



Montana kindergarten teachers beliefs and practices
by Debra Hawsey Hamilton

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Montana State University
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Abstract:

This study identified self-reported philosophical beliefs and practices of certified professionals currently teaching kindergarten in Montana public schools. Congruence between identified philosophical beliefs and practices was determined. In addition, this study examined the relationships among selected demographics and the philosophical beliefs and the classroom practices of those teachers. Lastly, each participant's perception of factors influencing their practices was investigated.

The Teachers Questionnaire developed by Charlesworth and associates was used to gather the data for this study. The survey instrument was distributed to 230 randomly selected certified personnel currently teaching kindergarten in Montana. A response rate of 86% was realized, with 197 respondents returning the instrument.

Based on analysis of the data using a combination of T-test, Pearson and Spearman Correlation Coefficients, and multiple regression procedures, the following conclusions were drawn. Philosophical beliefs are reflected in classroom practices. Teachers' perceptions of influences over classroom practices have an impact on beliefs and practices. The following independent variables are associated with a higher rating in teachers' developmentally appropriate beliefs: obtainment of a Master's degree, membership in the Montana Association for the Education of Young Children, and working in larger Montana school districts.

The following independent variables were found to be associated with a higher rating in developmentally appropriate classroom practices: developmentally appropriate beliefs of the teacher, more experience in teaching kindergarten, obtainment of a Master's degree, membership in the Montana Association for the Education of Young Children, and working in larger Montana school districts.

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BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

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APPROVAL

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This thesis has been read by each member of the graduate committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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ABSTRACT

This study identified self-reported philosophical beliefs and practices of certified professionals currently teaching kindergarten in Montana public schools. Congruence between identified philosophical beliefs and practices was determined. In addition, this study examined the relationships among selected demographics and the philosophical beliefs and the classroom practices of those teachers. Lastly, each participant's perception of factors influencing their practices was investigated.

The Teachers Questionnaire developed by Charlesworth and associates was used to gather the data for this study. The survey instrument was distributed to 230 randomly selected certified personnel currently teaching kindergarten in Montana. A response rate of 86% was realized, with 197 respondents returning the instrument.

Based on analysis of the data using a combination of T-test, Pearson and Spearman Correlation Coefficients, and multiple regression procedures, the following conclusions were drawn. Philosophical beliefs are reflected in classroom practices. Teachers' perceptions of influences over classroom practices have an impact on beliefs and practices. The following independent variables are associated with a higher rating in teachers' developmentally appropriate beliefs: obtainment of a Master's degree, membership in the Montana Association for the Education of Young Children, and working in larger Montana school districts. The following independent variables were found to be associated with a higher rating in developmentally appropriate classroom practices: developmentally appropriate beliefs of the teacher, more experience in teaching kindergarten, obtainment of a Master's degree, membership in the Montana Association for the Education of Young Children, and working in larger Montana school districts.

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION OF STUDY AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The first kindergarten opened in the United States in 1855. This program and those that followed were primarily concerned with the health, welfare, and education of the children they served. These early American kindergartens were patterned conceptually after the German kindergartens of Froebel which emphasized natural learning through play and exploration of the environment. The very word "kindergarten," which literally translates from the German as garden of children, expresses the need for nurturing the young child. Kindergarten was seen as a way to help poor children overcome their environmental disadvantages, to stimulate learning for all children during the crucial early years of development, and to ease children into elementary school (Woodill, 1988).

Although many Froebelian ideas and materials were changed and updated, this basic philosophy of stimulating and nurturing children's development continued as the major focus of American kindergarten for almost a century. The work of G. Stanley Hall and John Dewey reinforced the fundamental principles upon which early kindergarten programs were based and led the way for the

development of more updated teaching methods and materials based on research by the child study movement. Patty Smith Hill's essay, *Kindergarten*, pointed out:

If an intelligent observer who had not visited the kindergarten for half a century entered one today, like old Rip Van Winkle he would rub his eyes with surprise at the marked improvements which have been substituted since his last visit. Such an observer would see the same Froebelian theories of self-activity and development used as guiding principles, but he would discover them applied through far better methods of teaching and with new improved materials and equipment substituted. (1942/1992, p. 1965)

Today, reinforcing those concepts of the early kindergartens, child development research and the constructionist theory of learning proposed by Piaget have led to the development of guidelines for a kindergarten curriculum which nurtures young children's natural curiosity and eagerness to learn about their environment (e.g., Bredekamp, 1987; Day & Drake, 1986; Moyer, Egertson, & Isenberg, 1987; Shapiro & Biber, 1972; Spodek, 1988a; Warger, 1988). Much of the research conducted in the last ten years provides evidence supporting the concept of an exploratory, developmental approach to kindergarten curriculum (e.g., Dweck, 1986; Gottman, 1983; Parker & Asher, 1987). This developmental, child-centered approach to education is based on the belief that children construct knowledge for themselves through interaction with the environment, thus the title *constructivist education*. Constructivist kindergarten curriculum is based on establishing an educational setting which encourages children to explore and interact with the environment and each other in developmentally appropriate ways with guidance from the teacher (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987).

After another half century, however, if Patty Smith Hill's "intelligent observer" entered a typical 1992 American kindergarten, he would be in for quite a shock. Things have changed! Research evidence overwhelmingly supports the Froebelian philosophical foundation. Thus, it is difficult to understand why American kindergartens have moved away from the exploratory, constructivist concept on which it was built. In 1986, 84% of public school kindergartens were identified as having an academic or preparatory (for first grade) emphasis. Only 8.6% were identified as having a developmental focus similar to those found in Froebelian kindergartens (Educational Research Service, 1986). These kindergarten programs have moved away from a curriculum based on exploration and discovery to one which uses workbooks and rote memorization. Why have kindergarten programs become more academically focused when child development theories clearly support the earlier, nurturing nature of kindergartens?

There are many possible reasons for this change in direction of program practices in today's kindergartens. The Association for Childhood Education International's (ACEI) position paper on appropriate kindergarten practices identified the following reasons for this shift in curriculum emphasis: "(1) societal pressure, (2) misunderstanding about young children's development, (3) aggressive marketing of commercial material largely inappropriate for kindergarten age children, (4) a shortage of teachers specifically prepared to work with young children, and (5) the reassignment of trained teachers in areas of declining enrollment" (Moyer et al., 1987, p. 235).

These reasons could be generally grouped into four categories:

(1) differences in opinions about the purpose of kindergarten, (2) increased preschool experiences, (3) the embracing of alternative learning theories (especially behaviorism), (4) and a misunderstanding of the inherent differences in the way children construct knowledge (Kamii, 1985; Spodek, 1982, 1988a).

As more and more children began attending day care and nursery schools, kindergarten was no longer the child's first exposure to learning outside the home. Today, more than half of all kindergarten children have had some type of educational experience before entering kindergarten (Elkind, 1987; Spodek, 1988a). There are two reasons for the increase in preschool and day care attendance of children under five. In 1982, 50% of all mothers with preschool children were in the labor force as compared to 12% in 1950. By 1995, it is predicted that 66% of all preschool children will have mothers in the labor force (Children's Defense Fund, 1987). These changes in family demographics along with the preponderance of evidence of the importance of quality early childhood experiences have combined to create public demand for programs serving the needs of young children prior to kindergarten (e.g., Berrueta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein, & Weikart, 1984; Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, 1983; Hauser-Cram, Pierson, Walker, & Tivnan, 1991; Lazer, Darlington, Murray, & Snipper, 1982).

As the demographics of the society they served began to change, the emphasis of kindergarten programs also changed as they slowly became a part of the public schools (Washington, 1988a, 1988b). Primary school curricula had come

under the direct influence of Skinner's Behavioristic Learning Theory. The goals and objectives, as well as the teaching methods employed, reflected the sequential, programmed approach to learning endorsed by behaviorists. Many kindergartens became more academically focused as this behavioristic primary curriculum was forced downward into the kindergarten program (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1988a, 1988b; Spodek, 1982; Uphoff & Gilmore, 1986). Several recent movements in the United States have sought to revise or restructure education. The emphasis on subject matter such as math and science in the 1960's came after the launching of Sputnik in 1957 (Bryant & Clifford, 1992; Connell, 1987). The "back to basics" curriculum surfaced in the 1970's (Ornstein, 1988; Spodek, 1982), followed by the cry of accountability in the 1980's (Spodek, 1982; Webster, 1984). Each has had significant effects on elementary school curriculum (Lawler & Bauch, 1988). For instance, textbook publishers created "teacher-proof" text books and programmed instruction curriculum. Standardized testing became more prominent until it was often viewed as driving the curriculum (Kamii, 1985). These changes came about as attempted solutions to the perceived problems and failures of the American educational system. The American public and the behavioristic sector of educators both embraced an increased academic focus as the answer to perceived inadequacies (Kamii, 1985). These reforms failed to recognize that young children are not "miniature adults" but actually learn in qualitatively different ways (Elkind, 1986) and that behaviorism can explain some types of

learning but falls short in explaining the development of higher level thinking skills (Kamii, 1985; Lawler & Bauch, 1988).

The change to a more academic emphasis of curriculum also led to many problems in the primary grades and especially kindergarten. Retention rates in kindergarten have risen even though research evidence demonstrates little support for this practice (Delidow, 1989; Peterson, DeGracie, & Ayabe, 1987). Children as young as five and six are demonstrating signs of stress such as ulcers, stomachaches, headaches, etc. and increased aggression at a growing rate (Burts, Hart, Charlesworth, & Kirk, 1990; Burts, Hart, Charlesworth, Fleege, Mosley, and Thomasson, 1992; Honig, 1986). A rise in academic instruction usually means a decrease in play which has been found to be extremely important for the development of imagery, imitation, spatial relationships, and language development, all of which have direct impact on the ability to understand and express language (a necessary foundation for learning to read) (Gallagher & Coché, 1987; Gallagher & Reid, 1983; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Having varied and numerous opportunities to play tends to improve children's subsequent academic achievement (Glickman, 1979). In addition to the above problems with a strong emphasis on academic gains, longitudinal research is beginning to find that children exposed to early pressure to succeed academically may "burn out" or lose the "disposition to learn" (Katz, 1988; Miller & Bizzell, 1983).

Early childhood educators have demonstrated increased concern over the shift in kindergarten curricula from one which nurtures exploration and discovery to

one which emphasizes acquisition of academic skills (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Charlesworth, 1989; Doremus, 1986; Postman, 1983). Dr. David Elkind, noted early childhood psychologist, has written numerous articles and books questioning this curriculum shift, which he refers to as "miseducation" (Elkind, 1986, 1987, 1989). The two major national organizations dedicated to the promotion of quality early childhood programs, NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) and ACEI, have both released position papers giving their description of quality kindergarten programs and practices (Bredekamp, 1987; Moyer et al., 1987). Several other national education associations have released position statements endorsing this developmental philosophy for early childhood education (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1988; Greenberg, 1990; National Association of State Boards of Education, 1988; Southern Association for Education for Children Under Six, 1984).

Early childhood educators in the state of Montana have also shown support for developmentally appropriate kindergarten practices. The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI), after examining kindergarten curriculums in the other 49 states, prepared a handbook describing appropriate practices for Montana kindergartens (OPI, 1989). The program description in this handbook closely resembles the practices endorsed by the national early childhood organizations such as NAEYC and ACEI. There has also been an increase in the number of public school primary teachers attending the state early childhood conference and joining the state affiliate of NAEYC (MAEYC membership and conference records).

Studies conducted throughout the nation have noted the increased pressure felt by kindergarten teachers to move toward a more academically focused program (Bredekamp et al., 1989; Fromberg, 1989). Recent studies have found that many kindergarten teachers have adopted practices they consider inappropriate and are suffering from the dissonance caused by the conflict between philosophical beliefs and the practices they are being asked to implement (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991; Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Hitz & Wright, 1988; Rusher, McGrevin, & Lambiotte, 1992).

Is this the case in Montana? What kinds of programs are found in Montana kindergartens? What is the basic educational philosophy of Montana kindergarten teachers? Are kindergarten teachers in Montana implementing programs which they deem inappropriate? What is determining the direction of Montana kindergarten curriculum? This study will seek clarification of these questions.

Statement of the Problem

This study identified self-reported philosophical beliefs and practices of certified professionals currently teaching kindergarten in Montana public schools. Congruence between identified philosophical beliefs and practices was determined. In addition, this study determined the relationships among selected demographics and the philosophical beliefs and classroom practices of those teachers. Lastly, participants' perception of factors influencing their practices were investigated.

Need for This Study

Kindergarten is a growing and vital part of most elementary schools today. The number of children enrolled in kindergarten is growing nationwide. Although kindergarten attendance is optional in 43 states (including Montana), in 1988, 94% of all five year olds were enrolled in kindergarten or first grade as opposed to 67% in 1970 (Karweit, 1988).

In addition to an increase in percentage of children attending kindergarten, there is also a national trend to increase the kindergarten day. In 1985, approximately 22% of kindergartens were full day programs (Jalongo, 1986). In 1989 an estimated 45% of children enrolled in kindergarten attended full day programs (Olsen & Zigler, 1989).

There is little doubt that kindergarten programs throughout the United States are changing, not only in numbers and length of day, but in content and emphasis as well. Until around twenty years ago, kindergartens in the United States were basically developmentally oriented (Martin, 1985; Ransbury, 1982; Spodek, 1982; Weber, 1984). However, there appears to be a consensus among early childhood educators that a major-shift has occurred in kindergarten curricula (e.g., Connell, 1987; Durkin, 1987, 1990; Elkind, 1986; Freeman & Hatch, 1989; Fromberg, 1989; Hitz & Wright, 1988; Kamii, 1985; Moyer et al., 1987; Spodek, 1988a; Walsh, 1989; Washington, 1988b). This shift has gone from a child-centered, developmental focus to an emphasis on academic, specific skill acquisition. Spodek

(1982) described this trend as a move away from programs reflecting the needs and interests of the young child to programs primarily concerned with achievement of specific skills.

With an increase in the number of academically oriented programs (Educational Research Service, 1986) has come an increase in problems as well. Two problems of note causing concern throughout the nation are retention and stress (Shepard & Smith, 1988a, 1988b). Kindergarten retention, including the development of "readiness or transitional" classes, "redshirting" or delaying entrance to kindergarten of age-appropriate children by parents, and the use of screening instruments to assess readiness for kindergarten before admittance, has increased (Cryan, Sheehan, Wiechel, & Bandy-Hedden, 1992; Gullo & Burton, 1992; Walsh, 1989). This trend clearly disregards the data demonstrating the negative effects on self-esteem (e.g., Gage & Berliner, 1979; Sheehan, Cryan, Wiechel, & Bandy-Hedden, 1991) and the ineffectiveness of such retention practices (e.g., Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Smith & Shepard, 1986). In addition, several recent studies have found that as the program emphasis has shifted in favor of academics there has also been an increase in stress related illness and ailments among kindergarten children (Burts et al., 1990, 1992; Dickinson & Snow, 1987; Honig, 1986).

Conversations with those involved with kindergarten education almost always turn to concerns with these curricula changes. Articles with titles such as: "Should education for the young child focus on the whole child or on specific skills?" and "Working with mandates: They said I have to" appear frequently in early childhood

journals such as Childhood Education and Young Children questioning these changes and addressing educators concerns. A growing number of sessions at state and national conventions are addressing the concerns expressed by kindergarten teachers over being asked to implement what many believe to be inappropriate programs.

Noted leaders in the field are expressing concerns and rallying early childhood educators to address this problem. Teachers are being encouraged to stand up for what they believe to be best for children and not succumb to pressures for academic skill oriented programs. In his keynote address to the 1988 annual conference of the NAEYC, David Weikart called for early childhood educators to examine their beliefs and practices in all areas of early childhood education. Dr. Weikart stated that "... the work we do is too important and the futures of the children we serve too critical ..." (Weikart, 1989, p. 29) to do things haphazardly and without reason. He went on to say that we need to understand what and why we implement the programs we do. Only then can we defend our practices and stand up for the appropriate and correct curriculum in our programs and practices, becoming advocates for the children we serve (Weikart, 1989).

In a 1988 article, Lilian Katz (past president of NAEYC) also called for early childhood educators to examine their current practices and check for alignment with philosophical beliefs. Dr. Katz suggested that often teachers do things because they've always done them that way and never stopped to think if they were truly developmentally appropriate.

On September 26, 1991, an early childhood symposium was sponsored by the Early Childhood Project at Montana State, Montana Association for the Education of Young Children, Montana Board of Public Education, Montana Office of Public Instruction, MSU Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa, and Child Care Connections of Bozeman for the purpose of exploring current topics of interest and concerns of the early childhood community in Montana. Representatives from the sponsoring groups, the Governor's Child Care Advisory Committee, public and private teachers and administrators from preschools, elementary levels, and higher education were present and participated in the discussions. The symposium participants recognized the need for quality early childhood programs in Montana and expressed concerns about the types of curricula found in Montana kindergarten classrooms.

Participants expressed concerns over the growing number of readiness or transition programs and questioned the reason behind the need for these programs.

Participants proposed conducting a study to ascertain the nature of kindergarten programs in Montana and whether increased developmental training for teachers might have an effect on practices implemented in classrooms.

In the spring of 1992, the Early Childhood Project at Montana State University was awarded a grant by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to support and guide communities in Montana in the development of collaborative strategies to provide services to children ages three to eight and their families. One of the goals of the project is directly related to the need for a review of early childhood programs available in the state, "To improve the quality of early childhood services

provided across all settings including private child care programs, Head Start, public schools, and other programs providing early childhood services by impacting professional preparation programs through leadership development and professional associations" (Montana Early Childhood Collaboration Project grant proposal, 1991, p. 9).

The Montana Office of Public Instruction released a report in the spring of 1993 entitled Education for a New Century (Office of Public Instruction, 1993). The report outlines some of the major challenges facing education and lists some of the strategies now being considered in Montana. Early childhood developmental principles are supported by such ideas as the establishment of non-graded K-3 classes, developing family resource centers at schools, schools becoming learning centers for entire communities, adjusting teaching styles to the learning styles and needs of individual children, and giving attention to all areas of children's development (pp. 4-9). The report then goes on to examine areas which need to be updated so that Montana's schools will be ready for the future. One area which the report suggests is always undergoing change and will continue to need to undergo change is training and education for teachers and administrators. OPI suggests that teachers need to be ready to face new demands "for meeting physical, emotional, and social needs of children," not just be concerned with the cognitive aspects of their development (p. 16). OPI is currently reviewing the standards set for teacher education programs in the state and making changes. They are considering adding or changing several of the current standards to rely heavily on more intensive child

development training and knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices for the primary grades. OPI is questioning the chances of success in initiating the change process to more developmentally appropriate practices without intensive training for teachers and administrators and more information about what is actually occurring in programs around the state (personal communications with J. Atkins, N. Coopersmith, and J. Cobb, OPI, Fall 1992).

From these sources I am led to suspect that there is no clear picture of what is happening in Montana kindergartens. This study is being proposed to answer the need for additional information concerning the programs and practices found in Montana kindergartens and the philosophical beliefs of personnel teaching kindergarten in Montana. This information could assist those involved with establishing policies and recommending changes for education programs in the state by providing them with information which will allow them to make more informed decisions.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions will be utilized:

- (1) Early Childhood: The period of time from birth through age eight. Children in this age group learn in a qualitatively different way than older children and adults. Children have special needs which can only be fully met in an environment that provides for their development in four areas: (1) physical, (2) social, (3) emotional, and (4) cognitive (Bredenkamp, 1987).

- (2) **Early Childhood Educators:** Teachers who work with children birth to age eight or educators working with the teachers of children birth to age eight. Training and education for early childhood educators usually centers around child development and constructivist theories (Bredekamp, 1987).
- (3) **Developmentally Appropriate Education:** Educational activities and environments based on the developmental level and age of the children involved. The National Association for the Education of Young Children proposes that children's learning progresses through four stages:
 - (1) awareness, (2) exploration, (3) inquiry, and (4) utilization. Teachers of young children create an environment which encourages children to become actively engaged in the learning process, to have the freedom and security to take risk, and to take responsibility for their learning. Many and varied materials and teaching strategies are employed to meet the unique needs of individual children including developmental level, learning style, and cultural background (Bredekamp, 1987; Fenton & Osborne, 1992).
- (4) **Child-Centered Instruction:** In a child-centered classroom the teacher prepares the environment and guides children's discoveries and exploration. Children are actively involved in activities, making choices about their learning, and constructing knowledge for themselves. Teachers encourage self-directed problem solving and experimentation (Bredekamp, 1987).
- (5) **Teacher-Directed Instruction:** The teacher initiates and sets criteria for activities, directing all activities and deciding what children will do and when.

The lessons are highly structured and controlled by the teacher. Children are given few choices. The teacher dominates the environment, by providing instructions, defining acceptable levels of involvement and serving as the major source of knowledge (Bredekamp, 1987).

- (6) Kindergarten: The early childhood program available to five year olds prior to entrance in first grade. The word kindergarten was coined by Friedrich Froebel in the 1800's. This name was adopted to emphasize the difference between Froebel's concept of appropriate education for young children and the traditional classrooms of his day. When kindergartens were first introduced to America, they followed the teachings of Froebel very closely (Essa, 1992). Today kindergarten is an integral part of the majority of the public school systems in the United States, although not mandatory in Montana. The two major national early childhood education organizations (ACEI & NAEYC) still promote the original concept of kindergarten and its emphasis on play as the primary tool for learning (Bredekamp, 1987; Moyer et al., 1987).

Questions to be Answered

This study will seek answers to the following questions:

- (1) What are the philosophical beliefs of certified teachers currently teaching kindergarten in Montana concerning kindergarten curriculum?
- (2) What are the current curriculum practices being implemented in Montana kindergartens?

- (3) What is the relationship between the philosophical beliefs of certified teachers currently teaching kindergarten in Montana and the practices implemented in their classroom?
- (4) What do certified teachers currently teaching kindergarten in Montana perceive as the major forces influencing curriculum decisions in their kindergarten programs?
- (5) Is there any correlation between perceived empowerment of certified teachers currently teaching kindergarten in Montana and the degree of developmental appropriateness of their philosophical beliefs?
- (6) Is there any correlation between perceived empowerment of certified teachers currently teaching kindergarten in Montana and the degree of developmental appropriateness of the practices implemented in their classroom?
- (7) Is there a relationship between teachers' philosophical beliefs and any of the following variables: years of teaching experience, years teaching kindergarten, years at current school, chose/assigned to teach kindergarten, highest degree earned, where degree was earned, specific training in early childhood education, membership in professional organizations, size of district?
- (8) Is there a relationship between practices implemented in the classroom by the teacher and any of the following variables: years of experience, years teaching kindergarten, years at current school, chose/assigned to teach kindergarten, highest degree earned, where degree was earned, specific training in early childhood education, membership in professional organizations, size of district?

Review of Literature

The literature supporting this study falls into three categories: (1) a historical overview of the evolution of kindergarten, (2) current trends in kindergarten curricula, and (3) previous research concerning teachers' beliefs and practices.

History of Kindergarten

In order to understand the problem confronting kindergarten teachers in today's society, it is important to look at the evolutionary process of the kindergarten movement. The philosophical beliefs endorsed by the national organizations are better appreciated and comprehended in historical context. Viewing the evolution of kindergarten will also aid the reader in identification of the reasons for the introduction of alternative philosophies and practices.

European Roots

The first recorded mention of education for young children occurred in 1658, when Johann Comenius created the first known picture book for children entitled Orbus Pictus. Comenius is also credited with writing two parent education books, School of Infancy and The Great Didactic in which he advocated "mother schools" to train parents in the art of parenting. His books were based on the belief that children needed training through firsthand experiences in their early years and this

training was best achieved in the home through interactions with the mother (Hinitz, 1988; Osborn, 1991; Woodill, 1988; Wortham, 1992).

Jean Jacques Rousseau reiterated the beliefs expressed by Comenius concerning the need for hands on, experiential learning for children. Rousseau believed that direct instruction of young children was not appropriate and that education for children under twelve should be based on physical manipulations of objects and sensory perceptions. In the book Emile Rousseau described the characteristics of children of varying ages and outlined what he considered to be appropriate education for each age based on his concepts of child development (Hinitz, 1988; Osborn, 1991; Weber, 1984; Woodill, 1988).

In the late 1770's, Jean Frederic Oberlin started the first day care in France and Heinrich Pestalozzi opened a school for poor children in Switzerland. These men set forth the concept of schools "caring" for the young child's health and safety, as well as education (Woodill, 1988). This was the first time that schools for young children had been established as a response to the needs of a community (Hill, 1942/1992). Pestalozzi is often considered the "father of modern education" (Hinitz, 1988) and was considered a leading innovator in the education of young children during his lifetime. He developed many teaching aids and object lessons for use with young children and wrote the book How Gertrude Teaches Her Children. Pestalozzi believed exercise, play and object lessons were the foundations of learning for young children (Hewes, 1992; Hinitz, 1988; Osborn, 1991; Woodill, 1988; Wortham, 1992).

As many areas began to move from an agrarian society to an industrial one, many new problems emerged. With both parents and often older brothers and sisters working in the factories, young children were often left to fend for themselves during the day. Robert Owen, a factory owner, established the first recorded factory day nursery in Scotland as an answer to the need for child care. He felt a sense of responsibility to the community to provide a healthy and safe environment for the children of his workers (Hill, 1942/1992; Osborn, 1991). In these nursery schools, Owen emphasized dance, song, and outdoor play. He felt that corporal punishment, intimidation, and fear should not be used in training children. He was considered a pioneer in humane treatment of children (Hinitz, 1988; Woodill, 1988).

Friedrich Froebel, a student of Pestalozzi, started the first kindergartens in Germany in 1837. Froebel named his schools kindergarten (meaning "garden of children" in German) because he felt that given the right environment and encouragement children would develop or "flower." He is considered the "Father of Kindergarten" (Hewes, 1985; Shapiro, 1983). Froebel was one of the first to view play as an essential component of kindergarten. He was the first to use blocks in the classroom and wrote the book Mother Plays and Nursery Songs which contains many fingerplays and songs still used in kindergarten classrooms around the world (Hinitz, 1988; Osborn, 1991; Ransbury, 1982; Shapiro, 1983; Spodek, 1982).

Kindergarten Begins in America

Margaretha Schurz, a Germany immigrant who had worked with Froebel, opened the first American kindergarten in Watertown, Wisconsin, in 1855, to serve her children and those of her neighbors. This first kindergarten was taught in German (the language of the children who attended and the teacher) and was Froebelian in concept. The first English speaking kindergarten in America was started in Boston in 1860 by Elizabeth Peabody and her sister, Mary Mann (Mrs. Horace Mann), after studying under Schurz. Kindergartens were established across the United States as a part of the child rescue mission to save "slum" children. These first Froebelian kindergartens were concerned with the health, safety and education of the child (Hinitz, 1988; Lawler & Bauch, 1988; Woodill, 1988).

The first U. S. Commissioner of Education, Henry Barnard, recommended that kindergartens be a part of the public schools in the late 1850's. He stated in a government report that kindergarten was "by far the most original, attractive, and philosophical form of infant development the world has yet seen" (cited in Weber, 1984, p. 43). However, the first kindergarten to be considered a part of the public school system did not begin until 1873 in St. Louis, Missouri, under the direction of Susan Blow (Hewes, 1987; Osborn, 1991).

The Child Study and Progressive Movements Bring Dissension

Around the turn of the century, early childhood education began to look at the scientific child study movement for direction. Up until this time, practices in

early childhood education were based on philosophical beliefs and assumptions of the educators designing the programs and curriculums (Weber, 1984; Woodill, 1988). G. Stanley Hall introduced the study of child development to early childhood education in the early 1900's. Hall made recommendations for changes in curriculum practices based on his research with children. One of the most influential recommendations was the need for large muscle development to take place before fine motor development, which demonstrated that Froebel's small gifts (blocks) and occupations (sewing) were inappropriate for use with young children. Hall reinforced the Froebelian concept that the child dictates the curriculum (Osborn, 1991; Weber, 1984). He also suggested that kindergarten teachers needed to understand how language develops and the growth rate and development of children to be effective teachers. He agreed with the Froebelian concepts surrounding the importance of spontaneous play for young children and felt that kindergarten teachers needed to understand the vital role of play and imagination in the young child's education. Hall convinced kindergarten educators that knowledge of how children learn and develop and the application of that knowledge in developing a curriculum were the only way to an effective program (Shapiro, 1983; Weber, 1984).

Hall became president of Clark University in 1888 and established a child study center. Early childhood educators were drawn to Hall's work. Kindergarten leaders such as Patty Smith Hill and Jenny Merrill attended Clark University summer conferences

. . . searching for more fundamental knowledge about the child on which to base a new kindergarten program. Child study seemed a realization of their hope that they could base education on the nature of the child as Froebel had recommended, only now it would rest not upon an intuitive recognition but upon scientific observation. Hall, himself, believed that Froebel would have rejoiced in the development of a child study movement. (Weber, 1984, p. 49)

In 1893, Patty Smith Hill conducted a kindergarten class as part of an exhibition at the Chicago World's Fair. Hill's kindergarten was an adaptation of Froebel's concepts, not a strict adherence to his ideas as promoted by Peabody. Hill changed some of the Froebelian materials, added free play, and maintained a flexible schedule. Hill created the large building blocks often seen in kindergarten classrooms and composed the song "Happy Birthday." She was also instrumental in the foundation of the National Association for Nursery Education in 1929, now the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Hinitz, 1988; Osborn, 1991; Shapiro, 1983; Woodill, 1988). Hill, along with John Dewey, promoted what became known as the progressive movement which promoted free play, child centered discovery learning, and flexible schedules (Hinitz, 1988; Osborn, 1991; Woodill, 1988).

Dewey was influential in the introduction of the sand and water table, the home living center, and clay into kindergarten classrooms (Weber, 1984; Wortham, 1992). Dewey felt that the process of learning was more important than the product achieved and that individuals learn by a process of inquiry. Dewey also reinforced the Froebelian emphasis on free play as an important learning tool for young children (Senn, 1975). Dewey and Hill were convinced that schools should reflect

the democratic beliefs of their society, promoting freedom, choice, and responsibility for learning (Weber, 1984). One of the major contributions of Dewey and the progressive movement to education at all levels grew out of his research at his lab school in Chicago. Dewey reported that students learned more and put forth more effort when the activity or assignment was interesting and relevant to their lives. Up until this time, it was believed that lessons should be "distasteful" to the students requiring them to "discipline" their minds to complete the task (Taylor, 1986/87).

The Introduction of the Concept of Maturation

Arnold Gesell was also a student of G. Stanley Hall's. Gesell used many innovative research techniques in his scientific study of children. By studying and recording the characteristics of children at various ages, he developed "norms" of behavior and growth for each age group. Gesell called this process of innate growth "maturation." Although Gesell believed that environment played a role in development and that individuals developed in their own way, he felt that the primary determinant was maturation or the internal "biological clock" of the organism (Osborn, 1991; Weber, 1984). Gesell stated that norms or growth gradients served two distinct purposes: "(1) they define the developmental traits characteristic of childhood in general and (2) they enable us to determine in an individual child the attained levels of maturity for these traits" (Gesell & Ilg, 1946, p. 23). Gesell believed that incorrectly assessing children's developmental level and

attempting to teach children before they are ready for the material being presented is a waste of effort and can in fact interfere with normal development. Thus, the concept of readiness to learn was born (Gesell & Ilg, 1946; Semm, 1975; Weber, 1984).

Gesell's concept of maturation had a profound influence on kindergarten curriculum in the 30's, 40's, and 50's. His conceptualization of children's similarities to plants was an analogy with which kindergarten teachers were already familiar and was therefore easily assimilated into the conceptual framework of kindergarten. Teacher education textbooks were filled with references to characteristics of children at varying ages and the implications this carried for curriculum development (Weber, 1984). The intellections of school readiness, which greatly influenced kindergarten policies in the 70's and 80's, were direct descendants of Gesell's concept of maturation. Only recently have Gesell's ideas and research studies come under attack. The children used in his studies were not a true representation of American society and the norms derived from these studies should not have been generalized to the general public. In Gesell's defense it should be noted that he never intended for the norms to be used as absolutes or to deny individual differences (Weber, 1984). Although Gesell's concepts of maturation and readiness have been questioned, many of the infant tests used today are based on Gesell's developmental schedules or norms (Steinberg & Belsky, 1991).

Gesell believed that genetic predeterminations were the primary antecedents for development, but he did recognize that environment played an

important role in the maturation of children. G. Stanley Hall, Gesell's mentor, began to question the long held belief that intelligence was fixed for he felt that the environment played an important role in children's development. The research of J. McVicker Hunt provided evidence that intelligence was indeed influenced by the environment. Building on this idea, Benjamin Bloom and Arthur Combs wrote about educational practices and the effect schools could have on children. The evidence that environment could influence intelligence led to exploration of behavioral learning theories (Weber, 1984).

The Influence of Behaviorism Begins

Although considered a part of the progressive movement, in retrospect, Edward Thorndike was the forerunner of behaviorism. Thorndike sought to further the concept of education principles based on scientific study and developed objective measures with which to record data observed. He wanted to develop a science of education which would explain all learning. It was Thorndike that introduced the idea of standardized testing into the education field. Much of Thorndike's research was conducted with the use of animals, but he believed that humans learned in much the same way as animals. Thus he developed his principles of learning on his observations of animals and inferred his finding to humans (Taylor, 1986/87; Weber, 1984; Wortham, 1992).

Thorndike proposed that intellectual growth resulted from the formation of "mental habits" and suggested that "if young children were taught proper habits early

enough, they would develop intellectually" (Spodek, 1973, p. 193). Patty Smith Hill, in her continuing efforts to incorporate scientific research into the kindergarten curriculum, developed Conduct Curriculum at the Teachers' College kindergarten based on the principles of habit training. Although the concept of habit training was soon abandoned due to a lack of evidence of its impact on later development, some aspects of Thorndike's influence did remain. The use of a checklist of skills for charting individual children's progress and the use of behavior modification techniques in discipline are still found in most kindergarten classrooms today (Spodek, 1973; Weber, 1984).

Although kindergarten leaders had moved away from the basic premise upon which behaviorism is based, the work of Pavlov, Watson, and Skinner continued to "reinforce" the usefulness of the behavioristic principles in education. David Elkind, in an interview with Milton Senn, proposed that the views of behaviorism fit the mood in America after World War I causing it to flourish. At this time, America was turning away from its infatuation with European ideas and striving to foster the belief in the pioneering spirit, self-reliance, and the "American Dream." Behaviorism embodied these ideas and perpetuated the American concept that "anyone can do anything if they work hard enough" (Senn, 1975, p. 26).

The basic concepts of behaviorism appeared to reinforce the use of recitation and drill which was a major part of the elementary school curriculum at that time. Later, as Skinner introduced the idea of behavioral engineering into the education field, and the elementary curriculum began to translate this concept into

practices in the classroom, the discrepancies between the kindergarten and elementary philosophies grew. This would later become a major debate between early childhood and elementary educators (Weber, 1984).

The Impact of the Psychoanalytical Movement

The psychoanalytical movement, based on the work of Sigmund Freud, brought about an awareness of the importance of the early years of children's lives on their future development. Freud's psychoanalytical movement also emphasized the importance of the child's social-emotional well being on learning. Freud was the first to stress the importance of the early years and to make suggestions based on theories of development (Essa, 1992; Osborn, 1991; Spodek, 1973; Woodill, 1988). "When translated into school programs, this awareness meant the development of educational experiences to prevent emotional conflicts that could lead to neurotic complexes and the inclusion of expressive activities that would provide the catharsis necessary for mental health" (Spodek, 1973, p. 194). The methods employed in early education in the 1930's and 40's were heavily influenced by psychoanalytical theory. Play, a vital component in kindergarten programs, now was viewed as not only a learning tool, but a way to provide catharsis for the emotional needs of the child (Essa, 1992; Spodek, 1973; Woodill, 1988).

Neo-Freudians, such as Lawrence Frank, modified and built upon Freud's theories in the development of philosophical concepts of the importance of affective development in children. Dropping the emphasis on biological aspects of

personality development, Neo-Freudians used Freud's basic ideas to examine the cultural impact on this development (Wortham, 1992).

Lawrence Frank, who began his career as an economist, first became interested in the study of children through his association with Lucy Sprague Mitchell (the wife of his colleague Wesley Mitchell). Lucy Sprague Mitchell established the Bureau of Educational Experiments in the 1920's which later became the Bank Street College of Education (Osborn, 1991; Senn, 1975; Weber, 1984; Wortham, 1992). Frank developed an interest in the work of the bureau and recognized the need for a "systematic and intensive study of child growth and development" (Weber, 1984, p. 121). Frank proposed that teachers must understand the causes of individual children's behavior and respond according to their individual needs. He believed that teachers could not rely on one uniform way of preventing unwanted behavior as proposed by behaviorism, but must adjust to the unique needs of each child (Senn, 1975; Weber, 1984; Wortham, 1992).

Erik Erikson was also influential in the psychoanalytical movement. Erikson became interested in psychoanalytical training and worked with Anna Freud in Vienna. Erikson moved to the United States when Hitler came to power in Europe. Working with anthropologists in the United States gave Erikson the opportunity to observe cultural influences in child rearing. Incorporating the work of Freud and his own research on cultural influences, Erikson developed what is known today as psychosocial theory. The work of Freud, Frank, and Erikson was instrumental in the development of the holistic view of education held by early childhood educators

today. Kindergarten now added another purpose, the development of a positive self-image and concern for the affective development of children (Spodek, 1973; Weber, 1984; Wortham, 1992).

The Influence of Cognitive Developmental Theory

The cognitive growth movement traces its roots to the work of Jean Itard and Edward Seguin with retarded children in the early 1800's. Marie Montessori based her work with the mentally retarded children in Rome on the premises established by Itard and Seguin. She later adapted her methods for use with slum children in Italy and reported that although these children had comparatively low IQ's, she could teach them to read as quickly as middle-class children. Montessori is credited with the creation of tactile alphabet letters and many self-correcting sensory materials. However, the belief that intelligence was inherited and not influenced by environment kept Montessori's concepts from being widely recognized or accepted in the United States until the 1950's and 60's (LaFrancois, 1973; Osborn, 1991; Woodill, 1988).

Binet, who developed the first intelligence test, believed that intelligence was inherited, but he began to find proof that environmental factors also played an important role in mental abilities (Osborn, 1991; Woodill, 1988). Jean Piaget, an assistant of Binet's, became very interested in how children constructed knowledge. While testing children to help develop the norms for the intelligence test, Piaget became interested in why children of similar ages made the same types of

"mistakes." As he investigated this phenomenon, he began to develop his theory of cognitive development (Berger, 1991; Woodill, 1988).

Piaget offered early childhood educators proof that children learn quantitatively different from adults. He created ways to test for understanding of the concepts he presented and introduced the concept of cognitive stages. Piaget's concepts began to take root in American education in the early 1960's. Although Piaget never applied his concepts to educational practice, many educators (such as Barry Wadsworth and Constance Kamii) and psychologists (such as David Elkind) began to develop guides to aid teachers in using his theories in their classrooms to plan instruction and to evaluate children's thinking abilities. Teachers began to view children in a totally different light (Berger, 1990; Wadsworth, 1989).

Summary

Although many Froebelian ideas and materials have been changed and updated, the basic philosophy of stimulating and nurturing children's development has continued as the major focus of American kindergarten for over a century. The work of G. Stanley Hall and John Dewey reinforced the fundamental principles upon which early kindergarten programs were based and led the way for the development of more updated teaching methods and materials based on the research of the child study movement. Today, child development research and the constructionist theory of learning proposed by Piaget have led to the development of guidelines for a kindergarten curriculum which nurtures young children's natural

curiosity and eagerness to learn about their environment (e.g., Bredekamp, 1987; Day & Drake, 1986; Moyer et al., 1987; Shapiro & Biber, 1972; Spodek, 1988a).

Kindergarten has undergone many changes since its conception. It almost died out completely as a component of the public schools in the late 40's and early 50's due to cuts in public school budgets, but was revived in the 60's when education was again looked to as the salvation for the problems of society (Wortham, 1992). Becoming a part of the public schools has not been without problems. Although kindergarten has influenced primary education in America, kindergarten has also been changed in the process. Today, many kindergarten programs have lost their Froebelian, child-centered nature and have developed a strong academic focus. Kindergarten is often viewed as a "prep school" for first grade (Spodek, 1982). The purpose of kindergarten must be changed again if it is to once more continue in the nurturing tradition of the "children's garden."

Current Kindergarten Practices

As the exploration of the history has pointed out, there are two major theoretical orientations found in kindergarten programs in the United States today operating from two significantly different philosophical beliefs about how children learn and what they should be learning. These two views offer very different reasons and objectives for education (Fromberg, 1989).

The Developmental Approach

The child-centered, developmental approach is based on child development theories, predominately those of Jean Piaget. This approach is centered around the basic premise that young children perceive and process information differently than adults. Developmental or child-centered programs strive to adapt the program to the needs of the child. The emphasis is on the learner and the process of learning (Day, 1988; Fromberg, 1989; Moyer et al., 1987).

The Academic Approach

The academic/formal programs are based on behavioristic learning theories as proposed by B. F. Skinner. The basic premise is that all people learn in the same way, regardless of age. Academic programs have a body of knowledge they feel every child of a certain age should master. This body of knowledge is broken down into its smallest components which are then taught to the learner in a particular sequence. The emphasis is on the teaching of specific skills to the child (Day, 1988; Fromberg, 1989; Moyer et al., 1987).

Comparison of the Two Approaches

Early studies comparing preschool programs for low socioeconomic children found no discernible difference in academic achievement between the kinds of approaches used, only between control groups (having no preschool experience) and the groups participating in the programs (Weikart, Epstein, Schweinhart, & Bond, 1978). However, longitudinal studies have found that although academic

achievement of participants is similar, there are differences in pro-social dimensions between types of programs (Karnes, Schwedel, & Williams, 1983; Miller & Bizzell, 1983, 1984; Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larner, 1986a). Schweinhart, Weikart, and Larner (1986a) found that children in developmental (child-centered) programs reported fewer incidents of juvenile delinquency, more sports participation, and held more school offices than children in the direct-instruction programs. There have been criticisms of this study calling into question several methodological and interpretive aspects (Bereiter, 1986; Gersten, 1986); however, the researchers admitted at the beginning that the sample size was small and never generalized their finding to the general public. They merely pointed out that these findings indicated a need for more inquiry (Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larner, 1986b).

The Karnes et al. (1983) study comparing five preschool curriculum models found slight differences in academic achievement, favoring the direct instructional program. In addition, this study found that the groups from child-centered approaches had a higher rate of high school graduation than the direct instruction groups. Another preschool study conducted by Miller and Bizzell (1984) found no significant difference between curriculum groups through tenth grade.

A study conducted by Stallings (1975) in connection with project Follow Through (a program for primary children connected with Head Start) compared varying approaches used with primary children. This program was also directed at low socioeconomic children. Stallings found that children involved in the direct instruction program scored higher in math and reading, and children in

child-initiated programs scored higher on problem solving and reasoning tasks. The child-initiated group also had lower rates of school absenteeism. Stallings concluded that each program reached its objective. The direct instructional program sought to increase academic achievement scores. The child-initiated programs sought to enhance overall development of the child. Thus, the choice between the two approaches depends on the objectives and philosophy of the program.

There is not an abundance of research comparing these two very different approaches with kindergarten children, and what is available is not conclusive enough to establish a firm, undisputed policy (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1988). However, there is research that evaluates particular aspects of developmental, child-initiated learning and makes comparisons with techniques usually associated with direct instruction.

Research concerning stress in kindergarten children. In two recent studies conducted by Burts and associates (1990, 1992) children in classrooms identified as developmentally inappropriate exhibited significantly more stress behaviors than children in developmentally appropriate classrooms. Research conducted by Fimian and Cross (1986) with preadolescents found a significant relationship between classroom stress and student burn out, but what implications this may have for young children's development remains uncertain. In addition, Rutter (1979) has

found that positive school experiences can negate the effects of other environmental stressors in the lives of young children.

Research concerning the disposition to learn. It has been argued by leading early childhood educators that the primary grades should be devoted to helping children develop the attitude or "disposition to learn" (Bredekamp, 1987; Connell, 1987; Council of Chief State School Officers, 1988; Elkind, 1989; Gallagher & Coché, 1987; Greenberg, 1990; Kamii, 1985; Katz, 1988). Spodek (1986) suggested that children should be encouraged to question and explore their environment and look at school as a place of discovery, thus developing lifelong learners. Studies conducted by McGillicuddy-DeLisi and Sigel (1982a; 1982b; Sigel, 1985; Sigel & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 1984) cited in Sigel, 1987, p. 222, found a negative relationship between intellectual functioning and didactic, structured teaching strategies. Deci, Nezlek, and Sheinman (1981) found that children in developmentally appropriate classrooms had a higher level of intrinsic motivation and higher levels of self-esteem than children in teacher directed, academic classrooms. In addition, Hyson, Van Trieste, and Rauch (1989) reported that children in developmentally appropriate classrooms had more positive attitudes about school and learning in general.

Teachers' Beliefs

The general concept of what teaching really is has begun to change. The dominance of a strictly technical view of teaching is waning. A variety of alternative approaches to understanding the nature of teaching has taken its place (e.g., Doyle, 1990; Shulman, 1987). One growing area of research into the nature of teaching is that of teachers' beliefs. The importance of understanding not only what and how teachers teach but the underlying reasons for their actions and choices is critical to developing a clear concept of the nature of teaching (Kagan, 1992; Spodek, 1988b). Research has indicated that teachers' beliefs are relatively stable and resistant to change (Brousseau, Book, & Byers, 1988), are consistently reflected in their practices (e.g., Borko, Cone, Russo, & Shavelson, 1979; Clark & Yinger, 1979; Peterson, 1988; Shavelson & Stern, 1981), and that dissonance occurs when they are not (Barth, 1990; Hatch & Freeman, 1988).

Implicit Beliefs

Research conducted by Clark (1988) and Crow (1987) found that beginning teacher education students have already formed a "teacher role identity" which acts as a "filter" through which they view the information and observations they make while in teacher education programs. They found that these role identities change very little during preservice education and go on to be more fully developed and become personal theories of teaching during their first years in the field. Teachers construct their personal theories of teaching through examining the explicit theories

interwoven in professional literature and stated in workshops and college coursework and relating that to their personal experiences and teacher role identities formed by their earliest experiences with teachers. Spodek (1988b) refers to these constructs as implicit beliefs. Charlesworth and associates (1991, p. 18) defines implicit beliefs as "... the ideas about instruction that teachers develop from their personal experience based on their practical knowledge." Research has shown that what a teacher believes about teaching and how children learn is reflected in the way they deal with parents (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Galinsky, 1988), the organization (Elbaz, 1981), and the environmental atmosphere of the classroom (Harvey, Prather, White, Alter, & Hoffmeister, 1966; Katz and Chard, 1989), the approach used to evaluate and grade children (Terwilliger, 1977), and the way teachers adapt and implement the officially adopted curricula (Brophy, 1982). It is thus easy to understand the critical need for a better understanding of teachers' implicit beliefs.

In an exploratory study of preschool, kindergarten, and first grade teachers' implicit theories, Spodek (1988b) found a diverse mixture of beliefs. Differences in teacher training and in program goals were suggested as possible reasons for this outcome. Verma and Peters (1975), in a study of preschool teachers' beliefs, found that when the program had a well defined theoretical orientation, teacher's beliefs were consistent with their practices and with the explicitly stated theory of the program. Wing (1989) found that preschool teachers with strongly stated beliefs

were able to influence the beliefs of the children in their classrooms to coincide with the teachers' views.

In an 1988 investigation of kindergarten teachers' beliefs about readiness and retention, Smith and Shepard found that teachers' beliefs concerning how children learn influenced their beliefs concerning retention. Schools with high rates of retention were found to have a strong bureaucratic structure and highly academic emphasis in curricula. Smith and Shepard also found that schools with low retention rates were less bureaucratic in structure and more developmental in curricula emphasis.

Dissonance Creates Conflicts

Hatch and Freeman (1988) found that kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices were often not congruent. They found that most Ohio kindergarten programs were academic in focus. However, the majority of the kindergarten teachers' beliefs were congruent with development theory. They also found that many kindergarten teachers in Ohio were experiencing "philosophy-reality conflicts" due to the dissonance between beliefs and practices. These conflicts are believed to contribute to teacher burn out and an overall dissatisfaction with the teaching profession.

Hitz and Wright (1988) found that Oregon kindergarten programs were becoming increasingly academic and that kindergarten teachers' beliefs were not congruent with this shift. Kindergarten teachers reported a perceived increase in

pressure by parents and principals to provide a more academic kindergarten program.

Charlesworth and associates (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Thomasson, Mosley, & Fleege, 1993) in two separate studies found an increase in academic emphasis in kindergarten programs in the south. They also found that kindergarten teachers' beliefs were often reflected in their practices. Teachers with strongly held beliefs in developmentally appropriate practices implemented practices which were more developmentally appropriate. Teachers with strongly held beliefs in academic practices implemented programs which were more developmentally inappropriate. However, they found that kindergarten teachers in general expressed beliefs which were congruent with developmentally appropriate beliefs that were reflected in their practices. These studies also found that teachers who implemented more developmentally appropriate programs felt they had more control over curriculum decisions than teachers who implemented more developmentally inappropriate programs.

Summary

Previous research has shown that kindergarten programs across the United States are becoming increasingly academic and that kindergarten teachers do not necessarily agree with these changes. Some evidence has also been found to demonstrate problems may occur when teachers' beliefs and practices are not harmonious. It would be useful to know if (1) Montana kindergarten programs are

following the national trends toward more academic focus, (2) if teachers of kindergarten in Montana philosophically support this trend, (3) what variables influence teachers' beliefs, and (4) what variables teachers of kindergartens in Montana perceive as having the greatest influence on their curriculum decisions.

This information could potentially impact decisions now under consideration by the Office of Public Instruction, The Certification Standards and Practices Advisory Council, and Teacher Education Programs in the state.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the degree of developmental appropriateness of the self-reported philosophical beliefs and classroom practices of certified elementary teachers currently teaching kindergarten in the state of Montana. Congruence between identified philosophical beliefs and classroom practices was also determined. This study determined relationships among selected demographics and the philosophical beliefs and classroom practices of the teachers. In addition, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices and forces perceived by the teachers as exerting influence over their classroom practices was determined.

Conceptual Framework

A review of the literature relevant to this study indicates that what teachers believe about how children learn and about the purpose of education are important constructs to consider when examining practices in the classroom (Kagan, 1992; Spodek, 1988b). Teachers employing the same classroom practices may do so for

