

5-6-2023

How can early childhood teachers implement developmentally appropriate practices that support whole-child development in preschool and kindergarten programs?

Amanda Nolde
Concordia University, St. Paul, amandanolde07@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/teacher-education_masters



Part of the [Early Childhood Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Nolde, A. (2023). *How can early childhood teachers implement developmentally appropriate practices that support whole-child development in preschool and kindergarten programs?* (Thesis, Concordia University, St. Paul). Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/teacher-education_masters/92

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Education, Humanities, and Social Sciences at DigitalCommons@CSP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Teacher Education by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSP. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csp.edu.

How can early childhood teachers implement developmentally appropriate practices that support whole-child development in preschool and kindergarten programs?

Amanda Nolde

Concordia University, St. Paul

ED 590 Research and Complete Capstone

Course Instructor: Dr. Kelly Sadlovsky

Second Reader: Kristin Goetz

April 23, 2023

Contents

Dedication	4
Abstract	5
Chapter One: Introduction	6
Topic and Scope	7
Importance to the Field	7
Developmental Theorists	9
Definition of Terms	10
Developmentally Appropriate Practices	10
Early Childhood Education (ECE)	11
Holistic Approach	12
Play-Based Learning	12
Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)	13
Whole Child Development	13
Conclusion	13
Chapter Two: Review of Literature	15
Changes In Education	15
Implementation of Developmentally Appropriate Practices	18
Play-Based Learning	18
Authentic Assessments	23
Social-Emotional Learning	26
Challenges for Educators	29
Teacher Beliefs and Implementation	30

Professional Development and Training 36

Support Needed for Effective Implementation..... 47

Opposition to the Whole-Child Approach 54

Conclusion 57

Chapter Three: Discussion, Application, and Future Studies 58

 Summary of the Research 58

 Application of the Research 59

 Research Limitations..... 60

 Future Studies and Next Steps 61

Conclusion 63

Resources 65

Dedication

Thank you to my heavenly Father who answered my many prayers, provided comfort, and guided me through the challenges of obtaining my masters degree. Love and appreciation to my husband and children for standing by me and encouraging me through the difficult times. Time spent away from one another was discouraging, but with your love, support, and understanding, we made it through together. I love you all so very much. Finally, thank you to my parents and coworkers for your willingness to listen and offer advice. I appreciate all you have done to help me succeed.

Abstract

Kindergarten has dramatically changed in recent years with the rise of standardized testing and a stronger focus on academic achievement; yet with the change, children were deprived of essential components of a foundational education that supported the development of the whole child and prepared children to be successful in multiple areas of life (Slade & Griffith, 2013). Teacher-directed instruction has decreased child-centered activities, such as play, to maximize the potential of children's academic success in the future (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Despite educators' positive beliefs around developmentally appropriate practices, the need to find a balance in the integration of academics through developmentally appropriate practices such as play-based learning, authentic assessments, and social-emotional learning, was a continual struggle (Pyle & Alaca, 2018). Educators' beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices were often set aside in the classroom due to specific requirements and policies that educators needed to follow. The studies examined the shift in early childhood education from child-centered to academically driven, the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices, perspectives of educational stakeholders and the application of the beliefs held, the need for purposeful professional development opportunities, and support for educators around using practices that met the needs of the children. The results of the research suggested that although teachers understood and realized the importance of providing a developmentally appropriate educational experience for children, the need to meet academic requirements and other demands caused challenges for educators.

Keywords: developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), early childhood education (ECE), holistic approach, play-based learning, social-emotional learning, whole-child development

Chapter One: Introduction

Educational practices in kindergarten have changed from a focus on the development of the whole child through nurturing the child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills, to a current focus of closing the academic achievement gap through a teacher-directed approach and assessing children's abilities through standardized testing (Brown et al., 2019). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has been considered a possible reason for the shift in kindergarten practices; however, an increase in funding to public preschool, the advantage of children having been previously exposed to learning experiences prior to attending kindergarten, an increase in parents' investment in education, and children entering school with a higher degree of academic skills than in the past, were other possibilities for the change in kindergarten practices (Bassok et al., 2016).

Research examined throughout the paper has shown that educators supported the holistic needs of children through understanding the concepts of developmentally appropriate practices and whole-child development, considered viewpoints from educational stakeholders around the topic of developmentally appropriate practices and whole-child development, and recognized the need for systematic changes. Arnott (2021) suggested that early childhood education needed to move from a narrowed focus on curriculum and teaching practices to a field that addressed the holistic development of children through responsive pedagogical practices, flexible policies and curriculum, and decisions making guided by stakeholders within the field. This paper addressed aspects of the guiding research question, "How can early childhood teachers implement developmentally appropriate practices that support whole-child development in preschool and kindergarten programs?"

Topic and Scope

A shift in the expectations, requirements, and procedures seen in kindergarten classrooms, due to the need to academically prepare children for elementary school, have reduced the amount of time children were engaged in child-directed activities and increased teacher-lead instruction (Brown et al., 2020; Pyle & Alaca, 2018). Rigor and demand limited the educators' ability to focus on children's individual strengths and the educator's potential to create a learning environment that addressed the cultural, linguistic, physical, cognitive, social, and emotional needs of the children. The result was a developmentally inappropriate educational experience for the children (Mengstie, 2022). Maintaining high expectations and fulfilling academic requirements through the use of age-appropriate methods that addressed the development of the whole child and still provided a learning environment that aligned with child development, social-emotional well-being, individualized instruction, and culturally responsive teaching practices was needed to accommodate the growing demands placed on children and educators (Brown et al., 2019). When the focus became solely on outcomes, a division occurred between what research said about the needs of children and mandated policy requirements in early childhood education (Arnott, 2021). The research explored the importance of developing the whole child in age-appropriate ways, so each child was provided with a high-quality education that supported individual growth in all areas of development and prepared children for experiences encountered outside of the classroom.

Importance to the Field

Early childhood education influenced the developmental paths of young children. When provided with high-quality instruction during children's early years, improved outcomes were evident as children progressed through the educational journey (Farley et al., 2018). Educational

stakeholders more closely aligned with the concept of teaching to the whole child by emphasizing the need to focus on each developmental domain, conflicted with the perspectives of other stakeholders who found importance in focusing more heavily on academic content in literacy and math (Brown et al., 2019). Teaching holistically by addressing social, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills was vital to the children's ability to fully develop in all domains and still progress in academic achievement. Non-cognitive skills taught provided children with life skills of critical thinking, problem-solving strategies, social skills, persistence, being creative, and maintaining self-control (Garcia & Weiss, 2016).

Barriers to the effective use of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and teaching to the whole child included a lack of professional development specific for early childhood educators and how the expectations placed on teachers and children influenced the practices used in the classroom. Professional development that pertained to the uniqueness of early childhood education and focused on educating teachers in the effective implementation of age-appropriate activities that aligned with academic skills, was needed for educators to find a balance between academics and play (Schmidtke, 2022). Research done among Omani preschool teachers suggested that when teachers were provided with more professional development, teachers more strongly endorsed DAP (Mohamed & Al-Qaryouti, 2016). The expertise developed when teachers engaged in professional learning resulted in classroom experiences where children received quality play and rigor in developmentally appropriate ways (Schmidtke, 2022). Another challenge in the field of early childhood education was the misalignment of educators' beliefs around the knowledge of child development and the importance of DAP, and how the beliefs held impacted the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom (Mengstie, 2022). Research conducted in Jordan suggested that teachers held beliefs,

knowledge, and attitudes that reflected developmentally appropriate practices; however, the beliefs were more likely identified in the educators' philosophy of teaching rather than in the classroom instructional practices (Jumiaan et al., 2020).

Developmental Theorists

Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky were two child development constructive theorists focused on the cognitive development of children. Piaget was recognized for work done to identify the developmental stages that children progressed through as the children grew. Piaget asserted that children's cognitive development was based on the interactions children had with the environment. Instruction was delivered through opportunities for discovery with concrete objects and learning occurred through experiences that offered exploration, interpretation, and the ability to construct meanings (Semmar & Al-Thani, 2015). Piaget's knowledge of child development aligned with the use of developmentally appropriate practices that allowed children to develop holistically. Vygotsky's theory also addressed components of teaching to the whole child through developmentally appropriate methods, but the belief was that children learned through social interaction. The teacher's role was essential in the learning process as expectations were modeled and strategies were used to help children grow in cognitive skills. Vygotsky's theory included the zone of proximal development that explained how children moved from independently completing tasks to performing more challenging tasks with the assistance of the teacher. The process of assistance was referred to as scaffolding (Semmar & Al-Thani, 2015). Both theorists provided insight into developmentally appropriate practices that allowed children to grow more holistically in skills and abilities.

Definition of Terms

The noticeable changes in how early childhood education settings have become more academically driven and less focused on play, exploration, and social skills has created a division among what groups of educational stakeholders believe should be the emphasis of the education that young children received. Teaching to the whole child through a focus on each developmental domain versus teaching that was more focused on academic content continued to be a debate (Brown et al., 2019). Knowledge of educational theory, developmentally appropriate practices, the whole-child approach, and holistic teaching, strengthened the educators' understanding of practices used in education to support the overall development of children.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) position statement defined developmentally appropriate practice as "methods that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning" (NAEYC, 2020, p. 5). In the article entitled *The Association Between Preschool Teachers' Beliefs and Practices about Developmentally Appropriate Practices*, Mohamed and Al-Qaryouti (2016) stated that the developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) framework was a child-centered approach to teaching in ways that focused on the developmental needs of the child, the individual strengths and interests of the child, and the child's cultural context. Although not a curriculum, DAP has proven to result in positive outcomes for children when used with teaching practices that focused on children's interaction with the environment, used creativity, built social and emotional skills through interactions with others, and utilized play as a method of learning (Mohamed & Al-Qaryouti, 2016). Mengstie (2022) mentioned that DAP included the need to meet children's individual needs, created a space for learning to occur,

and guided children in the development of self-esteem and social learning. To ensure that children birth through age eight experienced a developmentally appropriate, high-quality education, educators needed to support children at an individual level of development and address children's specific learning styles in culturally responsive, child-centered ways (Mengstie, 2022). Children needed opportunities to engage in meaningful, self-directed activities to receive an education that integrated content with exploration and placed an emphasize on vocabulary development (Riley-Ayers & Figueras-Daniel, 2018).

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

NAEYC (2022) stated that early childhood education provided opportunities for children that ranged from birth to age eight to learn in centers, in-home childcares, and school settings. The education received ensured that all domains and content areas were developed in developmentally appropriate ways to maximize learning through joyful experiences (NAEYC, 2022). Early childhood education has often been viewed by people outside of the field, as a practice primarily devoted to the care of children; however, the view excluded the education and learning that occurred during children's early developmental years. To develop the whole child, educators in the field of early childhood education assumed multiple roles, with the role of a caregiver as just one example. Communicating, facilitating, observing, and creating were some of the responsibilities that early childhood teachers assumed to ensure that the diverse needs of the children were met. Holistic development was essential in early childhood and the misunderstood viewpoints of the field have presented challenges for policy changes to occur. Early childhood used knowledge gained from neuroscience, brain development, psychology, sociology, and other fields to become a field of education built on evidence and theory to support pedagogical practices (Arnott, 2021).

Holistic Approach

An approach to teaching young children that used developmentally appropriate practices was holistic learning. Research that reflected the holistic approach of addressing the whole child through play-based learning emphasized the importance of understanding each child and family to best support children in all developmental domains (Keung & Cheung, 2019). Components of a high-quality education combined academic skills with non-academic learning areas together that supported the overall development of children. The holistic framework influenced by the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, and Bruner incorporated the ideas of integrative and interactive learning, children as competent learners, the use of play to support learning, and provided children with adult support (Bautista et al., 2016).

Play-Based Learning

Play-based learning was a developmentally appropriate practice defined as independently chosen activities that allowed children to be involved in learning that nurtured the need to explore, engaged children, allowed for individualized decision-making, enhanced creativity, and focused on the process instead of the final outcome (Keung & Cheung, 2019; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Pyle and Danniels (2017) stated that free-play and adult-guided play were two types of play-based activities that supported learning. Free play was referred to as a self-guided form of pretend play that allowed children to choose activities based on interest. Adult-guided play offered a level of teacher involvement that incorporated learning objectives and allowed for adult support. The adult-guided play offered child-centered activities chosen by children and allowed learning to occur through purposeful teacher insight. Play-based learning enhanced academic outcomes and social-emotional development for children (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-emotional learning (SEL) was described as a process that children and adults navigated to gain knowledge in how to recognize emotions, regulate and manage the emotions felt, demonstrate empathy, develop positive relationships, and succeed in responsible decision-making (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017; Ng & Bull, 2018). Effective management of emotional regulation, the development of conflict resolution, and the consideration of different perspectives were skills attained through social-emotional learning (Ng & Bull, 2018).

Whole Child Development

The whole child approach reflected DAP by helping children develop socially, emotionally, mentally, physically, and cognitively and ensured that children were “healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged” (Slade & Griffith, 2013, p. 21). In the whole child approach, children learned by independently exploring materials and communicating with peers to support cognitive and noncognitive skills (Jenkins et al., 2018). The ASCD (formally known as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) advocated for the whole-child approach framework and collaborated with policymakers to support children academically and non-academically. Support for the whole child was necessary because for children to fully grow and develop in all areas, non-academic needs also had to be met. Preparing children to be lifelong learners through critical thinking, collaboration, problem solving, effective communication, and being creative was more beneficial than the focus on academic concepts such as memorization and standardized test scores (Slade & Griffith, 2013).

Conclusion

The field of early childhood incorporated the knowledge of child development, utilized and implemented child-centered, developmentally appropriate practices, and recognized and

supported children's individualized needs to ensure that a high-quality, whole-child education was available to each learner (NAEYC, 2022). Policies and requirements added pressure on educators and children in the educational setting that negatively impacted teachers' abilities to meet the holistic needs of the children through activities that engaged and benefited children. Chapter Two examined research that explored how play-based learning, the use of authentic assessments, and social-emotional learning implemented in developmentally appropriate ways promoted whole-child development and academic success. Challenges for educators around teacher beliefs versus teacher practices, professional development and training, and opposition to whole-child development were also discussed.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Children most often experienced public education for the first time as kindergarteners. Researchers acknowledged that the long-term effects of success in and out of school related to where children's academic careers started in kindergarten (Brown et al., 2019). Bassok et al. (2016) agreed that life outcomes were meaningfully influenced by early childhood learning. Although preschool and kindergarten experiences such as play-based learning, the use of authentic assessments, and the need to teach social-emotional skills to children were associated with positive life outcomes, barriers to effective instruction to the whole-child were presented. Factors included an increase in academic demands and pressures, a lack of teacher preparation and professional development to support educators in effective DAP implementation, and a struggle to find the balance between what was known about appropriate practices around child development and mandatory requirements. The literature examined focused on answering the question, "How can early childhood teachers implement developmentally appropriate practices that support whole-child development in preschool and kindergarten programs?"

Changes In Education

The shift in kindergarten from using play-centered, exploratory, social learning experiences to the use of an academically driven, prescribed curriculum has resulted in a growing concern over the inappropriateness of these methods (Bassok et al., 2016). According to Brown et al. (2019), while support for the benefit of providing children with both developmental and academic educational experiences by using a range of instructional techniques to teach to the whole child occurred in kindergarten, studies continued to provide data on the elimination of these practices from the classroom.

Quantitative data collected determined how classrooms have changed in a twelve-year span. Researchers hypothesized that current kindergarten classrooms would be more academically focused on math and literacy and that other content areas would receive less focus when compared to classrooms in the late 1990's. The three research questions focused on the change in the kindergarten experience, if the more current classrooms reflected first grade classrooms from the late 1990's, and if the changes were different for schools with a higher number of children who qualified for free and reduced-priced lunch (FRPL) and had a higher enrollment of non-white children. The study compared data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study which surveyed parents, teachers, and school administrators from two kindergarten cohorts in the years 1998 and 2010. Schools were first sampled from counties or groups of counties and then students were sampled from individual schools. In 1998, over 21,000 children were sampled and over 18,000 children were sampled in 2010. Although the survey responses focused more on kindergarten teachers, when students went to first grade, first grade teachers' responses were used to better answer the article's title question of: *Is Kindergarten the New First Grade?* (Bassok et al., 2016).

The researchers collected data about public school kindergarten changes regarding the beliefs that teacher held around school readiness, what amount of time was given to both academic and nonacademic subject areas, the organization of the classroom, how pedagogy was approached, the importance of specific assessment practices, and the frequency of using standardized assessments. Enrollment of the schools, the class sizes, the location in terms of urban cities, suburbs, or rural areas, and geographic regions were measures used to address bias. Characteristics of teachers included indicators about years of experience, credentials, and demographics (Bassok et al., 2016).

Results compared surveys from 1998 and 2010 around teacher beliefs. An increase from 31% to 80% of teachers reported that children should learn to read in kindergarten. Teachers in 2010 felt strongly that academics were significant in school readiness; however, the overall results suggested that although there was a stronger emphasis on academics, teachers placed more value on other school readiness skills. Additional changes also evident from the data included the significant reduction in time spent on nonacademic subjects and science, an increased focus on literacy and math skills with an emphasis on the use of textbooks and worksheets, a decline in child-selected activities, a larger portion of instruction devoted to whole-class activities, and a shift in assessment perspectives from placing value on improvements and effort to a focus on children's achievement of meeting standards in relation to peers. Schools that served FRPL and non-white children in both 1998 and 2010 surveys showed that teacher practices and beliefs tended to focus on academic skills and didactic instruction (Bassok et al., 2016).

Overall kindergarten classrooms from the 2010 study dropped in child-centered activities. The increase in teacher-directed instruction with the use of textbooks and worksheets and the occurrence of using standardized testing at least once a month indicated that kindergarten classrooms were structured more like a first-grade classroom from the late 1990's. The data also showed that kindergarten classrooms serving FRPL and non-white children were more greatly impacted. Suggestions for future study included conducting research about the reasons for the changes and understanding how the changes from the study may have impacted cognitive and social domains in both kindergarten and future grades (Bassok et al., 2016).

Implementation of Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Developmentally appropriate teaching practices focused on providing children with skills and strategies that promoted learning across all developmental domains and still considered the relevance to the children's age, developmental level, individual needs, and influences from family and society. Teachers implemented developmentally appropriate practices that allowed for children to choose and still supported goals in meaningful ways. Teachers realized that children needed to be active participants in the learning that occurred to better understand the world and to find success in peer interactions (NAEYC, 2022). The incorporation of play-based learning experiences, the use of authentic assessments, and the integration of social-emotional learning were a few examples of developmentally appropriate practices that supported whole-child development in preschool and kindergarten programs.

Play-Based Learning

Research around holistic teaching to best support the whole child has resulted in evidence that play-based learning is best implemented when supported by teachers, kindergarten children, and parents. Although play has been associated with positive impacts to whole-child development, a study conducted in Hong Kong illustrated the important connection that teachers, families, and kindergarten settings had in effective implementation of play-based learning (Keung & Cheung, 2019). The research emphasized the teacher's role was to provide effective individualized instruction and highlighted two ways that the teacher accomplished instruction in play. The first role was to be a play manager where teachers provided an engaging and inviting play environment for free play to occur. The second role was to play with the children to maintain engagement, offer suggestions, and observe children in play. Despite the incorporation of play-based learning in the classroom, challenges arose in implementation due to teachers who

misunderstand play-based learning and found it difficult to shift teaching practices. Kindergarten settings also had an influence on how play-based learning was used in the classroom. A suggestion was made that educators needed to share ideas and strategies to be effective in implementing play-based learning. The need to provide teachers with professional learning opportunities to collaborate allowed for more supportive learning environments for children. Finally, the involvement of parents enhanced interactions with children and communication that families had with teachers was documented. The research suggested that the challenge continued in convincing parents in Hong Kong of the importance of play when support for academics was more prevalent (Keung & Cheung, 2019).

The Curriculum Development Council of the Education Bureau gave advice to kindergarten programs in Hong Kong around administration, teaching approaches, and curriculum. The importance of play was emphasized and the requirement to provide children with adequate play was given (Curriculum Development Council, 2017 as cited by Keung & Cheung, 2019). A mixed-methods study was conducted that collected quantitative data through a teacher questionnaire and qualitative data from teacher interviews. The questionnaires explored teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of play-based learning and whole-child development. The qualitative data collected from teacher interviews expressed teacher viewpoints about what contributed to the development of play-based learning (Keung & Cheung, 2019).

Two years of quantitative data was collected from teachers, head teachers, and principals from 50 kindergarten programs in Hong Kong. The programs selected participated in a University and School Partnership project, between the years 2015 and 2017. The university team assisted teachers in the implementation of a curriculum focused on play. Questionnaires were completed at the end of the school year by 73 principals and head teachers and 211 teachers

and assistants. Of the 286 valid questionnaires, nearly all participants had engaged in some professional, play-based curriculum development, lesson planning meetings, classroom experiences, workshops, or other application activities. The survey ended with a question that asked volunteers to participate in a follow-up interview. There were 11 focus groups with 29 participants from 19 kindergarten programs. Data was gathered from seven principals, eight head teachers, and 14 teachers. The questionnaire consisted of 23 responses focused on how families, teachers, and kindergarten settings contributed to the implementation of play-based learning. A six-point Likert scale was used, and participants spent approximately 20 minutes completing the questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to learn about the perspective teachers had on play-based learning (Keung & Cheung, 2019).

The two questions asked in the study collected data to understand teachers' concept of play-based learning and what factors impacted how effective play-based learning and teachers' ideas were in whole-child development. The quantitative data indicated that teachers who implemented pedagogical practices around play best supported the implementation of play-based learning and that the involvement of parents enhanced whole-child development. Whole-child development was enriched when teachers engaged in collaborative experiences that supported pedagogical practices around play-based learning and when a connection was established between home and school. Qualitative data collected from the participants indicated that play benefited children, the role of the teacher changed during play depending on the situation, and that the use of scaffolding was important to support children during play. The role of the teacher was essential in the creation of authentic play for children due to the knowledge and skills needed for successful implementation. Interview data indicated the need for teachers to collaborate in professional learning and to reflect with one another. A final component of the

interview data gathered was the significant role that parents had in the promotion of play. A limitation from the study was the fact that only perspectives of teachers were included. Gaining insight from students and parents would offer additional viewpoints. Another consideration would be to broaden the scope of possible contributing factors for data collected in future studies (Keung & Cheung, 2019).

Research has demonstrated that play in kindergarten was effective in the developmental and academic needs of children; however, with the increased focus on educational standards, teacher-led, academic-focused instruction has become more prevalent. Pyle and Danniels (2017) explained that free-play was child-directed and often included pretend play. Although free play is based on children's interests, the play that occurred may be influenced by previous experiences versus inherent inclinations. Adult-guided play was defined as one where children chose the activity but that teachers supported the learning that occurred during play. Play allowed for learning to continue as children took the knowledge gained from teacher-led instruction and applied what was learned to the play that occurred. Play-based learning has been connected to positive effects on academic learning, the development of language skills, and improvement of social-emotional skills; however, the role of the teacher in play attracted various perspectives. One view was that play was an opportunity for children to develop without the support of teachers. A second view was one where play included opportunities for children to engage in academic content that was supported by the teacher. A warning was given against the second view because the play had a possibility of becoming less play and more work (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

A qualitative study was conducted to determine how play-based learning was used and explored the roles of the teachers during play. The study collected data from interviews and

observations from 15 kindergarten classroom, from three school districts located in Ontario, Canada. Ontario was chosen because of the province's requirements to ensure that kindergarten academic and social standards were met in developmentally appropriate ways. One suburban district, one large urban district, and one smaller urban district were chosen for the study. The teachers in the study had diverse experiences and ranged in levels of play-based implementation used in the classroom. Data was collected over a three-year period in two phases. Observations collected during the two phases concentrated on the classroom environment, instructional time, and play opportunities. Interviews conducted explored teacher perspectives on play and on the role that children and teachers had during play. Observational data from phase one resulted in five categories of play that informed how phase two was coded. The five types of play observed were free play, inquiry play, collaborative play, playful learning, and learning through games. Constant comparison was used for teacher interviews that resulted in one group that stated that there was a misalignment between academics and play and a second group that said that the connection was clear (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Two philosophies of play were evident from the 15 classrooms in the study. Six of the teachers claimed that play supported the social development of children and that teachers should not interfere. The six who had this viewpoint found that learning occurred in group settings and children primarily engaged in free play. Nine teachers viewed play as an opportunity to support academic learning in developmentally appropriate ways and mentioned that learning occurred through play and not solely through direct instruction. Variations of play were incorporated into the classrooms of the nine teachers. Free play, inquiry play, collaborative play, playful learning, and learning through games facilitated academic learning for all children in engaging ways. A continued division among perspectives regarding play was evident. When play was considered to

promote social relationships, free play was the advocated choice. When school was aimed to introduce target skills, structured play was suggested. However, with the increase of academic requirements, the broader view of the integration of a variety of play experiences aligned with polices and NAEYC's position on play (NAEYC, 2009, as cited by Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Although a variety of play experiences supported social and academic development, teachers continued to hold different perspectives on the level of teacher engagement demonstrated in play (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Limitations were not specifically mentioned in the study, but a suggestion was made that a shift was needed in the perspective of play. Free play alone and direct instruction were insufficient in teaching kindergarten children. A challenge remained for teachers who needed to adjust teaching practices and pedagogical ideas. Training was suggested to support the shift in perspectives (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Authentic Assessments

Methods that collected data on children's progress ranged from more formal, standardized assessments where results were compared to groups of peers to more informal, authentic assessments measures used to gather ongoing evidence of children's progress through documentation. Authentic assessment documentation was collected by teachers when children were monitored, observed, and engaged in interaction. The data collected was analyzed, shared with others in meaningful ways, and used to inform future instructional practices (LeeKeenan & Ponte, 2018). Dennis et al. (2013) stated that authentic assessment offered results of children's growth and development without the use of standardized testing measures. Data collected from play, natural settings, and performance provided teachers with a foundation that developed

meaningful instructional practices through use of interviews, observations, data collections, and play-based experiences (Dennis et al., 2013).

Assessments and tests were measures used to determine the progress made by children in academic concepts and used as a form of accountability in education. As standardized tests continued to become integrated into early childhood, the need to identify the perspectives of teachers around standardized tests to determine how the conceptions of teachers were influenced became necessary. Frans et al., (2020) considered standardized testing to be a test that was administered and scored in a systematic manner that resulted in a score that was norm-referenced or criterion-referenced. The study conducted was built on two previous findings. One finding found the format of an assessment had an impact on the use of the assessment and on teachers' viewpoints. The second finding was that various conceptions and grade levels viewed testing differently (Brown & Harris, 2009 as cited by Frans et al., 2020). Researchers used a mixed-methods approach that explored early childhood educators' views on standardized testing as a tool that measured improvement and accountability and identified the reasons that affected teachers' experiences with standardized testing (Frans et al., 2020).

The study was conducted in the Dutch, formal education system found in the Netherlands. Although the main source of assessment in preschool and kindergarten classes was through observations, a national, norm-referenced, multiple-choice test called LOVS continued to be given. The scores determined language and math abilities, progression over time, compared children's progress and national standards using Item Response Theory (IRT), and identified strengths and areas to improve. The study focused on the teacher' perspectives of LOVS (Frans et al., 2020). Ninety-seven participants were chosen from schools that had been part of a previous study about test stability and included 63 preschool and kindergarten teachers. The

teachers were primarily women aging from 24 to 64 years old and with teaching experience that ranged from two to 45 years. The Conceptions of Assessment Abridged questionnaire (CoA-III-A) measured teachers' conceptions of the purpose of assessment and multiple semi-structured interviews were conducted for one year. Online questionnaires were sent to a contact person in a school and distributed to preschool and kindergarten teachers. Teachers were contacted for voluntary participation in interviews after an analysis of the questionnaire, with the result of six interviewees (Frans et al., 2020).

Data analysis of the CoA-III-A questionnaire revealed that the distinction between the conceptions teachers had around how the test was used for improvement and for accountability was unclear. The Mokken scale analysis found that teachers did make a distinction between how valid and suitable the information from the test was and the usefulness of the test. The interview data expressed how teachers typically used the data from the tests in similar ways and for the same purposes, but the views held by the teachers differed and suggested that some of the teachers found normative tests to be a confirmation of children's progression while others found that the tests did not align with classroom observations. One teacher felt that despite considerable growth achieved by the children, multiple children failed to score an average or above on standardized tests. Another teacher found that the results of the test did not impact her teaching practices but found that the exposure to formal testing was a benefit to children. When children did not score in the average range, some of the teachers had a feeling of failure and frustration, often resulting in changes in curriculum that reflected testing content. Both positive and negative viewpoints were expressed in the study as teachers explained the pros and cons of the use of standardized tests (Frans et al., 2020).

A limitation of the study was that the range of perspectives included only teacher viewpoints. The collection of data from a larger sample of educators who participated in the questionnaire as well as educational stakeholders such as parents, administration members, and children would have provided more comprehensive insight into how standardized tests were utilized in early childhood education and various perspectives could have been examined (Frans et al., 2020).

Social-Emotional Learning

The education of the whole child was essential in children's ability to develop into people who were active, engaged, and typically healthier and happier members of society. Advancement in the efforts to teach to the whole child occurred through social and emotional learning (SEL). The development of self-awareness and the ability to organize emotions were necessary skills needed to navigate the social and emotional behaviors that were essential to become successful throughout life. Children who were more self-aware and had developed the skills to regulate emotions performed higher in academics. Alongside the ability to recognize and manage emotions was the ability to be successful in social experiences (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017). Early education provided a foundation for lifelong learning through academic and socio-emotional development. Children who develop SEL skills had lifestyles that were healthier, more enjoyable, and helped to enrich society (Ng & Bull, 2018). Social competence was the awareness of social contexts and the interaction among peers and adults. Students who displayed a higher level of social competence tended to have stronger relationships with others and performed better in academics and in social situations than children with a low social competence level. To support the overall development of the whole child, the incorporation of SEL in education was necessary. An improved focus led to greater academic success and improved social and

emotional skills that contributed to healthy relationships with others. SEL skills were valuable to the success of social, academic, and emotional growth; however, educators needed to provide guidance and support to children as the learning of SEL skills occurred (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017).

The knowledge of how teachers created, maximized, and supported children in social and emotional learning while in school provided an insight into intentional teaching practices in kindergarten classrooms. The development of social emotional skills in kindergarten was found to be important to academic success and opportunities for employment in later life. Brown and Mowry (2015) agreed that children who entered kindergarten with cognitive and social skills lower than peers, were more likely to be unsuccessful in school, which resulted in difficulties such as the incompleteness of high school and employment in a lower paying career as an adult. Activities completed by kindergarten children required the development of social and emotional skills to support cooperation, self-regulation, and engagement. Observational data used in the qualitative study gathered information around what situational experiences allowed for social and emotional learning (SEL) and determined how kindergarten teachers facilitated SEL in the classroom. Reduction of time, lack of resources, and the lessened priority to teach SEL were challenges faced by educators around the implementation of SEL; however, situations presented in the classroom fostered the socio-emotional development of children (Ng & Bull, 2018).

Reported data from the study was part of Singapore's Kindergarten Impact Project (SKIP) study that examined how the quality of structure and process used in the classroom affected children. Participants from SKIP were 1,538 children who ranged from ages four to five years old and were from 80 preschools that included 113 Kindergarten One (K1) classrooms located in different geographic locations around Singapore. Teachers were female, with a mean

of 34.2 years of age and an averaged 6.9 years of experience in early childhood. For the current study, six of the K1 classrooms that were randomly chosen represented two government run kindergartens, two non-profit kindergartens, and two commercial childcare centers. The selection had no cases of children with specialized needs (Ng & Bull, 2018).

Classroom activities captured with video and observations were made by two research assistants. Teachers were provided with no instruction or insight on what activities were to be completed while observed. The research questions were reviewed through inductive content analysis and narrative summaries were compiled from the recorded videos. Narrative summaries consisted of situations that involved the action of the teacher and how the children reacted. Singapore's early childhood educators used the Nurturing Early Learners Framework (NEL) that promoted SEL in relationship management, social awareness, self-awareness and positive self-concept, responsible decision-making, and self-management. The analysis of data collected identified 32 occurrences where teachers' actions supported SEL according to the NEL framework. The occurrences related to the size of the group, the activity, and the teaching opportunity (Ng & Bull, 2018).

The first question in the study included situational factors such as group size, activity type, and type of teaching opportunity to determine how often SEL was supported in kindergarten classrooms. The results indicated that SEL was supported by the teacher in the class during small group activities, outdoor play, after a lesson, while children ate, when children transitioned to activities, and in learning centers. Facilitation of SEL was noted more often in intentional than incidental teaching. The second component of the study focused on the strategies used by teachers to facilitate SEL. The results showed that teachers facilitated SEL in the classroom when a positive tone was used, suggestions were given to determine a solution, tasks

were allocated to children, and the extension of children's responses to situations with guidance from the teacher was provided (Ng & Bull, 2018). The study found that SEL occurred more often in small group activities that allowed for more individualized support and impacted children's development of cognitive and social emotional skills. Outdoor play promoted SEL development as well as the intentional teaching done by educators. Action-related strategies were more frequently observed than social-related strategies, and the use of a positive tone occurred the most. The study demonstrated that teachers used strategies to support SEL through informal opportunities rather than through formal, more structured instruction (Ng & Bull, 2018).

A suggestion to find a balance between planned lessons and informal teaching opportunities was given to maximize teacher's abilities to facilitate SEL with children (Ng & Bull, 2018). Limitations found in the study included the relationship between SEL indicators and SEL competencies were not exclusive, and the indicators could be found in multiple SEL competencies. A second limitation was strategies were identified due to the availability, which reduced the opportunity to determine if the strategies used were effective in the facilitation of SEL (Ng & Bull, 2018).

Challenges for Educators

Research indicated that educators in preschool and kindergarten classrooms acknowledged, believed in, and valued the concepts of developmentally appropriate practices for young children; however, complications arose in the implementation of turning beliefs into instructional practices (Cheung et al., 2022; Mengstie, 2022). The changes that have occurred in early educational programs around being more academically focused and standards driven, reduced the emphasis on educating the whole child because attention was given to meeting academic outcomes. The research explored brought attention to the importance of understanding

the components of developmentally appropriate practices, whole-child development, educational stakeholders' beliefs, and the need for change to occur in schools to best support the academic and non-academic needs of the whole child in developmentally appropriate ways (Brown et al., 2019).

Teacher Beliefs and Implementation

The increased focus on academic achievement among young children has caused early education advocates to suggest that the instruction provided did not use what was known about children's learning processes and negatively affected the curiosity and intentionality displayed by children when engaged in play-based learning (Brown et al., 2019).

Understanding how various stakeholders viewed the changes that have occurred in kindergarten was important in providing children with meaningful learning experiences and offering support to educators. The qualitative, explorative video-cued multivocal ethnographic (VCME) study by Brown et al. (2019) used the sensemaking process to understand how educational stakeholders at the local, state, and national levels critically reflected on the changed kindergarten. In the article entitled *Examining How Stakeholders at the Local, State, and National Levels Made Sense of the Changed Kindergarten* (2019), researchers video recorded a kindergarten classroom in Texas, edited the contents down to 23 minutes with the help of the classroom teacher, and had education stakeholders at various levels view the recording. Through conversations with school and district members, the recorded classroom chosen demonstrated typical experiences that teachers and children would be expected to engage in during the day. Participants were first chosen from the same school district as where the film was made. School district stakeholders included the students, kindergarten teachers, and school and district administrators. Then two school districts in Texas and two in West Virginia were chosen where

kindergarten parents, teachers, and district level administrators were interviewed. A snowball-sampling was conducted to choose participants from each state who had kindergarten and public education knowledge and to choose national level analysts, specialists, and researchers with kindergarten expertise. The participants viewed the 23-minute video and then were interviewed to determine what was understood about kindergarten processes and public education (Brown et al., 2019).

Results among the school community in Texas viewed kindergarten as a program that prepared children for future schooling. Although the stakeholders recognized the change in kindergarten to be more academically driven and that practices were not necessarily appropriate for children, the stakeholders felt that a need for academic accountability must remain to better prepare children for future grades. District administrators in Texas recognized that the change seen in kindergarten was a result of a systematic change where higher expectations, testing, and accountability measures were pushed further down in education. State education administrators and policymakers in Texas held similar beliefs as school and district personnel in that the entire educational system has changed. Specifically mentioned was that although kindergarten was meant to help children be prepared for school, there was a concern that kindergarten shifted in becoming more academically driven and that inappropriate instructional practices were used with children (Brown et al., 2019).

School stakeholders in West Virginia agreed that kindergarten was a time meant to educate and prepare children for future schooling; however, with the changes that have occurred, a worry was that children were missing time spent on social skills such as cooperation and problem solving. County administrators differed in views on kindergarten and stated that reform had been made to adhere more closely to the whole-child approach. Education advocacy groups

felt that kindergarten programs helped in school readiness and that if this were not the case, children would be less successful in later grades. Finally, national stakeholders placed an emphasis on the critical need to provide educational skills that prepared children for future grades and that kindergarten was essential in the process (Brown et al., 2019).

Overall, educational stakeholders wanted children to participate in engaging learning experiences, have opportunities to socialize, play more, and still be prepared to be successful in school. Despite the desire to implement the changes, due to the strong academic focus placed on children, the issue of how to implement proved to be challenging. Allowing kindergarten to become less academically demanding was a hesitation among stakeholders despite the desire to see that kindergarten returned to a more developmentally appropriate setting. According to the study, to implement change that allowed for more social and emotional learning, more access to play opportunities, and provided more adequate training for teachers, stakeholders from district, county, and school levels would have to address these issues together (Brown et al., 2019).

Broadening the range of states in the study would have provided more data on perspectives taken from various stakeholders and was a suggestion for future research. Another suggestion was to show a recording of a classroom that used developmental approaches that taught the whole child to gather additional data from a different perspective (Brown et al., 2019). The survey aligned with information noted from the article *Is Kindergarten the New First Grade?* (2016) which stated that developmental scientists agreed that teaching literacy and math could be taught in meaningful ways that engaged children if done with effective pedagogical approaches, quality teaching, and connected instruction to the curiosity of children (Katz, 2015; Snow & Pizzolongo, 2014 as cited by Bassok et al., 2016).

Beliefs held by teachers were considered psychological constructs that influenced the way a person behaved and acted. The mentality of educators guided the decision-making process and instructional practices used around developmentally appropriate practices (Mengstie, 2022). The theory of planned behavior was used in the study to determine teachers' behavior, intentions, and actions in the classroom. The theory of planned behavior suggested that the beliefs that a person had about a behavior influenced the decisions to demonstrate a behavior. Although behaviors were influenced by beliefs, there were discrepancies around teacher's beliefs about DAP and what practices were performed in the classroom. Some of the misalignment found between beliefs and practices came from the school's influence on how teachers acted (Mengstie, 2022). A qualitative study among Ethiopian educators that taught children ranging from ages four to six was conducted to determine how teachers' beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices aligned with the implementation of DAP in the classroom. The problems found among Ethiopian early education teachers included inappropriate curriculum used and the lack of educators trained in early childhood education. The study took place in Ethiopia due to the lack of DAP research conducted in low-income countries and the need to reduce the gap in the research (Mengstie, 2022).

A random selection of three private schools and three public schools in Gondar City resulted in the interviews of six female preschool teachers, who ranged in age from 25-40. The work experience of the interviewees ranged from five years to 17 years and four of the six had diplomas, while two of the six held a bachelor of degree. The interviews conducted focused on the teachers' beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices and the actual implementation of DAP in the activities of the classroom. A team of six members was established that evaluated the interview questions for relevancy, appropriateness, and cultural awareness. Eight open-ended

audio-recorded interview questions were asked in the local language of Amharic. The questions asked highlighted teacher beliefs around what was taught, how instruction and assessments aligned with children's optimal learning, and what challenges were faced around DAP.

Interviews were transcribed in Amharic and then translated into English (Mengstie, 2022).

Key findings from the data focused on teacher's beliefs around developmentally appropriate practices, the implementation of DAP in the classroom, and the challenges faced by educators who attempted to use DAP in classrooms. The results indicated that teachers' attitudes toward developmentally appropriate practices were positive and the importance of DAP for children's learning was understood. The importance of having planned lesson content that aligned with specific individual needs and considered social and cultural factors was expressed. Despite teacher's positive acknowledgement of the beliefs held around DAP, little evidence was found that showed the incorporation of developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom. Identified in the study were five barriers that contributed to the failure to implement DAP in classrooms. Overall, the factors that contributed to the teachers' implementation of DAP was a shortage of books, the admission of children into kindergarten prior to the age of four, parental misconceptions of school and lack of parental support, little shared experience among educators, and no professional development available. Other participants mentioned an unfavorable learning environment, unsupportive leadership, and large class sizes. The findings suggested that teachers held strong beliefs around the importance of DAP but did not apply what was known to classroom practices, which implied that the beliefs held by the teachers minimally influenced the teachers' actions needed for implementation. The study revealed that due to school management and other barriers, developmentally appropriate practices were rarely or never practiced in classroom settings (Mengstie, 2022). The public and private preschools selected were in urban

areas making the replication of the study to occur in rural areas more difficult. Limitations other than area coverage, included the scope of what was covered in the study, the sample size of the participants, and the methodology used to collect the data (Mengstie, 2022).

Research has produced a variety of results about how the beliefs held by teachers related to the way instructional practices were used in the classroom. Mohamed and Al-Qaryouti (2016) suggested that factors such as high-stakes testing, the type of involvement by parents, work stress, lack of resources, and an inadequate level of support affected the beliefs and practices of teachers. The study conducted collected data on preschool teachers in Oman to determine the beliefs held by educators and to provide information that could be useful to policymakers around developmentally appropriate practices. Questions that were used as a focal point related to what factors were influential to the preschool teachers, the level of preschool teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices about DAP, the relationship of the self-reported DAP beliefs and practices and preschool teachers, and if various factors such as classroom size, experience level and beliefs of teachers predicted practices (Mohamed & Al-Qaryouti, 2016).

The participants involved 264 preschool teachers from approximately 20 private preschool programs. The programs were randomly selected and represented the six governorate provinces. Teachers were mostly female, high-school graduates, around 25 years old, and had about eight years of experience as preschool teachers. Recruitment of the teachers was attained by consent forms sent to the schools. Approval from the Ministry of Education was needed, and the consent letters were randomly given to 60% of the private schools in Muscat. Once the consent forms were returned, teachers completed the Teacher Beliefs Scale (TBS) which measured the acceptance level of DAP beliefs and the Instructional Activities Scale (IAS) that measured educators' engagement in DAP associated behaviors (Mohamed & Al-Qaryouti, 2016).

Overall, the participants favored a child-centered approach where practices such as exploration, interaction, and self-selection of activities and projects were used instead of teacher-directed activities including worksheets, flashcards, and teaching subjects separately. The data showed that Omani preschool teachers scored higher in beliefs about DAP than in the incorporation of DAP practices into the classroom due to the possibility of an inconsistent environment, reduced resources, crowded classrooms, little parent-teacher partnership, and attitudes that reflected negatively about the profession. A suggestion that opportunities for additional professional development would increase teacher endorsement of developmentally appropriate practices was provided (Mohamed & Al-Qaryouti, 2016).

A limitation for the study was that the teachers provided data through self-reported measures and to determine the consistency of the claims made about DAP, in-classroom observations should have been conducted. In future research, a comparison among Omani versus non-Omani teachers could be examined because the sample from the study was more diverse and represented only a few Omani educators. Finally, since the study focused on teachers who were high-school graduates rather than educators that held early childhood degrees, a suggestion was made to gain perspectives from teachers with more training and qualifications in the field of early childhood (Mohamed & Al-Qaryouti, 2016).

Professional Development and Training

Singapore has traditionally been a country that due to high-stakes testing, has had pressure to primarily focus on academically preparing preschool and kindergarten children for primary school rather than encouraging children to learn through play, discovery, and exploration. In 2003, with the goal of improving the quality of early childhood education in Singapore, the Kindergarten Curriculum Framework was launched. Numeracy, literacy, and

science were skills that were incorporated in this framework; however, a larger priority was placed on the social and emotional needs that supported the holistic development of the child. A revision to the Kindergarten Curriculum Framework occurred in 2012 and was renamed the Nurturing Early Learning (NEL) framework. Although the framework remained much the same as the original, additional components were included to address outcomes, skills, and other dispositions that could be achieved within six areas that would support holistic learning. The use of a thematic approach was also encouraged in the NEL framework (Bautista et al., 2016).

In the quantitative, exploratory study conducted by Bautista et al., (2016), three research questions were developed around how teachers prioritized learning areas in the NEL framework, what teachers needed from professional development (PD) regarding the learning areas, and if differing teacher beliefs about children and how they learn made a difference in the teachers' prioritization of learning areas and specific PD. Participants were 123 in-service teachers who taught four and five year-old children. The participants were chosen once the centers the participants worked in agreed to participate in a longitudinal study that focused on the impact of preschool for children in Singapore (Bautista et al., 2016). Participants were 20-62 years of age, female, ranged in experience from 0.3 to 25 years, and all had certifications that related to early childhood education. An online questionnaire that used standardized scales was given to the participants to identify the personalities, motivations, beliefs, and PD experiences of the teachers. The first item was an in-house design which had teachers rank the seven NEL's learning areas in order of importance. The second item was also an in-house design that addressed the question of what level of further PD training would be needed to support the teaching of the seven learning areas. The final item on the questionnaire related to the beliefs that the participants held regarding how children learn. The Modernity Scale used placed teachers on a continuum that

ranged from traditional and more adult-centered instruction to a more progressive, child-centered approach to teaching (Bautista et al., 2016).

The data reflected that in terms of prioritizing learning areas, social and emotional development ranked highest whereas numeracy and aesthetics and creative expression were ranked as least important. Results from question two suggested that teachers needed high levels of further training in all NEL learning areas. Although aesthetics and creative expression received a ranking as least important for question one, question two reported that teachers needed the highest level of training in the same area. Finally, the data compiled for question three indicated that teachers who ranked social and emotional development and discovery of the world as a top priority, were more likely associated with a child-centered approach. Teachers who ranked numeracy and literacy as a top priority tended to be more adult-directed and held traditional beliefs (Bautista et al., 2016).

The researchers had anticipated that teachers would rank the more academic areas higher than the non-academic areas, however this was not the case as seen by the data. Based on the results, the participants who used the NEL framework realized that as an educator, the necessity to provide children with opportunities to develop holistically and to not solely provide academic content was important. The findings from the second question suggested that teachers needed training in each learning area; however, the areas where the most assistance was needed were in the areas ranked the lowest of the teachers' priorities: discovery of the world and aesthetics and creative expression. The acknowledgment of the importance of science and arts and music by teachers interested in gaining further preparation indicated that teachers realized the need for holistic development. The final goal of this study determined if the different beliefs held by teachers differed the priorities and PD needs for the various learning areas. There were no

significant results for the correlation between teacher beliefs and PD; however, academics tended to be prioritized by the teachers who held more adult-centered, traditional beliefs of how children learn. Teachers with more progressive beliefs prioritized non-academic areas of learning.

Bautista et al. (2016) stated that teachers' beliefs regarding how children learned was a large component of what influenced teachers' expectations, interactions with children, the instructional practices used, the classroom environment, and children's achievement with learning.

The finding suggested that teachers with a more adult-centered perspective could more easily meet society's expectations of a more formal education; but not meet the holistic needs of the children. A limitation from the study included the use of a single data source. The incorporation of qualitative measures such as interviews would add more depth. The improvement of the single-item measurement tool for questions one and two and conducting the study with a larger sample size were additional considerations for the study (Bautista et al., 2016).

Research has proven that play-based learning is an effective method of meeting academic outcomes in an age-appropriate way; however, in the article entitled, *A Qualitative Study of Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions About the Influences of Professional Learning on Their Implementation of Guided Play*, Schmidtke (2022) stated that teachers needed to know how to implement play-based practices in developmentally appropriate ways that still ensured that children were meeting the required academic outcomes. The successful integration of play and academics by teachers required supportive professional learning.

This study was completed by a single researcher who designed and facilitated the professional learning of the cohort. Although Galvan and Galvan (2017) suggested that qualitative research was more valid when done with a team of researchers, when a single

researcher completed a study, the study needed to be peer reviewed, or the process of member checking needed to occur. The researcher in the study conducted semi-structured interviews, member checking was completed on participants comments, and document analysis was done (Schmidtke, 2022). The components of the research were indicators that the method used was qualitative.

Teacher participants involved in the two-year qualitative research study were chosen by school administrators because of specific qualities the teachers presented. The process used to select a sample group suggested that the participants were purposefully selected to provide the researcher with valid data. Each of the seven participants demonstrated high-quality instructional and leadership skills, held a teaching license with certification at the elementary level, taught in schools that represented each of the geographical areas in the district's attendance area with a range of diversity among children, and English language learners were taught in each classroom. Some of the participants held an early childhood education endorsement, had between five to 25 years of teaching experience, and each of the women implemented play at various stages in classroom practice (Schmidtke, 2022).

The first stage of the data collection process had the participants complete a Guided Play Self-Assessment that determined proficiency in the practice of using guided play. The results of the self-assessment and teacher reflections about the assessment were topics of conversation held during the interviews. A summary was then completed for each individual interview and during stage two of collecting data, the participants went through the process of member checking to review and verify the specific summary of the interview. Member checking allowed the participants to help in eliminating any bias the researcher may have included in the summaries and to make clarifications about what was stated during the interviews. Finally, the researcher

collected documents that the district provided about expectations for play in kindergarten, district plans to expand upon current kindergarten play practices, and resources used to help guide the instructional practices used in kindergarten (Schmidtke, 2022).

The analysis of data began as the researcher coded the interviews through the analytical strategy of constant comparison. The researcher considered what each interview was about during the examination of each phrase of the interviews, coded each interview transcription, and created a member checking organizer based on common themes found in each interview. Once member checking was completed, the individual summaries were combined to create a collective summary of data. Finally, the documents collected from the district were reviewed, coded, and combined with the interview summaries to create a final synthesis of information about what was influential to participants when implementing guided play (Schmidtke, 2022).

A suggested limitation was that error could occur within the data due to the small group of participants. Having a slightly larger sample size might have provided more data about the effectiveness of using professional learning time to focus on a need that was unique to kindergarten teachers rather than on the participation in professional learning that was common among all district educators. Limitations by the researcher were that all kindergarten teachers in the district had some exposure to professional learning around play but an extension of the study to include all district kindergarten teachers would be influential. A comparison between the progress of the cohort and other kindergarten teachers' progress in the area could be studied. The study was unique because of the opportunities that the participants had to focus on the concept of play in professional learning communities and the support of the principals to engage in the work, whereas many teachers were unlikely to receive the time and resources needed to focus on a central topic (Schmidtke, 2022). An area where suggested improvement could occur was to

include a description of what a professional learning session entailed that provided the reader with guidelines on how to engage in meaningful work during PD time. With PD guidelines stated, kindergarten teachers who did not receive the same support as members of the study received, could still benefit from ideas about how to improve teaching practices from PD after reading the study (Schmidtke, 2022).

Play has been established as an effective method of supporting children's social-emotional and academic learning; however, the continued dilemma of how to implement meaningful play into classroom practices has remained an issue. Educators have been taught that play is a valuable component of child development but training around how to incorporate play in a classroom setting has been insufficient in professional learning experiences. The qualitative study conducted explored how teachers' play beliefs and practices were affected after having completed training from an in-service about play. Pre-service learning and teacher preparation training has lacked in assisting teachers to apply and connect what has been taught into practical situations. In-service training had positive effects on the improvement of teachers' knowledge and skills, which led to the use of developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom. The training sessions that improved teacher's instructional practices also improved children's classroom behaviors. Five behavior and motivation-based factors provided the participants in the study with a cohesive definition of play. The in-service training allowed teachers to have a collective understanding of the importance of play and built a connection between play and classroom activities (Vu et al., 2015).

Research questions for the study focused on the impact that professional development in-service training had on changing teachers' beliefs about play, the roles of teachers during play, and the relation between the role of the teacher during play and children's play experiences. The

participants in the study were offered a community-based training on play in early childhood. Training occurred in a mid-Atlantic state, provided teachers with continued licensure credit, and was not a requirement to partake in the study. Of the 30 participants, five had been randomly selected to be observed, and once notified, the five participants consented. The five selected were female, two were teachers, one an intern, and one an administrator, that also taught in the classroom. A high school degree was held by two participants, two held a bachelor's degree, and the final participant's educational experience was unknown. The education experience of the five averaged 13.80 years of teaching kindergarten-aged children or younger (Vu et al., 2015).

Early childhood faculty members developed the in-service training. The faculty were from a research-focused university, had training and knowledge in early childhood and in training development. The training was quality-assured through the state and went through a review process. The four-hour long training occurred in two-hour segments over the course of two weeks. Teachers in the training were presented with information about how various types of play supported the learning standards from the state and explored options for the role of the teacher to enhance children's play. Time for teacher reflection and application was also embedded in the sessions (Vu et al., 2015).

Observations of the five teachers selected for the study initially took place before training began and then two weeks after the training was completed. A questionnaire was filled out at each observation that collected information on teacher beliefs about play before and after the training was taken. The questionnaire rated the beliefs on a five-point Likert scale and focused on an academic subscale and a play support subscale. The observations occurred during free play and free-choice center times. The Emerging Academics Snapshot was used to collect data from the observations around the children's cognitive and social levels and the teachers' level of

involvement during play. Chi-square analysis was used to determine how the level of teachers' involvement differed before and after the training sessions. Results indicated that teachers shifted from being more engaged with individual children and the whole group, to a stronger engagement level with small groups of children after the training. After the training, the role of the teacher became more of a coplayer or play leader that supported children engaged in play rather than remaining in the continued role of an onlooker or stage manager. The active engagement of the teachers' roles encouraged children to participate in play when they may not have done so independently. Other results of the training included children who showed more engagement in dramatic play and constructive play and less in solitary play, parallel play, or no play (Vu et al., 2015). Vu et al. (2015) suggested that teachers in early childhood needed support and training on what skills children need to be successful in school and how to utilize developmentally appropriate practices to teach the necessary skills to enhance both social and academic learning.

One limitation of the study was the small sample size used to collect data around teachers' play beliefs and teacher roles in play. The participants also knew that an observation was scheduled, which might have had an impact on the performance displayed by the teachers. A third limitation explored the notion that the effectiveness of the training. The period of the training taken and of the observations conducted was short. More data around the long-term effects of the in-service training could have been collected if the teachers were followed for a longer period. A final limitation revolved around the training sessions. A total of four hours provided little time to explore the impact made on teachers and due to the shorter in-service provided, many of the teachers took the training to primarily receive the credits for re-licensure (Vu et al., 2015).

The belief that play was important to children's growth and development in social and academic skills was held by the participants; however, the study showed that the implementation of the knowledge needed to be directly taught and demonstrated to teachers. Teachers believed in the importance of play but were not trained in the methods of transferring what was believed into actual practice used in classroom settings. Teachers need to be trained in the implementation process and in the roles that should be taken by teachers to effectively facilitate learning through play (Vu et al., 2015).

Professional learning communities (PLCs) used in educational settings encouraged collaboration among educators to identify areas in teaching practices that could improve to enhance student learning. PLCs tended to be more effective with the support of principal leadership (Keung et al., 2020). Although PLCs were beneficial, the article by Keung et al. (2020) entitled *Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Whole-Child Development: The Roles of Leadership Practices and Professional Learning Communities*, stated that little research had been done specifically around how PLCs were used in kindergarten and how the PLCs affected whole-child development. The quantitative data from the research helped to demonstrate that PLCs were beneficial for kindergarten teachers and that the support of the principal helped to make learning communities successful.

Three specific questions were chosen and addressed in the study. The questions related to the effects that people in leadership had on kindergarten PLC components, how leadership practices were associated with the teachers' efficacy and perceptions around whole-child development, and also determined if the components of PLCs allowed for mediation between leadership practices and teacher efficacy and perceptions around whole-child development (Keung et al., 2020). To begin the quantitative study, a convenience sample of 160 kindergartens

were chosen to participate in a five-year project of teacher development. Teachers, principals, and other educators were invited to respond to a questionnaire within a given time frame. Of the 160 kindergartens that were chosen, 153 took part in the survey which resulted in 2,010 valid questionnaires. Statistics shared about the participants included percentages of those who were female, the roles the participants had in education, how long the participants had taught, the level of education, and how many had completed qualification training. Respondents were 98.5% female and 84.4% were teachers. The level of teaching experiences included 48.3% of teachers with less than ten years of ECE experience, 27.3% had taught between 11 to 20 years, and 23.8% of teachers had 21 or more years of teaching experience. All participants held either a bachelor's or master's degree and had completed training courses (Keung et al., 2020).

The questionnaire included four scales used to gather data. The Leadership Practice Scale (LPS) addressed the area of leadership functions, the Professional Learning Community Scale (PLCS) discussed teachers' perceptions and practices around PLCs, the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES) related to factors around teacher efficacy with instruction, management, and children engagement, and the Whole-Child Development Scale (WCDS) evaluated perceptions that teachers had around whole-child development. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale except the WCDS which was rated on a six-point Likert scale. A pilot survey was dispersed to examine the questionnaire's psychometric qualities before the main survey was released (Keung et al., 2020). Data was first analyzed using the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to determine the validity of the scales used. Structural equation model (SEM) analysis and mediation analysis were conducted to provide further information regarding the results of the surveys taken. Each measure used was explained, data was presented, each scale resulted in acceptable reliability, and the scales showed a positive correlation to one another (Keung et al., 2020). The researchers used

the quantitative study to gather information considered lacking around the subject of kindergarten PLCs and not for experimental purposes. Since the researcher did not attempt to treat the participants, the study was nonexperimental (Galvan & Galvan, 2017). The cause-and-effect relationship between PLCs for kindergarten and the influence of principal leadership was a large aspect of the study. Researchers wanted to know the effect that leadership had on PLCs, teacher efficacy, and children's learning (Keung et al., 2020).

One area that could result in flawed data was the fact that 98.5% of the survey respondents were female (Keung et al., 2020). Conducting research with a larger sample of male participants could result in differing data. Limitations presented by the researcher and suggestions for future research included the need to possibly divide the kindergartens chosen by specific attributes through the stratified sampling design instead of using a convenience sample, differentiating leadership practice elements to determine effects, using children's learning outcomes instead of teachers' perceptions as criteria, assessing whole-child development using objective measures, and using a mixed-methods approach by collecting qualitative data on teachers' perception (Keung et al., 2020).

Support Needed for Effective Implementation

Research suggested that teachers played a critical role in the development and learning of children which impacted the education received in kindergarten. For the continued effectiveness to occur, teachers' capacities must be developed in the areas of curriculum planning around play-based learning and pedagogical practices (Cheung et al., 2022). Kindergarten programs in Hong Kong have seen a change in the development of new initiatives and policies created to improve early childhood education. Hong Kong teachers were provided with a curriculum guide that expressed how teachers were influential in the development of child-centered curriculum.

Although play was expressed as a means for development and learning to occur among children, implementation remained a challenge as teacher directed instruction continued to be the primary method used in kindergarten (Cheung et al., 2022). The implementation of play-based practices was affected by the differing beliefs held by teachers around play-based learning and the role of the educator in play. Despite the evidence of how play benefits whole-child development, other complications affected the implementation of play-based learning in the classroom.

Complications included a lack of resources and support to assist teachers, insufficient knowledge around play-based learning, non-applicable training for teachers, multiple required duties, extended work hours, and a large workload. Collaboration among teachers was suggested to create change in practices that supported developmentally appropriate curriculum that allowed for the utilization of play-based practices. Purposeful collaboration among teachers was needed to improve teaching practices and positively impact children's learning (Cheung et al., 2022).

Free kindergarten programs in Hong Kong started in 2015-2016 with requirements from the *Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide* that emphasized the need to find a balance in the various domains that impacted whole-child development in children through meaningful experiences (Curriculum Development Council, 2017 as cited by Cheung et al., 2022). Play was suggested to support children's growth in the developmental domains; however, the need to understand the teacher's role in how play was incorporated into the curriculum was important. A partnership was developed between a university and schools to support teachers as the implementation of play-based learning was integrated into the curriculum to be effective in providing an education to children based on whole-child development. Over the span of three years, 90 kindergartens that participated in the partnership received either one year or one and a half years of support and consultation from members of the university team (Cheung et al.,

2022). Quantitative data collected from the first two year's cohort of 50 kindergartens' questionnaires were used to evaluate the reliability and validity of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) used, while the data from the third year was used in model testing. The third year included 323 participants from 40 kindergartens. The participants were 74% teachers and assistant teachers and 22.6% principals and head teachers. Of those that responded 53.6% had ten or more years of experience teaching and 94.4% had spent time in lesson planning. Respondents who had previous experience with the implementation of play-based learning were 83.8% and 52.3% had been part of workshops offered as part of the project. A SEM model and mediation analysis were also used to ensure the data was valid and reliable (Cheung et al., 2022).

The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect information about the perceptions teachers had around play-based learning, how curriculum was planned, and to understand the pedagogical thoughts around implementation. Part one measured structured responses of teacher's beliefs about play, teacher's capacity in the planning of curriculum, and teachers' teaching practices around play-based learning. Part two consisted of open-ended questions that used a six-point Likert scale, that teachers answered regarding how various factors impacted and affected play-based learning implementation. Responses were volunteer based and anonymous (Cheung et al., 2022).

The positive association between teacher's beliefs around play-based practices and the capacity teachers had for curriculum planning was evident from the results of the study. Although teachers held beliefs that aligned with play-based learning, the beliefs did not reflect the actions of the teachers since the beliefs had not been applied as teaching practices. Teachers who held stronger beliefs about play-based learning tended to apply the beliefs held, alter

pedagogical practices, and more fully incorporate play to enhance the development of the whole child (Cheung et al., 2022).

The development of teachers' capacities to create and modify curriculum that aligned with effective implementation of play-based learning was needed to allow for more developmentally appropriate activities be utilized. The study indicated that when the capacities of teachers were strengthened, teachers were more successful in the blending of play beliefs, teaching practices around play, and the development of the whole child together. The need to assist teachers in the continued improvement of professional skills and knowledge was necessary to support children's holistic development. Suggested support included professional learning opportunities for kindergarten teachers to collaborate and to build pre-service teachers understanding of curriculum goals and the alignment within the context of kindergarten through teacher education and training taken. Limitations of the study included the need to collect data from a sample of participants with differing demographic backgrounds, utilization of a more objective assessment tool to collect data, and to include qualitative data (Cheung et al., 2022).

The suggested perspectives teachers held about play were varied and problematic in determining a cohesive approach to the implementation of play-based learning in classroom settings. Different views on play included play solely as free-time for children, play as a way for the enhancement of children's overall development, play as an opportunity for the development of social-emotional learning, play to connect to academics, and still others were undecided about the overall benefits of play. Play was described as multi-layered and complex, which led to researchers undetermined in a concrete definition of play for educators. Without a collective understanding of play, play-based learning was supported by teachers, but implementation challenges occurred. Teachers acknowledged that the incorporation of play could be found in the

classroom setting; however, the practices utilized typically did not adhere to a true definition of play-based learning because academics tended to be removed from the play experiences provided to the children. Although teachers felt like play-based learning occurred in the classroom, a discrepancy was noticed in what had occurred. The disconnect between thoughts and actions demonstrated the need for clarity around what qualified as play-based learning and what roles teachers played in effective implementation (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). Vu et al. (2015) agreed that despite teacher's beliefs that play was a valued part of children's educational experience, teachers did not have clear understandings of how play might be incorporated into the classroom and needed professional development opportunities to help make the connection between beliefs held and implementation practices.

The province of Ontario transitioned to full-day kindergarten in 2020 and when this occurred, the Ministry of Education revealed a curriculum document that supplied teachers with the framework that play and academic development were not separate entities. Teachers were given an outline of what was expected but were not given a specific definition of play or explicit directions on how play should be used to develop children's social and academic skills. Without a solid understanding of play and the integration of play with academics, teachers were left to develop a plan to meet the requirements of the document based on personal perspectives (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

A quantitative study was conducted in Ontario through a survey that focused on play. All but six open-ended questions used a five-point Likert scale. Topics revolved around what play looked like in the classroom, the role of teachers during play experiences, and barriers and challenges faced by teachers around the implementation of play. An online survey was sent to participants via email with a total of 101 elementary teachers that participated. The teachers who

answered the open-ended questions were selected for the analysis with a result of 69 participants considered for the research study. Educational experience averaged 13 years with seven within kindergarten and most participants worked in public settings. The survey's responses to the closed questions were collected and translated into percentages to better understand the viewpoints and experiences teachers had with play. An open-coded analysis of the open-ended questions was completed to define play and implementation (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). Results indicated that 91% of teachers incorporated play into the classroom yet play-based learning only occurred in 19% of kindergarten settings. Play and play-based learning were separate entities that required teaching practices that aligned with each type. Seventy-one percent of the survey participants mentioned that play training had been received; however, the challenge remained in how to effectively change practices from current play to play-based learning while still adhere to mandated requirements (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

Play was defined by 41% of participants as a way for social development to occur among children and did not refer to an academic connection through play. The other definition created by 59% of the participants was that the development of social and academic skills occurred simultaneously. A universal definition of play was not constructed due to the results that were closely divided into two groups. Three implementation techniques emerged from the data. First, learning that occurred through play was focused on social skills and was a time for teachers to observe and assess children's growth. Second, play and learning were combined to focus on the development of social and academic skills. The third implementation type referred to the separation of academics and social skills with play. In the third method, children engaged in formalized work centers and upon completion of the center activities, children went to free play choices. The three methods used to implement play demonstrated the inconsistency of teachers'

view on play and the effect that the inconsistencies have on children's learning (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

Several challenges were stated around the implementation of play-based learning, but the issue of time was a challenge for 47% of participants. For participants that did not integrate play and academics, the time allotted for free play was mentioned as a barrier for teachers when trying to meet the multiple academic pressures because of amount of time that was used when children engaged in a recreational form of play reduced time needed for academic content. Difficulty in how to prepare a play environment that incorporated targeted learning outcomes, the work done with parents and administrators that ensured that academic rigor was maintained through play, large class sizes, lack of resources, and funds were additional barriers mentioned. To assist in the reduction of some implementation barriers, the need for a clear definition of play-based learning, the need to provide teachers with consistent expectations of the teachers' role in play, and clarity around what assessments practices should be used is needed. For effective play-based learning to holistically meet the needs of children, a consistent definition of play-based learning along with support for teachers to integrate play and academics in meaningful ways is necessary. The study results indicated that although Ontario's teachers were provided with policy, curriculum, and expectations to integrate play-based learning into kindergarten classrooms, teachers were insufficiently trained and unsupported (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

Play and play-based learning remained two terms that many teachers and researchers struggled to define which led to practices not fully aligned with play-based learning. The difference in teachers' beliefs around free play, play for social development, and play connected to academics remained influential in how play was incorporated into the classroom. The study

conducted indicated that the need for clear policy around play-based learning, a distinct definition of play versus play-based learning, and support for purposefully incorporating play and academics together for effective implementation. Limitations were not specifically mentioned; however, a collection of qualitative data might have given additional insight into the practices of teachers and may have resulted in different results (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

Opposition to the Whole-Child Approach

Evidence of whole-child development continued to be supported through various research studies and by organizations such as NAEYC; however, there was also data to suggest that improvements needed to occur for the whole-child approach to be successful in addressing the needs of all domains. Jenkins et al. (2018) stated that the type of curricula used by educators influenced how teachers used instructional practices to deliver content and guide learning. In the United States, the focus on the whole-child was the most used preschool curricula. A mixed-method study was conducted by Jenkins et al. (2018) about the impact of the implementation of whole-child curricula in classrooms versus the implementation of skills-focused curricula in the article entitled *Boosting School Readiness: Should Preschool Teachers Target Skills or the Whole Child?* Whole-child curricula was defined by Jenkins et al. (2018) as a child-centered approach to learning that encouraged children to interact with materials and people in the classroom environment instead of specifically teaching target skills. Three types of curriculums were compared as a part of the study. To represent the whole-child curricula, multiple curriculum choices were selected. Creative Curriculum and HighScope were chosen due to similar emphasis that both curriculums placed on hands-on learning and teacher scaffolding. Content-specific curricula was a focus because of the explicit instruction around academic and behavioral skills and use of free play to provide instruction. Locally developed curricula that emphasized how

educators developed the lesson plans rather than using a published curriculum, was also included in the study.

Data from the Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research (PCER) Initiative Study provided 14 evaluations of early childhood curricula where 12 grantees independently conducted evaluations of one or more of the 14 curricula with 2,911 children in 18 different locations. The grantees chose the center, randomly assigned treatment or control curricula to whole classrooms, and used Mathematica and RTI as programs to assist with evaluation management. The inclusion criteria used allowed for a drop of four grantees and 1,070 children to enable the researcher to focus on whole-child approaches most used in preschools. The remaining grantees were randomized based on four sets that compared curricula. The preschools and teachers who participated in the study were randomly assigned to the treatment or control groups and whole school and with-in school randomization also occurred. Treatment curricula were categorized as literacy, mathematics, whole-child, and locally developed. The treatment sites received additional support and training; however, the control groups did not and implemented the curricula with no additional support (Jenkins et al., 2018).

Classroom observation measures determined if a teacher's approach impacted the classroom activities and relationships with the students. Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Revised (ECERS-R) was conducted to identify classroom safety, interactions, and materials, and program staff were interviewed about the program, teacher qualifications, and ratio of adults to children. The Teacher Behavior Rating Scale (TBRS) informed the researchers about how much focus was placed on math and literacy activities and the quality of the activities. The Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale measured the attitudes portrayed by the caregivers. The academic achievement and socioemotional skills of children were assessed using nationally

normed tests, literacy was assessed using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) and Woodcock-Johnson III (WJ-III) Tests of Achievement in Letter Word and Spelling, math was measured using the WJ-III Applied Problems and Child Math Assessment Abbreviated (CMAA) tests, and socioemotional skills were measured by the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) (Jenkins et al., 2018).

The results of the data collected when comparing the whole-child Creative Curriculum approach to locally developed curricula indicated that the classroom instruction and teacher-child relationships were better with the whole-child approach. No significant differences were noted when comparing locally developed curricula with Creative Curriculum regarding school readiness, and even though there were mixed differences between the whole-child and targeted math and literacy curricula in process outcomes, children received higher scores in math and literacy using a skill-targeted approach. Overall, when using the randomized control data to determine achievement gains in math and literacy, whole-child and locally developed curricula were inferior to using curricula designed to target specific math and literacy skills and that the use of skill-based curricula does not negatively affect noncognitive skills. Data did not indicate that the Creative Curriculum held any advantage over the locally developed curricula in the improvement of academic, socioemotional, or noncognitive skills (Jenkins et al., 2018).

The research study suggested that when attempting to enhance children's literacy and math school readiness skills, the use of curriculum supplements that focused on academic skills was more successful than using whole-child curricula. A suggestion was given that before policies were made to mandate the use of a whole-child curricula, more research was needed to determine the effectiveness of the approach. The researchers recommended that the focus of policy efforts should be on the assessment and implementation of using developmentally

appropriate, skills-based curricula. Despite the higher ratings in academic quality and quantity, teacher-student interactions, and classroom quality of using the whole-child approach than locally developed curricula, the advantages did not support children in the improvement of academic or socioemotional outcomes (Jenkins et al., 2018). Limitations for the study included the lack of data around curricula that targeted socioemotional or executive functions skills, additional training for teachers implementing assigned curricula, testing of additional curricula to supply more detailed data, and the realization that although the data collected was internally valid, the data may not be externally valid outside of the sites in the study (Jenkins et al., 2018).

Conclusion

Research provided information about the importance of maintaining child-centered, developmentally appropriate instructional practices in a field that has dramatically shifted the focus to academic achievement (Brown et al., 2019; Brown et al., 2020). The implementation of play-based learning, the use of authentic assessments, and the incorporation of social-emotional learning were examples of developmentally appropriate practices that ensured the holistic growth of the whole child while maintaining academic accountability. Teachers' beliefs aligned with what was known about appropriate practices for young children, but more specific direction around the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom was necessary (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Ng & Bull, 2018). Professional development was needed to support teachers in connecting what was known and believed about developmentally appropriate practices with practical application techniques to support whole-child development (Cheung et al., 2022; Schmidtke, 2022). In the closing chapter, information about limitations in the research, suggestions for future studies, and application to the field of early childhood was provided.

Chapter Three: Discussion, Application, and Future Studies

Research has expressed the importance of developing teaching practices that effectively incorporate developmentally appropriate practices while simultaneously ensuring that children meet required academic standards (Cheung et al., 2022). Early childhood teachers need support in connecting the belief that teaching holistically is beneficial to children to practices used in the classroom (Vu et al., 2015). Action is required of educational stakeholders to ensure that the multiple developmental domains of young children are enriched through developmentally appropriate practices to effectively provide a high-quality learning environment focused on whole-child development in preschool and kindergarten settings.

Summary of the Research

Preschool and kindergarten experiences have continued to change and shift in practices used by teachers from the utilization of a whole-child approach to a teacher-directed, whole group instructional approach to learning (Brown et al., 2019). Research supported and revealed the positive influence that developmentally appropriate practices had on holistically instructing children. Play-based practices promoted whole-child development through building and nurturing a foundation of social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and linguistic skills (Keung & Cheung, 2019). Authentic assessments collected data in natural environments through various forms of documentation that provided information on the development of the whole child and supported the instructional planning of teachers (Dennis et al., 2013). Social-emotional learning allowed for children to be successful in areas outside of the academic realm. The navigation of emotions, effective interaction with others, and the awareness of situations in various settings supported children in understanding how to interact with people in multiple circumstances (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017).

To assist educators in the use of developmentally appropriate practices that supported the growth of the whole child, met academic requirements, and translated teachers' beliefs into pedagogical practices, professional development that focused on the needs of young children and teacher education around DAP was essential. Mohamed and Al-Qaryouti (2016) agreed that having training workshops that provided preschool teachers with continuous professional development supported developmentally appropriate practices and Bautista et al. (2016) noted that teachers were interested in becoming better prepared in the areas of science, music, and arts to instruct children more holistically. Although the beliefs held by teachers correlated with DAP, the implementation of DAP continued to be a struggle for teachers. Professional development that focused on effective play-based learning that incorporated play and academics to assist educators in the shift to support whole-child development was needed (Vu et al., 2015).

Application of the Research

Slade and Griffith (2013) mentioned that a shift occurred in what was perceived as important for children's education. The shift changed from a sole focus on meeting academic requirements to the development of the whole child. Teachers and community members have long understood the need to instruct children in more than academic concepts. The education system must begin to act upon the knowledge that through teaching children in critical, analytical, innovative, and creative ways, the development of skills needed in the community and workforce will be provided (Slade & Griffith, 2013). Bassok et al. (2016) suggested that academic learning and learning that occurred in developmentally appropriate ways, did not have to be separate entities, but rather could be integrated together to produce meaningful and engaging activities to support the development of children. Teachers often feel the need to focus on and utilize inappropriate teaching practices that do not align with child centered teaching due

to pressure from outside influences. Finding a balanced approach to learning through the integration of academic and developmentally appropriate practices is necessary to focus on children and enrich learning experiences (Riley-Ayers & Figueras-Daniel, 2018).

The beliefs held by teachers reflected the importance of the positive impact made on children using developmentally appropriate practices; however, the implementation of those beliefs was a challenge and DAP was found lacking in classrooms (Mengstie, 2022). Mengstie (2022) stated that multiple barriers were present in effectively implementing DAP but through various supports, including professional development, teachers could be more effective in connecting beliefs and practices around DAP. Professional development that allowed time for teachers to collaborate, develop pedagogical practices, and apply new learning, supported teachers in the implementation of DAP, such as play-based learning, in the classroom (Schmidtke, 2022). Play-based learning was a suggested DAP that supported whole child development and academic content; however, teachers needed to understand the difference between play and play-based learning, how to alter curriculum to support play-based learning, and to find a balance between required expectations and personal pedagogy (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). Vu et al. (2015) suggested that training that provided strategies to support teachers in addressing learning standards in developmentally appropriate ways, effectively implementing play, and becoming involved in play was needed.

Research Limitations

Developmentally appropriate teaching practices that provided children with skills to develop holistically have been determined to be influential; however, the research conducted presented limitations on the data collected. Some studies were limited to the small sample size and researchers suggested a need for a larger sample size (Bautista et al., 2016; Vu et al. 2015).

Other studies needed to include components such as the level of teachers' educational and teaching experiences to include a range of teacher demographics in future studies (Cheung et al., 2022). The collection of data from a variety of settings and participants would allow for data generalization and replication instead of collecting from unique sources (Mengstie, 2022; Schmidtke, 2022). The use of multiple methodologies to collect research would add depth to the data gained (Bautista et al., 2016; Cheung et al., 2022; Keung et al., 2019), observations of teachers' use of DAP in natural settings could produce different results (Mohamed & Al-Qaryouti, 2016), and having a longer period to collect data and for follow-up on progress would determine the effectiveness of the study conducted (Vu et al., 2015). Teachers' perspectives were collected as part of the research, but the data was limiting. The need to gather perspectives around play-based practices from a variety of stakeholders including parents and children would allow for a comparison of views (Keung & Cheung, 2019).

Future Studies and Next Steps

To provide children with an education that meets the needs of the whole child in developmentally appropriate ways, it is essential that teachers' pedagogical practices are enhanced through meaningful professional development. To understand how to best support preschool and kindergarten aged children, teachers must have a foundational knowledge of child development, the understanding of how to implement practices such as play-based learning, authentic assessments, and social-emotional education, and explicit direction on how to integrate DAP with high academic expectations to meet necessary requirements of administration and policy makers. Schmidtke (2022) stated that kindergarten teachers would benefit from training that focused on content directly related to guided play, time to share learning with other kindergarten teachers, and be given opportunities to take knowledge gleaned from ongoing job

trainings to plan instructional practices, determine effective implementation strategies, and reflect on the application of the training. According to Mengstie (2022), helping teachers build a skillset in applying the strong beliefs held about the importance of DAP into the classroom is a next step for administrators and policy makers. Due to the discrepancy between the beliefs held by teachers and the practices used in the classroom, further study should be conducted to identify teachers' knowledge level of DAP and how that translates to classroom practices (Jumiaan et al., 2020). Teachers often know and understand the benefits of DAP but fail to successfully implement DAP into the classroom.

Training around play-based learning would support teachers in the implementation process to find a balance in meeting the developmental needs of the whole child with academic content requirements (Pyle & Alaca, 2018). An intensive focus on academic content in preschool and kindergarten has the potential to elicit negative outcomes for children due to the stress caused using inappropriate practices when attempting to develop children's academic growth and achievement (Bassok, et al., 2016). The implementation of play-based learning was a suggestion that integrated play and learning that assisted in the balancing of both components of education (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). When teachers move from not interfering in play experiences, to guiding the extension of children's learning through play, the implementation of play-based learning becomes a positive influencer to children's academic success (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Slade & Griffith (2013) expressed the need to implement school-wide, systematic changes to support the whole child approach rather than having slight changes occur over time. The shift in school processes would allow for change to occur in practices towards the holistic development of all children. Brown et al. (2019) agreed that although a daily increase in play and social-emotional learning would benefit the shift in kindergarten, systematic changes needed to

also occur. Changes included smaller class sizes, new content and curriculum standards, and a limit on standardized testing usage were suggestions for policy makers to consider when determining how to best support the whole child and still maintain academic rigor (Brown et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Preschool and kindergarten children's education is impacted by teachers willing to improve and grow in pedagogical strategies by using developmentally appropriate practices that guide children in holistically achieving skills that enhanced the success of the whole child (NAEYC, 2022). To effectively support the use of developmentally appropriate practices, a commitment by teachers to continually improve, collaborate, and adjust according to individual needs of each child is essential (NAEYC, 2022). The level of implementation of DAP demonstrated is often dependent on what practices are supported by administration, the policies enforced, research initiatives, adult professional development and educational training, and other institutional efforts that affect teachers' classroom practices (NAEYC, 2022). Ensuring that a balance is found in the classroom between academic rigor and developmentally appropriate practices is necessary to enhance curriculum making-decisions by placing the focus on the children's needs. (Keung & Cheung 2019; Riley-Ayers & Figueras-Daniel, 2018).

Research examined in this paper addressed the question, "How can early childhood teachers implement developmentally appropriate practices that support whole-child development in preschool and kindergarten programs" through addressing the importance of developmentally appropriate practices that teach to the whole child, exploring challenges for educators, and providing insight about the application to the field. For teachers to develop skills needed to prepare children for society, action must occur to ensure that developmentally appropriate

practices are utilized to support the whole child (Slade & Griffith, 2013). According to Schmit (2020), “Change comes whether you like it or not” (p. 130) but educators with a strong understanding of child development, research, and best practices, are better able to identify what is developmentally appropriate when approached with upcoming trends and practices in education and can more fully advocate for what is best for children (Schmit, 2020).

Resources

- Arnott, L. (2021). Holistic experiences: celebrating the wonder of early childhood education. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 29(4), 353–357.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2021.2003949>
- Bassok, D., Latham, S., & Rorem, A. (2016). Is kindergarten the new first grade? *AERA Open*, (1)4, 1-31. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2332858415616358>
- Bautista, A., Ng, S. C., Munez, D., & Bull, R. (2016). Learning areas for holistic education: Kindergarten teachers' curriculum priorities, professional development needs, and beliefs. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 10(1), 1-18.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-016-0024-4>
- Brown, C. P., Englehardt, J., Barry, D. P., & Ku, D. H. (2019). Examining how stakeholders at the local, state, and national levels made sense of the changed kindergarten. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(3), 822-867.
<https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0002831218804152>
- Brown, C. P., Ku, D. H., & Barry, D. P. (2020). “Kindergarten isn’t fun anymore. Isn’t it so sad?”: Examining how kindergarten teachers in the US made sense of the changed kindergarten. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 90, 1-13.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103029>
- Brown, C. P. & Mowry, B. (2015). Close early learning gaps with rigorous DAP. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 96(7), 53-57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721715579041>
- Burroughs, M. D., & Barkauskas, N. J. (2017). Education the whole child: Social-emotional learning and ethics education. *Ethics and Education*, 12(2), 218-232.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2017.1287388>

- Cheung, A., Keung, C., & Tam, W. (2022). Developing kindergarten teacher capacity for play-based learning curriculum: A mediation analysis. *Teachers and Teaching, Theory and Practice*, 28(5), 618-632. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2022.2062749>
- Dennis, L. R., Rueter, J. A., & Simpson, C. G. (2013). Authentic assessment: Establishing a clear foundation for instructional practices. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 57(4), 189-195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2012.681715>
- Farley, K. S., Brock, M. E., & Winterbottom, C. (2018). Evidence-based practices: Providing guidance for early childhood practitioners. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 32(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2017.1387205>
- Fesseha, E., & Pyle, A. (2016). Conceptualising play-based learning from kindergarten teachers' perspectives. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 24(3), 361-377. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2016.1174105>
- Frans, N., Post, W. J., Oenema-Mostert, C. E., & Minnaert, A. E. M. G. (2020). Preschool/kindergarten teachers' conceptions of standardised testing. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy, & Practice*, 27(1), 87-108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2019.1688763>
- Galvan, J. L. & Galvan, M. C. (2017). *Writing literature reviews: A guide for students of the social and behavioral sciences*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (August, 2016). *Making whole-child education the norm: How research and policy initiatives can make social and emotional skills a focal point of children's education*. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/making-whole-child-education-the-norm/>
- Jenkins, J. M., Duncan, G. J., Auger, A., Bitler, M., Domina, T., & Burchinal, M. (2018).

Boosting school readiness: Should preschool teachers target skills or the whole child?

Economics of Education Review, 65, 107-125.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2018.05.001>

Jumiaan, I., Alelaimat, A., & Ihmeideh, F. (2020). Kindergarten teachers' knowledge level of developmentally appropriate practice in Jordan. *Education 3-13*, 48(8), 1000-1011.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2019.1699939>

Keung, C. P. C., & Cheung, A. C. K. (2019). Towards holistic supporting of play-based learning implementation in kindergartens: A mixed method study. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 47(5), 627–640. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-019-00956-2>

Keung, C. P. C., Yin, H., Tam, W. W. Y., Chai, C. S., & Ng, C. K. K. (2020). Kindergarten teachers' perceptions of whole-child development: The roles of leadership practices and professional learning communities. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 48(5), 875-892. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143219864941>

LeeKeenan, D. & Ponte, I. C. (2018). Meaning assessment and documentation: How directors can support teaching and learning. *YC Young Children*, 73(5), 87-92.

Mengstie, M. M. (2022). Preschool teachers' beliefs and practices of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 0(0), 1-12.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X221145464>

Mohamed, A. H. H., & Al-Qaryouti, I. A. (2016). The association between preschool teachers' beliefs and practices about developmentally appropriate practices. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, 186(12), 1972-1982.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1146260>

NAEYC. (2020). *Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP): A position statement*.

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/dap/contents>

NAEYC (2022). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8* (4th ed.). National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Ng, S. C., & Bull, R. (2018). Facilitating social emotional learning in kindergarten classrooms: Situational factors and teachers' strategies. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 50(3), 335-352. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-018-0225-9>

Pyle, A., & Alaca, B. (2018). Kindergarten children's perspectives on play and learning. *Early Child Development and Care*, 188(8), 1063-1075.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1245190>

Pyle, A., & Danniels, E. (2017). A continuum of play-based learning: The role of the teacher in play-based pedagogy and the fear of hijacking play. *Early Education and Development*, 26(3), 274-289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2016.1220771>

Riley-Ayers, S., & Figueras-Daniel, A. (2018). Engaging and enriching: The key to developmentally appropriate academic rigor. *YC Young Children*, 73(2), 52–58.

Schmidtke, A. (2022). A qualitative study of kindergarten teachers' perceptions about the influences of professional learning on their implementation of guided play. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 37(1), 49-76.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2022.2064013>

Schmit, C. (2020). *Advocacy for early childhood educators: Speaking up for your students, your colleagues, and yourself* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429325519>

Semmar, A., & Al-Thani, T. (2015). *Piagetian and Vygotskian approaches to cognitive*

development in the kindergarten classroom. *Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*, 5(2), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jedp.v5n2p1>

Slade, S. & Griffith, D. (2013). A whole child approach to student success. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy* 10(0), 21-35.

Vu, J. A., Han, M., & Buell, M. J. (2015). The effects of in-service training on teachers' beliefs and practices in children's play. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 23(4), 444-460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2015.1087144>