DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 287 576 PS 016 890

AUTHOR Hatch, J. Amos; Freeman, Evelyn B.
TITLE Ohio Kindergarten Programs: Perspectives of Teachers, Principals, and Supervisors.
SPONS AGENCY Spencer Foundation, Chicago, Ill.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Washington, DC, April 20-24, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Philosophy; *Educational Practices; Elementary Education; Ethnography; *Kindergarten; *Preschool Teachers; *Principals; School Districts; State Programs; *Supervisors
IDENTIFIERS *Ohio

ABSTRACT

Ethnographic interviews with 36 teachers, principals, and supervisors of kindergarten programs in 12 Ohio school districts were conducted for the purpose of investigating the philosophies and practices of kindergarten programs in Ohio public schools. Broad research questions which formed the structure of the interviews focused on (1) informants' assumptions about how young children learn and develop; (2) how kindergarten classrooms were organized, children's tasks were structured, and instruction was delivered; (3) what the functions of kindergarten ought to be; (4) informants' program goals and objectives; and (5) informants' assumptions about literacy and how it is developed. Findings indicated a striking dichotomy between current theory in early childhood studies and educational practice in the schools. Kindergartens in Ohio were increasingly academic and skill oriented. Individuals who implemented kindergarten programs experienced conflict between their own beliefs and what they were expected to do in practice. It is concluded that (1) Ohio's kindergarten programs are predominantly skill centered; (2) reading instruction in kindergarten is skill oriented; and (3) while a behaviorist orientation characterizes the kindergarten programs, 55.6 percent of all informants and 66.7 percent of teachers expressed philosophies other than behaviorism. (RH)

Ohio Kindergarten Programs:

Perspectives of Teachers, Principals, and Supervisors

J. Amos Hatch

The Ohio State University

Marion Campus

Evelyn B. Freeman

The Ohio State University

Newark Campus

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C., April, 1987.

This research was supported in part by a grant from the Spencer Foundation which was administered through The Ohio State University, College of Education Awards to Young Scholars.

Ohio Kindergarten Programs:

Perspectives of Teachers, Principals, and Supervisors

Across the United States, the momentum toward all-day, mandatory kindergarten programs is increasing. Sessions at professional meetings that focus on kindergarten curriculum, issues, and programs have proliferated. While a strong movement exists to make kindergarten more academic and rigorous, an equally vocal group has expressed concern for the "miseducation of young children", the "disappearance of childhood", and the lack of attention to the developmental needs of young children. The purpose of this paper is to describe an ethnographic interview study which examined the philosophies and practices of kindergartens in Ohio from the perspectives of educators directly involved in these programs.

Literature Review

There is no question that American kindergartens are in a state of transition. The legacy of Friedrich Froebel who provided the philosophical foundation for American kindergartens and who advocated play as the basis for the kindergarten curriculum is certainly in jeopardy. The call for excellence in education, the "Back to Basics" movement, and the strong emphasis on accountability have placed new pressures on kindergartens.

In a survey of 387 kindergarten teachers in the St. Louis area, the three most frequently reported changes in kindergarten programs in recent years were: more academic emphasis in programs, increased grouping for instruction, and greater use of commercial materials (Nall, 1982). The state of Florida has a kindergarten curriculum

which includes 200 content area objectives (Webster, 1984). Kindergarten reading programs have become paper and pencil oriented with textbooks, workbooks, and dittos (Carver, 1986; Willart & Kamii, 1985). States are investigating the feasibility of all-day kindergartens and many all-day programs are currently in existence.

As pressure mounts for academically rigorous programs, a counter movement has expressed strong concerns for the emphasis on skills instruction and the lack of attention to play and social development in kindergarten. The Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice issued by the National Association for the Education of Young Children points out that "hands-on activity and experimentation is more appropriate for this age group than fatiguing mechanical seatwork" (Bredekamp, 1986, p. 6). Similarly, joint statements of several major professional organizations have lamented the use of skills oriented reading instruction in kindergarten and advocate involving children in "meaningful, functional language experiences including speaking, listening, writing, and reading" (International Reading Association, 1985). Further, research has indicated negative effects for children who begin kindergarten before they are developmentally ready (Uphoff and Gilmore, 1986); and Elkind (1981; 1986) has received national attention for his discussions of the "hurried child" and the "miseducation of young children."

In light of these considerations, the present study was undertaken to describe the philosophies and practices of kindergarten programs in Ohio public schools. The study applied ethnographic interviewing techniques to explore the perspectives of educators responsible for designing and implementing kindergarten programs in Ohio. Because the values, attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions of educators responsible for kindergarten programs affect the design and implementation of those programs (Spodek, 1985; Schickedanz, York, Stewart, & White, 1983), the study was designed and interviews constructed based on the following broad research questions:

1. What are the informants' assumptions about how young children learn and develop (i.e., what are their philosophies of early childhood education)?

2. How will informants say: a) their kindergarten classroooms are organized; b) tasks are structured; and c) instructional experiences are delivered?

3. What do they believe the functions of the kindergarten experience ought to be?

4. What will they say are the goals and objectives of their programs?

5. What are their assumptions about literacy and how it is developed?

Subjects

In previous studies conducted by the researchers, data were gathered from approximately 100 public school districts in Ohio selected in a stratified random sample which represented six types of school districts. The six types include: a city with more than two high schools, a city with one high school having more than 1500 students, a city with one high school having between 1000-1500 students, a city with one high school having less than 1000 students, exempted village school districts, and county districts. In the present study, two school districts from each of the six types were randomly selected. In each of the twelve school districts, three individuals involved in kindergarten programs were invited to participate: a kindergarten teacher, a principal of a building that housed a kindergarten program, and the central office administrator responsible for kindergarten programs. The superintendent of each school district was initially contacted; he or she chose the three individuals who would participate in the study. A total of 36 informants (three in each district) were the subjects of this study.

Procedures

Each informant was individually interviewed by one of the researchers in a tape recorded session that lasted approximately one hour. Interviewing and the analysis of interview data were guided by Spradley's (1979; 1980) Developmental Research Sequence (DRS). Ethnographic interviews, as prescribed by Spradley, are taken to be dynamic interpersonal social events in their own right. Interviewers enter the interview situation with certain "guiding" questions in mind but remain sensitive to questions that emerge from the interview interaction, the social context being considered, and the degree of rapport that has been established.

Three types of ethnographic questions are presented by Spradley: descriptive questions, structural questions, and contrast questions. Sets of guiding questions (one set each for teachers, principals, and supervisors) including each question type were developed and used in this study. For example, "Could you describe a typical day in your classroom?" was a descriptive question used with teachers. A structural question for building principals included, "What are the different kinds of activities children in kindergarten do?" A contrast question for supervisors was, "Can you compare your kindergarten program today with kindergarten programs five years ago?" (see Appendix A for a list of Guiding Questions for Teacher Interviews).

The tape recorded interviews were transcribed into formal research protocols which were analyzed using the Spradley DRS model. The DRS is an inductive model which is designed to reveal the components of a social phenomenon, the relationships among components, and their relationships to the wider social context involved.

Findings

. Early data analysis led us to a large set of analytic generalizations related to the broad research questions listed above. As analysis proceeded, the following generalizations served to organize the complex components of our findings:

(1) Kindergartens are increasingly academic and skill oriented, (2) Individuals who implement kindergarten programs may not believe that these programs best serve the needs of young children. The findings of this paper are a description of data supporting these broad generalizations. As findings are presented, examples from interview protocols will be used to support generalizations. In addition, frequency counts have been made to help determine the relative strength of certain findings; and, where appropriate, frequency data (in the form of percentages) will be included.

Academic Kindergartens

The kindergarten programs described by teachers, principals, and supervisors interviewed in this study are predominantly skill centered, academically oriented programs designed to prepare children for "first grade work." Analysis of data in the following three domains led us to this conclusion: (1) participant descriptions of program goals and objectives along with explanations of how goals and objectives are acutally implemented; (2) descriptions of how classrooms are organized and instruction is delivered; and (3) descriptions of how "reading" instruction is accomplished.

Goals and objectives

The state of Ohio requires that school districts identify Pupil Performance Objectives (PPO's) for reading and math, that these be published in district courses of study, and that they be implemented in the classroom. Kindergarten programs fall under this requirement and all of the districts in which we interviewed reported having met the PPO requirements. When we asked informants to describe the goals and objectives of their programs, one hundred percent of them made reference to the PPO's and their courses of study. As is evident in their title, Pupil Performance Objectives specify, "in behavioral terms," acceptable levels of performance on particular academic tasks. Typical PPO's for kindergarten might include: "The student will be able

to identify the lower-case letters of the alphabet with 80% accuracy;" or, "The student will be able to count from one to twenty."

Understandably, all informants reported that they were complying with state PPO requirements. When we asked them to talk about how PPO's were accomplished in practice, the picture became more complex. The principals and supervisors took the position that the district course of study for kindergarten which was designed to meet state standards ought to be followed in their programs. Most (58.3%) worked from the assumption that the kindergarten teachers' job was to implement the course of study directly. Some saw the course of study as a guide for teacher decision making (25%) or as a set of minimum requirements (16.7%), but all expected classroom implementation. For example, when describing her role in relation to kindergarten, one superviser explained:

> Mainly I have been developing and administering the course of study, working with teachers in implementing the course of study and minimum standards, you know, Pupil Performance Objectives. We took our course of study and our PPO's and sort of transferred them to the report card. For example: 'He writes numerals to 10.' [Teachers] are going to test these children before the end of the first semester to say, in fact, they can either do it or they can't do it. It's my job to make sure all this happens.

Teachers, when asked how they implemented courses of study, divided into the following groups: those who reported that their programs were defined by the district course of study, i.e., it was their job to implement the course of study directly (66.7%); those who said they complied with the district requirements but who added and subtracted from the course of study at will (25%); and one teacher (8.3%) who said she was doing her own program and incidentally meeting district requirements. Excerpts from interviews with teachers "implementing directly" or "complying with" courses of study illustrate these positions which, when combined, account for 91.3% of teachers interviewed.

> In our district, we have been showing more and more pressure that we need to get back to the basics. Kids have to do all this academic stuff. And that has made everyone feel this pressure, like we have to get through this, this, and this. I finally just said, 'these are the objectives, this is the course of study, that's what I'm going to teach.'
>
> Much of what I teach, I have just collected over the years. I use what I feel is best from a lot of different things and I remember what is in the course of study to make sure that I cover that.

The researchers have examined the courses of study from the districts in the study and concluded that state PPO requirements are mandating increasingly higher academic expectations for kindergarten children. Further, by their nature, PPO's focus on academic "skil that require performance which demonstrates mastery against an arbitrary standard. This guarantees that some children will be unsuccessful. Informants agreed that academic skills drive most of what is done in kindergarten and most of them were working hard to implement those higher expectations in their classrooms.

Classroom organization, task structure, and instruction

We asked each informant to describe a typical kindergarten day, then asked follow-up questions designed to reveal how classroom activities were organized, tasks were structured, and instruction was delivered. Quite naturally, teachers were better able to describe the actuality of what their classrooms were like than principals and supervisors. Eleven of the twelve sites in the study provided half-day kindergarten; one site offered full-day. We have constructed the summary below based on teachers' descriptions of the components of their half-day programs and have included percentages of the eleven half-day programs to indicate frequencies with which particular planned daily activities were found.

10-30 Minutes Free Play (prior to the opening of school)	45.5%
Opening Activities (Flag Salute; Calendar)	100.0%
Reading Groups	63.6%
Large Group Reading Instruction	54.5%
Seatwork Activities	54.5%
Learning Centers	18.2%
Story Time	54.5%
Snack Time	27.3%
Music/Art/P.E. Resource	54.5%
Science/Social Studies Time	27.3%
Recess or "Play Time" (during school day)	27.3%

When we asked teachers at all sites to describe how instruction was delivered, it was taken for granted among all twelve that a direct instruction model was appropriate. Although some "play" or "choice" time was provided in 50% of the programs (usually prior to the opening of school), no teacher reported using a "child-initiated" (see Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larner, 1986) approach to delivering educational experiences. Teachers reported that instruction was delivered in both large and small groups (58.3%); in small groups only (25.0%); and in large groups only (16.7%). Even when learning centers were mentioned, these turned out to be locations in the room where teachers provided planned activities that children were assigned to complete.

When looking at descriptions of how classrooms were organized and instruction was delivered, we found teachers planning and implementing highly structured classroom activities. Teachers' modes of instruction were direct as opposed to "incidental" or child-initiated. Two examples from teacher descriptions help make this point.

They have sometimes five or six jobs [at work time]. I have the jobs written on the board, written out. We go over each one, what it is. I explain, I show it; if it is an art project, I demonstrate it. Unless it is something I want them to get by following directions, I will just demonstrate it and they will go back and do it or else I just explain the directions. I explain all the jobs in the order that they are supposed to do them and then we ask any questions. And then the children all go back to their assigned tables and they move at their own speed. Usually it takes about an hour and fifteen minutes to complete all of the work time. Most of the time it is in order of what I have listed on the board 'cause I list them in order of priority. While they are working in their seats, that is when I begin to call the reading groups.

[When they come in in the morning] they have a paper to work on and it is something I don't need to explain. It is something for them to do to keep them occupied until it is time for school to begin. [After opening exercises] I usually explain what their seatwork is to be for the day. So they are in a whole group in front of me and I'll show them the papers that they are going to be working on; and I'll actually do whatever they are going to have to do to make sure they understand. Then, two groups will go to their seats and I will work with one group and then we would switch off. As they finish their work, then they would have to bring their work to me to check it, very quietly while I'm listening to the other groups.

Reading instruction

Both teachers in the last two examples used reading groups and commercial reading materials in their kindergartens. Of the twelve sites examined, seven (58.3%) were using "readiness" or "pre-reading" materials that were parts of basal series (Houghton Mifflin; Ginn; Harper-Row; or Scott, Foresman) adopted by the district. Ten of twelve (83.3%) programs had officially adopted commercial "reading" materials (i.e.; basals, basals plus supplimentary materials, or commerical materials that were not part of a basal series). A "whole language" or "language experience" approach was part of the reading program at two (16.7%) sites and was the prescribed approach in one district (8.3%).

All programs used a skill based approach to evaluating reading progress. State PPO's, curriculum guides, report cards, and informant interviews indicate the dominance of a skill-centered orientation to providing pre-reading experiences. The typical kindergarten teacher implemented the curriculum guide and PPO's using the adopted commericial materials supplied by the district. Teachers depended on the activities and worksheets of the materials, giving instructions in large groups, and conducting daily reading groups. Three teachers' descriptions of their reading programs follow.

> Well, we have a book. There are three readiness books. The first one (pause) most of the children test out with the first test. That is just a basic readiness skills type of workbook that the lower children can do. The second one is a workbook that is basically letter recognition and writing of the letters. The third part is a Go-Read book which does have vocabulary.

> Well, we have our reading program. It's Houghton Mifflin and it has the early (pause) "Getting Ready to Read. We have that series. And then it goes into the reading readiness part and ends up in the transitional part for first [grade]. And there are certain sight words that those children ought to know by the time they go to first grade. So you have the curriculum guide and the basal text and you just follow that. That is about it.

> The pre-reading skills is the program. It is supposedly 180 days outlined for you in detail. But it has many games that children play individually to make sure that they have mastered those games. They deal with beginning sounds; they deal with endings; they deal with rhyming words; they deal with matching pictures; matching letters that are similar or different. An excellent program because if they are going to be using workbooks in first grade it will be less traumatic to them.

The last teacher's comment about getting children prepared for first grade was another familiar theme in our data. With reading instruction, as well as with other dimensions of the curriculum, an important rationale for teaching skills, structuring tasks, and providing direct instruction was the perceived need to prepare students for first grade work. As one teacher explained, "I feel the program is a pre-preparation

for first grade. I think it is real important that children be prepared for what they are going to have to do in first."

Philosophy-Reality Conflicts

Individuals who work in and are responsible for kindergartens may be implementing programs which they do not believe best serve the needs of young children. We have attempted to establish that, in large measure, kindergarten programs in this study were skill based, highly structured, academically focused, and based on a direct instruction model. We take these attributes to be definitional of a behaviorist orientation to learning and development (Schickedanz, York, Stewart, & White, 1983).

Several of our interview questions were designed to reveal informants' philosophies of early childhood education; i.e., their beliefs about how children learn and develop and what kinds of experiences ought to be provided in school based on those beliefs. We analyzed informant responses to these questions, classifying them into the three categories described by Schickedanz and her colleagues (Schickedanz, Schickedanz, & Forsyth, 1982; Schickedanz, York, Stewart, & White, 1983): maturationist, behaviorist, or interactionist. Each theoretical orientation is briefly reviewed below.

Maturationism, espoused by Gesell and others, stresses the role of genetically controlled biological change in behavior and learning. In contrast, behaviorism, associated with Skinner, emphasizes the importance of environmental factors. Interactionism, also known as cognitive-developmental theory, is based on the work of Piaget and views development as the dynamic interaction of the individual with his/her environment. From each of these theoretical orientations, implications about education can be generated. For example, the three orientations can be compared in terms of children's motivation for learning. According to Schickedanz, York, Stewart, and White (1983), the maturational theory assumes that "when a child is ready to learn something, the child will feel a great desire to learn it" (p. 3). In behaviorism,

motivation to learn comes from outside the child so that "if children are to learn the desired behaviors, their behavior must be reinforced" (p. 4). In the interactionist view, motivation comes from "the interaction between the individual and external experiences" (p. 5).

Our analysis revealed that, of the thirty-six individuals interviewed, 27.8% held beliefs classified as maturationist, 27.8% held interactionist beliefs, and 44.4% held behaviorist philosophies. What is most surprising to us in these findings is that more than half of our informants (55.6%) held maturationist or interactionist beliefs while working in or supervising programs which were clearly behaviorist in orientation. What this meant for many individuals was that the reality of what they were doing day to day was in direct conflict with their professed beliefs about what young children need in school contexts. Perhaps more importantly, the extent of what we call "philosophy-reality conflicts" seems more widespread among kindergarten teachers than principals or supervisors. In our study, 66.7% of teachers interviewed expressed other than behaviorist philosophies while implementing programs based in behaviorist principles and methods (50% of principals and 50% of supervisors held maturationist or interactionist beliefs). In order to give the reader a sense of what philosophy-reality conflicts might be like for each of our informant groups, excerpts from interviews with supervisors, principals, and teachers are included below.

Supervisors

In this study, we interviewed "supervisors responsible for district kindergarten programs." These included district superintendents (in small districts), elementary supervisors or curriculum directors (in larger districts), and early childhood or primary education supervisors (in the largest districts). As mentioned above, 50% of these supervisors held maturationist (16.7%) or interactionist (33.3%) beliefs about early childhood education. The series of excerpts below are taken from transcripts of an interview with a curriculum director. Her comments illustrate her maturationist

philosophy and show how her beliefs sometimes conflict with her role in the school system.

> [When asked to explain her earlier comment: "You are going to have students that just need a year of maturation to be ready to go"] Children mature at different rates and it has nothing to do with intelligence It has nothing to do with how bright the child is; it has to do with the fact that they just need a little more time.
>
> [When asked what would be included in an ideal kindergarten day] I think we would like to keep it as much hands-on as we can in kindergarten--you know, concrete. The teacher you are going to talk to is getting worried and I am too because of the emphasis on achievement and Pupil Performance Objectives in the curriculum. Kids need to be working hands-on, I guess that is our big concern. They can be evaluated a lot of other ways than just putting it on workbook pages. And yet, I think we are going in that direction.
>
> [When asked the follow-up question: "You say the teacher is concerned; what is her response?"] Well, this teacher and I think all teachers are in the system and they do what they think the system wants. Accountability has become a very big factor and I think we have got some pressure that we need to be thinking about. We are trying to do some things with students that sounded really good on paper but we weren't accounting for their ability to mature and to handle things; things that they weren't able to handle at that age. We're still doing it. We have a math workbook we are using now with pencil and paper so we are still going in that direction.

Principals

Principals of buildings housing kindergarten programs were interviewed. Principals' philosophies divided as follows: behaviorist 50%; maturationist 25%; and interactionist 25%. Excerpts from interviews with two "interactionist" principals follow.

> Principal 1
>
> [As part of his description of an ideal kindergarten day] I really think that with the kids we get we have to keep working on the social and emotional type activities in addition to the academics. I'm not in favor at all of stringent academics in kindergarten.

[When asked about what really happens in kindergarten] If you think about it, and I've talked to parents about it in this office, there are a lot of concepts and skills that are now being pushed down to the younger child. Some children can handle that great. But I think that may be a bit much developmentally to expect and put the child through.

Principal 2

[When asked: "Could you characterize the directions you see kindergartens taking?"] What I see happening that is distressing is that we are ignoring what we know about how children learn. We have seminars on how adults learn and how they develop differently than children. It is not an unusual notion to think that young children might learn differently than adolescent children. We know that stuff. There is an incredible amount of research out there. In fact, we are kind of sophisticated in the learning process. And yet, we ignore it which drives me bonkers. The paper-pencil orientation is disturbing to me. The fact that we want to regiment and put school on a real competitive academic achievement basis disturbs me a bunch. I see first hand experiences going out the window that way. I see muscular growth and development ignored that way. I see very little attention to language development and appreciation of language per se.

Teachers

Teachers are the individuals directly responsible for program implementation. The day to day classroom life of two-thirds of the teachers we interviewed was impacted by conflicts between what they believed and what they were doing and asking children to do. Among teachers interviewed, 41.7% were identified as maturationsits, 25% were interactionists, and 33.3% were behaviorsits. The excerpts below illustrate maturationist and interactionist philosophies and teachers' expressions of philosophy-reality conflicts.

Teacher 1

[When asked: "When you approach a kindergarten year, what are your major goals?"] So many of the things are clear-cut -- what we need to do because it comes from the Superintendent's office. But over all, my major goal, and this is me talking, is I want children to be happy and to think that school is fun and to enjoy learning. Thinking of next year, I want to do more. . . I'll get my neck cut off for this. . .I want to do more fun things with them and try to get a little further away from the books. Seems to be the academics are growing and growing. I think we have gotten to the point where there is so much book work that we don't have time for the fun things -- finger plays and acting things out. I think we need to go back a little. That's what I'm saying when I say I want to do more fun things with them. I think kindergarten is becoming more of a pre-first grade.

Teacher 2

[When asked: "What do you think is going to happen to kindergartens in five years?"] I see kindergarten turning into more of the academic atmosphere. If you think back, they talk about how kindergarten is not what it used to be. It used to be all just play and now it is so much academic. Down the road, it could end up being more of a first grade program.

[To follow-up: "How do you feel about that more academic program?"] I think it is a little too much pressure on the child. I really do. Right away, the first question you get in September is: 'When will they be reading?' It's like, slow down, let them be kids, they are only five years old.

Teacher 3

[When asked about materials she used] These are prescribed across the district. My concern is that as more and more companies publish kindergarten workbooks, worksheets, ditto materials, letters to parents, and that sort of thing-- I see a huge volume of printed materials for kindergarten becoming available and I'm not sure that is the best way for children to learn. I find myself doing more and more ditto materials and more and more workbooks and this kind of thing when I don't really feel that they learn that much or learn that way.

[When asked what she would include in an ideal day] I would try to do some of the things that have gotten pushed out of the curriculum with the influx of materials we are expected to cover. Some of the things would be creative movement and more art experiences. It just seems like we never have enough time to get all the things accomplished that I wish we could do. There would be more time for body management kinds of things: skipping, hopping, playing games, that sort of thing.

[In response to: "There are fairly recent reports that seem to say we are pushing kids too hard."] I read Elkind's book. That is a major concern of mine. If we ever go to an all-day program, I would not approve if it meant that we had to do eight hours of paperwork. I would feel like that time might be helpful in other ways but these children feel so much stress because they cannot do this or they cannot do that. I feel they don't need that extra burden. If the child is happy and eager to come to school and is eager to explore and do things and is not afraid to make mistakes, then I feel we have accomplished our purpose. But if we just keep dumping more things on them till they get to the point that they don't feel that they have any worth, it concerns me.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that kindergartens in Ohio are academically oriented, skill centered programs and that many educators involved in these programs experience conflict between their own beliefs and what they are expected to do in practice. While this study has certain limitations such as the size of the sample, the selection of informants by district superintendents, and the focus on only one state, the results have important implications for educational policy. What becomes striking when reviewing our findings is the dichotomy between current theory in early childhood and educational practice in the schools today. This conflict between knowledge about how children grow and learn and how they are actually being taught is evidenced by the following conclusions from this study.

First, kindergarten programs are predominantly skill centered, academically oriented programs designed to prepare children for first grade. Such programs run

counter to theory which emphasizes developmentally appropriate programs for young children (Bredekamp, 1986; Kamii, 1985). In addition, longitudinal research has indicated that child-initiated learning activities are an important aspect in programs for young children and affect social-behavioral skills of adolescents (Schweinhart, Weikart, and Larner, 1986). Further, Elkind (1981, 1986) has described the negative psychological consequences that may occur as a result of "hurrying" young children and warns that "there is really no evidence that early formal instruction has any lasting or permanent benefits for children" (Elkind, 1986, p. 636).

Second, reading instruction in kindergarten is skills oriented, with heavy emphasis on paper and pencil tasks. This approach has little support in current theory and research dealing with how children develop literacy. This body of work has found that children learn spoken and written language by actively discovering rules and relationships about language (Willert and Kamii, 1985; International Reading Association, 1985; Bissex, 1980; Goodman, 1984). Recent approaches to literacy have emphasized whole language instruction building on children's natural language abilities and using language for meaningful purposes (Goodman, 1986). The use of children's literature, the language experience approach, Big Books and shared writing are all effective strategies to use in initial literacy instruction.

Third, while 44.4% of the informants did hold behaviorist beliefs about kindergarten, 55.6% of all informants and 66.7% of the teachers expressed philosophies other than behaviorism. Yet a behaviorist orientation characterizes the kindergarten programs. Educators of young children, especially teachers, may experience a conflict between their own philosophies of education and the realities of classroom practice. Getzels, Lipham, and Campbell (1968) describe the role conflict that may exist when an individual's belief system comes in conflict with the norms and expectations of the institution. Such a condition is not in the best interest of either the institution or the individual. Recently, Heck and Williams (1984), Glickman (1987) and others (see theme

issue of Childhood Education, 1986) have advocated the importance of the teacher as a professional decision maker, one who can use his/her knowledge to make informed decisions about practice. If kindergarten teachers experience role conflict and are systematically denied opportunities to make their own decisions, then the quality of instruction may be negatively affected.

In considering these results, additional research possibilities become evident. Because this study involved only one state, similar research could be conducted across the United States to establish patterns that may exist. The confict that was evident in this study between individual philosophies and institutional expectations warrants more in-depth study. Research questions that could be investigated include: What are the dynamics of the philosophy-reality conflict? What are the dimensions of stress on kindergarten teachers? How do teachers resolve and cope with the philosophy-reality conflicts? Does this conflict affect their teaching effectiveness?

Further, these results have implications for educational policy. Knowledge about how children grow and learn and the essential elements of developmentally appropriate practice need to be conveyed to state legislators and local school boards. Fundamental questions need to be asked such as, What should the goals of kindergarten be? What are the best instructional approaches and most appropriate materials to achieve those goals? An even more critical set of societal questions includes, Why are we so eager to hurry children? Why are skills oriented programs for young children so highly valued? The results of this study point to the need for policy makers and curriculum planners to carefully consider current insights about early childhood education and to reconceptualize the kinds of programs being implemented in kindergarten classrooms today.

References

Bissex, G. (1980). Gnys at wrk: A child learns to write and read. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bredekamp, S. (Ed.) (1986). Developmentally appropriate practice. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Carver, N.K. (1986). Reading readiness: Aspects overlooked in structured readiness programs and workbooks. Childhood Education, 62 (4), 256-259.

Childhood Education. (1986). Theme issue on The Teacher as Decision-Maker. 62, May/June.

Elkind, D. (1981). The hurried child. Reading, MS: Addison-Wesley.

Elkind, D. (1986). Formal education and early education: An essential difference. Phi Delta Kappan, 67, 631-636.

Getzels, J.W., Lipham, J.M. & Campbell, R.F. (1968). Educational administration as a social process. New York: Harper and Row.

Glickman, C. (1987, April). Decisions about the unknown: Supervision for instructional improvement. Paper presented at the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference, New Orleans.

Goodman, K. (1986). What's whole in whole language?: Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.

Goodman, Y. (1984). The development of initial literacy. In H. Goelman, A. Oberg, & Smith, F. (Eds.), Awakening to literacy. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.

Heck, S.F. and Williams, C.R. (1984). The comlex roles of the teachers. New York: Teachers College Press.

International Reading Association. (1985). Literacy development and pre-first grade. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Kamii, C. (1985). Leading primary education toward excellence. Young Children, 40, 3-9.

Nall, S.W. (1982). Bridging the gap: Preschool to kindergarten. Childhood Education, 59, 107-110.

Schickedanz, J., Schickedanz, D., & Forsyth, P. (1982). Toward understanding children. Boston: Little, Brown.

Schickedanz, J.A., York, M.E., Stewart, I.S. & White, S. (1983). Strategies for teaching young children. Second edition;. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Schweinhart, L.J., Weikart, D.P., & Larner, M.B. (1986). Consequences of three preschool models through age 15. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 1, 15-45.

Spodek, B. (1985). Teaching in the early years. Third edition. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Spradley, J.P. (1979). The ethnographic interview. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Spradley, J.P. (1980). Participant observation. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Uphoff, J.K. & Gilmore, J. (1986). Pupil age at school entrance-how many are ready for success? Young Children, 41(2), 11-16.

Webster, N.K. (1984). The 5s and 6s go to school, revisited. Childhood Education, 60, 325-330.

Willert, M.K. & Kamii, C. (1985). Reading in kindergarten: direct vs. indirect teaching. Young Children, 40(4), 3-9.

Appendix A

Guiding Questions for Teacher Interviews

1. Could you describe a typical day in your kindergarten classroom?

2. How much of what you've described did you design and how much is "required"? If you were on your own, what would an ideal day look like?

3. Could you give an example of a reading readiness or early literacy lesson that you've used recently in your classroom?

4. What are your goals as you approach each kindergarten year and how do you know if you have been successful?

5. It's common to hear of children "failing" kindergarten. How do you respond when you hear such comments? Can you describe any particular cases where children repeated kindergarten?

6. How are children grouped for activities or instruction in your classroom? Can you characterize the differences among your groups? What are the benefits and weaknesses of such grouping?

7. Can you describe what qualities, characteristics, or abilities typify a successful kindergarten student?

8. What are the differences between children who are successful in kindergarten and those who have difficulties?

9. What are the steps involved in deciding what you will mark on a particular kindergarten child's report card?

10. What do you believe the primary purpose of kindergarten ought to be? In what ways do you think you are accomplishing that purpose and in what ways do you fall short?

11. Teachers often explain children's problems in kindergarten by saying, "He's immature" or She's just not ready." Can you describe any experiences with children whom you would characterize as "immature" or "not ready"?

12. How would you characterize the differences between the developmental level of kindergarteners and first graders?

13. Can you compare your kindergarten program with kindergarten programs five years ago? What do you believe kindergartens will be like five years from now?

14. The original "kindergarten" concept comes from the notion of a "children's garden" in which children were expected to grow and develop in a stimulating environment, but without the pressures of direct instruction or evaluation in relation to pre-set standards. How do you respond to suggestions that we ought to go back to the children's garden idea?

15. When you're talking with parents about your kindergarten program what do you stress as its most positive qualities? Are parents usually satisfied with your response or do they have different expectations for their child's program?

16. Critics say that educators study learning theory and child development theory in college but rarely use what they learn as they set up and implement programs. How would you answer such criticisms? Could you give examples of elements of your program that reflect particular principles of learning or developmental theory?

17. What are the qualities you believe make a good kindergarten teacher? What's different about kindergarten teachers in relation to teachers in other grades?