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Maintaining developmentally appropriate practice in an increasingly academic kindergarten

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Abstract

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However, in spite of the research, many early childhood professionals are not fully implementing developmentally appropriate practice. Three main obstacles to full implementation were the following: (a) increased accountability from state and local authorities, (b) the downward shift of curriculum expectations from the next grade level, and (c) increased expectations from parents. Detailed conclusions from the research were drawn and recommendations for developmentally appropriate classrooms were made.

MAINTAINING DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE IN AN INCREASINGLY ACADEMIC KINDERGARTEN

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Abstract

Developmentally appropriate practice has been common to all early childhood professionals since the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published its position statement in 1987. The position statement has been updated in recent years to provide early childhood professionals with guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice in their classrooms. The purpose of this paper was to conduct a review of research to determine whether a developmental or academic curriculum is most appropriate for kindergarten classrooms. The research outlined the benefits of developmentally appropriate practice, including increased academic performance and better social skills. The research also showed the detriments of developmentally inappropriate practice, including increased stress levels, a stifling of enthusiasm for learning and less advanced academic and social skills. However, in spite of the research, many early childhood professionals are not fully implementing developmentally appropriate practice. Three main obstacles to full implementation were the following: (a) increased accountability from state and local authorities, (b) the downward shift of curriculum expectations from the next grade level, and (c) increased expectations from parents. Detailed conclusions from the research were drawn and recommendations for developmentally appropriate classrooms were made.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background Information

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) has been outlined in guidelines and recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) since 1987. It emphasizes age appropriateness and individual appropriateness (Hyun, 1998). The NAEYC organization has been an advocate for young children for over 75 years. In 1996, a revised position statement was adopted by NAEYC for *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8*. It includes 12 basic principles of child development that should guide decisions regarding developmentally appropriate practice in an early childhood classroom (NAEYC, 1996).

Play is an important component of developmentally appropriate practice. Children's play allows them to interact with others verbally and physically, to explore the world on their own terms, to practice communication skills and to problem solve situations for themselves. Play is critical to emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development. Through symbolic or representational play children can interpret and understand larger emotional experiences that are too hard to digest all in *one bite* (Moustakas, 1974). Through sociodramatic play, young children learn to be role players, enabling them to become socially adaptive as adults (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990).

The value of play in DAP is similar to Vygotsky's constructivist theory that suggests that children construct their own knowledge through child-centered, hands-on experiences. "Vygotsky viewed pretend play as being responsible for the emergence of abstract thought" (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 1999, p. 483). The teacher is there to

organize the environment and help *scaffold* the children's learning (Decker & Decker, 1997). The idea of *scaffolding* a child's learning was also recognized in the early 19th century when Johann Herbart created the idea of *apperception*; that new knowledge must be based on old knowledge. "Herbart felt that children learned best through real experiences. He felt that education should not be so concerned with *seeing and hearing* things as *touching, handling and experiencing* things" (Osborn, 1991, p. 42).

Another essential component in the DAP guidelines is that all domains of a child's development are closely related and cannot be taken in isolation. "Development in one domain influences and is influenced by development in other domains" (NAEYC, 1996, p. 32). Cruikshank (1986) stated that "...the full-day kindergarten curriculum should take into account what we know about five- to six-year-olds. It should contain a balance of all three areas of child development: the cognitive (including language development); social/emotional; and the psycho-motor.... 'Academics' are not to be excluded from the curriculum, but should be presented in a way that is compatible with how five-year-olds learn" (p. 33). Seefeldt (1990) advocated for a *cognitive curriculum* that is based on first-hand, child-initiated, language-rich, and meaningful experiences. The cognitive curriculum differs from an academic curriculum in that the cognitive curriculum integrates all areas of learning into a unified whole rather than just focusing on academics. Friedrich Froebel, *the Father of Kindergarten*, also stressed this need for unity of all things in order for children to learn. It was the basis for his gifts and occupations curriculum (Osborne, 1991).

However, curriculum reform that began in the 1980s has "...resulted in the

increased emphasis on academics in kindergarten and primary grade curricula..." (Wortham, 1995, p. 175). The current kindergarten curriculum is becoming more academic each year, allowing less time for play and other developmentally appropriate practices. Many kindergarten programs are focusing heavily on the academic domain and forgetting to nurture the other essential domains needed to develop a *whole* child. This does not match the way young children learn. "In constructing knowledge children do not rely on only one developmental modality...in order to make sense out of their world. Rather, they use an integrated set of these modes" (Gullo, 1992, pp. 30-31). The early childhood curriculum should reflect an integration of all areas using an integrated or holistic curriculum (Krogh, 1990).

Elkind (1987) stated that "the threat of miseducation is greatest in public education, where the most children will be affected" (p. 9). This trend toward miseducation has united many national associations who advocate for early childhood education (i.e., the Association for Childhood Education International, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, International Reading Association, National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Association of Elementary School Principals, and National Council of Teachers of English; Elkind, 1987). They have issued a joint statement regarding concerns in early childhood education. These concerns address many of the inappropriate practices taking place in classrooms across the country (e.g., formal pre-reading programs with inappropriate expectations, isolated skill development through drill and other abstract activities, and little acknowledgement of individual needs and rates of development; Elkind, 1987).

Kindergarten teachers across the country are feeling pressures from state and district policies, from parents, and from upper grades to implement a more academic curriculum. In 1995, Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, and Milburn stated the following: "Practices that were previously not usually encountered until first grade or later—such as whole-class instruction, teacher-directed instruction, formal reading instruction, written assignments out of workbooks, and frequent grading—are now commonplace in kindergartens" (p. 209).

This is causing a conflict between what early childhood teachers know about how young children learn best and what they, as teachers, are expected to teach in their classrooms. In 1986, the NAEYC position statement addressed this issue by saying "the trend toward early academics is antithetical to what we know about how young children learn" (p. 4). Although it goes against what they believe, these expectations are causing many early childhood professionals to teach using developmentally inappropriate methods. Bryant, Clifford, and Peisner (1991) found a startling fact that only 20% of the kindergarten teachers in their study provided curriculum that met or exceeded the criterion for developmental appropriateness.

Statement of Purpose

The two purposes of this study are those of conducting a literature review in order to determine whether a developmental or an academic curriculum is most appropriate for a kindergarten classroom and determining guidelines for an effective, developmentally appropriate classroom. The following questions will be addressed to achieve these purposes:

1. What is developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)?
2. What are the advantages to implementing developmentally appropriate practice in the early childhood classroom?
3. What are the limitations to implementing developmentally appropriate practice in the early childhood classroom?
4. What are the guidelines for an effective developmentally appropriate practice classroom?

Need for the Study

In my review of literature, I read articles and studies dating back at least 20 years that were concerned with the increase of academics in the kindergarten curriculum. Shepard and Smith (1988a) stated that "...the escalation of the early grades curriculum is a gradual and continuous process" (p. 137). Kindergarten no longer has a protected status, separate from the elementary school, in regards to academic performance. Twenty years later, a solution still has not been found to stop the increased academic push in the early childhood classroom. The issue is not going away. In my personal experience, the kindergarten curriculum becomes more academic and less developmentally appropriate each year.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to a review of the literature available at the University of Northern Iowa, from Internet downloads and from the Education Abstracts Full Text Index. While many articles showed that teachers are not fully implementing developmentally appropriate practice in their classrooms, I found very few articles that

were against the use of DAP. Therefore, my interpretations and conclusions about developmentally appropriate practice reflect this lack of data against DAP and may be slightly one-sided.

The literature located and reviewed was mainly in regards to general education students. Even in the NAEYC guidelines, "...virtually no reference was made to the inclusion of young children with special needs. Nor did the guidelines suggest ways that the curriculum might be adapted to accommodate the cognitive, sensory, physical or psychosocial needs of such children" (Mallory, 1992, p. 1). Although I believe that developmentally appropriate practices could easily be adapted to meet the needs of early childhood special education students by considering individual appropriateness, no direct research was found in this area and is, therefore, not included.

Definition of Terms

Early childhood: Birth through age eight.

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP): Activities considered appropriate for young children, based on three important areas:

1. what is known about child development and learning...;
2. what is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group to be able to adapt for and be responsive to inevitable individual variation; and
3. knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families (NAEYC, 1996, p. 31).

Socioeconomic status (SES): A rating given to families based on the amount of money they earn. It is often calculated using the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Advantages to Using Developmentally Appropriate Practice

In my review of the literature, nearly all of the studies indicated positive benefits when using developmentally appropriate practice and negative effects when using developmentally inappropriate practices in the early childhood classroom. Children in developmentally appropriate classrooms are becoming more advanced, both socially and academically, than children who experience a developmentally inappropriate kindergarten classroom.

Despite the academic nature and the emphasis on direct reading instruction in inappropriate classrooms, "children from more developmentally appropriate kindergarten classrooms had higher average reading grades [in first grade] than children from less developmentally appropriate kindergarten classrooms" (Burts, Hart, Charlesworth, DeWolf, Ray, Manuel & Fleege, 1993, p. 29). This trend held true across socioeconomic (SES) boundaries; "no differences were found between high and low SES children from more appropriate kindergarten classrooms..." (Burts et al., 1993, p. 29).

In 1993, Marcon found similar results regarding the escalation of the kindergarten curriculum. Placing more emphasis on academics did not result in greater mastery of skills. In fact, results indicated a *detrimental impact* on young boys placed in an overly academic kindergarten. Girls in the study appeared to be more developmentally ready for academics than boys. However, girls in a developmentally appropriate kindergarten actually achieved higher skill mastery than did girls in an inappropriate program.

The negative effects of developmentally inappropriate practice should be causing alarm to professionals in the field. Burts et al. (1992) found that children in

developmentally inappropriate classrooms exhibited more overall stress behaviors than did children in classrooms using DAP. This was especially true for children with low SES, for black children, and for boys in inappropriate classrooms. Neither race nor sex differences were found in children from developmentally appropriate classrooms. Burts et al. (1992) believed their research shows support for the notion that "...developmentally inappropriate educational programs are potentially harmful to young children..." (p. 315), especially when adding the stress of developmentally inappropriate practice to the numerous other stresses some children are facing in their lives. Developmentally appropriate practices would produce a low-stress environment and allow for more learning.

Shepard and Smith (1988b) found long-term effects of a specific developmentally inappropriate practice (drill and practice of isolated skills) on children's performance in and enjoyment of school. They stated that "long hours of drill-and-practice on isolated skills are detrimental to all children, even those that are able to meet the demand, because tiny, boring proficiencies learned by rote are substituted for conceptual understanding and enthusiasm for learning" (Shepard & Smith, 1988b, p. 37). In this regard, Elkind (1987) believed that structured activities too early in a young child's education could cause inappropriate symbolic learning to be substituted for learning through manipulation. Elkind also stated that such activities stifle a child's natural enthusiasm for learning.

As outlined above, nearly all early childhood professionals and researchers in the field understand the value of implementing developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood classrooms. However, many early childhood teachers are not implementing these practices in their classroom.

Hatch and Freeman (1988) studied teachers' beliefs regarding DAP and their actual practices. When asked to describe a typical day in kindergarten, teachers described highly structured activities for the majority of their day. Of the twelve sites in the study, 63% conducted reading groups, 54% had seatwork activities, story time and large group reading instruction. On the developmental end, *playtime* was offered in only 50% of the programs, most of which was before the school day began and none of which was described as *child-initiated.* Only 27% had recess during the school day. Learning centers were incorporated into only 18% of the kindergarten classrooms. Hatch and Freeman's first conclusion was that kindergartens were obviously becoming much more academic. Their second finding was that the teachers who were implementing these practices did not believe that their programs were best meeting the needs of their students. Two-thirds of the teachers reported that "the day-to-day classroom life...was affected by conflicts between what they believed and what they were doing and asking children to do" (Hatch & Freeman, 1988, p. 161).

Stipek and Byler (1997) found that "for preschool and kindergarten teachers...the beliefs they espoused about appropriate and effective practices for young children were significantly correlated with the practices they implemented in their classrooms" (p. 314). The teachers in this study fell into one of two categories: child-centered practices or basic-skills orientation. The more teachers endorsed basic skills, the less they endorsed developmentally appropriate (child-centered) practices. When asked about their comfort level with the more or less academic natures of their programs, 68% of the teacher felt that their programs were *about right.* However, the remainder of the teachers stated they

received pressure to teach things that did not feel were appropriate. Nearly all teachers who made this claim said the expectations were too academic and structured.

Limitations to Implementing Developmentally Appropriate Practice

If most early childhood teachers believe in DAP, why is it then, that they are not fully implementing these practices in their daily classroom routine? Several obstacles to full implementation are clear in the literature review: (a) increased *accountability* from state and local authorities, (b) the downward shift of the curriculum expectations (by the next grade level), and (c) increased expectations by parents. Because all three of these trends demand a more academic kindergarten curriculum, teachers are not finding it possible to implement DAP as they would desire.

Often times, kindergarten teachers have little voice in the decision making process of choosing a curriculum. The National Association of Early Childhood Specialists (NAECS) confirms this.

> Classroom teachers continue to report that they play little or no role in the decision-making processes that determine curriculum and instructional methodology. Instead, these decisions are made by administrators who are influenced by public demand for more stringent educational standards and the increased availability of commercial standardized tests. (NAESC, 2001, p. 59)

Increasing demand for accountability is likely the largest factor for the escalation of the kindergarten curriculum, and therefore, for the more frequent use of developmentally inappropriate practice. Although developmentally appropriate practice has been the major emphasis in the early childhood world for the past decade, Wortham (1995) suggested that, "unfortunately, accountability for learning prevails over all other influences on early childhood educators in elementary schools" (p. 175). One example of pressures at the state level for accountability comes from a study by Walsh (1989) who

looked at the kindergarten curriculum in Virginia. The State of Virginia has "...state-mandated Standards of Learning (S.O.L.) that require the mastery of specific skills by the end of kindergarten" (p. 385). This academic kindergarten curriculum emphasizes academic goals and objectives with maximum time on task. Teachers in Walsh's study also reported additional pressures from first-grade teachers and parents who wanted increased academics in kindergarten.

Shepard and Smith (1988a) documented the same three sources of pressure for escalating the kindergarten curriculum: *accountability*, first grade teachers' expectations and parents' demands for a more academic program. Shepard and Smith (1988a) talked with kindergarten teachers about the day-to-day pressures to raise expectations. They reported the following: "A substantial group of teachers had established kindergarten goals in excess of district guidelines because first-grade teachers required such outcomes" (Shepard & Smith, 1988a, p. 136).

Parents' demands for increased academics can be somewhat understood as simply wanting their child to do well. Many are not informed as to what are appropriate expectations for young children. The media in our country is perpetuating this demand by parents. "In books addressed to parents a number of writers are encouraging parents to teach infants and young children reading, math and science" (Elkind, 1987, p. 3).

To address the issue of the increasingly academic kindergarten curriculum, several solutions have been proposed and tried by many states and districts across the country: (a) raising the entrance age to kindergarten, (b) kindergarten retention, and (c) readiness screenings. However, these *solutions* have only promoted further escalation in the curriculum.

Raising the entrance age to kindergarten has two downfalls. "First, the fact that children are now older is already being used to justify making kindergarten more narrowly academic. Second, and more important, moving the cut-off date back simply creates a new group of youngest children.... Whatever the cut-off date, a 12-month age range remains" (Walsh, 1989, p. 380).

While kindergarten retention can be explained logically, the current research data on kindergarten retention proves that this is not a viable solution, regardless if the placement is a second year of kindergarten or a transition program. While some students do show academic growth in their second year of kindergarten, these effects are not significant over time (Mantzicopoulos & Morrison, 1992; Cosden, Zimmer, Reyes, & del Rosario Gutierrez, 1995). In 1997, Peel's study verified this and stated that "...alternative instructional practices can be as easily implemented in the first grade as by having the child repeat kindergarten" (p. 151). Dennebaum and Kulberg (1994) found that

> despite an extra year of school, retained children in this study performed significantly lower on the standardized achievement measures [the Metropolitan Achievement Test] than did their grademates. In fact, the results indicate that retention actually hurt their achievement when compared to the children who were recommended for retention but went onto first grade anyway. (p. 11)

Evidence shows that retention provides no academic benefit to children. However, it does appear to threaten their social-emotional development (NAECS, 2001). Graue (2001) found that teacher attitudes and practices regarding retention are tied directly to their philosophical beliefs about how children learn. He supported this statement when he said the following: "Those who hold maturationist views are more likely to favor delaying school entry or retention for emotionally immature students and those who focus on basic skills advocate retention for children with slowly developing skills" (Graue, 2001, p. 69).

Readiness screenings are being used to determine if a child is *ready* for the academic demands of the kindergarten curriculum and if not, to keep them out of kindergarten totally. This goes directly against the NAEYC position statement on developmentally appropriate practice. It says "no public school program should deny access to children of legal entry age on the basis of lack of maturational readiness" (NAEYC, 1986, p. 16).

Once again the issue of philosophy versus expectations comes into play. Ideally when creating an early childhood classroom, teachers would be able to fully implement developmentally appropriate practice in order to best meet the needs of your students. However, many early childhood programs are a part of the public school system, which has demands for accountability from local, state and federal agencies. In many situations, this need for accountability is overriding the desire to be developmentally appropriate.

CHAPTER 3: GUIDELINES FOR CREATING A DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM

A teacher's philosophical position typically serves as the foundation for all decisions in his/her classroom. Many early childhood professionals view the constructivist theories to be the most appropriate and a good match with their philosophy on how children learn. In order to implement a developmentally appropriate early childhood classroom, the following guidelines are recommended:

1. Children will construct their own knowledge with the teacher as a guide.

The best ways to promote children's construction of knowledge are to: a) engage their interest, (b) inspire active experimentation with all its necessary trial and error, and (c) foster cooperation between adults and children and among children themselves (DeVries & Zan, 1994). It is the teacher's responsibility to discover the children's interest and then create an environment that allows for this experimentation and cooperation. The teacher should guide student learning by asking open-ended questions in order to: (a) find out what the child thinks, (b) provide counter-examples, (c) inspire a child's purpose, (d) focus a child's thinking, (e) enrich a child's efforts, and (f) model a higher level of reasoning (DeVries, Zan, Hildebrandt, Edmiaston, & Sales, 2002). Closed-ended questions, such *yes or no* questions and *why* questions should be avoided as they generally do not inspire children to think or engage in the activity further.

If construction of knowledge is to occur, adequate time must be provided for

in-depth investigation and engagement. Children should be given a minimum of two hours a day in a full-day program to pursue freely chosen activities and engage in in-depth explorations (DeVries et al., 2002).

While children should be encouraged to construct their own knowledge, teachers must also consider what children can do with adult assistance. Vygotsky termed this *The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).* The ZPD is constantly changing as the child learns, and varies within different content areas. Each child may be at different points in the ZPD (Bedrova & Leong, 1996). Therefore, teachers must plan activities that will allow for learning at two levels: what a child can do independently and what a child can do with adult assistance.

2. The environment will be conducive to the creation of a sociomoral atmosphere.

In the constructivist classroom, the sociomoral atmosphere is the building block of all other things that happen in the classroom. This sociomoral atmosphere allows for reciprocal, respectful relationships to develop between children and staff.

> These reciprocal relations with children...arise from respect for children as people and respect for the nature of their development. The general principle of teaching is that the teacher minimizes authority as much as practical and possible. Cooperation is important for the sociomoral atmosphere because it reflects respect for the equality of class members—equality in rights and responsibilities. (DeVries & Zan, 2000, p. 12)

Because of this mutual respect and cooperation, a feeling of community arises in the classroom. Whenever possible, children are involved in making decisions that involve the whole class. Classroom rules are created by the group, as are resolutions to conflicts that arise (DeVries, 2000).

3. The curriculum and activities will focus on all areas of a child's development (social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive) using an integrated approach.

Activities must match the program's overall goals and objectives. Constructivist programs tend to have broader, more developmentally appropriate goals and objectives than behaviorist programs. A constructivist teacher believes that activities must engage the children's interests or they are not worth doing. While providing necessary content, the curriculum must: (a) be challenging but achievable, (b) encourage children to be proud of their abilities, (c) be important and worthwhile, (d) build on prior knowledge, and (e) respect both children's home culture and the shared culture of the group (Moore, 1999). All activities must also meet guidelines for age appropriateness, individual appropriateness, and cultural appropriateness.

Children must be given opportunities for play, active exploration, and choices. A wide variety of concrete materials and activities should be provided. Instruction should be delivered using a variety of teaching methods, including small group, partners, one on one, and minimal whole-group instruction. Many opportunities for hands-on practice should be provided. This constructivist view is in agreement with DAP. It allows for individual differences, opportunity for exploration of the environment, learning centers as a way to introduce academic content appropriately, child-to-child interactions, and a focus on language (Decker & Decker, 1997).

4. Assessments will be age appropriate and integrated into the curriculum.

Developmentally appropriate assessment involves "using knowledge of age-appropriate and cultural expectations as a context for individual children's growth and

learning" (Graue, 2001, p. 69). In order to be developmentally appropriate, assessments must: (a) be on-going, strategic, and purposeful, (b) match children's age and experience, (c) be integrated with the curriculum content and goals, (d) not serve as a single determinant for major decisions such as placement, and (e) be mostly *authentic* in nature (such as anecdotal records, portfolios, checklists) rather than standardized (Moore, 2000). "From a developmental perspective, high-stakes testing can do more harm than good" (Sheehan & Wheatley, 2001, p. 32). They support this statement with the following:

> those who are concerned about developmentally appropriate practice recognize the importance of subject matter content, but realize that achieving these content outcomes must be balanced with promoting positive dispositions and feelings in students, with lessons that are exciting, relevant, and geared for the age of the learner. (Sheehan & Wheatley, 2002, p. 32)

5. Parents will be an integral part of the early childhood classroom.

Parent participation and involvement should be encouraged. On-going communication is a key factor in a good parent-teacher relationship. Staff should strive for a team effort with parents to help the child succeed. Recent revisions of Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs call for *Establishing Reciprocal Relationships With Families* (Moore, 2000).

CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The intent of this study was to determine whether a developmental or academic curriculum was most appropriate for a kindergarten classroom and to determine guidelines for an effective, developmentally appropriate practice classroom. The study addressed the following four questions to make this determination:

1. What is developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)?

Developmentally appropriate practice includes guidelines that early childhood professionals may draw upon when making decisions about their classroom practices. The DAP guidelines address interrelated dimensions that professionals must adapt into practice. These dimensions include (a) creating a caring community of learners, (b) teaching to enhance development and learning, (c) constructing appropriate curriculum, (d) assessing children's development and learning, and (e) establishing reciprocal relationships with families. DAP requires that teachers integrate all of their knowledge of the way that young children learn and develop (NAEYC, 1996).

2. What are the advantages to implementing developmentally appropriate practice in the early childhood classroom?

After reviewing the literature and applying the data to my own experiences in an early childhood classroom, it appears clear that implementing developmentally appropriate practices best meets the needs of young learners. Studies have shown that the experience a child has in an early childhood classroom often predicts their later success in school. Children who experience developmentally appropriate practice in preschool and

kindergarten show more academic and social gains that those children who experience a developmentally inappropriate classroom. Some children in developmentally inappropriate classrooms even demonstrate detrimental effects such as increased stress levels, a stifling of enthusiasm and love for learning, and less advanced social and academic skills.

3. What are the limitations to implementing developmentally appropriate practice in the early childhood classroom?

Developmentally appropriate practice has been an important concept in early childhood education for many decades. Yet classrooms are still lacking in full implementation of these practices. A conflict is continually occurring between what early childhood professionals know about how young children learn and what is actually happening in the classroom. Teachers' beliefs about best practice are being stifled by several obstacles, including: (a) increased accountability from state and local authorities, (b) the downward shift of the curriculum expectations from the next grade level, and (c) increased expectations by parents. These obstacles are forcing many teachers to focus more on the content of the curriculum than on the children in the classroom. This is especially common in public schools where teachers have little say in choosing the curriculum they are required to teach. It is a difficult balancing act for early childhood teachers to deliver a required curriculum in a manner that is developmentally appropriate and meets the needs of the children.

4. What are the guidelines for an effective developmentally appropriate practice classroom?

In order to meet the needs of the children in an early childhood classroom, teachers must strive to meet the following guidelines: (a) Children will construct their own knowledge with the teacher as a guide, (b) the environment will be conducive to the creation of a sociomoral atmosphere, (c) the curriculum and activities will focus on all areas of a child's development (social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive) using an integrated approach, (d) assessments will be age appropriate and integrated into the curriculum, and (e) parents will be an integral part of the early childhood classroom.

The conflict occurs for many teachers when the district or state curriculum requirements do not match these developmentally appropriate guidelines. It is then the responsibility of the early childhood professional to adapt the curriculum so that it is developmentally appropriate and meets the needs of the children, while still meeting the outside requirements from the district or state. This often takes much effort and planning. However, in the long run, it is well worth the effort when children experience an appropriate foundation for their future learning.

Conclusions

From my review of the literature, the majority of early childhood professionals feel that a developmental kindergarten curriculum is most beneficial to young children. This does not mean that content cannot, or should not, be taught. The following are the conclusions from this study:

1. Young children learn best in a classroom that implements developmentally appropriate practice. They exhibit more advanced social, language, and academic skills.

2. Young children who participate in an early childhood classroom with developmentally inappropriate practices often exhibit detrimental effects, including increased stress levels, a lack of enjoyment for learning, and occasionally, lesser academic performances.
3. Early childhood professionals often experience conflict between their beliefs about how young children learn and what is expected of them in the classroom.

Recommendations

After completing this study on developmentally appropriate practice, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Early childhood teachers must strive for a balance of content and developmentally appropriate practices so that the needs of the children can be met. A teacher should not be forced to choose between his/her beliefs and what district/state expectations are.
2. Early childhood teachers must create a sociomoral atmosphere in their classrooms that allow children to become responsible and respectful learners.
3. Further data should be collected as to the benefits of early childhood teachers working as a team with families to help each child have a successful first experience in school.
4. Early childhood professionals must continue to *educate* the administrative and legislative officials about developmentally appropriate practice so that full implementation can occur in the classrooms.

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