX, I have a question. I don't understand why —," but he is willing to learn.

I: Okay.

T: But when it comes to him in a principal's meeting making a choice on curriculum, do you know what I mean? Does he have the educated ability to make the best choice? Not necessarily because he's not trained in early education.

I: Um-hmm. How about your assistant principal?

T: This is our first year with her, and I'm not sure what her background is. She seems to be an elementary school person because of the way that she presents stuff to us. She says, "I know that you're good teachers and we see," and it is so nice to have a supportive person like that. "We see the great things that your children are doing. We know that if it is not appropriate that you'll change it." She is planting those little seeds and saying, "Our school is a great school. We can't let the county bring us down."

I: That's powerful.

T: And it is. And our principal is just so supportive. If you ask him to be, and if he knows what he needs to do to be supportive. He is not one that really knows. Like, you know he doesn't know how to help unless he is told. But he will take that advice very quickly. He'll ask for research and things to back it up, which I think is important. He doesn't just fly by the seat of his pants, but he is willing to learn and do. And I think the Power of K has helped him on that. I don't think he would have been as willing without the Power of K and the workshops and the different information that he is getting from that. So I feel like the Power of K has made my life as a kindergarten teacher easier and without it, I don't know if I would have stayed because it gave me the chance to say, "Well, I'm Power of K and I have the superintendent's signature and the principal's signature to support my endeavors."

I: Um-hmm.

T: It gave me that key to do it—to do what I knew was right, and kind of break the rules, you know what I mean?

I: Right.

T: So that helped. Because I think all teachers want to please. Everybody will shut the door and do what they know what's right, but they also want to please their boss and their principal and the grade above them and the grade below them. I don't think there are many teachers that really like to break the rules, do you know what I mean?

I: Um-hmm.

T: Those unspoken rules—and so it is a huge struggle.

I: You mentioned that your system mandates the Open Court for your literacy program. Are there any other mandates that are explicitly or implicitly expected from you in other areas?

T: Uhm, yes. It is very inconsistent in our county. I'm wondering on our central office level, "Where does it come from? Do they communicate with each other?" Like, we had the Open Court adopted for the entire county and it was our county mandate that we all follow it script-wise. They really wanted us to read the script. And I went to our elementary education specialist, the person in charge of elementary education, and I talked to her about it. And I said, "Tell me your reasoning for doing Open Court vs. learning through play. Tell me your reasoning for doing this and doing that." And she touched me on my shoulder and she said, "XXX, we know you're a great teacher, but what about those teacher's who aren't great teachers? That's why we have scripted text." And I said to her, "This is how I feel about that—we have great students and we help them learn and our students who aren't great, we don't bring all our high students and mid students down to their level. We work with them one on one. As a county office, could you work with those teachers one on one and help them become better and not make all the good teachers have to come down to the scripted test level?" She just kind of looked at me like, "That would be too much work." I never got an answer. But it kind of upset me when she said we know you're a good teacher but we do this for the teachers who aren't. And I thought, "How can you stand for that in your county knowing that you have teachers who aren't good teachers?"

I: Um-hmm.

T: You are going to bring everybody else down to their level rather than work one-on-one with them. And I specifically said that to her and I don't know how much we got out of it but I knew her kind of through when I was in pre-K. She knew me, had worked with her a little bit, so I felt comfortable talking with her and telling her how I truly felt. Um, I feel like I got off the question. It undermines the staff that they choose.

I: Um-hmm.

T: It kind of states to us, "We're not confident in you; we don't feel like you can do this without the help of a scripted text."

I: Right.

T: And all the kindergarten teachers that I have talked to said, "Why do we have...?" We've just adopted this new math curriculum through the county, where we found out that we've got to use math books next year—math workbooks—all this stuff! Kindergarten was saying, "What? We like using Math Essentials from the state. We like integrating our math; we like pulling our math activities. They are taking more of our creativity away and giving us more scripted text because of the EOGs. "The children need to be ready for the EOG."

And in this new math curriculum, it has kindergarteners doing multiple-choice questions and picking "a," "b," "c," or "d." And when I asked them about hands-on and they said, "Well, you can add hands-on." And we are thinking, "Well, we're already adding so much to scripted text in the morning and we had the freedom to integrate our math in that and make it fun. Now you're taking that away." And is it necessarily kindergarten that is causing it? What they want is, and I understand this and this is how it's presented to me, they want consistency. They want a child who leaves one school in our county in the middle of year and comes to another school in the county in the middle of the year to be able to flow—that it would be the same. I'm thinking, "It doesn't matter where they go, even if you're in the same curriculum, the same context, the same text. Every classroom is going to be different."

I: Um-hmm.

T: Teachers know how to take that child and get them where every body else is. Teachers know how to, um, move children from where they are to where they want them to be. And they do it individually, and it is just causing more work on us. And I don't think they realize.

I: Which math program is that?

T: I just found out last week and I'm trying to think. It has a lot of open ended questioning; it has them doing higher level thinking; it has them explaining everything that they're doing; thinking about thinking—meta cognition—all these great, great things that you should do, but there again it doesn't allow for multi-level.

I: Did you get any input on selection of the math?

T: Well, um, what they did was they brought a bunch of different math curriculums to—things that we had to choose from and you had these little boxes that you got to go look through. We got to go look and give our input. I don't know if it was truly taken, do you know what I mean? Because all the kindergarten teachers that I know said, "No math curriculum. Please don't order it for us."

I: Um-hmm.

T: And they did and they're mandating it for next year. And the thing that is inconsistent is our county has adopted Open Court but then they also asked us to do NC Reads, which is the state reading training.

I: Um-hmm.

T: It tells a good way to assess, a good way to teach, and a good way to implement reading practice. It does NOT correlate with our Open Court. . The research base in NC Reads is the opposite end of the spectrum of Open Court. So the training that they're giving us is okay, but the curriculum that they are mandating we use is completely—and I'm thinking, "Did one great person in the central office say, 'Oh my gosh, NC Reads is great! Let's do the professional development for that.'" And then did our curriculum specialist say, "Oh, we really like Open Court, let's do that." Did they get together and talk about it? Did they look at NC Reads and say, "This is what the states wants us to do; this is how the states thinks that we should teach. Let's find a curriculum that matches it"? I don't see that. So I'm just wondering, "What is their thought process?" I see a lot of: This department does this; this department does this; and, this department does this. And they never actually talk about it together and see how does it flow together. They do initiate [having] teachers be on the committees. Like, they do ask teachers to volunteer their time over the summer to be on a textbook committee, to review, and this and that. And they take what those teachers say to adopt. But it is a volunteer basis. So are you getting a true outlook from all the teachers? If it's five people, you know what I mean, do they, is that biased? Is it...are they K-6 teachers who've never had any early childhood training, things like that? I've noticed that there is no early childhood training in our staff development for our school.

I: I wondered.

T: No, but once I talked to the pre-K coordinator, she has opened up all of the pre-K staff development to kindergarten teachers. They can come on their own time, which is a FABULOUS, fabulous step to saying, "You know what, kindergarten and pre-K are more related than kindergarten and first." Kindergarten and first are important, we need to know what they're doing, we need to have multi-level cross grade meetings with pre-K, I mean, with kindergarten and first. But I think, as far as staff development, it really should be pre-K and kindergarten to show that these children are still in that very strong, strong developmental stage and we need to know those developmental abilities.

And I found that a lot of the teachers in kindergarten don't know the stages of development. They don't know what comes first and what to expect second in the normal typically developing child. And a lot of them have started, because of my knowledge of development, they've started emailing me, "Oh, I found out so and so about so and so. What's a good way to move them to the next step?" And they are starting to ask me information like that. And I've talked to several teachers who are in kindergarten doing their National Board Certification and they ask me, "How did you learn so much about development? I haven't had any training in development? All I've had is training on instruction." And I thought it was just my individual background, but please come to me

and I can get you the information that you need to learn about development. I can get you to the websites.

I: Did you get your BK certification in North Carolina?

T: Um-hmm. See, I had, through college, I had a K-6 degree but I had a concentration, which is like a minor in child development.

I: Okay.

T: And then in, when I taught, I taught one year in K-6 and accidentally got in pre-K, and there I got my BK certification. But nine years being in pre-K, every bit of my staff development, my professional growth from the county, was developmentally appropriate practice. And that's not what the kindergarten teacher's got. I think to myself, "They got stuck in Donald Grave's writing processes for 4th grade writing workshops because that was what the school had chosen and pre-K didn't have to go to the workshops in their schools. They went to specific pre-K training. And so I am advocating for specific kindergarten training, specific first grade training, and specific second grade training so that grade levels can go to training that is pertinent to their age group.

I: Differentiated?

T: Right and so that is something that I'm fighting for in our county to see if we can get it. We haven't gotten there yet, but we're working on it. Because, um, we need to know what fourth grade writers are expected to do in kindergarten. It is important to know where we are going to go to. But, do we need to spend eight staff development hours learning how to get fourth graders to write correctly or should we spend eight staff development hours learning how to get kindergarteners to begin to write? And like the Power of K, the Talking, Writing, Drawing book that they had, I've been reading that and implementing it in my classroom. And the only curriculum that I had when I first got into kindergarten was Open Court's writing. And it's the writing process basically. And all it does is it tries to make the fourth grade writing process into steps for kindergarteners—where you would spend one week on drafting, one week on pre-writing, one week on writing, and that doesn't develop writers. It does give them a little bit of a foundation for when they get to fourth grade but do they really incorporate it? This that I'm doing, the Talking, Writing and Drawing thing, I'm seeing AMAZING writing coming out of my children. And I'm able to figure out a way to make it appropriate for my children, and to make their writing meaningful to where their brains understand writing—do you know what I mean? And not that it's a task that I'm interested in them doing. Some children didn't, very few of my children, when I was doing the Open Court writing, enjoyed writing. You know what I mean? It was because Mrs. Jones asked them to; it wasn't for their own purpose.

I: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

T: Now, they write a lot more. And I've got children writing books and doing it on their own. In the past they would always do it during my play, they would make their own books and they would do all that stuff, but my curriculum teaching, it was ridiculous. It was a struggle.

I: Um-hmm.

T: So it is nice to have this and I'm really hoping to get to present this to some of the kindergarten teachers in our counties. "Guess what I saw! Look at the samples of what my children are able to do by using this type of writing!" And it supports the writing process in fourth grade, but it does it in a developmentally appropriate way for kindergarten.

I: Do you have someone that has grown to your level that you can work with in doing these presentations or are you still the lone ranger out there?

T: Uh, I'll say that, um, I'm still the lone ranger. The team that I have here, I started out here as a second grade teacher and before school started—like a week before school started—I got moved into kindergarten, which I was extremely happy about.

I: Um-hmm.

T: The second grade team that I started working with for a week, and I found out about them in my first summer here, so we got together and we worked. They were a fabulous team!

I: Um-hmm.

T: They liked to find out what you thought. We all shared ideas; we worked together. The team that I have in kindergarten at this particular school are very independent; they don't like to share ideas; they don't like to change; do you know what I mean? They don't like to take advice. So of course I'm not giving any advice. But through small comments and through things that they've seen my children do, they're saying, "Oh!" That's their, that's their, I'm kind of like their key. Like the Power of K was my key to break the rules. Not break the rules, but kind of go against what the county office, I think, is unaware of what they're mandating. I don't think they quite know the stress they put on the kindergarten children and teachers. And so I was able to step out of that box with support and because I get to step out of the box with support, now my team is beginning to step out of the box with my support, do you know what I mean?

I: More risks?

T: They're taking more risks, yes. And they are willing to put some things down to the kindergarten level and I think their kindergarten brains knew they were supposed to, but they were scared they would get in trouble.

I: Yeah.

T: So as far as, "Do I have a team in this school that supports me or in our county?" Not yet. I'm slowly getting there. Like the teachers who showed interest in coming to observe, those teachers were so excited to see play brought back into the classroom. Those teachers were so excited for me to say, "Its okay for you to do it."

I: Um-hmm.

T: You won't get in trouble with the county. It's a great thing. Our county supports this. And so those teachers are coming around and doing things. So this year I really wanted to start a forum with the county office, but I keep getting doors shut in my face, you know what I mean? I tried last year to start where once a month I could hold meetings, and give out some research and give out information that I'm acquiring from county—from Power of K—and not teach them anything. But, "Let's just talk as kindergarten teachers and find out what our struggles are and how we all go around them." Because I know there's a lot of kindergarten teachers in our county who are just as great and developmentally appropriate as I am, but maybe scared to let it out their door that they're really doing this. I just keep getting the door shut on me for that, I can't get that done.

I: Is it protocol for your system that you would have to organize that through the central office or you're not really free just to send an invite out to them say, "Hey come over to my classroom for some coffee."

T: Well, I think that maybe I could to that. But like last year, I had started—all of the technology information that we get being on the list serve, and it is the same list that our principals and everybody else gets. And plus the stuff that Eva and Amy send us specifically—I asked our central office people—well, I asked my principal and he said I needed to go through so and so. I asked her and you know, I said our county is huge on chain of command. You do not go above and beyond anybody's head and that is an issue. Um, so you have to go to your principal and the principal has to ask the question of the person that you want in the central office, you don't get to ask the question. So there is a lot of "traveling down" of information. Things may get misinterpreted, things may get changed. I can't just go to somebody in the central office and say, "I have this great idea I would like to do." I have to present it to him and he has to present it to them because they want chain of command. Why? I don't know. And we are a big county, so maybe they don't want a huge flux of teachers just coming in and blah, blah, blah blah, blah. But I asked XXX, our curriculum, I mean elementary school curriculum adviser, whatever she is I don't know, if I could start forwarding the list serve and forwarding the great information that I'm getting to all of the kindergarten teachers? Or could I possibly forward it to the principals and the principals give it to their kindergarten teachers? And she said, "Everything that you need to forward has to come to me to be approved first." So, any information that I got, I would have to email it to her, wait for her to email me back, and say, "Yes this is okay." And that was working, but it became so time consuming and so much wait time that—and teaching and doing everything else—that it

just didn't work out as good as I wanted and I still do it, but sometimes it may take a month.

(Male enters the room inquiring about keys).

I: Hello, hello.

T: Hey, I'm good. They did, they did. Oh another thing, I've been moved four times in four years. I've never had a classroom more than one year at this school.

T: So are you looking at my leak, what are you doing?

Male voice—(unintelligible).

T: Oh, oh, well I might have a possible leak right on my electrical box in there.

Male: Roof leak?

T: Maybe.

Male: Oh, I'll get somebody over here to look at. (Male exits classroom).

T: Okay, thank you. Bye.

I: Are there any changes you would like to make?

T: Uh, I don't get to do as much project based learning. I don't get to do as much inquiry-based learning. I don't get to let the children guide what my themes are, you know what I mean?

I: What's the barrier there? What keeps you from being able to do those things?

T: Um, my principal and our central office say that the teachers have to be on the same page.

I: Um, so the teachers have to follow?

T: When I was down in the second grade and I was looking at their curriculum and I thought, "Wow, how disappointing." Because I love being creative and doing—and was basically just told that every week you do the same story—you do this on Monday, this on Tuesday, this on Wednesday, and I thought, "Well, it will be easier to write lesson plans but (voice trails off)."

I: Yeah. So is that system wide or just within your school?

T: System wide. That came down from county office. Even when I was in pre-K, it came down from county office that you don't have to be teaching the same way, but you have to be teaching the same things.

I: So is that managed through like a pacing guide or how?

T: No, we just have to have weekly school-based meetings and our, kind of a pacing guide, but we have weekly meetings where the kindergarten teachers get together and say, "Next week we're going to do circus; next week we're going to bears." And this is something that irritates me is, I'm a thematic teacher; I am inquiry-based teacher; I am "children- guide-my-instruction." So if they are really curious about trees then we may spend a whole week, a whole month, as long as they're going—learning about trees, pulling in stories about trees, pulling in our, I can pull the math curriculum, I can pull the phonics, I can pull the reading instruction—all of it based on their interests.

I: Um-hmm.

T: That is how I like to teach. BUT because we have twins or we have brothers and sisters in different kindergarten classrooms at the same school, you have children who move from different schools, they want all of the teachers and, I can't say all the schools are on the same theme, but they want the teachers on the same theme in the school.

I: Un-huh.

T: And that makes it really hard because Open Court, you have things that last about a month. Then on top of that my kindergarten teachers pull in things that they used to always do. And they were here way before I was and I don't get to change them.

I: Un-huh, un-huh.

T: So I can't necessarily do bears and presidents. Like in Open Court, you do a whole month on red, white and blue. You learn about patriotism, I mean things that are abstract to kindergarteners. But then my kindergarten team is doing, during the time they are using the Open Court theme, also doing irrelevant weekly themes—They're doing bears, they're doing penguins, they're doing, I'm trying to think what other things—bears, penguins, arctic animals, and one more thing. And to me, those things do not tie in at all.

And I'm thinking how can we do an inquiry-based learning activity on two totally different things that make no sense. And really what theirs is-- there is a lot of worksheets, and so what they understand as a theme is, "All of my worksheets are going to have bears on them. All of my worksheets are going to have arctic animals on them. All of my worksheets are going to have penguins." And to me inquiry-based learning is, "Oh, you wonder about a penguin? Well, let's find out more about penguins. Let's get all the books we can get about penguins. Let's learn about penguins. Let's do projects on penguins. Let's read it." You know, let's build the Arctic, and this and that, and it takes

time. And I've had to let go a lot of my inquiry-based learning to keep up with the themes that they're doing. And so, there are some times that I'll say, "You guys, I really can't do this anymore." So I am going to pick this theme because it can kind of be correlated with yours-- like, when they did all the arctic animals, and this and that, I did winter.

I: Oh, yeah, yes.

T: Do you know what I mean? It's kind of it in with what they doing, but I was able to do a whole month's worth of winter to where they would go, and I'm a natural studier. We go outside and we have nature walks and we have a scheduled time for natural learning; every day after lunch is our natural learning time.

I: Um-hmm.

T: We get to walk, we have some really cool things in this school that were started before, like this really cool nature trail that goes through the woods. We go and look into holes in the trees and think about and discuss what could be in the hole, you know what I mean—just that question baseline. And um, that's really hard to stay on track with them and try to do the things that they do. Because I'm not a weekly teacher. I'm "until the children 'kinda' get-burnt-out on it" teacher. That has been one of my struggles is letting go of the way that I teach, that way, to make sure that the twins get the same thing, do you know what I mean?

I: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

T: Like if you have, for awhile there was a twin in one class and a twin in here and they moved, so that kind of took some of the pressure off, but what they want is that mother not to see a huge difference. And I think, again, "If there is a famine next year do you starve them to prepare for the famine?"

I: Right.

T: So I have to stand up for that, but you also have to have a cohesive working environment...grade level... do you know what I mean? So it is kind of, it's tough, it's tough.

I: Do they understand your, I'll use the word sacrifices, to be a team player? Do they understand what you're, what you are giving up?

T: I've tried to explain.

I: Okay.

T: I have talked to them about it. I asked them, I said, "How do ya'll truly get into a theme in a week? How do you end that theme in the week? I'm asking them how do they

do things? And sometimes I'll say, in my, and I try not to ever make them feel like they are not doing it right, I try not to ever make them feel defensive.

I do have to say that two of my three team members are very defensive and are very short, and do not like to change. [They] do not like to share and do not want you to know what they're really doing but will share, you know. Kinda, we think about the themes and this and that but I'll say, "Well, do you have a good idea of how to do so and so?" And they're like "Whoop! I'm not sharing my good ideas with you!" Do you know what I mean? So that makes me share with them more.

I: Um-hmm.

T: It makes me say, "Oh my gosh, guess what I found! Let me get this to you, let me get that to you". My first year here I got really upset about being very shut out, not being part of the team.

I: Um-hmm.

T: So I wrote thank you notes to my team members thanking them for things they really hadn't done.

I: Um-hmm

T: Thank you for being so kind to me. Thank you for giving me all this information.

I: Um-hmm.

T: Thank you for helping me understand the kindergarten of XXX Elementary. Thank you for blah, blah, blah and it did help. I started getting some things like that. And so, um, when I notice that it kind of gets into that, "I'm backing away from you. I'm not a team player," I'll go back to that psychological awareness that I have of saying, "Thank you so much for blah, blah, blah." And sometimes it works and sometimes they look at me like, "She is just crazy!" (LAUGHS).

I: One of the things I wanted to ask about the changes you'd like to make in your classroom, what is the likelihood that you will eventually get to that place where you want to be—incorporating all the project work? Do you see it happening in a year or is it going to take longer than that?

T: Ah, no. I really wanted to implement my project-based learning this year, which my student teacher, XXX, is starting student teaching in January, and so I was kind of, I was kind of nervous about me starting something that I was not completely confident in, um, while she was doing her student teaching.

I: Um-hmm.

T: Would that affect her grade? Would that affect her observations? Would that affect her learning ability in the classroom? But I also thought it is really important for her to learn project-based learning. But I'm not an expert in it yet; can I really teach you if I'm learning myself?

I: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

T: And I think we could learn together. I ended up making the decision to not really start a big part. I was going to start it right before Christmas and then some things happened and we didn't get started. We started but didn't get to actually do the project. We did a lot of brainstorming, a lot of thinking, and a lot of questioning.

I: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

T: Which that is something we do all the time anyway. Any time a question is posed sometimes I will completely let go of all Open Court that day—not telling anybody—but learn from what the children are saying and then pull in what skills I knew had to be presented from Open Court in their interest.

But I've decided she's got two more weeks in here before she goes to another grade and does some more student teaching. And when she leaves is when I'm going to rearrange my schedule a bit, and get it in there, and get it going. Because I still have three good months left, and you can do a great project in three months. I may just have to tell my team—and this is just personality—just tell my team, "Hey you guys, I've got this new thing that I'm trying to learn how to do. I am going to step away for awhile." I don't have that twin in my class anymore. I don't have a parent with another sibling in other kindergarten classes that can that can cause problems with the principal and say, "Why isn't my other child doing the same thing?" And that was the issue—is that parents were causing concern, do you know what I mean? I think it could have been handled differently but I don't know. You know you get those, you get those mandates or things told that you should do, so you try your best to do them and make them work for you.

The other thing is, um, the inquiry-based learning was always big with me, um, even my first two years of kindergarten. This year, for some reason, I don't know if it's the children that have made up this class, they don't inquire as much. And so I've thought about it a lot in the last month or two about, "Is it me? Is it them? What can I do different to make them question and inquire and think and wonder? Have I let go of something that I didn't realize I had let go of?" But I still have time to get that in. And, umm, it just seems like each year it's different—you know what I mean?

I: Right.

T: Each year I focus on something new and keep what I've got, let go of a few things. But some things I've looked at that I've let go, I think, "Ooh, I need to bring that back in." Because now that I'm towards the middle of the year—you know, middle end of the year—I'm seeing I've let go of 'this' and I see that it didn't need to be let go of. Like, my

children used to have their own journals that they kept in their desk and they got to write in it anytime they wanted to. Well this time, we didn't have time to get them made. I didn't have that high school student that came in and made my journals for me. And it was just that I thought, "Well, I'll get to it later. I'll get to it later."

And they have their Talking/Writing Journals that they can use, but I really miss them having their "Thought Journals." I don't give them any guided instruction in those journals; they're theirs. And I think, "I've got to get those journals back." It's not too late. I wish I had done it earlier because before, we had them at the very beginning of the year, and it was a way for them to think about their thinking.

I: Um-hmm.

T: And something else I've let go of that I didn't mean to let go of was at least every afternoon, and this has kind of changed because of our scheduling; our dismissal is now 30 minutes long. We start dismissing at 2:25 and we don't finish dismissing until 2:55 and that is tough. Every day at the end of the day we used to say, "What did you remember about today?" And then towards the middle to the end of the year we talked about "What you learned today," not just remember. And it gets them to thinking about thinking and I can kind of guide them into, "When you were playing in the blocks, what did you learn in the block area?" It was a good thing for people to come in and I would say, "Look, so and so did so and so." Well, because of that dismissal time, I can't get my first busload and my daycare children involved in that. They miss out on it almost every day.

I: Okay.

T: And so, I finally said, "That's not fair," and I just kind of let go of it. And I'm thinking to myself, "Why have I done that? Why let go of that language experience time; that 'them-seeing-me-modeling-writing-time'; that 'me-helping-them-think-about-thinking time.' Why did I let go of that?" So I've told myself I've got to go get that back in. I've just got to figure out a way to do it without taking up so much time. Because when you lose 30 minutes (shrugs).

And my car riders are the last ones and, honestly, I hate to say it this way, but most of your car riders are the ones who the parents spend a lot of extra time with. Your bus riders are the ones that really, I wish they could be left; you know what I mean, not the first ones to go but the last ones to go.

I: Right.

T: So they are the ones that miss out on a lot of really cool conversations and a lot of good extended activities.

I: Take me through a typical day from the time they come in—what is your schedule like?

T: And this is where I'm contemplating some change. When they first come in, um, they do, the only worksheet that they do is in the morning and it is a simple review. Something that they do—maybe practice writing numbers, maybe color a picture using their color words, something like that. Something very simple and that normally is where I step off into my math instruction. I don't use it as my math instruction but it is a thing for them because we have a ten-minute time for them to come in. I would really like for them to come in and be able to play in centers for the first fifteen or twenty minutes but, um, I just kind of went with what the other teachers did.

I: Um-hmm.

T: They copy for the whole school, so you get all these copies and you think, "When am I going to have to use these?" So I thought, "Well, let him have their morning work. That is a good time; everybody can do it. I can kind of individually touch each child while they're working."

My original first year in kindergarten was they got their journals out and they wrote whatever they thought about, drew whatever pictures they wanted to draw. And I got to talk to each child and dictate or help them write whatever was in their journal. It gave them a good feeling of security; they got to get out things that happened that morning—got a lot of thoughts out and it was perfect! I loved it! But when they started copying for me, not me making my own copies, I kept seeing all these trees being murdered and me stacking them up and thinking, "I've got to get these things put out some." Every year there's a lot of copies that I don't use, but I do find things that they can use as a quick repeat and I think to myself, "I'm not starving them to prepare them for the famine, but they do need to learn to work on a piece of paper at their table for first grade.

"

I: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

T: And they like it. They seem to love coming in and finding out what's on their table. We have our centers late in the afternoon—the last hour and a half of the day. Um, but anyway, they would do that until about 8:15 to 8:30 depending on the activity. Sometimes if a child needs a question or thinks about something, we may spend, I may pull a math activity in that I wasn't even aware that would come out. You might just say, "OH, let forget about calendar time, let's dah, dah, dah," depending on what the paper was. So, anyway, they do their morning work. About 8:30 we go to the rug; we do our little calendar time. There's a weather watcher who is in charge of watching the weather. There is a calendar person who gets to manipulate the things on the calendar. I don't like it being a whole group calendar time, but that is kind of what was purchased for me. And that is part of the 'thing' so we kind of make it brief, but we do touch each one of the standards. We do our patterns; we do our estimating; we do our little Good Morning story on the board; this and that. Then after that, we go into our Open Court, which is phonics and reading. There is a language arts piece and a writing piece. And I will pull that in as I can through our play, and through some of our projects. Like, our Circus

Time Board over, there are some masks that I made and they're going to have the masks for the art table. They get to choose whatever they want to make for the art; I don't want it to be a follow-the-directions-thing.

I: Um-hmm.

T: I want it to be artistic. And then we are going to talk about descriptive words and action words. So I've got a few prompts like, "The lion can—. The elephant will—". And the children are going to get to come up with some action words for the animals. And then the clowns—I want them to use descriptive words. We're going to have to talk about that, but that is going to be my language arts rather than doing Open Court language arts where we have a workbook, and they circle the action word and they circle the descriptive word.

I: Okay.

T: Do you know what I mean? And it will be through their art activities.

I: Are they reading those words at this point in time? Do you think they know?

T: Um, well, I have such multi level children. I have some who can write any word that they want to write. Um, I have some who are still writing just beginning sounds and ending sounds, and have some who have no concept of writing and they would be dictating.

I: Okay.

T: But it will be their writing on a word card. Do you know what I mean?

I: Gotcha.

T: If they make an animal or after they make whatever they want to make in the art center, then I would probably pull a few children at a time and say, "Do you want to describe the elephant?" or, "Do you want to tell the action of the elephant?" or, "Do you want to describe what a clown would do?"

I: Can they read the word in the workbook where they have to discriminate between an action word and a describing word?

T: I don't use the workbook

I: Okay.

T: I did try to use them one year and it was just ridiculous and I was wasting so much of my time and their time that I pass that. As a team, our kindergarten team voted not to

purchase the workbooks and we asked for extra copy money to make individual books for the children to take home—get extra copies for them to take home.

I: Um-hmm.

T: I let them write in these books, not those little decodables that they have to read and send back.

I: Un-huh.

T: So we got to do that. I don't know if we'll be able to do that with the math. Like, as the kindergarten team, we always voted not to have a math curriculum, not to have the math workbooks, not to do the Harcourt Math for a while, but we got overturned by the county office on that one. So we don't know that county office is not going to make us have the workbooks next year.

I: Um-hmm.

T: Now whether we use them or not, that is up to us. But, I don't know, I'm not a big fan of workbooks. I'm not a big fan of worksheets, but they do do one worksheet a day. There are some things that they come in, they have all these extra copies made—and when I say 'they' I mean my kindergarten team—of letter sound sheets, where you have different pictures and they have to write the beginning sound or the ending sound.

I: Um-hmm.

T: And I think that's important. Kindergarten needs to know how to write the beginning sounds and ending sounds, things like that. But if it were me and my choice, they would cut out their own pictures; they would write their own beginning sound and ending sounds. It wouldn't be them looking at a picture that I found and then trying to figure out what it was.

I: Um-hmm.

T: It would be a meaningful activity. But because those copies are already made for me, I have to use them. And they may get to turn over on the back and do my activity. "You get to find a picture, draw a picture whatever, and you get to write your own beginning sound and ending sound if you like."

I: Um-hmm.

T: I have some children on those beginning sound papers who, they try to sound out the whole word. I have some children on those beginning sounds—and this is where my children kind of get differentiation—the ones who are ready, they write like 'heart.' I have one table, not one table but I had about six students when heart was one of their words

and they were listening for the “/h/” sound; they wrote h-r-t; some of them wrote h-a-r-t, you know what I mean, it showed they had vowels.

I: Un-huh, un-huh.

T: I had some that just wrote "h-t" because they heard just the beginning sound and ending sound. I had some who were lucky to get the "/h/" sound and I had to make them focus on just 'what sound do you hear at the beginning.' Because they were just learning the beginning sound. But it allows for some differentiation. Um, it helps me be a team player, but in my own way—you know what I mean?

I: Um-hmm.

T: So that my kids were getting something.

I: Okay, so I interrupted. Okay, so they are doing their center work?

T: Okay, I forgot, the schedule. You wanted to know my schedule. In the morning they get to do their little writing work sheet paper or math, there is normally some sort of math activity. Then we go to the rug, do a quick calendar time, some movements, some "Good Morning" songs, some 'I'm glad you're here' and um... then we do our quick phonics, which Open Court suggests forty-five minutes of sitting and working on phonics. I do a very quick introduction, a very quick little game, and then small groups where we split. And so there is a little bit of movement. With twenty-three children, it's hard to find out who knows what, when you have fluent readers and 'don't-even-know-the-alphabet' level children. It is very hard to present them the same information.

I: Um-hmm.

T: So I take out what Open Court would present to all the children for forty-five minutes, and it is somewhat differentiated. It has higher level activities and lower level activities, so I pick what's appropriate for this group, what is appropriate for this group and what is appropriate for this group so that I'm still getting Open Court in there, but I'm doing it in small kind of literacy work stations in a way.

So that happens in the morning, it used to happen that I got my reading—Open Court reading instruction—which is about, I'm trying to think. Open Court suggests with phonics and reading, it was about an hour and forty-five minutes total time. And that considered your warm up, your phonics, your phonetic awareness, your letter sound knowledge—I mean there are all these breakdowns of it.

I: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

T: It is not just one quick little thing. Then reading was to last about thirty to forty-five minutes. When I only had seventeen students my first year of teaching, I could get the phonics and the reading all done in my morning time, which is until 9:45, so that is about

a good hour and fifteen minutes of instructional time. And then they had their little snack and they go to their special classes until 11:00. Then at 11:00 they—in the warm months—they stay outside for a whole thirty minutes; in the cold months they stay outside for fifteen minutes and then we go out another fifteen minutes after lunch. The children of today can't handle cold and hot. When they are cold, "Can't I go inside? I'm freezing!" And when they're hot, they don't want to stay out there.

So to make their play active and not laying under a bench, or sitting on the ground not playing, and I noticed that was happening after about fifteen minutes, we shortened it and gave them two separate play times. And then when they have their full thirty minutes in the morning, our afternoon outside time is "discovery." But when it is FREEZING outside in the morning, I did take away some of my discovery time for just recess—just go play. It is warmer after 12:00 than it is at 10:00 or 11:00.

I: Right.

T: So then, we, used to—and my schedule changes as the children change—after specials when they came back in around 11:30, it was only about twenty minutes of time before lunch. So I did my Talking, Drawing and Writing time. Math is never a one-whole-group time. Like I had an assistant principal last year say, "I really want to come in and see your math time." And I said, "Well, you need to come in all day, because math is integrated throughout the day and all day." When we're walking to the cafeteria we're looking at the trash bags, leaf bags; "Which one has more? Which one has less?" There is a lot of intentional teaching throughout. Going in the bathroom, you know, "We had seven, three went in, how many do we have left?" Number stories—all these real life learning activities that are just kind of integrated in.

So, after our specials and after our recess, we came in and did Talking, Writing and Drawing Journals which was when they got to share, when they got to spend time drawing and writing, when I got to conference with individual children. It was a short amount of time—it worked out great. Then we went to lunch. After lunch, you know, we had about a fifteen minute outside or discovery time depending on the seasons.

I: Um-hmm.

T: It kind of depends on what they're thinking about. Then when we came back in we had about, the beginning of the year we had a thirty-minute rest time, where everybody had to rest with a book or quiet writing or something, but they had to rest. Now, it is the end of the year and we have, "You can choose to get your towel and lay down with your Talking and Writing Journal" and now Talking and Writing Journals—their Writing Journals are more independent. It is during our rest time, "If you feel like you need to sleep you can."

I: Um-hmm.

T: I don't have many who sleep now, so that's kind of why I took that away but I do have several who want to get their towel and just have quiet time and not do anything.

I: Un-huh.

T: I have some who say, "I want something to do, I don't want to just lay there blank." So they get to choose to read or work in their Writing and Drawing Journals. I pull whoever is maybe disruptive or, really I haven't conferenced with them in awhile on their writing—somebody who is ready to start a booklet—I mean a five-page story

I: Un-huh.

T: Um, things like that, that's when I do my conferencing with them, assessment, things like that, but it is just a quiet time and now it lasts about fifteen/twenty minutes instead of thirty. Then after that it is free play centers. And during free play centers they don't just get to go and free play, they have an intentional play goal.

I: Un-huh.

T: "Yesterday I played in role play. I did finish what I was doing, so today I'm going to go to blocks." They have these little sheets that they get to mark, "What did I do today?"

I: Um-hmm.

T: Math, reading, writing, role play, blocks and I told them we can check a lot more than one thing. If you go in blocks and counted your blocks you get to check blocks and math. If you went in role-play and you read a book to the baby doll, then you get to check reading and role-play. They try to see how many things they can check off in a week.

I: Um-hmm.

T: Then they also have journals where they write what did they do during centers, what do they remember about their centers. It teaches the days of the week, and it's that independent writing. But I don't do any direct instruction with them and that is when, um, I get my free play centers—where nobody else in the school does free play centers. They do rotated literacy workshop centers. Do you know what I mean?

I: Um-hmm, okay.

T: And role-play and blocks maybe a part of that but not always.

I: Yes, yes.

T: Now on Fridays, sometimes they will get together; they will get to have a free play center. But most of the time they say they don't have time; that they have too much instruction that they have to do. So that is my day, you know—kind of the beginning of the year and kind of the middle of the year. Now, right now, we have changed. After lunch, I mean, after specials and this just recently changed, has turned into our story time, my reading instruction time. It is only a good twenty-minute time.

I: Um-hmm.

T: And we've moved our Talking, Writing and Drawing Journals to their rest time because they liked it. They kind of chose to put it there.

I: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

T: And that kind of gives me more time to do workshops in the morning. Um, and in my workshops, because we are not a Reading First school, I can incorporate math. I don't have to do just literacy. I don't know if that's going to change because many of the schools in our county are Reading First schools. Our county is a county of, what is the thing when you're not meeting your standards?

I: Oh, needs improvement status?

T: We are a "third year" countywide. Our school is not, our school has met expectations every year; we've never been below. But, according to a lot of the other ones, are Reading First schools and those happen because they are at-risk schools and they haven't met their needs. They mandate only literacy; there is no integration, and that is kind of where Open Court comes from.

I: Um-hmm.

T: And that is why Open Court has been mandated in the county and I think (LAUGHS), "Do they realize what they're doing here?" So that's our day, but one thing I say is, I'm consistent on my schedule daily, but I'm also willing to change my schedule to meet the needs of my changing children.

I: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

T: Um, so we've changed our reading time to after lunch. Used to, in the morning it was a chance to preview and plan, you know, they had their journals they could write in, and I kind of prompted them, "Write down anything you thought about this morning or anything you need to put in there. But how about 'Lets make a plan for the day'. What do you think you are going to do today? What would you like to do today?" And that kind of guided my instruction and I've kind of let that go. But I'm thinking about kind of restructuring our day a little bit to give them that work sheet in the morning to meet the needs of the other teachers. Also, giving them a good ten minutes to work in their journals, their independent journals, not me prompting them on anything and hoping that three months of that, compared to a whole year of that with my other students—this is the first year that my class hasn't had it—hoping that they can still get what the other students got out of it and I think they can.

I: Yeah.

T: It's just I won't see the growth of their writing from the beginning to the end. That was the one good thing that I liked about the journals.

I: You talked about you got some assessment done. What type of assessments are you held accountable for?

T: We have to do TPRI (Texas Primary Reading Inventory) three times a year. We used to do running records, which I really liked because that identified some of their misconceptions. It wasn't that great for kindergarten because it only assessed reading ability. If they were a non-reader then you didn't test.

I: Right.

T: TPRI kind of gives you phonics ability.

I: Is this the Texas, thing out of Texas?

T: Um-hmm. It doesn't give you any reading abilities. It tells me, can they recognize the letters of the alphabet? But it has capital and lower case letters together. And the research that I believe in is, and this is logical to me, children see in reading mostly lowercase letters, so if that capital letter is beside that lower case letter, do they really know the lower case letter. Does that help me? Not really.

I: It is presented like?

T: Capital A and lowercase a are side by side.

I: Ah.

T: And that on TPRI is "Yes they know A" or "No they don't know A."

I: Oh, okay.

T: Do you know what I mean?

I: Un-huh.

T: So I use TPRI as a mandate from the county, but I also pull my children separate, above and beyond and say, "Let's find out what letters you do and don't know." You see them get nervous and I say, "Oh no, no, this is not to find out what you don't know. This is to find out what I need to help you learn."

I: Um-hmm.

T: "This is for you and I to find out what are you going to focus on next week." When it comes to some of the freedoms I have is, is I have a high school student who comes in and works every day with my children. So she pulls certain ones and I tell her, "These are the letters that they consistently know. Put out these cards and let them pick two letters that they don't know and tell them they are going to learn two letters they don't know."

I: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

T: "It's not you choosing what they're going to learn." They can learn two different letters and you're going to do the same activities this and that. They have their own little journals to write about what they found out about those letters. It is very 'discovery' and these are the children that I think need that ownership to learn it. Whereas in Open Court, the way I have to present it, and this is one where we all have to be on the same page, we all have to be learning "F" the same day. We all have to be learning "P" the same day. We all have to be learning "E" the same day.

I: Regardless if they already know it?

T: Regardless, oh yes. And see, I have some students who were fluent readers when they came in and they're having to go back through letter sounds. But I made a mistake my first year of teaching. I had a fluent reader. He was a high level reader who was reading on a 3rd grade level when he came into kindergarten. But he was one of those self-taught readers and I didn't make him participate in my higher group activities. When I started, I would give him his own projects to do, things like that. And I found out that there were a lot of holes that he had, because he basically learned to read because he was read to all the time. He knew what should be next.

I: Um-hmm.

T: He recognized so many words by sight. He learned by reading the whole language, but he didn't understand very much phonics. So when he got in first grade there were a lot of holes and he had a lot of problems breaking down sounds, blends, and diagraphs. So I said, "Okay, I don't need to let my higher level students, um, just kind of be on their own and do all their discovery learning. I need to find out what misconceptions they've developed through not having a structured curriculum." So I involve them in it and find out and kind of let them guide what's happening next. But I also have to pull in that Open Court and make sure that I get them, make sure that they have the ability to blend words, to blend phonemes, to blend, you know to understand the phonics as well as the whole language. Open Court doesn't do any whole language, just the opposite.

I: So do they have a certain form that you have to complete and turn in to the Open Court supervisors?

T: No we have Open Court people who come and observe us and give a grade to our principal that says, "Yes they are a good Open Court teacher. No they are not a good Open Court teacher." And our principal will get chewed by them, by the county office when that report is submitted to our county office that says, "You mean your teachers have already turned their cards and the Open Court system says they shouldn't?"

I: What does that mean?

T: And when I say turn your cards,

I: Yeah, what does that mean?

T: These are our letter cards and notice, this is the thing that irritates me; "N" is a horse but when you present it, it is Norman Newsom's Nose. That doesn't look like a horse's nose to a child who is not an aural learner and really doesn't focus on me saying, "Norman Newsom's nose." He looks at it and he says, "Horse." "N" says /h/. On our "H" is a dog. But the way we present this long story, "Harry the Hound Dog hurries around, this is his hurrying sound, "/h/-/h/-/h/". Do you know what I mean? But to that child who really doesn't hear that poem that I say and see the poem that I touch, he sees a dog.

I: (LAUGHS)

T: That is a misconception. Our "C" and our "K" cards—it is, "Carlos' camera goes click, click, click." It is the same picture and it is the same story for the "C" and the "K". I will bring in my own thing that says, "C is a copy cat, it copies the 'K' or the 'S.'" But in Open Court they don't get to learn that "C" makes the "S" sound until first grade. But they do learn that "Y" sometimes says "I." And I'm thinking, "Why do I get to tell them that, but I don't get to tell them that "C" sometimes says "S"?" And we haven't taught the "E" sound yet, the "K" sound yet, the "Q" sound yet—any cards that don't have the picture turned over means Open Court has not introduced that sound.

I: Okay.

T: Open Court does not introduce SOUNDS until January. We spend the whole first of the year learning letter shapes, the way they look. I have readers, fluent readers who need a lot more than that. So we have to pull in things, do you know what I mean? That's where the things that the teachers use weekly, that is where they pull in their books that we make and their worksheets that they use.

Um, and so the Open Court person comes in and sees—okay she "got" the teacher next door because she—you know like these little letter cards that you have, that has a little dotted line where you write your "W", it might have a wagon—she had them stuck to the bottom of her cards and the Open Court person came in and said, "What is this? This isn't supposed to be with our cards. This doesn't go with Open Court. This is going to confuse them because Norman Newsom's nose should not be a nest!" And I'm thinking, you know it is the best thing in the word for those children, do you know what I mean.

I: Yeah.

T: What happens is the Open Court reps come and observe all the teachers. They send a report to the principal and they send a report to the superintendent. Then at the principals' meeting, the superintendent stands up and says, "XXX Elementary got a blah-blah-blah score; XXX got a blah-blah-blah score. Blank-blank got a blah-blah-blah score." So your principals who aren't really sure about that—your principals who don't

know that much about early education—are going to come back and say, "You better do what that Open Court says. I don't want my name 'Mud' at the principals' meeting." Do you know what I mean? And then your principal who says, "You need to do the best you can. I don't care what they said. It is okay." It all depends on the principal.

I: Yeah.

T: Do you know what I mean?

I: He is willing to take that criticism?

T: And let it just slide. So, you know what I mean, that, that is what it is. And in my opinion, you should teach letter names and letter sounds at the same time because two of my lowest students, one of them has associated every letter with a sound, one of them has associated every letter with a shape. And when I say shape, I mean the form of the letter goes like this. And these are two children who are late developers. They don't know all their letter names. They don't know all their letter sounds. They're, I get a lot of hands-on time with them. Me myself. If I'm going to give one group five, one group ten, one group fifteen, that group might get fifteen extra hands on activities. One of the children says, "Oh, that's Leah's name, /l/—Leah; that's Matthew's name, /m/—Matthew." He can tell me every sound and who to connect it with, but he can't tell me that's an "M." Where the other child says, "M" and I say, "What sound does 'M' make?" So that tells me as a knowledgeable person—common sense—letter names and letter sounds should go together multiple times. Because children learn in different ways. No child learns in the same way. And for my children who are fluent readers, why am I spinning their wheels? And they're going, "Please turn another card over! We want to see the picture on the "E"! Can we turn the "E"?" So it is just a struggle. Do you get your principal in trouble? What do you do? So when our Open Court rep comes, we try to fix things to make it look like we do it exactly like they should, so that our principal won't get in trouble.

I: Is it a scheduled visit?

T: Um-hmm. We do know when they're coming. And I agree with some of the things in Open Court; some of them, I don't. But they want consistency; they want us to teach these same cards because when they get in first grade these are the cards that are going to be on the wall. When they get in second grade, these are the cards that are going to be on the wall. Now, first and second grade they learn diagraphs, they're learning blends, they're learning things where these pictures maybe a little more appropriate for them, do you know what I mean? But in kindergarten, when you're just learning some of these sounds, there are a lot of misconceptions that can be developed. And that can stay developed if you're not a good teacher and catch them. Do you know what I mean?

I: Um-hmm. I was looking at your word wall. It is okay to put the words up there that begin with those letters even if the cards haven't been turned over?

T: Yeah, because see, this is the thing I don't understand. Open Court is teaching guided reading with small decodable books and sight words, but you are not learning letter sounds. And at the beginning of the year, I'm teaching sight words. "This is the word 'my.' M-y spells 'my.' Now put your finger on each word." And print concepts—I think print concepts are important. Yes, they need to know that. That's kind of a whole language thing, but it is really phonics. But we're not teaching any letter sounds.

I: Do you do that anyway?

T: I just don't turn my cards over. I used to teach using the Leap Frog curriculum. Do you see the "S" poster? "S is for sailing/Surfing the seas/Sand in my toes/Sunshine on me." So, when I teach the letter name shape through Open Court, I'll pull in my old Leap Frog thing and we talk about, /s/—'S'. Let's find all the letters that make the /s/ sound." But I just haven't taught the sound story of the card.

I: Okay.

T: So, it's weird. And you see all those words? They drive me crazy. This school presents five words per week for kindergarteners to know how to read by sight. And I look at [the words]: upon, about, think, our, myself and I think to myself, "Those are great for my high level students, but why am I presenting these to my mid to low level students? Why wouldn't I be presenting those first twenty-five to thirty words that are important, that you see often?"

I: Um-hmm.

T: "Upon" is not a word you see often.

I: Is that part of Open Court or is that a different thing?

T: Well, we found out there was kind of a miscommunication. There is a list of one hundred nine words in the back of the Open Court book. And that is where these kindergarten teachers said, "We need to get all these words. We've got to get all these words. They've got to know all these words before they get in first grade. That's what first grade wants. They want them to know these words." Then I contacted the Open Court people and I said, "What is expected of a kindergarten teacher? Is it to present all one hundred nine words or is it just to present the words that are introduced in our decodables—which are those little mini books?" They [mini-books] present one word a week, which I think is more appropriate.

I: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

T: I don't mind sending home three to five words—three at the beginning of the year, maybe five at the end—for them to play games with their parents. GREAT! But as far as trying to teach five words in a week for them to pick out of a book, you know what I mean, during reading? That's tough. That's hard.

I: Yeah.

T: I mean, we do things like, we do movement like they have to clap it, N-O spells no!" Or they have to stamp it—N-O spells no, you know, those little things.

I: Um-hmm, um-hmm.

T: The thing I don't like about Open Court is it's one mindset—all children learn this one research based way. It doesn't present multiple learning styles. It doesn't do that. But we are going to get there. I did find out that there is a curriculum that XXX County uses, and see, we've always kind of copied XXX County. They used to do Open Court. But now SRA, the people who developed Open Court, also has this thing called "Imagine It." And it uses the same letter cards but it is more open- ended inquiry-based, fun learning. They have "Morning Story" and they integrate their calendar math. But because our county has Reading First schools, I think that is the reason why they wouldn't allow the math. But I'm trying really hard to pilot that curriculum and say, "Okay, we're going to meet your standards of the children learning the same thing that will flow into first grade, but at a more appropriate level." So they sent me the third grade thing, and I had to send it back and say, "No, that's not what I wanted. I need the kindergarten one."

I: Yeah.

T: I have asked them. I would like to pilot the program to see." I'm hitting a lot of walls on that, but I'm trying." I do have a literacy coach who is very excited about the Power of K.

I: Is that here within your school?

T: Um-hmm, we just got her last year, part of last year.

I: Okay.

T: And that was when we merged. The school that we merged with was a Reading First school, which meant they got a lot of money. And they got a literacy coach who does a lot of staff development, a lot of training with the children, things like that. She doesn't have her hands on any of the children but she trains the teachers.

I: Okay.

T: That is what it is supposed to be. So now we have her two days a week. But she is not really doing any training with us; I don't really know what she does. She comes in and meets with us sometimes.

I: Do you have a teacher assistant?

T: I do.

I: Is it for the entire day?

T: I do. We are lucky. We have full kindergarten teacher assistants. There are some schools—and that is a school-based choice—that their teacher assistants are pulled. The school that I used to work with, I was in Pre-K and I was the only teacher who had a full-time assistant. Kindergarten teachers' assistants got pulled at least two hours a day to help with fourth and fifth grade, and so they didn't have full time assistants. But our school does and we're lucky. Second grade has to share assistants. The other school that I worked at, second grade had no assistants; maybe forty-five minutes a week, they would get an assistant. So, we are lucky in that sense. The teacher assistant that I have worked in Pre-K for a while so she has an understanding of learning through play. I am struggling with some issues of inappropriate language, of inappropriate interactions.

I: Oh.

T: Is it okay to yell at a child?

I: Oh.

T: Do I have an assistant who does that sometimes when I'm not in the room? Yes.

I: What do you do about that? How do you handle that?

T: That has been one of my big, big struggles. I like the fact that she knows how to interact with children during centers. The first assistant that I had, I do think she asked to leave because she didn't understand learning through play. It was very chaotic to her. She was always the first or second grade assistant and all the children were always doing the same thing; they were always this and that; it was very systematic and her being able to let go of the systematic, I think was extremely hard. And so she went to 1st grade. And she is very happy there. She was a wonderful assistant. I loved her but I think she just didn't understand.

I: Wasn't a match.

T: This one, she, I love her. She completely understands learning through play. She knows how to walk up to a child and prompt them and get more. She knows how to spark the learning and talking and then walk away. She knows how to see a child who might be wondering around or not very active and say, "Come sit down and play this game with me." And she kind of knows where they are and how to move them, and knows what game to actually pull. That is my favorite thing. But as far as behavior with the children, I don't like that.

I: Is she older?

T: She is. She's older. She hasn't been in education—I'm not sure how long she's been in education. I know she worked in business for a while and she wasn't always an assistant.

I: Um-hmm.

T: She loves and cares about them, but I do see that my children are sometimes fearful of her. And that is not the message that I'm trying to create.

I: Right.

T: This is her second year with me and so I praise. I kind of treat her just like I do my children when I catch her doing good. I praise and praise and praise and say, "AH! That is exactly what we need in this room when we talk so quietly." And tell them what a great job they're doing.

I: Right.

T: Sometimes when I have a severe discipline problem, I talk to her about developing a special relationship with that child. Like, she has one child who comes in angry every day. We don't know what is going on but he is very angry and he gets irritated and frustrated. He has a very hard time being part of a group.

I: Un-huh.

T: So whenever she sees him start to get upset, she holds up her two little pinkies. Every morning when she sees him when he gets out of the car they do a pinky promise and they shake pinkies. So then he'll look at her and he'll smile and he'll try to change back.

But then there are sometimes when she's just not in a great mood and her leg hurts. She has some health issues. She'll be short and rebuff them and it is hard to deal with that. You have a cohesive working environment; you never want to get somebody on the defensive. You never want to tell them that they're not doing their best. So I have a hard time.

I: Yes. Well, Teacher H, I have so enjoyed this opportunity to visit and talk and hear about the good things going on. Good luck with this idea of bringing the kindergarten teachers together.

T: I've never really felt like I was that great. I always felt like I was just teaching. I was segregated for nine years. I was off campus, in a room with one other teacher in my building. So I taught myself basically, with all of my staff development there—great staff development there. When I came here I didn't realize, I never felt like a great teacher, you know what I mean? And this is my first year having a student teacher.

I: Um-hmm.

T: And she says, "Oh my gosh, I've learned so much from you!" She is building up my head like a balloon! And it makes me feel really good about the choices that I make, that I second-guess a lot.

I: Good! Well, thank you very much. It has been a joy to be here.

T: You're welcome. I will walk you down.

APPENDIX H

Interview Summaries

Teacher A

Teacher A first taught pre-K out-of-state-in what she terms an "ivory tower" environment. The school was a university-affiliated childcare center, accredited by NAEYC. Teacher A taught kindergarten and then pre-K before going back to graduate school. Teacher A considers that eighteen of her twenty years in kindergarten have been wonderful. Her past two years in North Carolina presented challenges.

Teacher A has a strong passion for teaching kindergarten. She feels her teaching practices—being developmentally appropriate—make a positive difference for children.

Teacher A has a very supportive principal during her first three years at her school. This principal had been a former kindergarten teacher. The principal could answer questions related to best teaching practices for young children. Her new principal, a former elementary teacher, does not offer the same level of support. Teacher A believes that her administrator has limited knowledge about how young children learn. She felt freer to tweak the system's developmentally inappropriate expectations under the leadership of her former principal who understood the need to do so.

Teacher A says that some days she cries in response to her system's inappropriate expectations for teaching and for young children. Other days she just goes about teaching, quietly doing what she believes is right in direct opposition to what she is being asked to do. Teacher A said she follows the sequence of skills outlined in the basal that she is required to teach, but uses her own creativity in how she teaches—she does not follow the suggested activities like worksheets. She worked to make instruction developmentally appropriate.

Teacher A wants feedback and support from her principal. She wants to feel needed and valued as at teacher. She gets part of that need filled by being a Kindergarten Teacher Leader in the Power of K group. Teacher A believes that Power of K has empowered her to stand up for what she believes is best for children. It has allowed her to create a microcosm within her classroom where she can do what is right for children.

Teacher A has only one team member who shares her passion for developmentally appropriate practice. Teacher A's reports that her other kindergarten colleagues do not implement developmentally appropriate practices—they teach to the middle. Teacher manuals are followed to the letter with skills being taught in isolation. She wants to have a stronger cohesive team that is on the same philosophical page. Teacher A feels one of her strengths is her background knowledge of child development. She believes it to be an important part of being a successful teacher.

Teacher B

Teacher B has been teaching kindergarten at her school for eight years. When she came to the school she observed that the kindergarten classrooms there were not as developmentally appropriate as she believed they should be operated. But as a new teacher, she reports that she fell into doing what the other teachers did. Teacher B says she really did not have the confidence to articulate what she was feeling. She just followed their lead. She did know that what she was doing was not best practice for children, so she went back to school earning her masters in Birth-to-Kindergarten. She found her roots as teacher with strong beliefs about teaching kindergarten in a developmentally appropriate way. She became better at being able to say why she used this approach. Near the end of her Master's program, she met the leaders at NCDPI who initiated the Power of Kindergarten movement. She was actually contemplating leaving teaching at that point in time. She feels that Power of K fed her professionally. She now loves teaching kindergarten.

Teacher B thinks the new Power of Kindergarten position statement on developmentally appropriate practice is important in emphasizing the balance allowing for both teacher and child learning choices that should be evident in kindergarten classrooms.

With regards to her kindergarten team members, Teacher B feels she is alone in her knowledge and use of developmentally appropriate practices. Teacher B believes that teachers do not implement her teaching approach due to lack of knowledge and training. Because of the differences in the professional needs of first year teachers and veteran teachers, Teacher B relishes the idea of differentiated professional development. She also believes that professional development needs to be aligned to grade level needs. Teacher B wishes there were someone else in building that was on her same journey so that they could learn and support each other.

Teacher B feels that when administrators come into her classroom, they observe good practices being used, even though it is different from what is observed in the other classrooms. She has never felt that an administrator disapproved of her teaching style. Teacher B reports that student results are very good and relationships with students and their families are very positive. She gets the sense that her administrators trust that she knows what she is doing so that they do not interfere.

However, Teacher B feels passively supported by the administration. Teacher B feels this "hands-off approach" is not really helpful to her. Teacher B prefers that they be more knowledgeable about young children and more actively involved so as to be able to offer her suggestions for professional growth.

Teacher B reports feeling the pressure to be doing more paper pencil activities to help transition the kindergartners into first grade. Some of that pressure, she thinks, is self-imposed because she knows what awaits her children in first grade. She feels that it is necessary to give the children some first grade "survival skills."

Teacher C

Teacher C has less than twenty children in her classroom. Her school is located in a high poverty area and serves children of poverty. Many of the parents have lost their jobs. Teacher C likes the school and the children she serves. She considers them to be very mannerly and likes that the children show their appreciation.

Years ago, Teacher C's school was well known for its developmentally appropriate approach to teaching young children. The teachers were strong in implementing a developmentally appropriate kindergarten program. But these teachers moved on, leaving the school with teachers inexperienced with DAP. . As new teachers were hired, the concept and emphasis on developmentally appropriate practice eventually diminished. Teacher C knew what they were doing were not the right things for children but she didn't have the guidance or knowledge to know how to fix it. She was miserable and she felt the children were miserable. She was so unhappy that she thought about leaving the classroom. That was when she received the information about applying to be a Kindergarten Teacher Leader. She jumped at that chance and was selected to participate.

Teacher C reports that Power of K has empowered her. She is better able to define and defend her instructional practices to others. She has learned that mandates that were supposed to have come from Raleigh, in fact, did not. They came instead from her local administration. She knows now that DPI supports and encourages developmentally appropriate practice. Teacher C believes her central office focuses mainly on test scores. She does receive strong support from her principal, a former kindergarten teacher.

When Teacher C's system adopted a guided reading program, much time and professional development were aimed at introducing this approach to teachers. Centers such as blocks and housekeeping were no longer used in kindergarten so as to make time for doing guided reading groups. She began to feel the effects of a heavy emphasis on academics. Teacher C still feels pressure to get the children ready for first grade—to have them reading at Level 4. She feels that the first grade teachers do not appreciate the hard work that she does as a kindergarten teacher. The children come to her with limited experience and with many problems. She feels like the first grade teachers look down on kindergarten, saying, "All they do is play." "Play" is not a dirty word, in her opinion.

Teacher C feels very frustrated by the other kindergarten teachers' practices and their resistance to developmentally appropriate practice. . She reported feeling rejected and lonely. So she leaves them alone.

Teacher C also attributes her team members' hesitancy to use DAP to fear and to their choosing to take the easy path. "It's easy to do a worksheet and keep them quiet." This [approach] is so hard and costly. Teacher C explained the extensive planning she does to differentiate and engage the students. "It is a LOT of work."

Teacher D

Teacher D has always wanted to be a teacher since she was a little girl lining up a classroom of dolls to teach. Teacher D did her student teaching in kindergarten with a master teacher who served as a strong model. This teacher encouraged her and helped her hone her skills as a teacher. She has been teaching kindergarten at the same school for 15 years.

Her school serves a very affluent population of children. There is little diversity at the school in terms of students. White students make up 90% of the school. There are only 1% of the students on free lunch. Test scores are very high. Teacher D reports having a great relationship with the parents and staff. Her principal, who has served the school for eight years, is a former PE teacher and is highly supportive. She demonstrates a high level of trust for Teacher D. Her principal doesn't question anything Teacher D does for the children. Teacher D also enjoys a very close working relationship with her teacher assistant. They are on the same page philosophically.

On reflecting about her kindergarten teaching experience, Teacher D notes that today's curriculum is totally different from when she first began her teaching career. She taught first grade for two years earlier in her career. She feels that the curriculum currently being taught in kindergarten is more rigorous than the first grade curriculum she taught those years ago.

Teacher D struggles with her system's extremely high academic expectations for kindergartners. Kindergartners are expected to be reading at Level 3 to be considered on grade level. Expectations had previously been as high as Levels 5 and 6.

Challenged by her system's expectations, Teacher D talks about feeling "in the middle of the road" because the system administration keeps telling teachers that the students should be doing "this" or "that" when she knows the children are not ready. No Child Left Behind, in her opinion, drives the system's expectations. Teacher D feels like she is up against a brick wall because no one listens. She thinks it is important to stand firm for how she teaches. She thinks teachers must be able to explain why they do what they do.

Teacher D explains that she deals with system expectations/mandates by trying to figure out a way to create a balance—how to make it fit; and how to do it in a different way. Teacher D, fortunately, has capable parent volunteers who come in and work with groups of students on readiness skills.

Power of K has been very meaningful to Teacher D. She enjoys being with other teachers who share the same beliefs. She feels rejuvenated after attending each session. POK affirms the way she thinks and what she has been doing all these years.

Teacher E

Teacher E thinks that being a teacher in her system is like being a child in a household with two parents having two different approaches to discipline. One person says one thing; another person says another thing. She is concerned about the lack of continuity and resistance to change. Teacher E believes that so much has been learned in the past forty years about educating students and that teaching practices should reflect the new knowledge. She thinks about quitting every day.

She feels strongly that administrators from the state level to the local principal should take time to be in classrooms to learn what is going on and to see what children are doing. Teacher E believes there is a strong correlation between the visibility of the administration and student achievement.

Teacher E believes that the ability to implement developmentally appropriate practice in her system is dependent upon who is in charge of what, on what day. She has had experiences where those people who have power to make curriculum decisions have not made wise decisions, wasting a lot of her time in professional development sessions that could have been better used. Teacher E wants the professional development sessions she attends to be relevant to her needs and certainly to her grade level.

Teacher E is very outspoken about what she believes is right for children and for teachers. She does not hesitate to confront those who try to recommend practices or programs that, in her opinion, are weak and/or not appropriate for children. It was during the adoption process of a new math program that Teacher E expressed grave concerns about one particular program that her school was piloting. It was a scripted program including workbooks and worksheets. She felt it taught to the middle with no differentiation for the lower or higher level students. She and others believed the kindergarten version of the math program had major flaws. Their concerns were listed and given to the administration as had been requested. After extensive time spent in meetings, the system announced it would be adopting the math program they piloted. Nothing was ever suggested to improve the weaknesses identified. Teacher E's morale dropped. She felt as if her opinions were not appreciated and that she is not supported.

Teacher E teaches with three other kindergarten teachers. There is a real hesitancy for them to become excited about a developmental approach to teaching. Teacher E believes the resistance is there because they do not want to change. They want someone to direct their teaching—to tell them exactly what to do. Teacher E reports feeling lonely and bored as a member of her kindergarten team.

Teacher E believes that developmentally appropriate practice used in a consistent intense manner results in children acquiring a love for learning and a high level of success. She believes that her participation in Power of Kindergarten allows her to teach in the way she does.

Teacher F

Teacher F, an eighteen-year veteran teacher, works in a school serving a very affluent community. She works with five other kindergarten teachers who share Teacher F's philosophy about developmentally appropriate practice. Two members of the team have their Birth to Kindergarten license; the other teachers have early childhood teaching experience. Teacher F reports that her principal is highly supportive of her teaching practices. The principal taught in grades K-3 before becoming an administrator. The principal believes in a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching young children. Teacher F believes she is teaching in an ideal situation.

The system in which Teacher F works sets high expectations for its teachers. Teacher F believes that the system does ask kindergarten teachers to do things that are not developmentally appropriate for children. She keeps working to be developmentally appropriate despite these expectations. She engages children in conversations, plans active learning experiences, and teaches children “intentionally” as they work in centers. Teacher F is pleased that she has been able to implement free choice centers as best practice. She wants students to become independent. Students choose where they want to work and with whom they want to work. She considers free choice centers to be a crucial part of her instructional day.

Parents in the area have high expectation for their children. Teacher F reports that most of her children come to school knowing their alphabet letters and a few come in already reading. Having highly educated backgrounds, the parents want their children to be reading in kindergarten—even at a first grade level. Teacher F works to reassure parents that their child’s instructional needs will be met. During the school's annual Open House event, Teacher F distributes information about the classroom to the parents to help them understand her philosophy and rationale for her teaching approach. She explains to parents the active learning experiences that go on in the classroom, and that most of the learning is more process-oriented and not product-oriented.

Mrs. F’s kindergarten team recently met with Pre-K teachers from feeder pre-schools. Teacher F shared their expectations for incoming kindergartners and how the kindergarten program was designed. Rumors about what was happening in kindergarten had reached the Pre-K teachers, causing concern. These veteran Pre-K teachers were very happy to hear that the expectations and the program itself were actually very developmentally appropriate.

Teacher F believes that the Power of Kindergarten has helped her tremendously in improving her professional practice. She now feels more confident to stand up and say, "This is what the state says we should be doing." Even though she has always tried to teach in a developmentally appropriate way, having that POK Position Statement behind her makes her feel like she can boldly say, "I am doing the right thing."

Teacher G

Teacher G began teaching kindergarten in a school rich in resources. The school's PTA budget was close to one hundred thousand dollars a year. The PTA gave teachers discretionary money to use in their classrooms. She remembers getting about six hundred dollars a year to purchase whatever was needed to support instruction. That amount did eventually decrease to about two hundred dollars a year.

After teaching eighteen years in that school, Teacher G's family moved to a very different area of North Carolina. Teacher G's current school is located in a rural farming community. Many of her children live in one-parent homes, or are being raised by grandparents. Over sixty-five percent of the parents do not have a high school education. Ninety-four percent of the children in her school participate in the free lunch program. The school's test scores are low, as is the rate of parent involvement.

The culture of the area is very different from the area served by Teacher G's previous school. She reports being horrified by a school letter she was to distribute to parents at the first conference. The letter asked parents to give the school permission to administer corporal punishment if needed. Teacher G was quick to tell parents of the children in classroom that she would not be doing that.

Teacher G has found that her school has limited instructional supplies. She usually spends personal money to buy basic supplies such as pencils, sentence strips, and paint. This year, for the first time, teachers were asked what kinds of supplies they needed. The school purchased pencils and crayons.

Teacher G has a strong belief in a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching. However, she has faced a number of challenges during the school year, which have served to diminish her passion for teaching. She is "not where she wants to be" as far as implementing developmentally appropriate practices for her children due to parameters that have been established by her school system. She feels much pressure related to her system's focus on test scores and accountability.

The main challenge Teacher G faces this year is the requirement to follow a basal literacy program exactly as it is scripted. The system is requiring the fidelity in order to determine whether or not the program works for the population of students served by the school. Teacher G is very torn about this mandate. Though there are some good things in the program, she believes the methodology is not developmentally appropriate for the children. Teacher G thinks if she tweaks the program and the students do well, there might be the assumption that the program works. If she follows the program as designed, she says, "It kills me."

Teacher G has enjoyed participating in Power of K. She is glad to know there is a group of people who understand young children. She is extremely glad to be part of the group that might have the voice to change things.

Teacher H

Teacher H teaches in a school that serves a large middle class socio-economic group of students. The majority of the students are white.

Teacher H is in her third year of teaching kindergarten after teaching Pre-K for eight years. She found it difficult to come to kindergarten after teaching Pre-K. She found Pre-K to be place where developmentally appropriate practice was mandated. Teacher H wanted to go to kindergarten to find out why kindergarten teachers complained about not having time for centers. She felt she had to find out for herself what was going on in kindergarten—to see the struggles and to see how hard it was.

It was indeed very hard. Teacher H even contemplated leaving kindergarten after teaching it a year and returning to Pre-K. She decided to stay in kindergarten because of her original purpose—to experience it and make the necessary changes to make it work. She wanted to be able to implement a play-based program while meeting system requirements. She made it work and it made her feel successful. She reports loving kindergarten now.

Teacher H works with three other kindergarten teachers. At first she felt shutout by the team. But she maintained a friendly outgoing attitude so that they were friendlier in return. The teachers do not fully embrace developmentally appropriate practice in the same way that Teacher H does. She finds them to be very worksheet driven. They have engaged their students in centers, but not the type of free choice centers provided in Teacher H's classroom. Their centers are more academic in nature. The teachers meet together weekly to plan. Teacher H finds that the other teachers are hesitant to share ideas even to the point of being secretive at times. Teacher H responds by being overly sharing with them. She finds it to be a struggle and frustrating for the team to be on different philosophical pages.

Teacher H reports that when she first joined the team and saw the way they taught, she second-guessed herself for a while. She began to ask herself if she was right in the way she wanted to approach teaching kindergarten. Would the children get what they needed to be successful in first grade? But she came to the realization that she was right. She remembers hearing Lucy Roberts, from the North Carolina Department of Instruction, address the group of Kindergarten Teacher Leaders with the comment, "If you know there is going to be a famine next year, do you starve the children this year to prepare them for it?" That comment strengthened her resolve to go forth doing the right thing for children, to meet their individual needs, and to give them the opportunity to learn through play. She believes that play provides her students the opportunity to become thinkers and problem solvers. Teacher H says she works to develop the whole child—not just the mathematician or the reader. She believes her approach is what will make them successful first graders.

A first grade teacher once said that the children coming out of Teacher H's classroom know more than the children coming from the other kindergarten classrooms.

Teacher I

Teacher I worked with developmentally delayed pre-school children for nine years before moving to kindergarten. She is now in her seventh year of teaching kindergarten and is very happy that she made the change. Teacher I has a strong understanding of developmentally appropriate practice.

Teacher I reported that her administrator is very supportive of her approach to teaching. The principal, a veteran educator, is nearing retirement. Teacher I believed that her principal does not like that kindergarten has become so academic and would prefer that the other kindergarten teachers in the school model themselves after Teacher I. However, Teacher I stated that it is not the principal's leadership style to "boss" the more academically structured teachers into changing—she appeared to honor differences in teaching styles. Teacher I knew that her student achievement results were just as good as those of the other kindergarten teachers. She believes that parents and students are very happy with the way she teaches.

When Teacher I first came to teach in her school, she felt like she was the "odd man out." The other six teachers were a tight-knit group professionally and socially. With her experience in implementing developmentally practices, Teacher I was surprised to see that the kindergarten was not what she expected. There was a heavy usage of worksheets as well as a heavy dependence upon teachers' manuals for instruction. The team planned together so that everybody was doing the same thing. They held the same expectations for all their students—both academically and behaviorally. Teacher I describes it as trying to put all the children in the same box. Their academic approach to teaching kindergarten differed greatly from Teacher I's vision. However, even with her knowledge and confidence as a veteran teacher, she reports that she fell into the trap of following what the other teachers did. Eventually she did see that what was happening was not the best practice for children.

Teacher I knew that the reading series being used by the teachers was not meeting the needs of her children. She feels strongly that no publisher knows what is right for all her children. She stopped using the series before the first year was over. She began using very different, more developmentally appropriate, literacy instructional strategies that included morning messages, predictable reading charts, book making, and Writers' Workshop. Teacher I chose books and themes that she felt were more interesting and meaningful to her children than those presented in the basal reading program.

Teacher I's classroom includes blocks, sand, water, and dramatic play. Tables are scattered all over her classroom, instead of being clustered together. Student work—paintings and other child-produced work—is displayed on the walls rather than commercial posters. Many manipulatives are available to the children. Children engage in free choice center time for an hour and a half each morning. They learn to plan what they will do in the centers. There is also a shorter choice center time in the afternoon.

Teacher J

A veteran teacher with twenty-five years of experience, Teacher J loves teaching kindergarten. She believes it to be the most important year of school. Teacher J taught first grade for seventeen years before moving to kindergarten. She came not to like the increasing rigidity of first grade. Kindergarten is her favorite grade level to teach, even though she finds it to be very challenging at times.

Teacher J recalls her first year in kindergarten. Support in the beginning came in the form of, "Just talk to the other kindergarten teachers and do what they are doing." Teacher J felt closed out and unwelcome by the kindergarten team. She felt torn between trying to follow the other teachers' practices, and doing what she knew was right for her children. What she wanted to do was not always what she was told she should be doing. She believes, however, that there comes a time when you have to stand up and do the right thing. She did that for her children. Eventually new teachers were hired allowing the team to become more collaborative and more on the same page, philosophically.

Teacher J's principal is a former football coach. He sometimes questions what goes on in kindergarten—not always understanding play as a learning process. Teacher J encourages her children to describe for him what they are doing in centers and why. She reports that he comes in her classroom only briefly and usually at the same time every day. He does appear to have trust that Teacher J is doing the right things for children. She would expect him to talk with her otherwise.

Due to budget cuts, there are presently only two kindergarten classes in her school. This has resulted in an unusually large class size, which is her biggest challenge this year. She started the year with twenty-six children and now has twenty-five. The increased class size has changed her usual practice. She says she really does not like assigning children to centers, but sometimes has to do that to ensure everyone get a chance to work in a popular center. She tries to record something about each child during the week, but admits that she isn't able to do that every day.

Historically, there has been a high retention rate in kindergarten at Teacher J's school. However, Teacher J reports that the kindergarten teachers in the system have decided that there will no retentions this year. They believe that first grade must step up and be ready for the children coming to them. Teacher J says it is very hard sending her students to first grade where practices and expectations are very different. She feels protective of her students moving to grade one. Teacher J reports using what she considers to be developmentally inappropriate practices at times, but says she does it to make the kindergartners' transition to first grade easier.

Teacher J is very happy to be a participant in the Power of Kindergarten group. She says that POK has reaffirmed everything that she believed. It has given her the courage to say "No" to practices she believes to be inappropriate for her children.