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# Acceptability, Integrity and Perceived Effectiveness of Kinder Training

Natalya Ann Edwards

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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, ACCEPTABILITY, INTEGRITY AND PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF KINDER TRAINING, by NATALYA EDWARDS, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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Natalya A. Edwards

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## ABSTRACT

### ACCEPTABILITY, INTEGRITY AND PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF KINDER TRAINING

by  
Natalya A. Edwards

There has been limited research on the effectiveness of kinder training, but those studies that have been conducted show promising results. The majority of past kinder training studies utilized quantitative methods. The current study implemented a qualitative approach to examining the acceptability, integrity and perceived effectiveness of kinder training. The researchers explored the perceptions that a group of elementary school teachers had of the content and process of kinder training, including its impact on teaching beliefs and practices, student behavior, the teacher-child relationship, and classroom management skills. Findings indicated acceptability related to the content and structure of the kinder training model for all teacher participants. The researchers also examined the degree to which participants implemented the kinder training language and skills as originally taught. The results suggested moderate integrity based on the observations of the Principal Investigator. Additionally, the teachers reported an enhanced teacher-child relationship, improved student behavior and improved classroom management skills. Implications for research and practice, as well as the limitations of the study are discussed.

ACCEPTABILITY, INTEGRITY AND PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF KINDER  
TRAINING

by  
Natalya A. Edwards

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the  
Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Counselor Education and Practice  
in  
the Department of Counseling and Psychological Services  
in  
the College of Education  
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA  
2007



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## AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. JoAnna White and Dr. Kristen Varjas, for their tireless work and invaluable support on my behalf. Thanks also to Dr. Catharina Chang who is always willing to go beyond the call of duty. A special thanks to Dr. Barbara Meyers who has been so encouraging and has provided me with much help in the conceptual stages. Finally, I would like to thank my family, partner and friends who have been my backbone throughout this process.

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## CHAPTER 1

### KINDER TRAINING: STRENGTHENING TEACHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS, STUDENT OUTCOME AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

#### Introduction

A healthy emotional connection between teachers and students may serve to enhance students' social behavior and academic progress (student outcome) and facilitate a functional classroom environment. The literature indicates that there may be a reciprocal relationship among the teacher-child bond, student learning and social behavior (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Burnett, 2002; Espinosa & Laffey, 2003; Isaacs & Duffus, 1995; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). There also seems to be a correlation between students' social and academic behavior and teachers' classroom management skills (Pianta, Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002). The complexity of the relationships among these classroom variables emphasizes the importance of multi-dimensional professional development training programs that concurrently address teacher-child relationships, student outcome and classroom management.

Professional development training programs designed for elementary school teachers have addressed the interaction of several classroom variables, including teacher behavior, students' social behavior, academic learning, teacher-child relationships and teachers' classroom management skills (e.g. Farmer, Goforth, Hives, Aaron, Jackson & Sgammato; Hollins, McIntyre, Debose, Hollins & Towner, 2004; Lannie & McCurdy, 2007; Marshall, Weisner & Cebula, 2004; McIntosh, Rizza & Bliss, 2000; Pianta &

Hamre, 2001). However, these programs tend to address only one or two of the classroom components at a time. McIntosh, Rizza and Bliss (2000), for example, describe Teacher- Child Interaction Therapy, which is designed to develop the teacher-child relationship and promote pro-social student behavior. As another example, the Raise Responsibility System developed by Marshall (2004) targets student behavior and teachers' classroom management skills. To date, kinder training is the only professional development training program that concurrently targets teacher-child relationships, students' social behavior, academic achievement, and teachers' classroom management skills. The purpose of this paper is to present the literature on the interplay among these classroom components. Various relevant studies are illustrated, including the description of specific professional development training programs related to one or more of the classroom variables mentioned. Finally, kinder training is presented as a multi-dimensional play-based professional development training model aimed at enhancing teacher-child relationships, improving student behavior, engaging students in effective learning, and improving teachers' classroom management skills.

## Review of the Literature

### *Teacher Child Relationships*

Teacher-child relationships are influenced by multiple classroom variables including teacher behavior and students' social and academic conduct (e.g. Baker, 2006; Gable, 2002). Teacher-child relationships also have the potential to affect these classroom components (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Burnett, 2002). Given this complexity the following section describes the interplay among the various aspects of the teacher-child relationship.

*The central role of the teacher-child relationship.* Researchers have compared the relationship between teachers and students with parent-child relationships (e.g. Attwood, 2005; McIntosh, Rizza & Bliss, 2000). Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) emphasized the regulatory role that both parents and teachers have in children's academic and social development. They cited relationships as one of the factors that influence students' progress and noted the potential influence (positive/negative) of parent-child relationships and teacher-child relationships on children's academic skills and social behavior. Like the parent-child relationship, the quality of the teacher-child relationship is associated with school-related outcomes and social competence (Pianta, Nimetz & Bennett, 1997).

Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) examined the degree to which students' relationships with their teachers predicted academic success and pro-social behavior. Teachers reported on their students' academic and social behavior in pre-school, kindergarten and first grade. The researchers also explored the stability of teacher-child relationships over the three-year period using the short form of the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001). Pianta and Stuhlman found that conflict and closeness within the teacher-child relationship at the pre-school level were significant predictors of teachers' rating of academic achievement and social competence in first grade.

Researchers often depend heavily on teacher perception of student behavior, but they also emphasize the need to obtain assessments from multiple sources in order to gain a more accurate picture of students (Friedman, Friedman & Leone, 2001). Best practices in student assessment also promote the use of multiple methods to evaluate student behavior (Thomas & Grimes, 1995). In addition to teacher reports, Pianta and Stuhlman

(2004) employed mothers' ratings of children's behavior in order to account for behavioral evaluation across contexts. The results show that mother-rated child internalizing behavior (e.g. anxiety and depression) at the first grade level was predicted by pre-school and first grade teacher reports of closeness in the teacher-child relationship. The same association held true for mother-rated child externalizing behavior (e.g. aggression and hyperactivity) and reports of conflict in the teacher-child relationship. Reports of conflict in the teacher-child relationship in kindergarten and first grade were inversely associated with first grade reports of social competence.

In terms of the stability of the teacher-child relationship, Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) found that overall teacher ratings of closeness and conflict within the teacher-child relationship were moderately stable over time (pre-school through first grade). These results align with earlier studies examining the stability of the teacher-child bond between pre-school and kindergarten (Howes , Phillipsen & Peisner-Feniberg, 2000) and kindergarten and first grade (Pianta, Steinberg & Rollins, 1995).

Foundational research on attachment theory highlights the importance of the mother-child relationship in the social, cognitive, and emotional development of young children (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). However, Howes and Matheson (1992) suggest that children tend to develop an attachment to several caregivers, and the quality of these relationships may vary from one caregiver to the next. On this basis, Howes and Hamilton (1992) explored the teacher-child relationship from an attachment perspective. In a longitudinal study, they explored the role of a secure teacher-child attachment on the emotional development of children.

Consistent with other studies on assessment of student behavior across contexts and informants (e.g. Achenbach, McConaughy & Howell, 1987; Duhig, Renk, Epstein & Phares, 2000; Walker & Bracken, 1996), Howes and Hamilton (1992) examined 72 children and their parents and teachers within child care centers and family day care homes. Two observers obtained teacher and parent data at five data collection points (18, 24, 30, 36 and 42 months). Children's relationships with their parents and teachers were assessed on the basis of secure (e.g. "spontaneous check-in to adult"), avoidant (e.g. "no physical contact with adult") or ambivalent (e.g. "distressed social interaction") attachment.

In the teacher component of their study, Howes and Hamilton (1992) emphasize the fact that children tend to change teachers between infancy and pre-school and suggest that this may result in a problem for children. They therefore examined whether or not the children in their study would form a similar bond with each new teacher or be so negatively affected by losing a caregiver that they would reject subsequent teachers. Using Waters and Deane's (1985) Attachment Q-set, the researchers explored the correlations between the total number of times the teacher changed and the final score on security within the teacher-child relationship. They also examined the security scores with the point in time that the change in teacher took place. The findings indicated that children who changed teachers between the first and second data collection points (18 and 24 months) had lower security ratings at 24 months and 30 months than children who did not change teachers. Of significance, the security scores for the children in these two groups remained the same at later assessments (36 and 42 months). Based on this latter



finding the authors noted that children who are at least pre-school age do not seem to be negatively affected by a change in teacher.

The quality of the teacher-child relationship may be both a contributor and a measurement of the social and academic adjustment of children (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). This highlights the central role that the teacher-child relationship can play in the socialization of children. The results of Howes and Hamilton's (1992) study point to the importance of a healthy teacher-child relationship, primarily within the first two years of a child's life. Additionally, secure early teacher-child relationships and emotional stability/regulation can lay a foundation for healthy teacher-child interactions and social and academic adjustment during school-age (Baker, 2006).

*Teacher-child relationships and student adjustment.* Researchers have investigated the interaction of teacher-child relationships with various measures of student adjustment including learning difficulties, externalizing and internalizing problem behaviors and academic scores (e.g. Achenbach, McConaughy & Howell, 1987; Pianta, Steinberg & Rollins, 1995). Baker (2006) explored the degree to which the teacher-child relationship enhanced elementary school students' social and academic adjustment. She echoes the work of Howes and Hamilton (1992) noting the potential of the teacher-child relationship to give students the emotional security needed to be socially competent and fully engaged in the learning process. According to Howes, Phillipsen & Peisner-Feniberg (2000), the teacher-child relationship contributes to the social and academic abilities of very young children. Baker (2006) extends this view, highlighting the influential role of the teacher-child relationship throughout the school-age period. Teacher-child relationships during kindergarten have been found to predict children's

academic adjustment through the fourth grade, and their behavioral regulation through middle school (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

In her study, Baker (2006) hypothesized that the quality of the teacher-child relationship would contribute to aspects of student adjustment throughout the school-age period, and that this association would be stronger for social indicators of adjustment than for academic variables. One thousand, three hundred and ten kindergarten through fifth grade students and their teachers participated in this three year study. The quality of the teacher-child relationship was measured using the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001) and student social and academic behavior was assessed by the Behavior Assessment System for Children (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992). Academic competence was also measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the Stanford Achievement Test Series and report card grades.

The results of the study align with Baker's (2006) initial hypotheses. There was a low moderate correlation between closeness in the teacher-child relationship and positive work habits and reading scores. There was however a stronger association between teacher-child relationship closeness and children's social skills than the correlation between teacher-child closeness and children's academic skills. Additionally, the findings indicate that the teacher-child relationship influences children's adjustment during the formative years as well as in the upper elementary grades. This is supported by previous studies which underscore the importance of the teacher-child relationship in enhancing the academic success of young children (Birch & Ladd, 1997) and predicting later school success (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

In an earlier study, Pianta, Steinberg and Rollins (1995) examined the influence of teacher-child relationship quality on the social and academic adjustment of children. Using the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 1994), teachers of 436 students gave their perceptions of the teacher-child relationship during kindergarten, first and second grade. The teachers also provided ratings of the students' social and academic adjustment over the three-year period. Similar to Baker's (2006) study, Pianta et al conceptualized school adjustment in terms of students' ability and readiness to be socially and academically engaged. The findings of the study indicated that those kindergarten students who were rated as having a positive relationship with their teacher were also rated as being better adjusted in first grade than was originally predicted by teacher ratings in the kindergarten year. Additionally, kindergarten students who experienced close teacher-child relationships were rated as being better adjusted in second grade than those students whose teachers provided ratings of conflict within the teacher-child relationship. These results, supported by similar studies (e.g. Baker, 2006; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Birch & Ladd, 1998) suggested that the teacher-child relationship may be a protective factor for children who struggle behaviorally and academically, highlighting the potential remedial effect of a healthy teacher-child bond.

*The impact of teacher behavior.* The significance of the teacher-child relationship is also expressed in children's reactions to teachers' behavior. Young children in particular are sensitive to teachers' behaviors and may be positively influenced by affectionate conduct, such as positive verbal comments and smiling (Zanolli & Saudargas, 1990). According to Brok, Brekelmans and Wubbels (2004), children develop stable views of the teacher-child relationship based on initial impressions of teachers'

classroom behavior. Students' then respond to teachers both verbally and non-verbally according to their understanding of the nature of the relationship.

Zanolli and Saudergas (1990) took a foundational approach to children's response to teachers' behavior, by examining the responses of two year olds to their teachers' emotional and behavioral expressions. According to Twardosz, Schwartz, Fox and Cunningham (1979) adults interpret a variety of behaviors (e.g. physical contact, positive verbal expressions and smiling) as affection. On this basis, Zanolli and Saudergas examined whether the children in their study responded similarly to all affectionate teacher conduct and whether or not they were able to differentiate between affectionate teacher behavior (e.g. affectionate words and affectionate physical contact) and routine care-giving behavior (e.g. question/instruction).

Zanolli and Saudergas (1990) conducted observations with nine day-care teachers and their students (ages 16-28 months). Affectionate teacher behavior was identified in terms of smiling, smiling with contact, affectionate words, passive affectionate physical contact (e.g. holding a child in arms/lap) and active affectionate physical contact (e.g. hugging and kissing). Care giving teacher behaviors were categorized according to questions/instruction, questions/instruction with contact and care giving contact (e.g. wiping nose/tying shoes). The children's responses were identified as positive (e.g. laughter, smiling, affectionate words), negative (e.g. crying, whining, screaming), neutral (i.e. interaction with teacher after affectionate or care giving behavior but no positive or negative emotion), and none (i.e. no interaction with teacher after affectionate or care giving behavior).

The results of Zanolli and Saudergas' (1990) study highlight the potential benefits of affection as a function of routine care giving. The results indicate that smiling and smiling with contact had a high probability of a positive response from the children in the study. Additionally, children's responses differed for affectionate behavior and regular care giving conduct (which was not likely to elude positive responses). These findings suggested that smiling and affectionate physical contact may have a positive effect on children's ability to reciprocate affection. This emphasizes the potential influence of teacher-initiated non-verbal affection in teacher-child interactions. These findings are also consistent with Propper and Moore's (2006) view that responsive and affectionate care giving during infancy and early childhood contribute to healthy emotional and psychological development.

Consistent with non-verbal responses, teacher verbal feedback also appears to have an impact upon students. Students, therefore may respond behaviorally and academically according to the perceived quality of the teacher-child relationship (Rimm-Kaufman, Paro, Downer, & Pianta, 2005). Burnett (2002) examined the effect of teacher praise and feedback on students' perceptions of the teacher-child relationship. Seven hundred and forty-seven students and their teachers participated in the study over a three year period. Teachers' feedback was measured by the Teacher Feedback Scale (Burnett, 1996) and categorized according to praise (e.g. "well done"), negative feedback (e.g. "that's not good enough"), ability feedback (e.g. "you seem very smart to me") and effort feedback (e.g. "you are working very hard"). According to the results, effort feedback and negative feedback were directly related to the students' perceptions of the teacher-child relationship. Effort feedback had a positive impact on students' perceptions of the

teacher-child bond and negative teacher feedback had a negative influence on students' view of the teacher-child relationship. This suggests that teachers' verbal feedback may also play an important role in the quality of teacher-child interactions, and that encouragement may be more significant/ effective than praise.

*Teacher-child relationships and students' behavioral orientations.* Consistent with the reciprocity involved in human relationships, the interaction between teachers and students is also susceptible to the behavioral orientations (i.e. externalizing and internalizing indicators) of the students themselves. Birch and Ladd (1998) suggested that children's characteristics may moderate the quality of the teacher-child relationship. In a longitudinal study, they examined the association between the behavioral orientations of kindergarten students and aspects of their relationship with their first grade teacher. One hundred and ninety-nine students and their teachers participated in the two year study. Student behavior was assessed using the Child Behavior Scale (Ladd & Profilet, 1996) and the teacher-child relationship was measured by the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta et al., 1995). The findings of the study indicated a positive correlation between early maladaptive behavior and teacher-child conflict. Conversely, early anti-social behavior correlated negatively with teacher-child closeness. These associations held for both analyses in kindergarten and first grade. These results suggest that students' early behavioral orientations may predict the quality of later teacher-child relationships.

Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) asserted that teacher reports of teacher-child relationship quality may be synonymous with the perceived behavioral orientation of students. Therefore, a teacher may be less likely to initiate and/or describe a close relationship with a student that exhibits particular problem behaviors (e.g. hyperactivity

and aggression). Additionally, teachers' perceptions of students' behavioral orientations play a dominant role in social and academic evaluation of students (Murray & Murray, 2004). This highlights the interaction of the teacher-child relationship, student outcome and teacher perceptions.

Espinosa and Laffey (2003) examined the impact of teacher perceptions of student behavior on school-related outcomes of young children. Twelve teachers and sixty-one students (pre-school through first grade) participated in this exploratory study. The researchers compared teachers' ratings of students' social and academic behavior with independent measures of these variables. Teachers' perceptions of students' social and academic competence were assessed by the Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliot, 1990). Additionally, the researchers developed two measures of mathematical knowledge and employed behavioral observations to independently evaluate students' social and academic skills. The findings of this study indicated a positive relationship between teachers' expectations of maladaptive student behavior and low scores in academic capacity. For the group of teachers sampled, academic ratings were influenced by perceptions of negative student behavior. In addition to these findings, the authors suggest that negative teacher perceptions impact the quality of the teacher-child interaction, and students' ability to develop close teacher-child relationships.

*Teacher-child relationships and student peer interactions.* Within the classroom environment social exchanges are not limited to teacher-child interactions. Students are also expected to relate to their peers. Researchers have found an association between the nature of the teacher-child relationship and student peer relationships (Howes, 2000). Howes, Hamilton and Matheson (1994) explored the interaction of students' peer

relationships with components of the teacher-child relationship. Forty-eight children (13 to 24 months) and their teachers participated in this longitudinal study. Over a period of three years, the researchers collected data on teacher-child relationship quality using the Waters and Deane (1985) attachment Q-Set. Student behavioral observation samples were also taken at each of the six data collection points. When the children were four years old, peer behaviors were observed and each child was interviewed for assessment of social problem-solving behaviors and social cognition. Howes et al. (1994) found that children's security with their teacher is negatively related to maladaptive social behaviors and positively associated with healthy peer interactions and outgoing behaviors.

Howes (2000) extended this work by examining the extent to which children's second grade social competence with peers could be predicted by the quality of pre-school teacher-child relationships. This longitudinal study involved 793 children and their teachers. The researchers employed classroom observations, measures of the social-emotional climate of the classroom, the Peer Play Scale (Howes & Matheson, 1992), the Classroom Behavior Inventory (Schafer, Edgerton, & Aaronson, 1978), the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 1994) and the Teacher Assessment of Social behavior Questionnaire (Cassidy & Asher, 1992). The findings reflected teacher ratings of low aggressive behavior with peers (in second grade) coupled with low scores of conflict within the pre-school teacher-child relationship. Conversely, teacher reports indicated high second grade pro-social behaviors with peers compared with high scores of closeness within the teacher-child relationship during the pre-school year. These findings suggested that the quality of the relationships that students have with their



teachers may predict future peer relationships. This implies that healthy early teacher-child relationships can positively affect the social web of young children.

### *Student Outcome*

Teachers are primarily responsible for evaluation of student outcome, which includes both social behavior and academic success (Zhang & Burry-Stock, 2003). Within the classroom environment, teacher-child relationships play a central role in student outcome. However, there are other factors that contribute to student outcome that may not be related to specific teacher-child interactions. These include parent-child relationships, peer interactions, temperament, cognitive skills and self-management skills (Anthony, Anthony, Glanville, Waanders & Shaffer, 2005; Ramos, Guerin, Gottfried, Bathurst & Oliver, 2005; Miranda, Webb, Brigman & Peluso, 2007). The literature on student outcome also tends to focus on maladaptive internalizing and externalizing behaviors and the relationship between students' social competence and academic accomplishment (Lane, Givner & Pierson, 2004; Isaacs & Duffus, 1995; Wehby, Lane & Falk, 2003). Social behavior and academic success, two core components of student outcome, will be discussed in more detail.

*Social behavior.* Research on student behavior often places emphasis on problem behaviors in the classroom (Espinosa & Laffey, 2003; Irvin et al., 2006; Lumley, McNeil, Herschell & Bahl, 2002; Sutherland, K. S. & Oswald, D. P., 2005). Much less attention is given to examining and enhancing pro-social behavior. Consistent with this trend, intervention studies traditionally focus on students with emotional, behavioral and learning disorders (Ardoin & Martens, 2004; Freeman et al., 2006; Little, Hudson & Wilks, 2002; O'Reilly, Lancioni, Gardiner, Tiernan & Lacy, 2002; Stichter, Sasso, &

Jolivette, 2004). Although an emphasis has been placed on special education student populations, there has been a recent shift towards applying behavior management models to general education populations (McKinney, Campbell-Whately & Kea, 2005). These include both individual and group behavior management techniques such as: motivation strategies (MacGrath, 2005), behavior management through adventure (Walsh & Aubry, 2007), and classroom meetings (Edwards & Mullis, 2003). Examples of similar professional development training programs designed for implementation in the general education setting are described later in this paper.

Some research-practitioners conducted analyses across classroom variables and described the interaction of teacher behavior and student behavior (Boekaerts, de Koning & Veddes, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Howes, 2000; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005). Others have designed behavior management models based on their own analyses of classroom conduct (Downing, J., Keating, T., Bennett, C., 2005; Kamps, Kravitz, Stolze & Swaggart, 1999; Marshall, Weisner & Cebula, 2004; Martin & Baldwin, 1996; Patton, Jolivette & Ramsey, 2006). Babkie (2006), for example, illustrated 20 tips to help teachers manage classroom behavior more effectively. These include clear and consistent rules, established boundaries, set routines, and cues to help students transition from one activity to the next.

Evertson (2001) implemented an intervention which involved key components of behavior management. A major goal was to help elementary school teachers monitor student behavior and academic engagement. The 15 teachers in the experimental group participated in a workshop targeting three components of behavior management: planning (prior to the start of school), implementing rules (at the beginning of the year), and

maintaining the system (throughout the year). The teachers were specifically taught how to explain rules, procedures and behavioral expectations, facilitate behavioral compliance, stop inappropriate conduct and implement consistent limits and consequences. The findings of the study indicated that teachers in the treatment group were better able to manage student behavior than those teachers in the control group. Specifically, trained teachers provided incentives for appropriate conduct; gave non-verbal cues to correct behavior and provided clear instructions prior to a new activity. The models of classroom conduct that have been developed (e.g. Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Howes, 2000; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005) point to the need for practical and proactive approaches to behavior management. Despite a movement toward innovation and application, the literature on student behavior still lacks comprehensive behavior management programs that have been applied rigorously, and that also concurrently address other classroom variables such as the teacher-child relationship.

*Academic success.* Research studies on student behavior have emphasized the reciprocal relationship between student behavior and academic progress (e.g. Lane, Givner & Pierson, 2004; Mottl, 2001). Consistent with the research on student behavior, the literature on academic outcome has been linked to aspects of social competence including self-determination and emotional insecurity (El-Sheikh, Buckhalt, Keller, Cummings & Acebo, 2007; Patrick, Kaplan & Ryan, 2007; Vybornova & Dunaeva, 2007). This underscores the importance of developing professional development training programs that target the promotion of adaptive behavior within the framework of academic progress. If curriculum goals are seen as the sole point of focus, teachers may miss underlying psychosocial barriers to student success.

Lane, Givner and Pierson (2004) examined teachers' perceptions of the skills that are necessary for school success. One hundred and twenty-six teachers from four elementary schools participated in this study. The teachers were asked to read a list of items from the Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) and rate the relevance/importance of each skill for students' classroom success. The majority of the teachers saw seven skills as critical to school success: following directions, attending to instructions, controlling temper with peers, controlling temper with adults, getting along with people who are different, responding appropriately when hit and using free time in an acceptable way. The findings of this study emphasized the relationship between students' social competence and academic success.

Another component of academic outcome is teaching effectiveness, which may be defined as the connection between teaching and student outcome (Brok, Brekelmans & Wubbels, 2004). In addition to behavioral expectations, research studies have examined the impact of teaching effectiveness on students' academic outcome (Evertson, 2001; Martin & Baldwin, 1996; Mottl, 2001; NICHD ECCRN, 2005; Pianta et al., 2002). Brok, Brekelmans and Wubbels (2004) examined the impact of teachers' interpersonal behaviors on teaching effectiveness. In their study, they extended the usual observational approach to assessing teaching effectiveness by also utilizing student ratings. The results indicated that a teacher's cooperativeness may be an important source of student motivation, but it is less important for students' academic achievement. This highlights the importance of teaching effectiveness for enhanced student outcome.

### *Classroom Management*

Effective classroom management involves the integration of several teaching skills including organizing, goal-directed activities, clear communication and opportunities for feedback (Evertson, 2001). Classroom management also includes promoting cooperative behavior and encouraging students' active participation in learning (Babkie, 2006). Consistent with the literature on student behavior, studies exploring classroom management skills often focus on management of maladaptive student behavior and academic remediation (Baker, 2005; Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino & Lathrop, 2007; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006). Rydell and Henricsson (2004), for example, examined the techniques that teachers employ to handle externalizing problem behaviors of students. The researchers noted various contributing factors to classroom management including, teacher orientation and the perceived ability to manage student behavior. The latter factor, in particular, influences teachers' preferred behavioral management strategies. The findings suggested that teachers who perceive that they have limited ability to monitor student conduct will tend to use authoritarian disciplinary methods such as directives, verbal reprimands and physical restraint.

Baker (2005) explored aspects of children's developmental problems including learning difficulties and externalizing and internalizing problem behaviors. These issues were examined within the framework of the teacher-child relationship and its potential impact on student behavior. Baker took a more proactive approach to classroom management by examining the protective role of the teacher-child bond in student adjustment. However, like other studies related to classroom management and student behavior (e.g. Sugai, Guardino & Lathrop, 2007), the focus was on remediation.

There are studies on classroom management that focus on other classroom variables, such as classroom quality (components of the classroom environment that affect children's learning; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network [ECCRN], 2005; Pianta et al., 2005; Pianta et al., 2002; Rimm-Kaufman, Paro, Downer, & Pianta, 2005). The findings of these studies indicated that the quality of the classroom environment is negatively affected when a teacher lacks formal early childhood education and does not hold child-centered beliefs (Pianta & Howes, 2005; NICHD ECCRN, 2005). Additionally, students' social competence and academic success increases when classroom atmosphere is of a high quality (Pianta et al., 2002; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005). The results of these studies highlight the central role of teacher-specific variables in impacting classroom quality and student outcome. They also point to the need to develop professional development training models that enhance teachers' classroom management skills.

Some research studies focus on preventive approaches to classroom management (e.g. MacGrath, 2005; Walsh & Aubry, 2007). A classroom meeting (Edwards & Mullis, 2003), for example, is a classroom management model that promotes cooperative student behavior and adaptive skill development. This model involves various components including: appreciations and accomplishments, conflict resolution and problem solving, and a class encouragement activity. The goal is to encourage the active participation of all students, engender cooperation, sharing and mutual responsibility. These meetings are facilitated by the teacher and can be used as an intervention tool as well as a preventive strategy. Despite the existence of similar comprehensive programs (e.g. Babkie, 2006; Boekaerts, de Koning & Veddes, 2006), additional research on classroom management is

needed. This includes the development of professional development training programs that specifically address other classroom variables including, the teacher-child relationship, student behavior and academic achievement.

#### *An Overview of Professional Development Training Programs*

The literature supports a complex interaction among teacher-child relationships, student outcome and classroom management (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Burnett, 2002; Espinosa & Laffey, 2003; Pianta et al., 2002). Some research-practitioners have designed models of classroom management which examine the components within and among the classroom variables, and provide practical solutions to teaching professionals (Boekaerts, de Koning & Veddes, 2006; DeJames, 1981). King (1997) for example, highlighted the importance of play in the classroom and outlined the role of instrumental play in the classroom community. King described instrumental play activities which are designed and controlled by the teacher. In this way, teachers are able to engender academic learning, and promote pro-social behavior while facilitating students' natural desire to play. Although such articles provide educators with practical tools, there has been limited research on the application of these models to the classroom setting (e.g. Kamps et al., 1999).

The majority of research studies focus on analyses of the relationships among teacher-child relationships, classroom management and student outcome (Baker, 2006; Birch & Ladd, 1998; Espinosa & Laffey, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Howes, 2000; Howes et al., 1994; Lane et al., 2004; NICHD ECCRN, 2005; Pianta et al., 2005; Pianta et al., 2002; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005). Some comprehensive professional development training programs have been applied to the

classroom context (e.g. Evertson, 2001; Martin & Baldwin, 1996). However, they do not adequately account for the complex relationships that exist among teacher-child interactions, student outcome and classroom management skills.

Consistent with this paper's focus on the interaction of teacher-child relationships, teachers' classroom management skills, student behavior and academic success, the following overview illustrates professional development training programs that address one or more of these variables. A program was selected if it was primarily designed for/applicable to elementary school teachers and their students and targeted at least two of the following areas: teacher behavior, the teacher-child relationship, classroom management, student behavior, and academic progress. Kinder training is then presented as a play-based professional development training model that is designed to concurrently address teacher-child relationships, student outcome and classroom management.

*Teacher-Child Interaction Therapy (TCIT)*. TCIT was developed based on Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT, Ryberg, 1998). McIntosh, Rizza and Bliss (2000) designed TCIT as a parallel program to PCIT that would address teacher-child relationships and student behavior. The specific goals of TCIT include: strengthening the teacher-child relationship and improving students' behavioral outcomes. Like PCIT, TCIT is intended for children ages two to seven and is designed to provide teachers with specific behavioral strategies (e.g. reflecting what children say and using praise statements) to address potential problem behaviors (e.g. non-compliance and aggression) within the classroom. A key component of the TCIT training model involves individual and classroom coaching by a psychologist to assist in behavior management.



Given the important role that play has in children's social, emotional and cognitive development (Piaget, 1962); TCIT incorporates the use of play techniques. McIntosh, Rizza and Bliss (2000) implemented a case study design to demonstrate the TCIT approach. The teacher participant was trained to use both child-directed (CDI) and teacher-directed (TDI) play techniques with the child of focus in special one on one play times. These play times were either led by the child (the child would initiate play and the teacher would follow) or the teacher participant depending on the intervention phase (CDI or TDI). The teacher was taught specific communication techniques to use during CDI and TDI. During CDI, these included describing the child's actions, reflective responding (i.e. paraphrasing what the child said), imitation of the child's behavior, praise, ignoring improper behavior and refraining from the use of questions and commands. During TDI, the teacher was trained to use effective commands and manage non-conforming behavior in a more directive style (e.g. giving directives and taking the lead). Finally, the teacher was taught to transfer the play communication skills to classroom interactions with the student. The majority of the twelve sessions took place in a small room while the last two sessions were conducted in the classroom. Additionally, during the training, the teacher was asked to have five minutes of special time with the child of focus during the regular class schedule.

The findings of this case study show promise for TCIT. Participant observation and data analysis of structured observation instruments and interviews reflected an improvement in the teacher-child interactions, and a reduction in the problem behaviors of the child. The child was more compliant and the teacher had less need to issue specific commands. This case study suggests that TCIT may be an effective approach to

enhancing teacher-child relationships and reducing maladaptive student behavior. The results cannot however be generalized; additional research studies are necessary. Despite the positive outcome of this case study, there has been no empirical research with TCIT beyond this project. TCIT is also designed for one-on-one implementation and therefore does not account for the generalization of skills to the entire classroom of students.

*Banking Time.* Banking Time involves a consultant, a teacher and one student, and is designed to develop the teacher-child relationship (Pianta & Hamre, 2001). For ten to fifteen minutes, at least twice per week, the teacher and the student engage in a special communication time. Teachers are taught to allow the child to lead the interaction. Teachers are asked to describe the student's activities, reflect the student's feelings, conduct reflective listening (i.e. paraphrasing the child's verbal content), imitate the student's behavior and use non-verbal communication to demonstrate interest. The teacher is expected to avoid giving commands, asking questions or engaging in other activities during this special one on one time. After several sessions, the teacher begins to develop relational themes based on the teacher-student interaction. Relational themes refer to comments regarding the potential supportive role that teachers can have in a student's life. These themes are then incorporated (by the teacher) during the special communication time. The teacher may say, for example, "Teachers are people that you can ask for help."

Banking Time generalizes principles of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) to the teacher-child relationship by focusing on the potential significance of a secure teacher-student bond (Howes & Matheson, 1992). The goal is to capitalize on the attachment model and help teachers and students develop healthier relationships (Pianta, 1999).

Despite its potential significance in developing the teacher-child bond, there has been limited empirical research on the efficacy of Banking Time. To date, only one study has examined the effectiveness of Banking Time for enhancing teacher-child relationships, and improving student behavior and time spent on instructional activities (Attwood, 2005). Using a multiple base-line approach, the researchers collected data on three teacher-student dyads over a 12- week period. The goal of the study was to examine the impact of Banking Time sessions on teacher-student relationship quality, teacher instructional behavior, student appropriate behavior and student inappropriate behavior. Classroom observations were conducted using the Mainstream version of the Code for Instructional Structure and Student Academic Response observation system (MS-CISSAR; Greenwood, Carta, Kamps & Delquadri, 1995). The results of this study did not find support for the efficacy of Banking Time as a way to develop the teacher-student bond and improve student behavior.

*The Raise Responsibility System (RRS)*. Marshall, Weisner and Cebula (2004) describe the use of RRS within the elementary school system. According to these researchers, RRS is a group model intended for use in the larger classroom context. With the teacher as trainer, RRS was designed as a means to strengthen the internal motivations of students. Based on elements of choice theory (Glasser, 1998), the program has three phases: teaching the hierarchy, asking students to reflect on behavior, and eliciting changes in behavior. Phase one involves the hierarchy of social development which includes: developing self-discipline, showing kindness to others, developing self-reliance, and doing good because it is the right thing to do. The focus of this phase is internal motivation. Phase two involves asking students to assess their behavior. The key

is to encourage the students to identify /describe their own behavior rather than simply telling them that the behavior is inappropriate. Phase three involves using “guided choices” beginning with an activity that allows the student to reflect on his/her behavior.

RRS focuses on the internal motivation of the child, and encourages choices. The goal is to avoid punitive measures and/or force the teacher to hold full responsibility for student behavior (Marshall, Weisner & Cebula, 2004). Although RRS appears to have practical applicability, there is only one empirical study supporting its effectiveness. Marshall, Weisner and Cebula outline results indicating that RRS is an effective tool for reducing problem behavior of students. These include increased obedience and appropriate classroom conduct of student participants. There has, however, been no other empirical research beyond this article.

*Good Behavior Game (GBG)*. GBG is an empirically supported behavior intervention first implemented by Barrish, Saunders and Wolf (1969). Intended for use with the entire class, the goal of GBG is to improve adaptive student behavior and reduce maladaptive student conduct (Lannie & McCurdy, 2007). Various research studies have been conducted which support GBG as an effective classroom management tool (e.g. Barrish et al.; Darveaux, 1984; Salend et al., 1989). GBG necessitates specific material including: GBG rules, GBG integrity check-list, weekly chart, timer, and a recording sheet. The rules of the game are reviewed by the teacher before the game begins. The class is divided into teams and the timer is set. Once the timer is started, the teacher records the number of instances of misbehavior among the members of each team. Since GBG is based on team scoring, individual student behavior has an impact on total group scores.

Lannie and McCurdy (2007) implemented GBG in a large urban elementary school. The goal of the study was to test the effectiveness of the GBG model in a high poverty, large urban setting. In addition to conducting student observations of on-task conduct and disruptive behavior, the researchers also conducted observations of teachers' classroom behavior (previous studies focused solely on student behavior). The results of the study align with previous studies indicating an improvement in adaptive behaviors (e.g. compliance and on-task behavior) and a reduction in disruptive behaviors (e.g. talking out) of students. The findings also indicated that teacher praise statements remained at almost zero throughout the intervention period, while negative and neutral teacher statements varied with the type and degree of off-task behavior. GBG shows promise with regard to student behavior and related classroom management. It does not however address key classroom variables including teacher behavior and the teacher-child relationship.

*Self-sustained learning.* Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollins and Towner (2004) conducted a five step structured teacher study-group aimed at enhancing teaching effectiveness within a predominantly African American urban school system. The five steps included (a) *delineating challenges*, (b) *identifying approaches for meeting challenges*, (c) *implementing selected approaches*, (d) *evaluating implementation*, and (e) *formulating theory to guide future practices*. The goal of the teacher study group was to encourage teachers to challenge personal biases and, through group feedback and enhanced self-awareness, implement student specific and culturally appropriate measures with African American students.

The teacher study group represented the professional development component of a larger study. The professional development model was ultimately designed to improve literacy acquisition among African American students. The results of the study indicate that teacher participants increased their use of positive expressions concerning children. The teachers also committed to having open classroom discussions regarding cultural issues and collaborate with other teachers to develop new teaching methods. These findings suggest that the continued use of self-sustaining teacher learning communities may enhance teacher collaboration and communication, encourage the development of new instructional methods and increase teachers' awareness of the specific needs of their students. Whereas the model specifically addresses teacher behavior, additional research needs to be conducted with regard to the impact on student achievement.

*Competence Enhancement Behavior Management (CEBM)*. CEBM (Farmer et al., 2006) is designed to provide teachers with specific behavioral strategies for use within a general education setting. This classroom management model aims to strengthen teacher-child interactions, let students know that they are valued, and reduce problem behaviors of students.

The five components of CEBM include "Aims and Viewpoints", "General Management Strategies", "Communicating with Students", "Social Networks and Peer Groups", and "Constructive Consequences." The sub-components within the framework involve: addressing teachers' views about discipline and behavior management, specific behavioral techniques necessary for effective classroom management, approaches to building healthy relationships with students exhibiting problem behaviors, and methods of discipline that encourage appropriate student behavior while developing the teacher-

child relationship. Although this model addresses multiple classroom components including the teacher-child relationship, student behavior and classroom management, there is no empirical data to support its effectiveness.

*High Probability Command Sequences (HPCS)*. HPCS is otherwise known as “behavioral momentum” (Mace, 1996) and refers to providing a series of requests with a high probability of compliance (e.g. “stand up tall”, “jump in place”) followed by a sequence of requests with a lower probability of compliance (e.g. “start working”, “sit in your chair”). Research has found support for the effectiveness of HPCS in school settings (e.g. Ardoin, Martens & Wolfe, 1999; Belfiore, Vargas & Skinner, 1997). However, the majority of the studies focus on students with disabilities. Less attention has been given to the application of HPCS among general education students (Austin & Agar, 2005).

Austin and Agar (2005) trained general education pre-school teachers to use HPCS as a regular part of their classroom activities. The goal was to increase the level of compliance among a group of students who had been exhibiting challenging behaviors. Findings reflected an increase in compliance for low probability requests, although these did not necessarily follow compliance to high probability requests. These results supported previous studies which indicated HPCS as an effective behavior management tool. This model addresses student behavior and related classroom management but does not specifically account for the quality of teacher-child interactions.

This overview was not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, it presented examples of professional development training programs that have been designed for, and in some cases, implemented with elementary school teachers and their students. Additionally, the programs described focused primarily on teacher behavior, student behavior, teacher-

child interactions and classroom management. Of significance was the fact that only two of the programs address the academic achievement of students, and none concurrently target teacher-child relationships, classroom management, student behavior and academic learning. To date, kinder training is the only multi-dimensional professional development training program that addresses all key classroom variables mentioned.

*Kinder training.* Play provides a foundation for healthy social, emotional and cognitive development (Piaget, 1962). It is also the natural, spontaneous expression of a child. According to Landreth (2002) children use toys in the same way that adults use words; the *real* child emerges and finds free expression within the context of play. These concepts form the foundation for a non-directive approach to therapeutic play. Landreth (1991) adapted Axline's (1947) client-centered play therapy and developed child-centered play therapy. Landreth believed that a non-directive approach to play therapy facilitates a permissive atmosphere (allowing minimal limits on the child's behavior) and a non-judgmental relationship that is different from any other relationship or setting that the child has experienced. When this happens, the child may begin to actuate the child's own potential for development and growth.

The classroom environment does not necessarily reflect the traditional view of play. However, play facilitates learning and fosters healthy cognitive development (King, 1997; Piaget, 1962). Teachers are therefore encouraged to use play to engage children in learning. Play also facilitates communication and may be used as a tool to build a sense of community within the classroom (Gottman, 1983). King also supports the use of instrumental (teacher-directed) play in the classroom. In this way, teachers can integrate fun activities with academic learning. This latter point may provide support for the use of



a professional development training program which incorporates play techniques aimed at social development, academic learning, cooperative behavior and improving the teacher-child relationship within the framework of play.

Kinder training is a play-based professional development training program developed by White, Flynt and Draper (1997). Kinder training is based on filial therapy, which is a play-based parent education program designed for parents of children (ages three to ten) who may be struggling emotionally or behaviorally (Guernsey, 1964; Vanfleet, 2005). Kinder training also includes aspects of Individual Psychology, such as encouragement, logical consequences, goal identification and disclosure that aid in classroom management (Adler, 1983; Dreikurs, 1968). Utilizing consultation, kinder training is designed to develop the teacher-child relationship, increase students' social competence, reduce students' problem behaviors, engage students in learning, and enhance teacher's classroom management skills. Through kinder training, teachers are taught to use non-directive child-centered play techniques (Landreth, 1991, 2002) and principles of Individual Psychology to build a relationship with one child (Adler, 1983). Teachers are then taught to generalize kinder training language and skills to the classroom setting. The goal of the classroom component is to help teachers use kinder training language and skills to build stronger relationships with all students, encourage students' cooperation and participation in learning, and promote self-esteem building skills and classroom community (White et al.).

The six week kinder training model developed by White, Draper, Flynt and Jones (2000) begins with an initial 2 day training. This model is specifically designed for implementation by school counselors. On day 1, teachers are presented with a rationale

for kinder training. Other topics include: a review of child development, principles of individual psychology, play principles and play techniques. On day 2 of the kinder training model, participants are given the opportunity to practice kinder training language and skills in dyads. Each dyad is given approximately 15 minutes to conduct a practice play session in a play room with the other participants observing through a live video feed. When all dyads have conducted role plays, the school counselor allows time for group feedback, discussion and additional questions.

At the end of the 2 day training, teachers are asked to conduct 6 weekly play sessions with a child with whom they may have difficulty connecting. Each play session lasts approximately 30 minutes. The play sessions are conducted in a play room in which students are encouraged to use the toys in ways that are meaningful to them. The teacher is asked to allow the child to lead the play while the teacher follows the child verbally and physically (posture, eye contact). Teachers are specifically taught to use particular communication and facilitation skills to enhance the play session and encourage a permissive atmosphere.

After each play session, teachers meet with the school counselor for approximately 20 minutes. During these times, teachers are able to provide reactions to the kinder training process in general and the play sessions in particular. School counselors also use this time to help teachers to make connections between play session process/content and the classroom environment. To facilitate this latter goal, school counselors also coach teachers for 1 hour each week during a set classroom activity. Through modeling and immediate feedback, the teachers are taught how to apply skills used in the play room to the general classroom context. A major goal of kinder training is

to help teachers to build a relationship with one student, while developing classroom management skills to engage all students in the learning process.

There has been research on the use of kinder training, but those studies that have been done provide evidence of its effectiveness (Draper, White, O'Shaughnessy, Flynt, & Jones, 2001; Hess, Post, & Flowers, 2005; Post, McAllister, Sheely, Hess, & Flowers, 2004; Solis, 2005; White et al., 1997; White, Flynt, & Jones, 1999). Researchers have examined kinder training as a preventive model as well as a remedial intervention. Studies have investigated the kinder training model with teachers of discouraged students (Draper et al., 2001; White et al., 1997; White et al., 1999), and teachers of students deemed at risk (Hess et al., 2005; Post et al., 2004; Solis, 2005).

The seminal article on kinder training (White et al., 1997) described a case study of a kindergarten student who struggled with school anxiety and control issues. Her school counselor adopted several interventions including in-class observation/supervision, parent consultation and play therapy before implementing kinder training with the child's teacher. Through kinder training, the counselor taught the teacher basic play therapy skills and supervised play sessions between the teacher and the child. Based on observations and interviews, the researchers noted improvements in the teacher-child relationship, changes in the teacher's perceptions of the child's abilities and successful transfer of the kinder training skills to the classroom setting.

White et al., (1999) conducted a kinder training pilot study with six teachers and six children. Unlike the individual model (White et al., 1997), this study began with a six-hour group training in which the teachers were taught principles of play therapy, the content and structure of kinder training, and concepts of Individual Psychology. The

teachers then conducted six weekly individual play sessions with their child of focus. Based on classroom observations of teacher behavior, the findings of this study reflected an increase in statements related to encouragement, goal-disclosure, and logical consequences, and a decrease in ineffective limit-setting. Assessment instruments completed by the teachers reflected an increase in the levels of student encouragement, improvements in language arts mastery, an increase in appropriate social skills, and a reduction in problem behaviors of student participants.

Draper et al., (2001) conducted a larger study with 14 teachers and 14 students. The initial training took place over a three-day period and included the basic group training content (White et al., 1999) in addition to a review on early literacy development. The teachers then conducted six weekly individual play sessions with their target students. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of kinder training, the researchers utilized social/emotional/behavioral measures, teacher behavior observation, child descriptive measures, child academic behavior observation and early literacy measures. Student data reflected an increase in early literacy skills, academic engaged time, adaptive behaviors, encouragement, social skills, and academic competence, and a reduction in problem behaviors. Teacher data indicated an increase in encouraging statements and effective verbal responses, and a decrease in praise statements.

Post et al., (2004) explored the effectiveness of kinder training with teachers of students deemed at risk (displaying aggression, lack of social and academic skills). The foundational kinder training studies were grounded in principles of Individual Psychology (Draper et al., 2001; White et al., 1997; White et al., 1999). However, Post and colleagues (2004) developed a child centered approach to play-based training using

the Landreth (1991) 10- week filial training model. Based on assessments of child centered play therapy skills, empathy measurements, and behavioral evaluations, the results indicated that this play-based training model is an effective approach for both at-risk students and their teachers.

In a follow-up study, Hess et al., (2005) found differences between trained and untrained teachers in play therapy skills and empathic responses during individual play sessions. There were however no differences between the two groups on similar skills in the classroom setting. In a focus group, the trained teachers also reported that the play-based training improved their confidence in teaching, and increased their awareness of students' opinions/needs.

Solis (2005) took a qualitative approach to exploring the treatment acceptability and perceived effectiveness of kinder training for a group of African American teachers. The findings of this study indicated a moderate degree of acceptability and effectiveness for the teacher participants. Based on post-intervention interviews with the teachers, the results also reflected improved student behavior, self esteem and student-initiated verbal communication, and a decrease in problem behaviors of students.

These research studies on kinder training provide modest support for its effectiveness as a school-based prevention/ intervention model. Their findings specifically point to the goals of kinder training: enhanced teacher child relationships, improved student outcome, and effective classroom management (Draper et al., 2001; Hess et al., 2005; Post et al., 2004; Solis, 2005; White et al., 1997; White et al., 1999). However, these studies focus primarily on quantitative methodologies. Only two studies have examined the perceptions that teachers have of the process and outcome of kinder

training (Hess et al., 2005; Solis, 2005). It may therefore be helpful to conduct additional qualitative and/or mixed methodological approaches to examining the acceptability, integrity and efficacy of kinder training. This may include in-depth interviews (individual and focus groups), analysis of school records, journals (participant and researcher), and systematic play session/classroom observations in addition to quantitative data collection/analysis procedures.

All teachers come into contact with students who exhibit certain goals of misbehavior (i.e. attention, power, revenge and inadequacy; Dreikurs and Stoltz, 1964). These students often have difficulty engaging in healthy peer relationships and participating in the learning process. Teachers may also be challenged to manage classroom activities effectively, particularly if several students engage in problem behaviors. According to Pianta and Stuhlman (2004), teachers play a significant role in students' lives. Kinder training capitalizes on this important relationship; training teachers to be therapeutic agents of change, while improving the teacher-child bond. Kinder training is a comprehensive model that addresses the specific needs of both teachers and students. Through this program, teachers are able to communicate effectively with children, enhance the teacher-student relationship, engage students in learning and cooperative behavior, and build key classroom management skills. Kinder training represents a professional development training program designed to address the complex interaction among teacher-child relationships, student outcome, and classroom management.

There is a complex interaction among teacher-child relationships, student outcome, and teachers' classroom management skills. Several studies indicate that there

is a reciprocal association between teacher-child relationships and student outcome. This positions the teacher as a significant agent in students' socio-emotional development and academic success. Studies have also suggested that there is reciprocity in the relationship between students' social and academic behavior and teachers' classroom management skills. Over the past ten years, professional development training programs have been developed to target the teacher-child relationship, student outcome and classroom management. Only kinder training has been specifically designed to concurrently address all three classroom variables. This paper has examined the interplay among these three classroom components, including various professional development training programs that focus on one or more of the categories. Kinder training was then presented as a play-based professional development training model aimed at enhancing teacher-child relationships, developing social competence of students, engaging them in effective learning, and improving teachers' classroom management skills.

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CHAPTER 2  
ACCEPTABILITY, INTEGRITY AND PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF  
KINDER TRAINING

Introduction

Healthy teacher-child relationships are defined by support, understanding, and invigorating learning experiences (Gable, 2002). Such relationships have been found to promote positive school adjustment (Baker, 2006). A strong teacher-child relationship, reflected by overall closeness and minimal conflict and dependency (Pianta & Stulman, 2004) increases the possibility that a child is able to participate effectively in learning and develop functional peer relationships (Howes, 2000). Within the classroom context, teachers are the primary agents of student evaluation (Zhang & Burry-Stock, 2003); this includes assessment of both academic skills and social competence. Baker suggests that student behavior and academic proficiency may be reciprocally associated and are heavily influenced by the quality of the teacher-child relationship.

One of the major goals of teachers is to engage students in the learning process (Zhang & Burry-Stock, 2003). Academic engagement refers to a combination of specific classroom behaviors including reading, writing, actively participating in tasks, asking and answering questions (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002). Academic engagement may however be negatively affected by emotional difficulties that can lead to behavioral problems. Behavior problems may result in many difficulties for elementary school children, including decreased academic and social learning, and social rejection by peers

and teachers (Hovland & Smaby, 1996). Teachers should aim to maintain a supportive environment that fosters cooperation and adaptive skill development for all students. These factors are essential for students' academic success (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler & Feinberg, 2005). Teachers must therefore be taught specific skills to cope with students' problem behaviors, encourage adaptive behavior and communicate more effectively with students. These skills are likely to assist teachers in increasing student retention rates and reducing referrals to special education (Schiff & BarGil, 2004). Students may however be more apt to be academically engaged and socially cooperative if they perceive a healthy teacher-child relationship. Research has indicated that there is an association between the quality of the teacher-child relationship and the social-emotional and academic adjustment of students (Howes, 2000; Pianta & Stulman, 2004).

#### *Teacher- Child Relationships*

Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) have compared teacher-child relationships to the relationships between parents and their children. The significant role that a teacher plays in a student's life positions the teacher as a potential therapeutic change agent. Negative relationships between teachers and students may result in increased maladaptive behaviors of students (Birch & Ladd, 1998) and reduced academic involvement (Ladd, 1999). On the other hand, positive teacher-child relationships have been associated with academic achievement and social competence (Pianta, Steinberg & Rollins, 1995). This underscores the importance of developing preventive and remedial approaches to strengthening the relationships between teachers and their students.

The relationships between teachers and students have been found to impact students' internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Baker, 2006). Howes (2000)

conducted a longitudinal study examining the effect of individual teacher-child relationships on the social-emotional competence and peer interactions of early elementary school children. Findings indicated that teacher-child relationship quality was a significant predictor of students' socio-emotional adjustment. Research also suggests that there is a reciprocal relationship between children's early behavior and future relationships with teachers. Birch and Ladd (1998) found that kindergartners' behavioral orientation predicted the degree of closeness, conflict and dependency within the first grade teacher-child relationship. These findings highlight the importance of early intervention projects that target classroom management, student behavior and an awareness of individual student needs within the context of the teacher-child relationship.

The literature on teacher-child relationships specifically reflects the impact of the teacher-child bond on students' academic success. Hamre and Pianta (2001) conducted a longitudinal study exploring the degree to which teachers' perceptions of the teacher-child relationship predicted children's school success. The results of this study suggested that negative relationships (conflict and dependency) between kindergarten teachers and their students were related to academic results through the eighth grade. These findings are supported by a later study investigating the quality of teacher-child relationships and the academic skill development of preschoolers through the first grade (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). The results suggested that changes in academic skills of these students were associated with the level of closeness and conflict between teachers and students. These studies indicate that additional research on the teacher-child relationship may not only impact children's emotional well being, but also their academic success. To date, only one professional development training program, kinder training, concurrently



addresses these classroom variables including classroom management (White, Flynt & Draper, 1997). Kinder training is a professional development training program aimed at strengthening the teacher-child relationship, developing students' adaptive skills, increasing academic engagement and enhancing teachers' classroom management skills.

### *Kinder Training*

Kinder training is a play-based professional development training model developed by White, Flynt and Draper (1997). It is an adaptation of filial therapy, which is a parent education program developed by Guerney (1964). The kinder training model includes principles of Individual Psychology (Adler, 1983; Dreikurs, 1968), such as encouragement, logical consequences, goal identification and disclosure. Its specific goals comprise: enhancing the teacher-child relationship; improving students' behavioral and academic adjustment and developing teachers' classroom management skills (Draper, White, O'Shaughnessy, Flynt, & Jones, 2001).

Through kinder training, teachers are taught to use non-directive play techniques to develop a relationship with one student. Play is vital to the social and emotional development of children (Piaget, 1962). It is also the natural, spontaneous expression of a child. Within the context of play the 'real' child can find expression using toys as his/her words (Landreth, 2002). In the kinder training manual which was developed by White, Draper, Flynt and Jones (2000), teachers conduct individual play sessions with one child. Through these weekly play sessions, teachers build a relationship with their target child, while practicing specific language and skills for application to the larger classroom context. Teachers are also encouraged to see how the principles of Individual Psychology (e.g. belonging; Adler, 1983) contribute to a healthy classroom environment.

There has been limited research on the use of kinder training, but the studies that have been conducted provide evidence of the model's effectiveness (Draper, White, O'Shaughnessy, Flynt, & Jones, 2001; Hess, Post, & Flowers, 2005; Post, McAllister, Sheely, Hess, & Flowers, 2004; Solis, 2005; White, Flynt, & Draper, 1997; White, Flynt, & Jones 1999). For all teacher participants, there was an increase in facilitative statements, encouragement, and limit-setting (e.g. White, Flynt, & Jones 1999), greater confidence in teaching (Hess, Post, & Flowers, 2005; Solis, 2005), increased awareness of children's needs (e.g. Solis, 2005), and a decrease in the number of praise statements and ineffective limit-setting (Draper, White, O'Shaughnessy, Flynt, & Jones, 2001). Additionally, all students reflected improved social skills, enhanced self-esteem and reduced problem behaviors (Draper, White, O'Shaughnessy, Flynt, & Jones, 2001; Post, McAllister, Sheely, Hess, & Flowers, 2004; White, Flynt, & Draper, 1997; White, Flynt, & Jones 1999). The majority of these studies (Draper, White, O'Shaughnessy, Flynt, & Jones, 2001; Post, McAllister, Sheely, Hess, & Flowers, 2004; White, Flynt, & Draper, 1997; White, Flynt, & Jones 1999) utilized quantitative data collection methods.

The use of qualitative data illuminates the subjective experiences of teacher participants and complements objective data (Dukes, 1984). To date, one study has explored the process and outcome of kinder training utilizing qualitative data collection methods (Solis, 2005), and another study employed a mixed methods approach (Hess, Post & Flowers, 2005). For these two studies, data analysis of individual and focus group interviews revealed acceptability of the kinder training model among teacher participants (Hess, Post & Flowers, 2005; Solis, 2005).

### *Acceptability*

The concept of treatment acceptability was introduced by Kazdin (1980) and refers to the extent to which participants believe that an intervention is reasonable. Kazdin also indicated that a treatment is considered acceptable when it is deemed appropriate to the problem, is non-intrusive and aligns with socially sanctioned perspectives of what a treatment should be. The acceptability of a treatment may be affected by how well the participants understand the concepts presented (Reimers, Wacker & Koepl, 1987). Reimers and colleagues also suggested that a clear understanding of a treatment has a direct impact on treatment use, treatment outcomes, and treatment sustainability.

Methods to assess acceptability have included asking students/ researchers to read vignettes in which particular treatments were applied. Subjects then rate acceptability using a specific rating scale (Miltenberger, 1990). Miltenberger also stated that clients in clinical settings may be asked to carry out treatments and then evaluate acceptability at different phases of the treatment. No matter what approach is used to assess acceptability; there are special considerations for school-based interventions (Witt, Moe, Gutkin, & Andrews, 1984). For example, potential interference with routine and substantial energy and time needed for the treatment may negatively affect acceptability (Witt, Martens, & Elliott, 1984). However, acceptability may in fact be greater for those participants with more teaching experience who may be able to incorporate new approaches into a sophisticated skill set (Witt, Moe, Gutkin, & Andrews, 1984; Witt, Martens, & Elliott, 1984).

*Integrity*

Integrity refers to the extent to which a treatment is implemented as designed (Kazdin, 2000). According to Kazdin, there is a direct association between integrity and degree of effectiveness. Researchers highlight the importance of adherence through treatment manuals and the development of manipulation checks (Waltz, Addis, Koerney & Jacobson, 1993). These may serve to enhance the integrity of treatments particularly where instructional delivery is concerned. Integrity measures also allow researchers to determine possible changes in treatment protocols in order to increase effectiveness (Powes, Blom-Hoffman & Clarke, 2005). Interventionists should then document such changes for analysis and replication purposes (Nastasi, Moore & Varjas, 2004).

Treatment integrity may be seen as a multi-dimensional construct, which includes quality of delivery, exposure, participant responsiveness, adherence and program differentiation (Dane & Schneider, 1998). Given the complexity of the concept, it is important that interventionists evaluate treatments in a comprehensive way to assess for all of the variables that have the potential to affect integrity and related effectiveness.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of the current study (Teacher Perceptions, TP) was to examine the acceptability, integrity and perceived effectiveness of a kinder training model for teacher participants. The goals of the kinder training intervention were to strengthen the relationship between teachers and students, improve student behavior and enhance the classroom management skills of teacher participants. The researchers then explored the teachers' views of the training content and structure, including perceived changes in teaching beliefs and practices, student behavior, the teacher-child relationship and classroom management.

### *Research Questions*

The following guiding research questions were addressed:

1. What are the perceptions that teachers have of the content and structure of kinder training?
2. Before and after the kinder training, what are teachers' perceptions of:
  - a) their teaching beliefs and practices?
  - b) the characteristics and behavior of their focal student?
  - c) their relationship with the focal student?
  - d) their classroom management strategies and skills?

### *Research Design*

A key component of the current multiple phase study was the implementation of an intervention in the teacher participants' natural setting. According to Creswell (1998), a qualitative research design allows for a detailed exploration of a topic in which participants can be studied in their natural environment. In this way the researcher is able to be an "active learner" (p.18) providing the reader with the participants' unique perspectives. Specifically, TP incorporated a phenomenological approach to explore the participants' understanding of the kinder training process and the meaning that they attach to the experience (Creswell, 1998). Dukes (1984) notes that subjective interpretation impacts and informs objective data. TP therefore utilized phenomenology in examining the acceptability, integrity and perceived effectiveness of kinder training. According to Kazdin (2000) acceptability relates to participants' perceptions and therefore suits such a qualitative design. Through pre and post-intervention interviews, Solis (2005) explored treatment acceptability of kinder training among a group of

elementary school teachers. TP extends this qualitative approach by evaluating acceptability at multiple phases of the intervention (Miltenberger, 1990). In addition to pre and post intervention interviews, the TP researchers utilized supervision sessions (during the intervention) to explore the perceptions of elementary school teachers regarding kinder training and its perceived impact on various classroom components. TP also adds to previous kinder training studies (e.g. Draper, White, O'Shaughnessy, Flynt & Jones, 2001; Solis, 2005) by evaluating integrity in addition to acceptability. Immersion in the context allowed the PI to account for integrity through systematic observation of teacher participants.

## Methodology

### *Behavior Recovery*

The current study (Teacher Perceptions; TP) was a part of a larger intervention entitled Behavior Recovery (BR). The purpose of BR was to develop the adaptive and academic skills of students (kindergarten through grade 2) and strengthen the relationship between these students and their parents and teachers. BR was funded by the United States Department of Education under the administration of Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities. It was conducted during the 2006-2007 academic year, at an elementary school in the Southeastern United States.

Twelve teachers were recruited to participate in the kinder training component of BR. TP involved a subset of teacher participants who participated in additional data collection procedures.

### *School Context*

The intervention school houses 12 kindergarten classrooms, 11 first grade classrooms and 12 second grade classrooms (Gwinnett County Public Schools [GCPS], 2007). The school met Annual Yearly Progress for the 2006-2007 academic year and has a current enrolment of 1,276 students (GCPS, 2007). This title I school has a diverse population (15.9% White, 37.2% Black, 12% Asian, 29.8% Hispanic, and 5% Multi-racial) with 49.73% of students eligible for free/reduced meals (GCPS, 2007).

#### *TP Participants*

The elementary school staff included 58 regular education teachers, 23 paraprofessionals (ten in kindergarten), 12 Special Education teachers, four Reading Recovery teachers, three resource speech teachers, and three English as Second Language (ESOL) teachers (GCPS, 2007). Twenty-seven percent of the school's teachers have experience ranging from 6 to 20 years and 17% have greater than 20 years of experience (GCPS, 2007). The school's teachers also have a range of educational experience; 36% hold Master's degrees and 8% have Specialist degrees or doctorates (GCPS, 2007).

The TP participants were recruited using convenience sampling which Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte (1999, p. 233) defined as a "group readily accessible to the researcher that reasonably might be assumed to possess characteristics relevant to the study." Kinder training was designed for use among early elementary school teachers (White, Flynt & Draper, 1997). Therefore, the target population of TP was teachers who taught kindergarten, first and second grade. The TP participants were 5 White women ages 24 to 50 who taught kindergarten (n = 1), first grade (n = 3), and second grade (n = 1). Years of teaching experience range from 2 to 20 years. Four of the five teachers hold

bachelor's degrees and one teacher holds a graduate degree in Early Childhood Education.

#### *TP Research Team*

The TP research team included the PI, two university-based researchers, two faculty advisors and a school-based supervisor. The PI is a counselor educator in training who was a doctoral level intern in the elementary school during the 2006-2007 academic year. The two university-based researchers are both Licensed Associate Professional Counselors with experience in play therapy. They assisted the PI in qualitative data analysis and management of the audit trail. The PI was supervised by the first faculty advisor, who is a professor and department chair at a large urban university in the Southeastern United States. The second faculty advisor is a specialist in qualitative research methodology, school-based and culture specific interventions, and is an assistant professor at the same university. The PI's school-based supervisor is a specialist in promoting a positive school culture and has had more than 20 years of experience as a school counselor and play therapist.

*Role of the principal investigator.* LeCompte and Schensul (1999) note that the nature of qualitative research (i.e. face to face interviewing, training and participant observation) necessarily requires an examination of the impact of researcher variables (i.e. roles, personal characteristics and biases/assumptions) on the participants and the data collection and analysis process. This is in contrast to other research methods that allow more distance between the PI and the focus of the study.

As the PI, I was integrally involved in all aspects of the research project including, training, interviewing, supervision, data collection and analysis. As a result, I



held multiple and varied roles. I was one of the trainers during the initial group training. I was also responsible for supervising and coaching five teachers. For research purposes, this also included audio-recording, transcribing and analyzing interviews and supervision sessions with these teachers. Additionally, as a doctoral intern at the intervention site, my role as researcher was compounded by other duties (e.g. parent and teacher consultations) not directly related to TP.

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) also indicate that personal characteristics (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and education) can influence the research process and outcome. Although I shared similarities with the participants in terms of gender and age (average age was 35), there were differences in terms of race and ethnicity. All of the TP participants were European American and I am Afro-Caribbean. Although no specific information was obtained from the participants with respect to socioeconomic status, the majority of the participants had a bachelor's degree whereas I had almost completed my Ph.D. Additionally, although I had experience working with young children in a play therapy setting, I did not have specific experience teaching young children.

I began the current study with particular biases/assumptions and expectations of the process and outcome. Since the BR team was invited by the school's principal I expected full administrative support to conduct TP, coordinate teacher schedules and secure substitute teachers. Since TP was conducted on a strictly voluntary basis, I expected that teachers would be flexible in terms of coordination of interviews, play sessions, supervision sessions and classroom coaching. Given the strong emphasis on play principles and child-centered interactions, I wondered if the teacher participants

(especially those with more authoritarian teaching styles) would embrace the kinder training model. Since I observed all play sessions, supervised each experience and conducted classroom coaching with all TP participants, I anticipated that there would be a moderate to high degree of integrity related to the kinder training skills. Finally, since I was involved in a similar research project prior to TP, I expected that the participants would see kinder training as an effective intervention. In the previous study (Solis, 2005), participants specifically reported improved behavior and increased self-esteem among their students.

Erikson (1985) noted the importance of maintaining a comprehensive record of one's thoughts, assumptions, reactions and preferences related to the research process. This documentation facilitates minimal misinterpretations of the data. In order to account for my multiple roles, the potential impact of researcher variables and inherent researcher bias, I employed a reflexive journal in which I noted my perceptions of the teacher participants, my reactions to the interview/supervision/coaching content and process and my assumptions related to the research outcome. I also relied on the input of the other members of the research team to balance the influence that I held in the capacity of PI.

#### *Kinder Training Intervention*

The kinder training began with a 2 day in-service conducted by five trainers; three of whom are the developers of the kinder training model. The other two trainers included the PI and a counselor educator who is an experienced play therapist. The 2 day training consisted of brief lectures, group discussions, videotapes and role-plays. For more information on the training format and content, please see White, Draper, Flynt and Jones (2000).

*Day 1.* The first day of training consisted of both experiential and didactic elements; including icebreaker activities, a review of child development, play principles and techniques and concepts within Individual Psychology (Adler, 1983; Dreikurs, 1968). Kinder training was introduced to the participants as a professional development training program which utilizes non-directive play techniques to engage students in the learning process while enhancing the relationship between teachers and students. The teachers also were taught the play techniques of tracking, encouragement, empathy and limit-setting using the acronym TEEL (Draper, 2004). Teachers used this acronym as a basic guideline for the individual play sessions with their students.

Tracking (T) is used to build the relationship between the teacher and the student. In this way, the teacher verbally observes what he/she sees the student doing in a non-judgmental manner. For example, if the child goes to the sand tray and begins to place stones in the sand, the teacher may say “you are placing those in there one by one”. A sub-component of the tracking skill is reflective responding which may involve the teacher paraphrasing what the child says in the play session.

Encouragement (E) was highlighted as being very different from praise. Praise focuses on the outcome; encouragement recognizes the effort and energy of the child and therefore enhances his/her sense of self. Encouragement may also serve to give permission to a child who may be hesitant to play freely. For example, a child may enter the play room and slowly walk to the puppet stage, pick up a puppet and glance back at the teacher. At this point, the teacher may say “you decided to take a look at that one to see if you want to play with it”.

Empathy (E) recognizes the feelings of the child and is a key relationship-building tool that helps the child to know that the teacher is present, observing and in tune with the feelings and needs of the child. A child may play with the ring toss, succeed on his/her first attempt and smile broadly at the teacher. Here the teacher may reflect the feeling expressed by saying “you are happy that you got that one.” Empathy statements also form an integral part of the limit-setting process.

The permissive nature of the play sessions encourages minimal limits aimed at the safety of the teacher, the student and the playroom toys and materials. A child may scoop some sand in his/her hands and begin to walk toward the dollhouse with the sand. The teacher may then say “You would like to take some sand over to the dollhouse (empathy statement which acknowledges feelings/intent) but the sand is for staying in the sand tray (communicating the limit). You may bring the dolls to the sand tray or play with these other toys in the sand tray (targeting acceptable alternatives).

*Day 2.* The second day of the kinder training was designed to help teacher participants practice TEEL. Day 2 was contracted to a 2 hour afternoon session because of pre-planning and calendar restrictions. The format of the afternoon included a review of the training material presented on day 1, large group discussion and role-plays.

*The play room.* The play room at the elementary school was set up by members of the research team. The room was organized in a center style with each center representing particular types of toys. The types of toys chosen were based on the recommendations outlined in White, Draper, Flynt and Jones (2000), and included nurturing toys (baby dolls, kitchen items, medical kit), aggressive toys (handcuffs, punching bag, toy soldiers, aggressive puppets), toys related to normal social experiences

(family house and people, cash register, police), communication toys (nerf ball and bat, telephone), and mastery toys (chalk board, Velcro darts, school supplies, blocks).

*Kinder training play sessions.* Following the 2 day training, BR teachers were asked to identify a student with whom they would work for 4 consecutive weeks. The teachers were specifically told to choose a student with whom they had difficulty connecting. They were also told that they would be assigned a trainer who would work intensively with them throughout the play session/supervision sequence and the classroom coaching. Each teacher conducted special play sessions with her target student for approximately 20 minutes per week for 4 weeks.

*Supervision of teachers.* After each play session, each teacher participant was supervised by her assigned trainer for approximately 10 minutes. The trainer asked the teacher for her reactions to the play session and focused on any new discoveries that the teacher had made about the child as a result of the play sessions. The trainer also listened for any information that indicated that the teacher was making connections between the play session process and the classroom context and encouraged such connections.

*Generalizing skills to the classroom context.* Although the focus of kinder training is to enhance the relationship between a student and his/her teacher, it is also designed to help the teacher function more effectively in the classroom. Teachers were therefore coached to use kinder training language and skills in the classroom as well. After the 4 week play session/supervision sequence, the teacher participants received 4 weekly coaching sessions from their assigned trainer. At these times each week, the trainer actively observed the target teacher for 30 minutes and assisted her in transferring kinder training language and skills to the classroom.

### *TP Intervention*

TP focused on exploring the perceptions that 5 of the BR teachers supervised and coached by the PI had regarding the process and outcome of kinder training. This included the teachers' perceptions of their teaching beliefs and practices, student behavior, the teacher-child relationship, and classroom management, before and after the kinder training. TP also examined the teachers' views of the content and structure of the kinder training. As a part of TP, the 5 study volunteers agreed to participate in additional data collection procedures including pre and post kinder training interviews and audio-taped supervision sessions.

### *Data Sources*

TP utilized three data sources: pre and post intervention semi-structured interviews (see Appendix D), the first and last audio-taped supervision session conducted with each teacher, and the PI's reflexive journal.

*Data collection points.* We used a multi-phase data collection approach: (a) the pre-intervention interview, one week before the initial training; (b) the first audio-recorded supervision session, one week after the initial training; (c) the last audio-recorded supervision session, three weeks after the first supervision session; and (d) the post-intervention interview, five weeks after the last supervision session. During the five-week period between the last supervision session and the post-intervention interview, the PI systematically observed the teachers' skill acquisition/display during four weekly classroom coaching sessions.

*Semi-structured interviews.* In addition to gathering basic demographic information (see Appendix C), the PI conducted pre and post intervention individual interviews with the teacher participants. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour.

The pre- intervention interview was conducted prior to the first day of training. This interview gathered information about teaching practices and beliefs, perceptions of the focal student's behavior, and views of the teacher-child relationship. Examples of pre-intervention interview questions include: (a) what have been the most effective methods (academic/interpersonal) that you have used to help your students to learn? (b) How do you build a relationship with your students?

The post-intervention interview was conducted after the play session sequence and the classroom coaching session sequence were complete. This interview explored the acceptability and perceived effectiveness of the kinder training model by asking teachers to note their perceptions of changes in their teaching practices and beliefs, their focal students, the teacher-child relationship, and classroom management skills. The teachers also were asked to give their impressions of the content and structure of kinder training, including transferring techniques to classroom use. Finally, they were asked if they would continue to use the kinder training techniques after the training period was complete. Specific post-intervention questions included: (a) Please tell me about your experience with the kinder training. What aspects were helpful? What aspects were unhelpful? (b) In what ways (if any), has the training impacted you (personally and teaching methods)? The final interview process also provided the PI with an opportunity to explore respondent validation (Creswell, 1998) of comments made during the initial interview and supervision sessions.

*Supervision sessions.* There were four weekly play sessions following the initial training. Supervision sessions were conducted after each play session and audio-taped. These sessions illuminated the teachers' perceptions of the play session sequence, skill development, and student progress. The first and last supervision session with each teacher were transcribed and analyzed. The researchers explored the teachers' perceptions of the impact of the kinder training model on various classroom components. The research team therefore felt that the content of the first and last supervision sessions would provide sufficient data related to perceived changes over time. These supervision sessions also were used as a source of respondent validation. The PI compared teachers' comments from the supervision sessions with responses from the pre-intervention interviews.

*Reflexive journal.* The reflexive journal records the researchers' thoughts, reactions, concerns and potential influence on data analysis and synthesis (Varjas, Nastasi, Moore & Jayasena, 2005). Polkinghorne (1989) suggested that the PI's reflexive journal/self-reflection can be used prior to interviewing, although it is generally used to process the actual interview/training experience. The PI examined her own biases and assumptions related to the content and context of the kinder training and used the journal to reflect on these internal processes. The reflexive journal also was employed to explore her concerns and initial reactions to the training process and the teacher participants. Consistent with the iterative method (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), questions that arose from this self-exploration often informed the content and process of the supervision sessions, classroom coaching and final interviews. Following each supervision session, classroom coaching and final interview, the PI took a similar course of action. Here



journal content was informed by the content and outcome of the sessions/interviews and used as a preliminary stage in data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). This phase of journaling indicated what supervision session, classroom coaching and interview data was related to the focus of the study; adding to the credibility of the research findings. The reflexive journal included specific comments/observations about teacher's skill acquisition/display and was therefore primarily used to account for aspects of integrity.

### *Trustworthiness*

The TP researchers used various approaches to increase trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness points to the strength of a particular study (Patton, 2002), indicates the quality of the research methodology and is sometimes referred to as credibility or rigor (Morrow, 2005). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2000), key indicators of trustworthiness include confirmability (objectivity), dependability (reliability), transferability (external validity), and credibility (internal validity). The following description outlines the methods that the TP researchers employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

*Prolonged engagement.* Prolonged engagement refers to the investment of an extensive amount of time in a particular setting in order to learn the culture of a group and gain the trust of group participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the on-site administrator of BR, the PI of TP had the opportunity to work in the elementary school for a period of one year and was therefore able to transition from an outside consultant to an active member of the school counseling team during the research study (Spradley, 1980). The play room at the school was also the PI's office for the duration of the project. This made her accessible to students and faculty and gave her an opportunity to be

immersed in the school's culture and make observations about group norms. The PI's prolonged engagement with the intervention school enabled her to make decisions about what data were related to the purpose of the study. According to Creswell (1998), ensuring that data collection methods and content are consistent with the focus of the study/research questions contributes to the credibility of the research findings.

*Audit trail.* The audit trail contributes to the dependability and confirmability of research data/findings (Creswell, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the audit trail as a thorough and detailed record of all steps in the data collection and analysis process, including any changes made to the research protocol. Halpern (1983) outlines six types of information that may be included in an audit trail: (a) raw data, (b) the results of data reduction and analysis, (c) the results of data re-construction and synthesis, (d) process notes, (e) information related to expectations and personal notes, and (f) information on instrument development. The audit trail for TP included materials related to the study activities (e.g. informed consent documents and demographic data on each participant), development of interview protocols and the coding scheme, data source spreadsheet with related time-lines for transcription and analysis, and the PI's reflexive journal.

*Triangulation.* Triangulation refers to the use of multiple and various sources of data, methods, and researchers in order to substantiate findings (Creswell, 1998). Patton (2002) notes that triangulation strengthens a study by combining different approaches to the problem. Each approach provides key information that may confirm prior findings or delineate discrepancies. This enhances the rigor of the research methodology (Morrow, 2005). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) using multiple and diverse data sources and methods contributes to the credibility of a research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The PI was able to employ multiple data sources to gain insight into teachers' perceptions of the process and outcome of the kinder training. She was, for example able to compare and contrast interview data with supervision sessions and her own observations of the teachers' skill display/development during the play session sequence. As an additional integrity check, during the classroom coaching sequence the PI recorded observations of the teachers' skill acquisition/display and compared these with teachers' comments from the interviews and supervision sessions.

*Peer debriefing.* Similar to the concept of inter-rater reliability in quantitative research, peer debriefing provides an objective balance to research procedures (Creswell, 1998), and contributes to the dependability of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Consistent with the principle of triangulation (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), the PI compared and contrasted different sources of information across different stages of the kinder training process and from different trainers (Creswell, 1998). The PI was responsible for managing the larger BR project, coordinating play-room schedules, and making contact with teachers and administrators on behalf of the other trainers. This role provided the PI an opportunity to have weekly contact with the other trainers. Once per week, the trainers discussed their trainees' progress as well as their own reactions to the kinder training process. This peer debriefing contributed to the confirmability of the research findings since it involved comparisons between the PI's interpretations/observations and those of other trainers.

*Respondent validation.* Respondent validation or member checking enhances credibility; the researchers request participants' views of data analysis interpretations (Creswell, 1998). In TP, the PI explored respondent validation throughout the interview

and supervision process. The interviews were guided by particular questions related to the research protocol. However, the supervision sessions were primarily teacher-led. This gave the teachers the opportunity to air concerns/thoughts related to the study. The PI was then able to give her initial interpretations of interview responses and confirm their accuracy.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis often entails repeatedly examining and revising emerging themes, and comparing them to information at the research location. This is known as a recursive/iterative process (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The researchers employed recursive methodology in developing the code scheme (see Appendix B) and answering the research questions. The initial and final interviews, and the first and last supervision sessions with each of the teachers, and the PI's reflexive journal were transcribed and analyzed using an eight-step adaptation of Huberman and Miles' (1994) data analysis strategy. A recursive method was used for steps one through eight. Here the researchers reformulated existing themes as new data emerged. Although the researchers employed open coding (Creswell, 1998), the process was both inductive (based on the data) and deductive (based on theory; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). For example, during data analysis, the researchers established a framework of categories based on the research questions. As data were analyzed, emerging themes were placed in relevant categories. New data also informed/reformulated the already established groupings. Steps one through six represent the inductive process, and step seven represents the deductive component.

*Step 1.* The PI and the second researcher independently analyzed each of the initial interview transcripts and made notes in the margins (independent open coding; Creswell, 1998). These initial remarks consisted of ideas and reactions to the data and often included specific words used by the participants. These marginal comments sometimes led to new interpretations and questions and indicated connections between different parts of the data set (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The marginal notes were usually in the form of key words such as “behavior management” and “developmentally appropriate strategies.”

*Step 2.* During regular coding meetings the researchers drafted a summary sheet of the marginal notes made on the initial interview transcripts. The summarized notes were based on comments that were repeated throughout the data and/or common to both researchers. For example, teacher comments included: “word things differently”, “different way of speaking”, “different conversation”, and “different way of saying things.”

*Step 3.* The researchers formulated key phrases from the words contained in the draft summary sheet (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This was a preliminary step in code development (Creswell, 1998). These phrases were comprised of the language of the respondents and/or interpretations of the researchers based on familiarity with the research questions and related protocol. Using the above example, “different ways of communicating” was formulated.

*Step 4.* The researchers contracted/combined the phrases and developed specific codes related to the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Consistent with the phrases, the codes established at this point were largely based on the language of the respondents

and/or relevance to the research questions/protocol. Based on the previous example, “different ways of communicating” eventually became “communication.”

*Step 5.* The researchers organized and combined codes in separate groups and developed a preliminary coding manual. The purpose of this manual was to conduct initial coding of a subset of the data (see Appendix B).

*Step 6.* The researchers established inter-coder agreement (Marques & McCall, 2005) by applying the preliminary coding manual to a portion of the data (all of the initial interviews). The researchers met to compare findings and discuss discrepant coding. A mean agreement of 90% was reached on this data subset and the coding manual was finalized (Bakeman & Gottman, 1986).

*Step 7.* Themes, factors and sub-factors contained in the coding manual were organized according to the research questions. This involved a grid system (each section was assigned to a component/sub-component of the research questions). The researchers placed themes and factors in the relevant compartments of the grid. The researchers then used the grid to develop a graphical representation of the coding manual. There was one code scheme for all data sources related to the research questions (see Appendix B).

*Step 8.* The researchers independently conducted a final round of data analysis using the finalized coding manual. This finalized manual was applied to all transcribed data sources (initial interviews, first and last supervision session with each participant, the final interviews and the PI journal). The researchers then met and discussed discrepant coding and possible coder drift (Schilling, 2006).

## Findings

TP explored teachers' perceptions of the process and outcome of kinder training, including perceived changes in teaching beliefs and practices, student behavior, the relationship with the focal student and classroom management skills. TP also accounted for aspects of integrity based on the PI's observations during classroom coaching. Data analysis revealed six major themes: understanding of training content, views of training structure, communication, views of focal child, teacher-child relationship, and classroom management (see Appendix B). Emerging themes are examined and described within the framework of the research questions.

#### *Research Question One*

The first research question examined the teachers' perceptions of the content and structure of kinder training. This question explored the degree of acceptability of the training protocol; how reasonable, appropriate and useful the participants found the kinder training model (Kazdin, 1980). The researchers' examination of acceptability also included the degree of understanding of the information presented by the researchers (Reimers, Wacker & Koepl, 1987). Kazdin (2000) notes the direct connection between the level of understanding and the degree of integrity of an intervention. Data sources used to answer research question one included the pre and post intervention semi-structured interviews, the first and last supervision sessions with each teacher and the PI's journal. Data analysis revealed two major themes related to this research question:

*understanding of training content and views of training structure.*

*Understanding of training content.* Understanding of training content was defined as a participant's grasp of one or more of the training components (as stated or implied by participants' comments/responses). The researchers compared participants' statements

with the specific content/skills taught during the initial training. Understanding of training content also applied to any statement that suggested a lack of familiarity with the training content.

During the first supervision session, one teacher reflected some difficulty with providing a verbal response to her focal child. “I was trying to think of what to say then; it didn’t come to me.” Another teacher expressed a similar challenge when she said “I just wasn’t sure if I should comment on that or not.” Many of the comments/questions made by the teachers related to clarification of training content. One teacher, for example, said, “I opened my mouth to say ‘you’re telling me this is ...’ I don’t know if I should say that. Is it okay to say that?” Another teacher told the PI that she was trying to remember the training content during the play session so that she could find an appropriate response.

Consistent with the voice of the participants, the PI’s reflexive journal provided some evidence of teachers’ struggles with the kinder training language and skills. Following a classroom coaching session, for example, the PI noted that one teacher “expressed the difficulty of being consistent with the kinder training language and skills in the larger classroom context.” The PI also made note of those instances in which the teacher participants demonstrated skill acquisition. She noted that another teacher “incorporated my suggestions from the last session, displayed a clear understanding of the skills and used the whisper technique extensively and appropriately.”

Although all of the teachers referred to the training content in general terms, there were several statements that related to specific kinder training skills. Four subthemes related to understanding of training content emerged from data analysis: tracking,



empathy, encouragement, and limit-setting (TEEL). These factors were consistent with the child-centered play therapy skills taught on the first day of training (White, Draper, Flynt & Jones, 2000).

Tracking was defined as verbally communicating to the child what one sees the child doing. This skill also may involve paraphrasing the child's verbal expressions and/or using the child's language (Kottman, 2001). All of the teachers reported an accurate understanding of the tracking skill, particularly within the context of the play room. Teachers stated that they were especially careful not to label items in the play room until the children did. For example, in the first supervision session, one teacher said, "That's why I tried to...when we went to the cash register; I didn't call it a cash register." Another teacher told the PI that she did not want to label a toy for her focal student. "He doesn't know what it is and I'm not going to tell him. He thinks it's this big huge balloon." In the second supervision session, one teacher stated, "It was with the jaguar...it was a tiger but we called it a jaguar or we just went with it."

As reflected by the teacher's comments during the interviews and supervision sessions, the PI's journal reflections indicated that the teachers had an overall understanding of the tracking skill and were able to incorporate it into their regular classroom teaching. The PI noted for example, that one teacher "did a good job of tracking the student's actions and reflecting their words. She was able to naturally use the language in tandem with regular teaching by incorporating statements such as 'you're helping each other' or 'you're thinking about it.'" The PI also recorded instances which indicated some challenges with the tracking skill. Referring to one classroom observation, she stated "[the teacher] asked more questions than may have been

necessary.” In another instance, the PI noted that “when one student told [the teacher] a story, she listened intently and responded but did not track/reflect the content.”

Empathy was defined as a verbal reflection of the child’s emotional expressions. Only one teacher reported having initial difficulty with empathy, particularly within the framework of the limit-setting skill. This was corroborated by the PI’s observations as described in her journal. “It seems difficult for her to reflect feelings. When she is not sure how to respond, she ignores.”

The majority of the teachers reported a clear understanding of the empathy skill. For example, when asked how she would handle her student’s unwillingness to end the play session one teacher said, “I know that you’re sad because you want to be in here.” In another instance, the teacher who reported having initial difficulty with empathy noted her response to her student’s fear. “You could see the smile was gone. And I didn’t say anything at first, but I said ‘you look like you’re scared,’ because he did have that expression on him.” One teacher told the PI that her focal student was a very quiet child. Therefore, she had to be very attentive to him during the play sessions in order to gauge (and respond to) his emotions. “I think it’s probably easier for a kid that’s not talking, to look and say ‘I’ve got to get some type of emotion.’”

The PI’s journal provided some support for these teachers’ responses. For example, the PI recorded specific teacher comments during a math lesson: “you seem tired. I can see you laying your head on the desk.” “I know that was a real tough one”. “That one was tricky.” The PI also recorded instances in which teachers either used the empathy skill inconsistently or neglected to employ empathy with their students. “There was one instance when [the focal student] was off-task. I thought it was a good

opportunity to use empathy prior to setting a limit (I know you really want to play...) but she did not use it....”

Encouragement was defined as focusing on the child’s efforts and strengths. Consistent with the use of empathy, the majority of the teachers reported a clear understanding of encouragement. The teacher who initially struggled with empathy also expressed some initial difficulty incorporating encouragement into the play session content. During the first supervision session she said, “I guess I could have asked him, you decided to open it or... could I say, you can try to open it yourself? Is that OK to say? I wasn't sure.” She was, however, eventually able to master this skill. In the final supervision session she stated, “I was asking him to do things for himself, like you recommended the last time. I said, ‘you do it’.”

Consistent with the teachers’ comments during the interviews and supervision sessions, the PI’s journal remarks provided some evidence of consistent and accurate use of encouragement. She noted for example that “when [a] student decided to pick the chair up by herself, [one teacher] said ‘you solved your own problem’.” During another teacher’s classroom coaching session the PI noted specific encouraging statements such as: “you’re working really hard,” “you got it” and “you decided to choose puzzles.” However, the PI also noted inconsistent use of encouragement and missed opportunities. “[One teacher] encouraged a student who built something and showed it to her: ‘You decided to do that’. A few minutes later, she used two praise statements: ‘that was a nice jump’ and ‘that was very pretty’.” The PI also commented on another teacher’s difficulty with encouragement. “I noticed that [the teacher] did for the children what they could do

themselves (i.e. erased a section of their workbook). This was a missed opportunity for the teacher to say ‘that’s something that you can do’.”

Limit-setting was defined as respectful and clear communication of the boundaries of the play room or classroom. All of the teachers stated that their target students were generally cooperative. As such, they noted that they had limited opportunity to employ limit-setting in the play room. During the last supervision session, one teacher expressed her comfort with the use of limit-setting with her focal student in both the play room and the classroom.

I felt fine, I just said the sand is for staying in the sandbox. He was like okay. He does not challenge me in the [class] room either. Like if I say books are for reading, he’ll open the book and start reading. He wouldn't rip it apart.

As reflected by the voice of the teachers, the PI’s journal comments indicated the teachers’ use of limit-setting but not necessarily in the sequence taught during the initial training. There were several instances, for example, in which the PI noted the omission of empathy in the limit-setting sequence. She described one teacher’s interactions with her focal student:

[The teacher] worked hard to keep [the focal student] on task by using statements such as “now is the time for coloring,” “markers are not for smelling,” “markers aren’t for banging down,” and “the puzzles are not for breaking”. Limits were set but without the empathy component.

*Views of training structure.* Views of training structure were defined as participants’ perspectives (positive/negative) about the organization/format of the training

program. Two sub-themes emerged from data analysis: the format of the play sessions and views of the initial training.

The format of the play sessions was defined by their one on one and child-centered structure. This involved non-directive play techniques which allowed the child to initiate play and related conversation (Landreth, 2001). All of the teachers reported that they saw the importance of allowing the child to lead the play. They did however note that this was sometimes challenging. One teacher, for example, described her desire to help her student during the final play session.

I had all I could do not to reach over and unlock it for him. But I kept saying no no no he's got to figure this out himself. And he tried and tried and he couldn't get it undone. And then he squeezed it tighter on his hand and I was like oh my god, okay. I'm cool. If he needs your help he'll say something.

As the teachers grew in their comfort level in the play room, they often commented on how different play room behavior was from teaching behavior in the classroom setting. For example, one teacher said, "in the classroom, I would know what to do, but I wasn't sure what to do in the play room."

Views of the initial training were defined as participants' perspectives (positive/negative) about the content/structure of the first two days of training. During the post-intervention interviews, all of the teachers provided overall views of the initial training. They specifically said that they had "learned much", "found success" and "received good information". A common point made by these teachers related to the amount of information presented. One teacher, for example, said, "[The first day of training] was very fast..." Another teacher was particularly concerned about being

adequately prepared for the play room sequence. “The information is so intensive that when they’re only two sessions then it’s really difficult to completely absorb the information before being put into the play room setting.” Another teacher noted that the initial training focused more on the play room than on potential classroom situations. She therefore suggested that there be more of a balance in the training content.

Even before we went into the play room... the actual prep that we’d gotten before going into the play room, it was mostly talked about how you would react to the child with this...but it wasn’t discussed if you had a group of children, what would you do. How would you direct yourself, you know redirect them...with the actual training before we went into the play room before we met that Saturday... that actual day was mostly directed towards you being in the room with one child. I think it has to be more directed to how would you use it in the classroom? Maybe it has to be a separate piece.

Consistent with the teachers’ statements made during the interviews and supervision sessions, the PI journal provided evidence of teachers’ positive views about the initial training. “The day after the practice training, I saw [one teacher] as I entered the building. Before I could even pose the question, she noted that she thoroughly enjoyed the practice session the evening before.” The PI also noted more balanced teacher perspectives:

At lunch-time, I went to check on [another teacher]. I asked her how the training was for her. She noted that it was fun although a little anxiety- provoking. At the end of the school day, I went to see [a third teacher]. I asked her how the practice

training was for her. She noted that it was difficult and “nerve-racking”. She said that she felt very anxious because there were so many people watching her.

### *Research Question Two*

The second research question explored the teachers’ perceptions of their teaching beliefs and practices, the characteristics and behavior of their focal student, the teacher-child relationship, and their classroom management skills before and after the kinder training intervention. Data sources used to answer research question two included the pre and post intervention semi-structured interviews, the first and last supervision sessions with each teacher and the PI’s journal. Data analysis revealed four major themes related to research question two: *communication, views of focal child, teacher-child relationship and classroom management.*

*Communication.* Communication was defined as words/strategies/methods that teachers used to enhance the teacher-child connection. All of the teachers noted the importance of communicating with their students. They specifically referred to using the class content as a bridge for developing open communication. During the pre-intervention interview, one teacher said,

There's a special journal that I do, where I write something to the students. I put something that they can read. Or I draw them a picture...and they respond to me. So we have kind of a one-on-one. Like if they feel sad. I'll write them a note, “Could you tell me why you're feeling sad?” And they'll respond to me like “something's happening at home” or “I'm not feeling good”.

Another teacher described a similar approach to working with her students:

During reading groups, I ask them to tell me how they can relate to the story. Also, I make an effort to meet with each one of my students one-on-one throughout the week and I have conversations with them, because they write about their own experiences and memories.

A third teacher noted,

I work one-on-one with them with guided reading. I can build relationships through the book if they have some kind of connection and then I can talk to them about that. And then when it's writing time when I conference with them. Like "remember this book that we were reading, and you said that your grandmother also cooked cookies and why don't you write about that?" Or "tell me some more details about that." As I confer with them, I take notes so that when I come back to them, "We talked about this last time. Are we getting better with this? How are you doing?" That kind of thing.

In the post-intervention interview, the teachers were asked to comment on the impact of kinder training on their teaching practices. All of the teachers specifically referred to the impact of kinder training on their communication style. They said that they had learned different ways of communicating with their students. One teacher noted that the training helped her to "word things differently" and provide more choices. Another teacher also said "I found different ways to say things...other ways to say things so that I'm not saying the same things over and over again." A third teacher stated, "I think it helps me when I speak to them. How I speak to them."



As indicated by the teachers' remarks during the interviews and supervision sessions, the PI noted the impact of the kinder training classroom coaching model on the teachers' level of interaction/communication with their students. After the first classroom coaching session, the PI encouraged one teacher to interact with all of her students during center time. The PI noted that during the second classroom coaching session "[the teacher] made a special effort not to focus solely on [her focal student]. She went around to other students and they seemed to have responded well." During her first coaching session, another teacher "was actively involved with the children and moved around to each small group. She got down on their level and her body language reflected keen interest."

*Views of focal child.* Views of the focal child were defined as participants' perspectives/observations (positive/negative) of the focal student. All of the teachers had a strong awareness of the characteristics and behavior of their focal student, even after only a few weeks of school. During the pre-intervention interview the teachers described unique characteristics of the focal student. Since the teachers chose students with whom they had difficulty connecting, some of the descriptors were negative. One teacher, for example, stated,

I think he's a bit immature for his age. So I think that a lot of the things that he does are just very impulsive. His maturity level is what's keeping him from being on track. And he'll do something that...you are thinking "a five-year-old shouldn't be doing this.

Another teacher said, "He's very immature, and it's very difficult for him to focus on what he is supposed to be focusing on so he wants to play all the time. Well that

happens because he so immature.” Other teachers gave more balanced descriptions by also identifying positive characteristics. One teacher, for example, remarked,

He's active in the classroom; he's active in the hallway, that's just his personality. Academically he's one of my higher students. So he's very capable and that sticks out a lot because he does love to participate and nine times out of ten he knows what the answer is.

All of the teachers also described changes that they noticed in the focal student's behavior as a result of the kinder training. One teacher said “I've seen some of his self-confidence come up which I think is especially important because he's a very needy child.” Another teacher said, “He's more aware of what he's doing. And if he really thinks about things he is monitoring his behavior.” A third teacher commented, “He's now a different child. He's happier, he wants to be here. He doesn't get in trouble. I don't have to write any behavior notes.” These latter comments are supported by the PI's classroom observations. After the first classroom coaching session with this teacher, the PI noted that “[the focal student] will not work unless [his teacher] is with him.” By the third classroom coaching session, the PI stated “[the focal student] seems to be gaining some independence, or at least some understanding that [his teacher's] time has to be shared among all the students. He remained on task for a short time without supervision.”

*Teacher-child relationship.* The teacher-child relationship was defined as the bond (positive/negative) between the teacher participant and the focal child. During the pre intervention interviews, all of the teachers stated that they had a connection to the focal student. One teacher, for example, told the PI “he wants to be around me all the time. He feels safe. He's not afraid I'm going to like fuss at him.” Another teacher also

described a similar connection to her focal student when she said, “He likes when I sit next to him when he has to do his work. We just kind of clicked.” A third teacher said, “his relationship and mine, just in general has just begun to blossom. [The other day] he reached over and gave me a kiss on the cheek.” In the post-intervention interview, another teacher described the open relationship that she shared with her focal child.

If there's something going on at home that he's upset about, he lets me know. We have that sort of relationship now that he will come in the mornings and I can tell something is going on, and he is very honest and open when things are going on.

All of the teachers noted an improvement in the teacher-child relationship as a result of the kinder training. One teacher stated that she did not see a considerable change but noticed an increase in both verbal and non-verbal student-initiated communication. She also stated “I just notice that look in his eyes like he knows that I care about him.” Another teacher did not describe specific changes in the teacher-child relationship (she said that it was “better”) but emphasized that she saw her focal student differently. A third teacher noted a similar change in her relationship with her focal child.

It's just I felt [the kinder training] made me more in tune to [my student] as an individual not just a student. I feel like he trusts me, and he looked forward to going to those sessions with me and it built not only a student teacher relationship but also a friendship.

One teacher also described the improved teacher-child relationship when she said, “we've got such a bond you know between us, this child and myself, that I really feel that was really enhanced through this whole process. It's just made us closer.” Another teacher gave a similar response,

He definitely warmed up to me. I think he opened up some more when I took him to the play room and he got to spend time with me, me not being there to judge him, just letting him do what he wants to do.

The PI noted that after the last classroom coaching session this teacher said that “she was eager to continue to work with [her focal student] in the play room after the project in order to continue to build that bond.”

*Classroom management.* Classroom management was defined as strategies that teachers used to promote cooperative behavior/learning, facilitate routine, and clarify boundaries and rules. During the pre-intervention interview, all of the teachers stated that they used various behavior management strategies including: choices, time-out and redirection. One teacher, for example, stated, “I do a lot of sending them away. And when they figure out that they can control themselves, they can decide to bring themselves back.” Another teacher also noted using 1, 2, 3 magic and the stop-light system as key classroom management techniques. “The stoplights, where they change their pin. Green is what they want to be on and then yellow ...warning and orange is a time out called ‘think it over’. Red... they would go to the office.”

All of the teachers described the impact of kinder training on classroom management. One teacher, for example, described using tracking as a limit-setting tool. “I try to do some of [the tracking] to redirect them. “You're playing with your shoelaces” and they'll stop. It really is a good redirection tool as well. ” Another teacher described incorporating tracking in her use of directives,

If somebody was out of their seat, I would say so and so please go back to your seat. And if they didn't do it on the first instruction, I would say I see you're not

going back to your seat and they would make that choice on their own. Whereas before, I was probably saying it over and over again.

One teacher focused on the choice component of limit-setting,

I'm trying to see the kids in a different way maybe. And I try to give room.

Maybe if I do give them choices right or wrong, maybe they will pick the right.

Like I'm trying to think of it more than I did before instead of just being a teacher like okay I told you to do this so just go ahead and do it.

The PI's journal provided support for this teacher's statements. After the first classroom coaching session, the PI noted that "[this teacher] seems to have an authoritarian approach to working with her students." However, after the second classroom coaching session, the PI noted that "[the teacher] offered choices: 'You have two choices- you can play with the blocks or you can play with the puppets'.".

The PI observed that another teacher had strong classroom management skills at the start of the classroom coaching sequence. After the initial classroom session, the PI noted that "the children tend to be cooperative with each other and listen carefully to instructions. They also transition from one activity to the next without prompting. When I left the room, they were all quietly sitting at their desks." Despite this observation, in the post intervention interview, this teacher described the impact of the kinder training on her classroom management.

It really has helped to hone in on my management skills in the classroom. There are times when a child is using scissors inappropriately where in the past you might have screamed that's not what you do with the scissors but to turn around

and say scissors are for cutting or you know the hall is for walking and just seeing the change in the child without you know having to be that authority figure.

### Discussion

The current study (Teacher Perceptions, TP) examined the acceptability, integrity and perceived effectiveness of kinder training among a group of early elementary school teachers. Teacher reports during the pre-interviews, supervision sessions and post-interviews provided evidence of acceptability of the kinder training model. By the end of the intervention period, all teachers noted that they found the intervention to be non-intrusive and appropriate to their setting and needs. Despite these reports, acceptability may have been moderated by the child-centered format of the play sessions and the amount of information that teachers were expected to retain. The PI's reflexive journal provided evidence of moderate integrity of skill display based on supervised play sessions and classroom coaching sessions. These recorded comments also highlighted discrepancies between teachers' self-report and the PI's observations. Based on their reports during the interviews and supervision sessions, the teacher participants saw TP as an effective intervention. The teachers specifically noted an improvement in teacher-child relationships, student behavior and classroom management skills.

#### *Acceptability*

The results of the current study provided evidence of acceptability of both the content and structure of the kinder training model. Consistent with Kazdin's (1980) definition of acceptability, the teacher participants noted that the content of the training (i.e. TEEL) and the structure of the training (i.e. initial group training, play session/supervision sequence, classroom coaching sequence) were non-intrusive and

appropriate to both the setting and the specific needs of the participant group. The acceptability of the kinder training intervention may also have been affected by the level of understanding that the participants had of the training content (Reimers, Wacker & Koepl, 1987). By the end of the kinder training intervention, all of the participants reported a clear understanding of the kinder training language and skills. This perceived understanding may have contributed to the overall acceptability of the training model as reported by the teachers.

The acceptability of the TP kinder training model also was indicated by the participants' reports of the importance and feasibility of the training (Nastasi, Moore & Varjas, 2004). In terms of feasibility, the interviews for the current study were conducted at the convenience of the teachers at a time when they had substitute/resource teachers to conduct class sessions for them. Where substitution was not an option, teachers conducted interviews after bus-call on days when they had no additional meetings/duties. These accommodations may have positively influenced acceptability.

The TP results also aligned with previous studies which documented acceptability of kinder training for teacher participants (Hess, Post & Flowers, 2005; Solis, 2005). The current study added to the work of Solis (2005) by exploring acceptability at multiple phases of the intervention (pre interview, supervision sessions, and post interview). As mentioned, this on-going data collection allowed researchers to explore respondent validation of comments made during the pre-intervention interviews.

Although the TP teachers reported an overall acceptance of the kinder training model, they noted some difficulty related to the format of the play sessions (led by the child). Teaching style may have contributed to the challenge that teachers faced

concerning the differences between playroom and classroom variables. The kinder training model espouses a child-centered philosophy (White, Flynt & Draper, 1997); this philosophy did not necessarily align with the teaching philosophy of all the teaching participants (the PI observed that one participant had an authoritarian teaching style as indicated by directives and verbal reprimands). The participants were introduced to the same model; there was a specific training protocol with limited flexibility to accommodate unique teaching philosophies and related practices. Acceptability may also have been moderated by the amount of information presented during the initial training. The majority of the teachers stated that the information was “good”, but “intensive”. These findings were consistent with those of Solis (2005); the teachers in that study commented that they needed additional time to learn/understand and practice the skills presented in the training.

### *Integrity*

Reimers, Wacker and Koepl (1987) indicate that the degree of acceptability of a treatment model has a direct impact on the integrity of the model. Based on this premise, the degree to which teacher's implemented the kinder training language and skills as originally taught may have been affected by their acceptability of the model. In TP, this perspective was balanced by the classroom observations of the PI. In order to account for integrity, the researchers compared the teachers' comments (from the interviews and supervision sessions) with the PI's classroom coaching observations. Based on this analysis, the researchers found support for moderate integrity regarding the use of the kinder training language and skills.



All the teachers reported that they had an accurate understanding of tracking and limit-setting. Although this was corroborated by the PI's journal records, her comments indicated some challenges with acquisition of the tracking skill. She also noted that the teachers tended to implement the limit-setting sequence without the empathy component. Only one teacher reported having initial difficulty with encouragement and empathy. The PI noted, however, that she was eventually able to accurately use encouragement during the play session sequence. Although the PI described this teacher's struggle with the empathy skill during a classroom coaching session, the teacher later reported (during the post-intervention interview) that she was able to appropriately use empathy with one of her students. Based on the PI's observations, the other teachers were able to consistently and appropriately use both empathy and encouragement. Instances where these teachers may have missed opportunities to use specific skills may be explained by the developmental challenges inherent in the learning process (Morgan, 1997). According to Morgan, learners necessarily go through particular stages of knowledge/skill acquisition. With time and experience, these learners are able to appropriately retain/display knowledge.

Dane and Schneider (1998) note that adherence to a specific treatment protocol has an impact on the degree of integrity of a model. The TP study was implemented within the framework of the school structure. Although the researchers were given full administrative support, there were certain restrictions based on the nature of the school system. These included the length of the play sessions, the number of play sessions and the school curriculum. For example, the typical play session within a private practice setting is approximately 30 to 45 minutes. However, play sessions within the intervention

school were limited to 15 to 20 minutes. The reduced time may have negatively affected the integrity and related effectiveness of the treatment. However, the careful attention that TP researchers gave to accommodating the teachers' hectic schedule may have had a positive impact on acceptability.

Based on the comparison between teacher reports (during supervision sessions and interviews) and the PI's observations, TP examined the interaction among acceptability, integrity and effectiveness. Whereas past studies have examined one or two of these constructs at a time (e.g. Draper, White, O'Shaughnessy, Flynt, & Jones, 2001; White, Flynt & Draper, 1997; Solis, 2005) the current study augmented teacher perceptions with the systematic observations of the researcher. In this way, perceived effectiveness and acceptability measures are balanced by the investigator's frame of reference.

#### *Perceived Effectiveness*

According to White, Flynt and Draper (1997) the goals of kinder training include: developing the teacher-child relationship, improving student behavior, and enhancing teacher's classroom management skills. Based on the responses from TP participants, the findings support all of the goals of kinder training as originally determined by its developers. TP teacher participants specifically reported that the kinder training helped to enhance the teacher-child bond, facilitate student's pro-social behavior and provide the teachers with key classroom management tools. The PI's journal and related classroom observations provided additional support to teachers' statements. The PI noted for example, key improvements in student behavior and teachers' use of specific kinder training classroom management strategies. The findings of TP also supported previous

kinder training studies which reflected enhanced teacher-child relationships (White, Flynt & Draper, 1997), improved student behavior (Solis, 2005; White, Flynt & Draper, 1997; White, Flynt & Jones, 1999) and stronger classroom management skills (White, Flynt & Jones, 1999).

*Teacher-child relationships.* During the post-intervention interview, all TP teachers noted that their relationship with their focal student had improved as a result of the kinder training. The process of one on one interaction in the play sessions, and in-depth discussions about student behavior/progress in the supervision sessions/interviews, may have enhanced the teachers' awareness of the students' needs/issues and heightened the perceived teacher-child connection. This is consistent with the findings of White, Flynt and Draper (1997) which indicated that both the teacher-child relationship and the focal teacher's view of her student improved as a result of kinder training.

*Student behavior.* All TP teachers stated that they saw positive behavior change in their focal student throughout the intervention period. The literature on student behavior indicates positive associations between the quality of the teacher-child relationship and student conduct (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Burnett, 2002; Espinosa & Laffey, 2003; Isaacs & Duffus, 1995; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). In TP, the one on one interaction throughout the play session sequence may have had an impact upon both teacher behavior and students' perceptions of their teacher. This may have in turn had a positive influence on student cooperation. As mentioned, the PI noted improvements in specific student behaviors. White, Flynt and Draper (1997), also suggested that the improved teacher-child relationship in their case study contributed to enhanced student behavior.

*Classroom management.* All TP teachers reported that the kinder training intervention had a positive influence on their classroom management skills. They stated the perceived ability to incorporate the kinder training skills into their established classroom management strategies. Of significance for this study was the participants' reported use of the tracking skill as a limit-setting tool. It seemed that the teachers were less inclined to use the limit-setting sequence as originally taught. Rather than state limits, alternatives, and consequences (Kottman, 2001), tracking was often used to help the students be more aware of their behavior and make cooperative choices. This finding is not consistent with White, Flynt and Jones (1999) study which documented an increase in effective limit-setting statements. In their study, teacher data reflected the use of limit-setting in the way that it was originally taught.

#### Limitations

There were specific limitations to TP including the potential lack of transferability and possible researcher bias. TP involved 5 participants, which may limit both transferability and generalizability of findings. A larger, more representative sample may have provided more information regarding the perceived efficacy of the model for teachers in the intervention school as well as other elementary school communities. Although the results of this study indicated enhanced teacher-child relationships, improved student behavior, stronger classroom management skills and overall acceptability of the kinder training model, the findings cannot be generalized to all elementary school teachers. Of significance however, is the close alignment between the findings of TP and those of previous kinder training studies which provided evidence of its effectiveness (e.g. White, Flynt & Draper, 1997; White, Flynt & Jones, 1999) and

acceptability (Hess, Post & Flowers, 2005; Solis, 2005). A small sample for the TP intervention also allowed the PI to gain a greater understanding of each teacher's perspectives through in-depth data collection procedures.

The potential for researcher bias existed primarily because all TP teachers were trained and interviewed by the PI. Therefore, all data collection and analysis related to TP were taken from this perspective. Although there were opportunities throughout the training for the PI to debrief with other trainers, there was no opportunity to compare and contrast actual supervision/interview data. The other BR trainers were not a part of the TP study and therefore were not required to collect qualitative data. The reduced objectivity inherent in the dual role of trainer and researcher may have negatively influenced data collection and analysis. However, the prolonged engagement and persistent observation by the PI allowed her access to the cultural norms of the group. Additionally, her consistent presence and participation on the counseling team may have served to increase her credibility as researcher-practitioner.

#### Implications for Research and Practice

The findings of TP qualitatively supported results of previous studies regarding the effectiveness of kinder training (e.g. White, Flynt & Draper, 1997; White, Flynt & Jones, 1999). The results of this study also supported earlier studies with respect to acceptability (e.g. Hess, Post, & Flowers, 2005; Solis, 2005). The findings of these latter studies seemed to indicate that participants see the kinder training model as fair and reasonable. Future research may therefore take a more complex look at determining the cross-relationships among acceptability, integrity and effectiveness of kinder training interventions. This may include mixed methodological approaches that qualitatively

assess acceptability and perceived effectiveness while evaluating integrity and efficacy using observations and quantitative analyses.

From a practical stand-point, the kinder training model may be influenced by the nature of the teacher work-day. Even where compensation is available for training, it may be difficult to secure teacher participants who are willing and available to participate in a full day of training. Based on these potential challenges, the suggestions of the TP teachers, and the participants' comments in Solis (2005), the initial training period may need to be lengthened (e.g. over a two day period). This may allow the teachers more time to process the information presented, which may in turn, positively impact understanding, acceptability, and outcome.

Future training should also account for the limitations placed on the length of play sessions as a result of the nature of teachers' schedules. The reduced length may be augmented by additional play sessions. Kinder trainers may consider utilizing six to eight play sessions (White, Flynt & Jones, 2000) followed by an equivalent number of coaching sessions. This may assist teachers' acquisition and synthesis of the kinder training language and skills.

The kinder training model also necessitates full school-based administrative support. The model involves day-long training, intensive practice, scheduling requirements, teacher-substitution, parental consent and the presence of outside consultants in the classroom setting. These requirements only can be fulfilled with full teacher participation balanced by administrative support. For example, the TP researchers saw the benefits of gaining the trust and assistance of key stakeholders and gate-keepers

before entering the school system. Kinder trainers should therefore ensure that they have the requisite administrative support before implementing an intervention.

### Conclusion

TP explored the acceptability, integrity and perceived effectiveness of the kinder training model. Teacher reports during the interviews and supervision sessions provided evidence of acceptability of the kinder training intervention for the TP participants. These teachers also noted enhanced teacher-child relationships, improved student behavior and stronger classroom management skills as a result of the kinder training. The PI's reflexive journal augmented teacher reports and provided support for moderate integrity regarding the teachers' acquisition/display of the kinder training language and skills.

TP utilized a qualitative approach to examining the process and outcome of the kinder training intervention. Although it is important to quantitatively assess the effectiveness of a training program, the subjective view of participants also may illuminate their voices, and provide researchers with practical information to better meet the needs of the target group (Dukes, 1984). When participants see an intervention as appropriate to the problem, they are more likely to see the treatment as acceptable (Kazdin, 1980). As mentioned, TP participants saw the intervention as non-intrusive and appropriate to their setting and specific needs. When an intervention is viewed as fair and reasonable by participants, it is also more likely to be implemented as taught and reap sustainable results (Kazdin, 1980). This view is supported by the moderate integrity and perceived effectiveness found in the current study.

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## APENDIXES

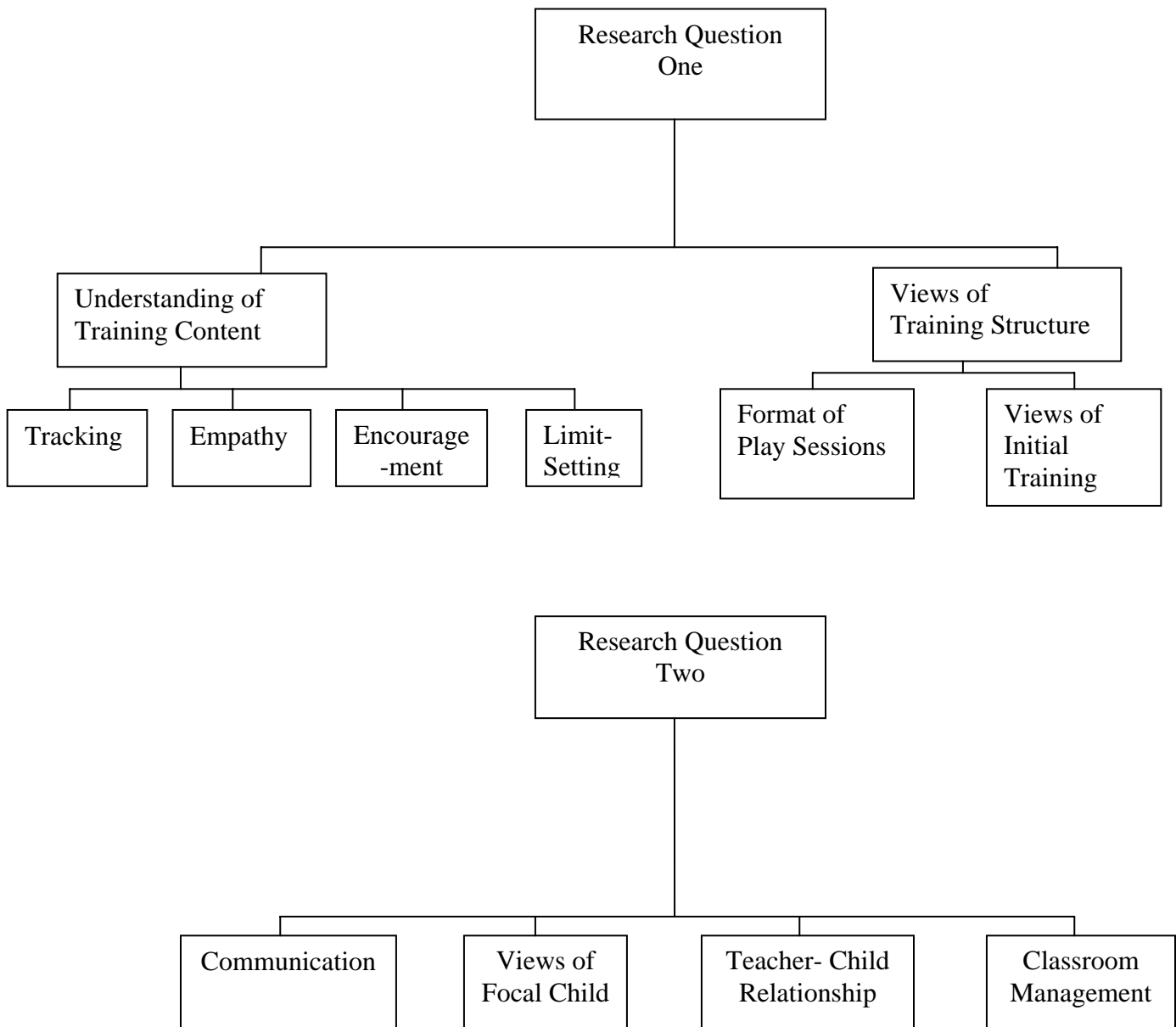
### APPENDIX A

#### Code Definitions

Codes	Definition
*Understanding of Training Content	Used when participants grasped one or more components of the training content (as stated or implied by their comments/responses).
Tracking	Non-judgmental communication of what the teacher sees and hears the child doing. Used when participants made reference to the use of this skill and/or gave an example of the skill.
Empathy	Looking for and acknowledging the child's feelings. Used when participants made reference to the use of this skill and/or gave an example of the skill.
Encouragement	Actively focusing on the child's strengths, abilities and resources. Used when participants made reference to the use of this skill and/or gave an example of the skill.
Limit-setting	Stating the boundaries of the play room/classroom. Used when participants made reference to the use of this skill and/or gave an example of the skill.
Views of Training Structure	Used when participants gave specific perspectives (positive/negative) about the structure of the entire training protocol.
Format of Play Sessions	Referred to the structure of the play sessions: One on one and child-centered
Views of Initial Training	Used when participants gave specific perspectives (positive/negative) about the content/structure of the first day of training.
Communication	Referred to methods that teachers used to enhance the teacher-child connection.
Views of Focal Child	Used when participants gave general perspectives/observations (positive/negative) of the focal child.
Teacher-Child Relationship (T-C-R)	Referred to the bond (positive/negative) between the teacher participant and the focal child.
Classroom Management	Strategies/techniques/skills that teachers used to promote cooperative behavior/learning, facilitate routine, and clarify boundaries and rules. Also referred to teachers' inability to promote/elicit cooperative behavior/learning.

APPENDIX B

Code Scheme





APPENDIX C

Teacher Demographic Information

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Teacher's Name

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Teacher's Gender

male

female

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Highest Level of Education Completed

High School Diploma

Some college

Professional Diploma (specify type: \_\_\_\_\_)

Associate's Degree

Bachelor's Degree

Professional Degree (specify type: \_\_\_\_\_)

Graduate Degree (specify type: \_\_\_\_\_)

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Years of Teaching Experience:

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Additional Training/Certification (please specify):

## APPENDIX D

### Kinder Training Interview Questions

#### *Before the Intervention:*

1. In a few words, how would you describe your classroom atmosphere?
2. In your experience, what have been the most effective methods (academic/interpersonal) that you have used to help your students to learn?
3. Teaching is challenging, particularly when you think of connecting with students one on one. How do you build a relationship with your students?
4. You've chosen one student to help you with this project. Describe your relationship with this student?
5. How does he/she stand out in the classroom?

#### *After the Intervention:*

1. Please tell me about your experience with the Kinder Training.
  - a. What aspects were helpful?
  - b. What aspects were unhelpful?
2. If you were to participate in the training again, what would you like to see done differently?
3. In what ways (if any), has the training impacted you? (personally and teaching methods)
4. In what ways (if any) has the training impacted the student that you chose to work with?

5. In what ways (if any) has the training impacted the relationship that you have with this student?
6. Describe what it was like to transfer the Kinder Training language and skills from the playroom to the classroom.
7. What impact (if any) did the use of the Kinder Training language and skills have on the other students in the classroom?
8. In what ways (if any) did the use of the Kinder Training language and skills affect your classroom management strategies (promoting cooperative behavior/learning-consistency, boundaries, and rules)?
9. Do you plan to continue using the Kinder Training language and skills? Why/why not?