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Delaying kindergarten entrance

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Delaying kindergarten entrance

Abstract

This study addresses the issue of delayed kindergarten entry of children five years of age. Benefits as well as problems were discussed. Guidelines for implementing a developmentally appropriate kindergarten program were outlined and conclusions were drawn from the literature. Recommendations were made for future kindergarten programs.

Delaying Kindergarten Entrance

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By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	2
Need for the Study.....	3
Limitations.....	4
Definitions.....	4
CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	6
Value of Kindergarten Holding Out.....	6
Problems with Kindergarten Holding Out.....	9
CHAPTER III GUIDELINES FOR A SUCCESSFUL KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM	14
Planning the Successful Program.....	14
CHAPTER IV SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	22
Summary.....	22
Conclusions.....	24
Recommendations.....	24
REFERENCES	26

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

During the past decade there is a growing trend for parents of five-year-old children to hold their age-eligible child out of kindergarten. In fact, Portner (1997) reported that the ratio of students who have delayed entry into kindergarten has doubled in the past twenty years. The reasons why parents hold their children from school include an academic as well as a social advantage. Also, researchers believe that some parents wish to give their child a competitive advantage in athletic activities (Portner, 1997). Rusch (1998) claimed that the reason parents were less likely to hold their child back 20 years ago is because kindergarten programs then were focussed on readiness and social skills, they did not have the academic push of kindergarten programs of today. The academic focus of kindergarten programs nationwide has indeed been the reason why many parents are choosing to hold their children from school for an additional year. As the academic pressures increase for students, parents are concerned that their children are not ready for kindergarten (Bellissimo, Sacks, and Mergendoller, 1995).

As the trend toward delayed school entry grows, so do the number of studies done to determine the results of this trend. Gullo and Burton summarized the research findings concerning school entry age as uncertain or clouded (1992). Studies conducted by DiPasquale, Moule, & Flewelling, 1980 and Karweit, 1988 show that the youngest children in an academic kindergarten, those that were not held out for a year, do not do as well as older children. On the other hand, studies by

Kinard & Reinherz, 1986 and Shepard & Smith, 1986 have demonstrated that the negative effects of being the youngest in the class disappear as children reach second and third grade (in Gullo and Burton, 1992 p.177).

Part of the debate about school entry into kindergarten is that each state makes its own legislative decisions on the age children are allowed entry into school. As a result, there is now a range of at least six months between eligible age for kindergarten programs throughout the country. As an example, some states, such as California, mandate that children must be five years of age by December or January of a given school year; many other states have a kindergarten entry date in September or October. Indiana requires that children are five years of age in June, prior to entering kindergarten (Jacobson, 1997).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the literature concerning delayed entry into kindergarten by students and to present guidelines for a developmentally appropriate kindergarten program. To accomplish this purpose the following questions will be addressed.

1. What is the value in delaying kindergarten entry?
2. What are the problems associated with delaying entry into kindergarten?
3. What are guidelines for a developmentally appropriate kindergarten program that includes both young students and students who are older because they were held out of kindergarten for a year?

Need for the Study

“Parents, educators and policy makers have concerns about how old children should be when they start school” (Spitzer, Cupp & Parke, 1995, p.434). This concern has caused many parents to consider holding their child out of school for a year, and many educators are encouraging them to do so. Yet research findings on this topic are inconclusive as to the best age to enter school. In this regard, Gullo and Burton (1992) reported that “while some studies show that the youngest children in an academic kindergarten do not fare as well as the older children, others have demonstrated that the negative effects of being the youngest in the class disappear in later years” (p.176).

Katz (1988) observed that, “just because we can ameliorate the early effects of being the youngest child in the class... does not necessarily mean that we should do so” (in Gullo & Burton, 1992, p.185). Determining readiness for kindergarten depends on the perspective that is taken. School administrators tend to look at academic readiness. Families take the perspective that a child is ready for school at a determined legal age. Other factors also include social and emotional development as well as the program the child is entering: whether it is child-centered or content-centered.

The question of optimum age for entering school becomes more pressing as parents look to educators for answers. Often, parents are advised to hold back those children with summer birth dates “...based, in large part, on hopes and fears rather than strong, empirically rigorous knowledge base” (Crosser, 1991, p.142). Indeed, “the existing knowledge base for decision making about school entrance age for

summer birth date children is not particularly strong” (Crosser, 1991, p.145). Educators are advising parents of summer birth date children without carefully looking at research subjects and variables in comparison to their own situation (Crosser, 1991). The need for this study is best stated by Crosser (1991), “there is a need to focus on a stronger knowledge base on which to build entrance-age recommendations” (p.145).

Limitations

This study is limited to the review of the literature available at the University of Dubuque in Dubuque, Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, Iowa. A study that was referenced in much of the literature reviewed was originally published in the journal *Pediatrics*. That journal was unavailable to this paper’s author and was therefore used as a secondary source. An additional possible limitation includes the fact that some sources were found on the Internet.

Definitions

For purposes of use in this paper, the terms listed below will be defined in the following way:

Absolute Age: A term used to describe a child’s chronological age.

Birthdate Effect: “... Younger children in the group generally have a slightly more difficult time academically in kindergarten and even throughout the elementary years” (Peck, McCaig, & Sapp, 1988, in Freeman, 1990, p.31).

Developmentally Appropriate Practices: “Result from the process of professionals making decisions about the well-being and education of children based on at least three important kinds of information or knowledge: what is known about child development and learning; what is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group; and knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live” (NAEYC, 1997, p.8-9).

Kindergarten Holding Out: “... The decision by parents to delay their children’s entry into kindergarten by a year” (Meisels, 1992, p.165).

Regular Age-appropriate Entry: A term used to describe a child’s entry into school at the appropriate age; without being retained or held out of school.

Relative Age: A child’s “standing within the age distribution of the group” (Spitzer, Cupp & Parke, 1995, p.434).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Value of Kindergarten Holding Out

As educators and researchers study kindergarten-aged children, they seem to put the children into one of two groups: those with summer birth dates and those without. Looking closer at the group of summer birthdate children leads experts to consider whether or not these children should be sent to school in the fall of their fifth year. Many educators and researchers strongly believe that young five-year-old children should not be sent to kindergarten because they will experience negative consequences if they do go to school.

James Uphoff (1996) has written about the effects that chronologically younger children will meet in comparison to older children at any particular grade level. Uphoff wrote that younger children are more likely to become dropouts, receive counseling services, be slower in social development and be less attentive in class (Uphoff, p.57). Uphoff has also conducted research that shows "...that the youngest children in kindergarten are more likely to score low on achievement tests, need special education services, have discipline problems, and repeat a grade" (in Jacobson, 1997, p.2). Uphoff has concluded from his own research and from that of others "...that children who are less than five and one-half years of age at the time of school entrance into kindergarten are much more likely to encounter problems" (Uphoff, 1996, p.55).

As research has shown, chronologically younger children may have more difficulties in school than older children may. In addition to chronological age, other

factors influence a young child's success. Crossner (1991) reported the following findings: "given similar levels of intelligence, males with summer birth dates tended to be advantaged academically by postponing kindergarten entrance one year. That advantage was greatest in the area of reading" (p.145). Crossner (1991) also stated that "academic achievement is only one of the variables to be considered when making entry-age decisions for individual children. Social, emotional, and physical implications deserve careful consideration as well" (p.145). The National Center for Educational Statistics reported that demographic, socioeconomic and developmental factors account for some of the differences in performance of chronologically young children (1997).

Along with social, emotional, and socioeconomic factors, rate of development is a concern for those who advocate delaying school entry an extra year for young children. Jim Grant (1997) explained that children of the same chronological age develop at varying rates and that this rate of development can affect their school performance.

"Especially around the ages of 5 and 6, for example, some children are ready, willing, and able to work with a pencil and learn letters and numbers. Other children of the same chronological age might be ready to do the same things one year later..." (p. 35)

Children who are forced to do things they are not developmentally ready for are likely to develop discipline problems and negative attitudes toward school (Grant, 1997).

"Common sense would seem to suggest that some children who are chronologically or developmentally young might need more time to develop and grow" (Grant, 1997, p. 26).

Some educators believe that a more developmentally appropriate curriculum will bridge the gap between younger and older children in a particular grade, for:

“Educators and their students are learning the hard way that focusing on only the curriculum and related instructional practices is an academic approach that does not address two crucial aspects of the learning process—each child’s current stage and rate of development”. (Grant, 1997, p.42)

Grant (1997) also asked the question: “Is there really a developmentally appropriate curriculum that can be individualized to create a ‘level playing field’ for both [chronologically young and old] children...? (p. 27). Grant stated that the answer is instead “a range of time-flexibility options that enable students to master curriculum...no matter what their current developmental rate...” (p.27). One time-flexible option may include kindergarten holding out.

To many, the concept of developmental age deserves more attention than that of chronological age. Grant (1997) discussed the point that school-entrance cut-off dates are arbitrarily decided, often by state legislators rather than educators. With school entry dates ranging among states, it is possible for a child turning five years of age in September to be denied entrance into a school in one state, yet a four-year-old not turning five until December may go to school in another state (Grant, 1997).

Grant (1997) wrote that he supports what he calls the gift of time through an example of “a child living on one side of a state line [having] a full year more to grow and learn than a child born on the same day but living on the other side of a state line” (p. 38). The school-entrance dates are determined without considering a child’s rate of development, or the school curriculum; one child “...is allowed to develop an additional 365 days” more than the other child (Grant, 1997, p.38). This problem

occurs among children living in the same state, but born just two days apart-before and after the cut-off date (Grant, 1997).

Problems with Kindergarten Holding Out

While there are many reasons to advocate delayed kindergarten entry, especially for summer birthdate children, there are numerous reasons against kindergarten holding out as well. Meisels (1992) stated that there are many negative effects for children who are held out of kindergarten. Effects that include, “downward escalation of academic demands, increased economic burden...higher probability of dropping out...and exaggerated social-class differences” (p.167).

Many researchers share Meisels’ concern that the trend toward holding children out of kindergarten can have negative effects. One common concern among researchers is that the range of growth and learning will expand even greater than it already is. Meisels (1997) wrote that, “because young children reach developmental milestones at different rates, any kindergarten class...will exhibit a two-year range in ability” (in Jacobson, 1997, p.2). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), in their Position Statement on School Readiness (1990), reported that “...within any group of children, it is likely that one child will possess exceptional language and social skills, but be average in physical development and emotionally less mature than is typical of the age group” (p.21). With the differences in developmental growth that occur already, there is concern that holding some children out of school an additional year will increase the range, making the gap in a single classroom difficult to close. Meisels (1992) supported this concern by stating:

What are the implications of the hold-out phenomenon? First, the chronological range in the average classroom expands from 12 months to 24 months, meaning that the oldest child may be 30% older than the youngest at kindergarten entry. The problems posed for a teacher by this type of age span are nearly monumental.... (p.166)

Many of those who support children entering kindergarten at an older age do so based on the argument that the curriculum has changed in recent years toward increasing academic expectations. If a child is to start school a year later, he or she would be more ready to meet the academic challenge (Meisels, 1992). Meisels (1992) argued, however, that chronological age is only one factor in a child's maturation and that "this focus on chronological age ignores important differences among children that result from environmental and genetic factors" (p.159).

Freeman (1990) stated that "the effect of youngness is not due to absolute age but to the relative position of a child within his or her cohort group" (p.32). As children are being held out of kindergarten there is still a youngest and an oldest child in the class, only now the range is increased (Freeman, 1990). Shepard and Smith (1986) urged "...districts not to encourage parents to voluntarily hold back their young fives because this trend only increases the age differential of children in kindergarten and first grade" (in Freeman, 1990, p.32). NAEYC (1990) also took the position that a:

Wide variability also exists in the rate of children's growth. The precise timing of when a child will achieve a certain level of development... cannot be predicted... Raising the legal entry age or holding an individual child out of school a year are misdirected efforts to impose a rigid schedule on children's growth in spite of normal differences. (p.22)

The range of development of young children presents difficulties in most kindergarten classrooms. As the trend toward holding children out increases, so too

does concern over the curriculum. Meisels (1991) has written that "The 'holdout phenomenon' expands the age range in the classroom to 24 months... because of holding out, 1st-graders who are barely 6 years old are being compared with 7-and-a-half year olds on standardized tests" (p.32). The push toward a more academic kindergarten is causing many classroom teachers to use developmentally inappropriate practices such as teacher-directed instruction and reliance on an abundance of paper-pencil and workbook tasks (Freeman, 1990). NAEYC (1990) has taken the view that, "children entering kindergarten are now typically expected to be ready for what previously constituted the first grade curriculum" (p.22). This type of instruction presents "the problem of trying to force children to learn concepts, skills, and facts that are inconsistent with their developmental abilities and that are presented in ways that are unsuitable for young children's styles of learning" (Meisels, 1992, p.156).

Meisels (1992) described what is happening to kindergarten programs:

As the kindergarten group grows older through holding out, the focus of instruction typically shifts upward in response to the needs of the older students and the expectations of their parents. Ironically, this contributes to the escalation of academic demands that brought parents and some professionals to recommend holding out originally. (p.166)

Kindergarten holding out is not only affecting the curriculum, but it is creating

other inequities as well. Meisels (1992) observed that as schools are working to establish equity in their classrooms, 6-year-olds are being compared to 7 ½ -year-olds not only on standardized tests but also in drama and sport teams. The trend of holding out appears to divide social classes as well. "Given that higher income families can more easily afford to keep their children in daycare or preschool another

year, it is clear that holding out truly makes a bad situation worse by accentuating the negative effects of social class” (Meisels, 1992, p.167). As a result of holding out, Nicholas Zill (1997), a researcher on the topic, wrote that “many of those children [being held out of school] are not greatly disadvantaged, and they set a standard that puts other children at a disadvantage” (in Viadero, 1998, p.2).

Recent research on the topic of kindergarten holding out has shown that negative effects can lead into adolescence for students that have been held out of kindergarten. A study published in *Pediatrics* found that “students who are older than their classmates because they started school late tend to have more behavioral problems in adolescence than students who are the average age for their grade” (Portner, 1997, p.1). Robert S. Byrd, who was the lead author of the study, stated that, “kids who are older than their classmates may act out as teens because they’re bored with school. Or they may feel out of step knowing they’re a year older than everyone else in their grade” (in Rusch, 1998, p.130). In fact, the study revealed the following:

Students who started school later had more behavioral difficulties than average-age students, especially when they reached adolescence. At age 17, 7 percent of the average-age students in the study exhibited extreme behavioral problems. In comparison, 16 percent of the students who started kindergarten late displayed similar inappropriate conduct. (Portner, 1997, p.1)

In addition to behavioral problems, studies have shown that “being one year too old for a grade level increases a child’s risk of dropping out by 40 to 50 percent for urban students” (Meisels, 1991, p.32).

While the study published in *Pediatrics* brings concern of the lasting negative effects of holding children out of school an additional year, other studies report no

significant difference. Smith and Shepard (1987) reported that “the youngest child in a classroom achieves slightly lower than the oldest child...the oldest and the youngest children are separated by about 9 percentile ranks on first-grade reading tests, but by third grade oldest and youngest are indistinguishable” (in Meisels, 1992, p.159).

Freeman (1990) supported this statement as her review of research when she wrote, “that the effects of being the youngest disappear by the end of third grade” (p.31).

Controlling for factors such as social and economic differences results in the finding that “delayed-entry students appear to be doing no better than other first and second graders” (Viadero, 1998, p.1). Given the information that there are no significant academic or social differences for delayed-entry students, combined with the findings that there are may be negative effects for these students later; there appears to be little reason to delay entry to those children who are ready and able to go to school (Freeman, 1990).

From looking at the value of and the problems with holding children out of school for a year, it is clear to see this discussion cannot easily be resolved. However, as Meisels (1997) pointed out, “there [may not be] an ideal starting time for school, but age of entry should not be a barrier to educational opportunity” (in Jacobson, 1997, p.2). The next section of this paper will provide guidelines to modify kindergarten programs to meet the needs of the students of varied chronological and developmental ages entering the program.

CHAPTER III

GUIDELINES FOR A SUCCESSFUL KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

Planning the Successful Program

Because of differences in development, children entering kindergarten today have a wide variety of skills and abilities. Developing a program that meets the needs of each child entering takes careful consideration from a community of people.

School districts, including administrators and teachers, as well as parents and community members, each have a role to play in developing a kindergarten program. School district policies must reflect the interest of young learners.

Guidelines for School Districts

1. Teachers in early childhood should be current in their knowledge of development and apply this knowledge to early childhood practice (NAEYC, 1997).

Early childhood teachers and administrators can then provide school board members information on current research and theory on developmentally appropriate programs for kindergarten children (Freeman, 1990). With this information, Walsh (1989) suggested that board members may begin to make policy decisions based on good theory, solid evidence and actual needs (in Freeman, 1990).

2. Teachers should inform parents and school personnel about developmentally appropriate practices (Maxwell and Eller, 1994).

It is important that teachers are able to respond to the differences in the students they teach by individualizing the curriculum and teaching practices (NAEYC, 1990). In order to do this, both teachers and administrators must understand how children

develop and learn and how to create and implement a program that is developmentally appropriate in it's curriculum (NAEYC, 1990).

3. Expectations of kindergarten students should be reviewed once policy makers and community members are educated on research and theory of developmentally appropriate curriculum.

The NAEYC (1997) explained that:

Curriculum expectations in the early years of schooling sometimes are not appropriate for the age groups served. When next-grade expectations of mastery of basic skills are routinely pushed down to the previous grade and whole-group and teacher-led instruction is the dominant teaching strategy, children who cannot sit still and attend to teacher lectures or who are bored and unchallenged or frustrated doing workbook pages...are mislabeled as immature, disruptive or unready for school. (p.20)

Kindergarten traditionally has been seen as a place to develop social skills, however recently more kindergarten programs have been focussing on acquisition of academic skills (Maxwell and Eller, 1994). There also appears to be a difference of opinion between parents, early childhood educators and administrators as to what should be expected of students in kindergarten. In a survey by the U.S. Department of Education in 1993 of 1,400 public-school teachers, 75 percent of the teachers said that "children entering kindergarten should simply be healthy, well-rested, well-nourished, enthusiastic, curious, and able to communicate their needs and thoughts" (Rusch, 1998, p.131). Yet more school districts are using their own guidelines, including school entry tests, to deny some children into kindergarten for academic reasons (Shore, 1998).

An article focussed on this topic in Of Primary Interest (1998) suggested that "there is no one quality or skill that children need to do well in school-a combination

of factors contribute to school success” (in “Ready or Not...”, p.2). Those factors include physical well being, social and emotional maturity, language and problem solving skills and creative thinking (“Ready or Not...”, 1998, p.2). The article in Of Primary Interest (1998) also stated that “school success depends upon the ‘match’ between children’s skills and knowledge and the school’s expectations. More children succeed when these expectations reflect the knowledge of child development and learning” (p.2).

4. Schools need to be ready to meet the needs of the children rather than expecting the children to be ready for school (Cooney, 1995).

The National Education Goals Panel supported the need for schools to be ready for children to find success when they asked a group of advisors to identify what makes a ready school. As a result a report, *Ready Schools*, identifies specific approaches found in successful elementary schools (Shore, 1998). The report stated that “ready schools accept all children on the basis of chronological age” (Shore, 1998, p.3). Ready schools realize that there will be a range in the developmental level of children entering school and will conduct assessment to facilitate planning and to find strengths and weaknesses in children, but not to exclude them from school (Shore, 1998). The NAEYC also believes that schools must be ready for children and that can happen “with better trained teachers, smaller classes, and a curriculum that helps children acquire the skills they need to become successful” (AASA, 1992, p.16).

Guidelines for Early Childhood Programs

1. There is a need for better-trained teachers and smaller class sizes in a successful kindergarten program.

Teachers need to be trained in child development as well as practices that are appropriate to be used in teaching young children. Recent data show that “teachers who receive inservice training on developmentally appropriate practices via workshops, site visits, and journal reflections reported a greater tendency to use these practices in the classroom” (“Guidelines”, 1998, p.4). Many teachers also indicate that they believe in developmentally appropriate practices, yet do not have classrooms that are developmentally appropriate (“Guidelines”, 1998). A recent study found that kindergarten teachers also demonstrate “conflicts between their philosophy of early childhood education and their classroom practices” (“Guidelines”, 1998, p.4).

Changes need to be made in kindergarten classrooms if schools are to be ready to meet the needs of individual children. In its Position Statement on School Readiness, the NAEYC suggested that “in addition to ensuring that teachers of young children have specialized training in child development and early education, class size should be reduced and additional adults available to ensure individualized instruction” (NAEYC, 1990, p.23). The National Association of Elementary School Principals supported the need for smaller class sizes and additional adults as they recommended a staffing ratio of two adults for 20 children (AASA, 1992). “Low child/staff ratios provide teachers with the opportunity to spend unhurried time with every child [and] to address each child’s unique needs” (AASA, 1992, p.23).

2. In developing a successful kindergarten program it is also necessary to investigate how children learn and to relate that knowledge to practices and curriculum in kindergarten classrooms.

According to the NAEYC (1990) “A basic principle of child development is that there is tremendous normal variability both among children of the same chronological age and within an individual child” (p.21). In an ideal kindergarten program, “teachers use their knowledge of child development and learning to identify the range of activities, materials and learning experiences that are appropriate for a group or individual child” (NAEYC, 1997, p.17). The curriculum needs to address all areas of child development including, “social skills, physical development, intellectual abilities and emotional adjustment” (NAEYC, 1990, p.21).

3. A successful kindergarten program should apply developmentally appropriate practices.

Knowledge of the development of a child provides a framework for preparing the learning environment and planning goals for children in the program (NAEYC, 1997). Understanding of how children learn also provides a base for developing a kindergarten program that utilizes developmentally appropriate practices. The NAEYC (1997) took the position that, “developmentally appropriate programs are based on what is known about how children develop and learn; such programs promote the development and enhance the learning of each individual child served” (p.8). An article on this topic in Of Primary Interest (1998) suggested that developmentally appropriate practices are those strategies which teachers use “to make day-to-day decisions based on the individual children, their families, and the

social and cultural context” (“Guidelines”, 1998, p.4). The article also suggested that “developmentally appropriate practices evolve from a deep knowledge of individual children and the context within which they develop and learn” (in “Guidelines”, p.4).

4. Individual teachers need to move toward developmentally appropriate practices in their own classrooms and in their curriculum.

An article written on this topic in Of Primary Interest (1998) suggested that schools “offer a curriculum and teaching practices that reflect principles of child development and learning” (in “Ready or Not”, p.2). This is done through active learning experiences which are meaningful to children and build on knowledge and abilities already existing in the children (“Ready or Not”, 1998, p.2). Teachers must also “create an intellectually engaging, responsive environment to promote each child’s learning and development” (NAEYC, 1997, p.18). The National Association of State Boards of Education, in a 1991 report entitled *Caring Communities*, proposed that an ideal kindergarten classroom, “should be organized with learning centers where children can read, work with blocks, explore science, listen to tapes of stories and music, create art, engage in dramatic play, and manipulate mathematics materials” (in AASA, 1992, p.22).

In order to utilize developmentally appropriate practices in a kindergarten classroom, children’s physical, social, and emotional needs must be addressed as well as their intellectual development (NAEYC, 1997). Teachers must be willing to “observe and listen to the children in order to design a responsive curriculum that meets their needs” (Cooney, 1995, p.165). The curriculum must provide meaningful experiences from which children can learn rather than requiring students to acquire

isolated skills (NAEYC, 1990). Once this happens many kindergarten classrooms will begin to look different. Children will be initiating learning activities rather than teachers, whole group instruction will be replaced with more small group lessons, subject areas will be integrated throughout the day with students actively learning with hands-on materials (NAEYC, 1990). Children's individual talents will be encouraged and celebrated as well, and the classroom would provide many opportunities for children to interact socially (Cooney, 1995). In a developmentally appropriate classroom adults will use a variety of strategies "to encourage children to reflect on their experiences by planning beforehand and 'revisiting' afterward" (NAEYC, 1997, p.13). This allows for deeper understanding and greater knowledge as a result of the experience (NAEYC, 1997).

5. The teacher's role should be that of a facilitator as children construct their own knowledge through learning activities.

"Principles of developmentally appropriate practice are based on several prominent theories that view intellectual development from a constructivist, interactive perspective" (NAEYC, 1997, p.13). To develop an ideal kindergarten classroom which utilizes developmentally appropriate practices, "play, creativity, curiosity, self-esteem, and interest must be returned to kindergarten classrooms" (Freeman, 1990, p.33). The NAEYC (1997) has taken the view that in an ideal kindergarten classroom:

Young children actively learn from observing and participating with other children and adults, including parents and teachers. Children form their own hypotheses and keep trying them out through social interaction, physical manipulation, and their own thought processes-observing what happens, reflecting on their findings, asking questions, and formulating answers... Throughout early

childhood, the child in processing new experiences continually reshapes, expands, and reorganizes mental structures. (p.13)

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the literature concerning delayed entry into kindergarten by students and to present guidelines for a developmentally appropriate kindergarten program. The study addressed three questions to accomplish this purpose:

1. What is the value in delaying kindergarten entry?

The value in delaying Kindergarten entry is that younger children are more likely to encounter problems in school, including discipline problems and negative attitudes toward school as well as academic difficulties. Young boys particularly were found to experience difficulties in reading. An additional value in delaying entry into kindergarten is that chronologically young children are allowed more time to develop and grow.

2. What are the problems associated with delaying entry into kindergarten?

Many problems are associated with delaying entry into kindergarten. In kindergarten programs where children have delayed entry for a year, the range of growth expands even greater than in other programs. This tends to push the curriculum of kindergarten programs toward more academics, which leads to the use of more developmentally inappropriate practices. There also exist inequities in classrooms where children have delayed kindergarten entry. Children six years of age are compared to seven and one-half year old children in academic and other areas.

age are compared to seven and one-half year old children in academic and other areas.

Additional problems in delaying entry into kindergarten include that as students develop into adolescents they experience more behavior problems in school. This may be due to boredom with grade level learning and possibly the feeling of being out of step with other students who are a year younger.

3. What are guidelines for a developmentally appropriate kindergarten program that includes both young students and students who are older because they were held out of kindergarten for a year?

Guidelines have been developed in two different areas:

Guidelines for school districts

1. Teachers in early childhood should be current in their knowledge of development and apply this knowledge to early childhood practice.
2. Teachers should inform parents and school personnel about developmentally appropriate practices.
3. Expectations of kindergarten students should be reviewed once policy makers and community members are educated on research and theory of developmentally appropriate curriculum.
4. Schools need to be ready to meet the needs of the children rather than expecting children to be ready for schools.

Guidelines for Early Childhood Programs

1. There is a need for better-trained teachers and smaller class sizes in a successful kindergarten program.

2. In developing a successful kindergarten program it is also necessary to investigate how children learn and to relate that knowledge to practices and curriculum in kindergarten classrooms.
3. A successful kindergarten program should apply developmentally appropriate practices.
4. Individual teachers need to move toward developmentally appropriate practices in their own classrooms and in their curriculum.
5. The teacher's role should be that of a facilitator as children construct their own knowledge through learning activities.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from this study:

1. While there is evidence to support both positions, the majority of the studies reviewed found that there are more problems created by delaying kindergarten entrance than there is value for the child.
2. A developmentally appropriate kindergarten program must be developed by teachers knowledgeable in child development who use their knowledge to plan a curriculum, which is meaningful and meets the needs of a range of individual children.

Recommendations

Based on a review of the literature and my own experience as a kindergarten teacher, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. All children should enter kindergarten when they are five years of age. Parents should be encouraged to send their chronologically young five-year-old children to kindergarten rather than delaying entry for a year.
2. Kindergarten classrooms should become developmentally appropriate. Teachers should be provided opportunities for continuing education on the development of children. Curriculum in kindergarten should reflect the development of typical five-year-old children and should not be pushed down from first grade.

Kindergarten classrooms should be staffed with enough adults and class sizes should be kept low. The learning experiences in kindergarten should be active and meaningful to the students and should allow students to construct their own knowledge through teacher facilitation.

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