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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper, one of several background reports for a comprehensive policy study of early childhood education, is to identify current issues regarding the kindergarten curriculum, particularly in relation to the trends surrounding the shift from a developmental curriculum to a more academic-based curriculum. The single major issue discussed is our society's inclination to introduce children earlier and faster to academic expectations. A brief historical background is provided on early philosophical and pedagogical influences on the development of kindergarten curriculum in the U.S. Five current approaches to the kindergarten curriculum are identified and compared; namely, traditional kindergarten, the Montessori method, behavior analysis, direct instruction, and Piagetian programs. Four reasons for the shift in emphasis from a developmental curriculum to an academic curriculum are discussed. These reasons are as follows: (1) a greater emphasis on kindergarten attendance as the beginning point in school, (2) increased societal pressure to provide academic instruction at an early age, (3) increased use of standardized achievement and screening tests which tend to emphasize outcomes of formal instruction, and (4) lack of appropriate early childhood education training for kindergarten teachers. Next, the controversies related to the shift in emphasis are delineated. Finally, research on the kindergarten curriculum is described pointing to a conclusion that, while studies show that children can learn a great deal at very early ages, it can also be shown that some learning will not occur if children are not developmentally ready. Also included in the paper is a table comparing the two curricular orientations from the standpoint of five criteria: teacher, pupils, activities, materials, and expectations. (DST)

THE KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Department of Planning, Research, and Evaluation

Springfield, Illinois

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FOREWORD

This paper is one of several written for an Illinois State Board of Education policy study on Early Childhood Education. The interpretations and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the State Board of Education. The paper was prepared by Dr. Leandro A. Bartolini and Dr. Leighton Wasem, Research and Statistics Section, State Board of Education.

Ted Sanders
State Superintendent of Education

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Purpose

This paper provides a summary of current issues concerning the content of the kindergarten curriculum. It is one of several reports being completed for a State Board of Education Task Force on Early Childhood Education. The Task Force, charged with identifying, analyzing, and making recommendations regarding current policy issues in early childhood education, was created as a result of increased interest in this area of education. Because of perceived needs and unresolved issues, legislation will likely be introduced in the Illinois General Assembly, as well as in other states, to address various aspects of current policies and practices regarding kindergarten, including kindergarten schedules and the age at which children enter kindergarten. The purpose of this paper is to examine current trends and practices in the kindergarten curriculum. Specifically, historical background leading to current curriculum practices and alternatives to current practices will be examined.

Background

It has been slightly more than 125 years since kindergarten was introduced in the United States (1856). During this period of time, the kindergarten curriculum was first influenced predominately by the philosophy and pedagogy of Friedrich Froebel, later by G. Stanley Hall and John Dewey and more recently by current scholars in the child development field (Spodek, 1981). The composite and evolving influence of these educators resulted in kindergartens which were child-centered and which emphasized learning-by-doing, natural experiences, and development of the whole child through free play. Teachers were responsible for developing a curriculum which focused upon the needs and interests of the child (Spodek, 1981). This curriculum was characterized as having an experiential/social/play orientation. Because this curricular orientation is rooted in the principles of child development, it is generally referred to as a <u>developmentally oriented</u> curriculum.

There is a consensus among current scholars in early childhood education that a major shift in the kindergarten curriculum has evolved during the past 15-20 years (Whitehurst, 1969; Federlein, 1984; Werner, 1984; Spodek, 1984; Dillingofski, 1984; and Gullikson, 1984). This shift has been from a developmental curriculum to a more academic-based curriculum. This trend is described by Spodek (1981) as follows:

> The concern for development in young children and for the creation of programs reflecting their needs and interests seems to be lessening. In its place can be found a concern for the achievement of specific learning goals. It seems as if the kindergarten is again being reconstituted, this time essentially as an extension downward of primary education. Thus the change is from a concern for continuity of development to a concern for continuity of achievement.

Kindergarten curricula oriented toward the achievement of specific learning goals or emphasizing a downward extension of primary education are generally referred to as curricula with an academic orientation.

Despite the shift in emphasis, current approaches to the kindergarten curriculum are not always discrete or distinct, nor are they easily classified as "developmental" or "academic." In the publication Early Childhood Education in Illinois, Focus on Kindergarten (1980), published by the Illinois State Board of Education, five popular approaches, from many that are available, are described. The first, Traditional Kindergarten is described as a program or programs which focus upon the social, emotional and physical development of children. These programs also support the development of modes of expression and preparation for first grade.

The second, the Montessori approach to kindergarten and early childhood education, is structured so that the child interacts with a prepared environment under the guidance of a Montessori directress. Self-correcting materials are used by children in prescribed ways. The purpose is to help children develop sensory motor skills and ways of organizing sensory perceptions. Children are also taught skills in everyday living.

A third approach focuses upon behavior analysis. Behavior Analysis Programs are those based upon principles of applied behavior analysis, and the goals of the program are defined in terms of observable behaviors. Attitudes or predispositions are not emphasized as goals in these programs. Rather, goals include the teaching of behaviors related to academic skills and expected social behaviors.

A fourth approach is identified as Direct Instruction and is described as teaching in a direct manner. Basic mechanics of academic skills are emphasized. In accordance with this method, imitation, drill, and association are used to teach language, reading, and arithmetic skills directly. Academic skills, rather than social and emotional development, are emphasized in this type of program.

Piagetian Programs are the fifth instructional approach used in the kindergarten curriculum. Piagetian Programs are based upon the theories of cognitive development as viewed by Jean Piaget. In these programs it is believed that children construct knowledge based upon experiences. Knowledge provided to children is carefully planned and supported to allow intellectual development during each of several distinct stages. Many of the play activities of the traditional kindergarten are also used in kindergarten programs based upon Piaget's views.

These five approaches to kindergarten education identified above help to illustrate the variety of curricula which might be developed ir any given school or school system. It is important to understand, however, that some aspects of each program may be common to others as well. All of the above approaches, for example, may include strong parent involvement.

Furthermore, all of them can make use of different learning resources within each community. While all support learning, different kinds of learning are supported to different degrees by each program.

Similarly, all of the different kinds of approaches generally share similar goals (ISBE, 1980). These include:

1. Supporting the child's development;
2. Providing an orientation to the world of schools;
3. Helping children develop knowledge about the physical and social world;
4. Developing physical, social and intellectual competence;
5. Helping the child develop modes of self-expression.

Given that different approaches to kindergarten education frequently share common goals and that components of various programs are frequently included in a number of different curricula, the distinction between approaches is usually a matter of emphasis. Differences in emphasis, however, may have an important effect on different kinds of learning. Some children, for example, may perform well in an academic environment because their physical, social, and emotional development has progressed to a level sufficient for such learning. Others, whose development is at a different rate than their age peers, may be ready for a different set of experiences.

Current Issues

Differences in the Curriculum

Approaches to kindergarten education have changed in the last decade or two. Regardless of the formal title or label attached to each program, there has been a shift in emphasis from a developmental orientation to an academic orientation. The major differences between the developmentally and academically oriented kindergartens, as well as their main characteristics, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Kindergarten Curricula: A Developmental Orientation as Compared with an Academic Orientation*

	Developmental Orientation	Academic Orientation
Teacher:	Plans and organizes learning environment; facilitates learning.	Determines and initiates activities; provides direct instruction to class.
Pupils:	Freedom of movement and verbal expression. Frequently initiate and determine their own activities.	Sit and follow instructions; Responsible for learning concepts presented by teacher.
Activities:	Children work and play individually or in small self-organized groups; emphasis on learning by doing, problem solving, and discovery learning in informal atmosphere; activities designed to create interest in learning; manipulation of concrete objects in natural/play situations.	Same abstract concepts (e.g., numbers, letters, words) taught to all children at the same time and in the same manner; direct, formal instruction of reading, mathematics and writing; de-emphasis on play.
Materials:	Emphasis on manipulation of concrete objects in natural/play situations. Paper and pencil materials used sparingly and for child's own creative purposes.	Prepared by commercial textbook publishers (e.g., reading series, workbooks); heavy use of paper (e.g., ditto worksheets) and pencils to copy abstract symbols/concepts (e.g., letters, words and numbers).
Expectations:	Individualized and includes language, social/emotional, physical and cognitive objectives.	Emphasis on academic skill achievement; all children expected to learn same academic symbols/concepts.

*This table represents a synthesis of information from Whitehurst, 1969; Federlein, 1984; Werner, 1984; Spodek, 1984; Dillingofski, 1984; and Gullikson, 1984.

Reasons for Changes in the Curriculum

The shift in emphasis from a developmental kindergarten curriculum to an academic curriculum has occurred for a number of reasons. First, kindergarten attendance has become the rule, rather than the exception. In the last 40 years, the percentage of five- and six-year-old children in Illinois who were enrolled in school increased from 47% to approximately 90% (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1960 and 1980). As a result, those who develop elementary programs and educational materials give much more attention to the kindergarten curriculum, and kindergarten education has become the expected beginning point in school and, therefore, a focus for establishing continuity in school programs (Spodek, 1981).

A second influence is the increased societal pressure to provide academic instruction at an early age. According to Whitehurst (1969) and Federlein (1984), factors contributing to this pressure include increased criticism of American education, the advocation of formal instruction as a reaction to the launching of Sputnik, the back-to-basics movement, the advent of instructional television programs for young children, and the increased proportion of children attending organized preschool programs.

A third factor has been the increased use of standardized achievement and screening tests for kindergarten children. The use of these tests influences what is taught. Spodek (1981) states that the content of most standardized achievement tests in the early grades is on the mechanics of reading, language and arithmetic. Achievement scores on these tests are used to assess educational programs. Consequently, instruction tends to emphasize the knowledge required to do well on the tests (letter-sound associations, computation skills, spelling, punctuation), rather than higher order academic processes (comprehension, problem solving, or the application of principles to real problems).

There has also been interest and, as a consequence, research in the early learning/teaching process, especially for the disadvantaged, preschool child. The evidence accumulated implies that there is much that young children can learn prior to first grade. These shifting theories of development included interest in the work of Jean Piaget who described the cognitive development of children as moving through stages, with each successive stage dependent upon successful progress through earlier stages. Hunt's research (1961) on intelligence and experience also implied that early experiences could have a major impact on the development of the intellect of children. Bloom (1964) analyzed test data on intelligence and demonstrated that what children learn early in life could affect later learning. Consequently, educational programs such as Headstart and Follow-Through were developed for young children. A result of this knowledge was greater emphasis on academics in kindergarten (Whitehurst, 1969; Spodek, 1981).

A final reason given to explain the shift in the kindergarten curriculum is that many kindergarten teachers lack training in early childhood education. In a survey conducted by the Education Commission of the States, 35 out of 44 states reported that kindergarten teachers were required to be certified in elementary education, not early childhood education. While endorsements in early childhood education were sometimes available, many teachers receiving elementary certificates had little or no training in early childhood education but were considered qualified to teach kindergarten. According to Spodek (1981), these teachers may view the introduction of elementary academic learning into the kindergarten curriculum as appropriate.

In Illinois, the minimum requirements for early childhood education teaching certificates and elementary teaching certificates differ although only the elementary certificate may be used for teaching kindergarten. The early childhood certificate is valid for teaching children up to 6 years of age, exclusive of children enrolled in kindergarten. The elementary certificate is valid for teaching in kindergarten through grade nine. For a standard elementary certificate, 16 semester hours of professional education credits are required, 2 of which must be in educational psychology (including human growth and development) and 2 of which must be in history and/or philosophy of education. To be eligible for an early childhood certificate, however, 22 semester hours of professional education credits are required, 3 of which must be in child growth and development with emphasis on the young child and 3 of which must be in history and philosophy of early childhood education. In addition, candidates for an early childhood certificate must have 6 hours of credit in instructional methods (as opposed to 2 hours of credit for an elementary certificate), 2 hours of credit in health and nutrition for the young child, and 3 hours of credit in child, family, and community relationships (ISBE, 1983).

Additional differences between requirements for earning a standard elementary certificate and an early childhood certificate in Illinois exist. A candidate for an elementary certificate must have 2 hours of credit in methods of teaching reading, must have pre-student teaching clinical experiences equivalent to 100 clock hours, and must complete 5 hours of student teaching at a grade level between kindergarten and 9th grade. Early childhood education candidates must complete 5 hours of practicum in a preschool. All additional requirements for elementary and early childhood certificates are similar (ISBE, 1983).

Some of the reasons given for the shift in emphasis in the kindergarten curriculum, such as increased societal pressure to provide academic instruction and lack of appropriate training for teachers, have been debated as separate educational issues. The current controversy, however, has centered on the content of the curriculum.

The Controversy over the Curriculum

The change in the kindergarten curriculum is resulting in a wave of protest from early childhood education scholars, some kindergarten teachers, and some parents.

Judy (1984), in an article entitled, "Here We Come, Ready or Not," argues that the academic push in kindergarten is causing difficulty for administrators, teachers, and children. She notes that on one hand educators want to develop a child of superior capabilities, but on the other hand, the realities of child growth and development must be dealt with. While we agree, she states, that it would not be educationally sound to ask a five-month-old to skip, many educators and parents ask four- and five-year-old children to read before the children have developed the necessary discrimination and memory skills.

Judy further reviews basic principles of motor development, visual development, auditory development, and social and emotional development. She provides illustrations of how underdevelopment in these areas leads to failure in an academic environment. She notes, for example, that auditory concerns affect the ability of children to succeed in an academic environment. Many young children acquire infections in the middle ear because their ears are positioned in such a way that fluid is prevented from draining from the middle ear. Such children have difficulty discriminating between similar sounds. The ear is usually not in an up and down position until age nine. Consequently, many children have difficulty with phonetic programs and become discouraged. The desire to achieve may be present, Judy states, but the physical development may prevent or hinder such achievement. She concludes that without this consideration of development in young children, many will not be ready for the academic pressures as proposed by blue-ribbon educational committees.

Belgrad (1984) echos the warnings of Judy. After briefly tracing the trend for greater emphasis on academics in kindergarten, she argues that a return to principles of child development is necessary. Kindergarten teachers, she states, must reemphasize the importance of theories of child development. They must use well-established research to show that kindergarten children will learn when past learning, stage of development, nature of the material and individual differences are considered.

Weeks (1984) also expresses concern about the shift in emphasis toward academics in kindergarten. She questions the assumption that kindergarten children are ready to read. She points out that readiness for reading is essentially the point in time that a student is ready to cope with the method of reading instruction. A child will fail, for example, if a phonics method is used and a child does not hear his or her sounds. Likewise, a child who has not developed to the point where he or she can see symbols will not learn to read if a sight method is used. She states that those who fail in this initial instruction sometimes take years to overcome the failure syndrome.

Federlein (1984) is another early childhood educator concerned about the trend to teach reading at the kindergarten level. She emphasizes the need to address the needs of five-year-old children in four areas: cognitive development, social-emotional development, motor development, and language development, before assuming that a child is ready to read. She further questions the assumption that because more children attend preschools today, they are ready for academics in kindergarten.

According to Federlein, it is important for those who construct a kindergarten curriculum to understand that preschools do not accelerate the child's development. It is not true that because a child has attended preschool, he or she is ready to read. She states, however, that preschools do provide experiences which form a base for future learning, including reading, when children are ready.

Using statistics from The Early Prevention of School Failure Nationally Validated Program, Werner (1984) notes that results on over 100,000 kindergarten children revealed a range in levels of development covering seven years. Furthermore, she notes, "a higher percent of children each year enter kindergarten with a two- to three-year developmental lag in the language, auditory, and visual areas." Some children entering kindergarten have the developmental skills of only two- or three-year-olds. The push for academic excellence, she states, does not provide time and appropriate programs, in many cases, to address the needs of these children. Consequently, more and more children experience academic failure in their first year of school. She suggests that these early experiences may have long-term effects on the desire of these children to learn in future years and notes that studies have suggested that long-term learning difficulties often occur when children are asked to learn academic skills beyond their levels of development.

The controversy over the kindergarten curriculum led the Southern Association on Children Under Six (SACUS), a non-profit educational organization whose purpose is to work in behalf of young children and their families, to issue a position statement in May, 1984 criticizing recent trends to incorporate the academic, skill-oriented curriculum at the kindergarten level (SACUS, 1984).

Weeks (1984) summarizes the controversy by asking who is holding teachers accountable for teaching specific skills to younger and younger children? Is the media putting pressure on parents who then put pressure on teachers? Are publishing houses convincing administrators that their materials for teaching specific skills work best, leading administrators to place pressure on teachers so that their schools can show the greatest gains in achievement? She states that she is not sure who is putting pressure on whom, but she feels certain that most kindergarten teachers don't like these pressures because they don't think they are right for children. Kindergarten teachers, she states, need to speak up and be accountable for that which they know is right for children. The consequence of not speaking up, she states, is having children turn off learning and turn off the school system (Weeks, 1984).

The literature on the kindergarten curriculum is dominated by early childhood educators who advocate a greater emphasis on a developmental orientation. Conspicuous by its absence in the literature, however, is any consideration of those students who are, in fact, ready to be introduced to academics. Perhaps it is assumed that in a developmental kindergarten, the curriculum is individualized and, therefore, adjusted for each child's level of readiness. In this ideal situation, children ready for an academic orientation would receive appropriate instruction. Perhaps students ready for academics could be grouped in some way. Nevertheless, articles deploring the emphasis on academics at the kindergarten level tend to ignore the fact that some students, given the wide range in levels of development of entering children, are ready for academic instruction.

Research on the Kindergarten Curriculum

There is no substantive body of research which directly compares the academically oriented kindergarten curriculum with the developmentally oriented kindergarten curriculum on pupil outcome measures. Nevertheless, available research shows that: (1) children can learn a great deal prior to first grade, and (2) some learning will not occur if a child is not developmentally ready. There is general agreement among directors and teachers of early childhood education that the pressures of the academically oriented curriculum are a major contributor to failure and frustration among kindergarten pupils (Nall, 1984; Manz, 1984; Bantel, 1984; Werner, 1984, Federlein, 1984). Furthermore, available research does not demonstrate the superiority of an academically oriented curriculum in terms of long-term achievement (Spodek, 1981).

While agreeing that accumulated evidence suggests that there is much that young children could learn prior to first grade, Spodek (1981) argues that there has been no unanimity on the issue of what young children ought to learn during that period. Early childhood educators do not agree on what priorities ought to be given to the different learnings that are possible, nor do they agree on what the long-term consequences of particular learnings are. Many believed that what was learned in kindergarten ought to support what was learned later in school or that the kindergarten curriculum ought to support that which seemed to be preparatory to later school learning. Yet, states Spodek, "there is no evidence that there are greater long-term payoffs for these kinds of learning activities than for activities more consistent with the growth ideology of the progressive kindergarten."

In a recent paper on placement of children as they enter American schools, Gillespie (1984) reviews the work of contemporary specialists in early childhood education. In paraphrasing Myrtle McGraw, to whom she gives credit as the formulator of the concept of "readiness," Gillespie notes that "when a child shows signs of readiness, curriculum activities can be introduced with a reasonably high probability of success. By contrast. . . the introduction of traditional curriculum activities before the appearance of such signals is futile because neuromuscular maturation is insufficient to permit the child to profit from the learning experience."

Gillespie further quotes David Elkind, the chair of the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study at Tufts University and the author of The Hurried Child. Elkind states that during childhood, children establish either a firm sense of industry or an abiding sense of failure. Children who are faced with demands to do math or read before they are ready may experience a series of failures which affect their self-concept. Such failures may cause them to feel worthless. Elkind's point is that pushing academics onto children who do not have the requisite mental abilities not only causes early school failure, but may affect future learning because of a poor self-concept.

Hymes (1964) notes that stages of development cannot be skipped. To try to by-pass them or to push them is to risk having children abhor learning. When children are asked to do school work which they cannot do because of a lack of development, the chances are increased that children will resist, resent, and reject what they could otherwise so easily learn later on.

Eventually lessons may be learned, states Hymes, causing parents to believe that an early introduction to academics works. The consequences, however, are that the children acquire a negative attitude toward learning when educators and parents try to make them do what they cannot yet do.

Canter (1975) studied the developmental relationships between a battery of cognitive tasks -- including cognitive operations identified by Jean Piaget -- and early reading achievement. She concluded that standardized psychometric measures were more related to reading achievement than were the Piagetian tasks. She also learned, however, that there were developmental differences in the relationships of all variables to reading achievement. She states that the instability of cognitive thought, meaning differences in levels of development, may interfere with academic achievement.

Klanderman (1971) conducted a study to test whether perceptual-motor development training would increase school readiness at the kindergarten level. The hypothesis was that a structured, sequential perceptual-motor development program would demonstrate significant gains for experimental groups in (1) academic achievement, (2) mastery of basic skills, (3) gross motor skills, and (4) fine motor skills. The results showed that the hypothesis was unsupported for all four outcomes. The training which was designed to promote perceptual motor development did not result in increased academic achievement, mastery of basic skills, or improved gross or fine motor skills.

Other studies by Turner (1970), Van De Riet (1970), Deutsch (1971), and Stanchfield (1972) can be used to illustrate that early intervention and enrichment programs, especially those designed for disadvantaged children, help to increase achievement among young children (Pre K through 3rd grade). As stated previously, however, these studies and others like them do not directly test the long-term effects of one type of kindergarten curriculum compared to another.

In summary, literature on the academic and the developmental kindergarten curriculum generally states that an academic curriculum, if emphasized before children are ready, could be educationally harmful. This case is presented despite the fact that there is agreement among early childhood educators that some students can learn a great deal at a very early age. Little has been written about the advantages of an academic-oriented kindergarten, however. Early childhood educators, nevertheless, tend to agree that developmental kindergartens tend to be more appropriate for most children. Strom (1978) illustrates the American society's inclination to push children into academics by relating a story involving Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget:

> After completing a lecture term at Harvard University, the renowned authority on child development consented to reflect on his experiences in America. One of the newspaper reporters began "Is it true, as Harvard's Jerome Bruner asserts, that if we try hard enough we can teach almost any child at any age to do almost any task in some reasonable way?" Piaget's short reply was "Only an American would ask." Indeed, in his later writings, he called this inquiry "The American Question."

Strom suggests that Piaget was justified in doubting the appropriateness of America's academic expectations for young children. He further suggests that American early childhood educators should change the focus of their inquiry from "What can children learn?" to "What kinds of learning are best during childhood?" Based upon the testimony of former kindergarten teachers whose disappointing experience with forcing academic goals led them to seek assignments at a higher grade level, Strom believes the shift in concern is overdue.

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to identify current issues regarding the kindergarten curriculum. It has been demonstrated that changes have occurred in the kindergarten curriculum, that there are a variety of reasons for the changes, and that the changes have not occurred without controversy. The single major issue, in the words of one author, is our society's inclination to introduce children earlier and faster to academic expectations. Related issues are the reasons behind the shift in emphasis toward the academically oriented kindergarten curriculum. A summary of the recent changes, the reasons for the changes, and the resulting controversy follow.

There is a general consensus among early childhood education specialists and teachers that a major shift has occurred in the types of learning being emphasized in the kindergarten curriculum. While many different kinds of kindergarten programs exist, most can be classified as being developmentally oriented or academically oriented, depending upon the degree of emphasis on different types of learning. In the last 10 to 20 years, the shift has been from the developmentally oriented curriculum to the academically oriented curriculum.

The two approaches differ in a number of respects. The developmentally oriented kindergarten curriculum reflects differences in readiness among children. Children work or play individually or in small self-organized groups. There is an emphasis on learning by doing, problem solving, and discovery learning in an informal atmosphere. The objective is to enhance development and help prepare children for a more traditional curriculum. The academically oriented kindergarten curriculum emphasizes the achievement of specific learning goals. The same concepts (numbers, letters, words) tend to be taught to all children at the same time and in the same manner. The objective is academic skill achievement.

Reasons for the change in emphasis in the kindergarten curriculum are varied. They include societal pressure to provide instruction at an early age (due to adverse criticism of American education, the back-to-basics movement, and an increase in the number of children who attend pre-school), a greater emphasis on kindergarten being the beginning point in schools (due to greater enrollment in kindergarten), an increase in the use of standardized achievement and screening tests which tend to emphasize outcomes of formal instruction, a new interest in early learning (especially for the disadvantaged, pre-school child), and the lack of specific training in early childhood education for kindergarten teachers. Any or all of the reasons given for a shift in the content of the kindergarten curriculum could be examined as separate issues.

The shift in emphasis from a developmentally oriented curriculum to an academically oriented curriculum has become controversial. Early childhood education specialists, teachers, and some parents are objecting to the downward thrust of academics to the kindergarten level. It is argued that principles of child development must be taken into consideration at the kindergarten level, and that many, if not most, children will not be ready for academics in kindergarten. There is a wide developmental range among children entering kindergarten. Children, in order to understand, comprehend and learn various academic skills, must reach minimum levels of mental and physical development in a number of areas. If sufficient development has not occurred, children will experience early failure which may also affect future learning.

There is little research which compares the academically and the developmentally oriented kindergartens directly. While studies show that children can learn a great deal at very early ages, it can also be shown that some learning will not occur if children are not developmentally ready. Little has been written in support of the academic curriculum as an alternative to one that is developmentally oriented. At the same time, those advocating an emphasis on a developmentally oriented kindergarten curriculum tend to ignore the fact that, given the wide range in the levels of development, some kindergarten children may be ready for academic instruction.

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