Attitudes Towards Developmentally Appropriate Classroom Practices Among Kindergarten Teachers in Tennessee

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the opinions of kindergarten teachers about developmentally appropriate practices and their effects on students externalizing behaviors. It was expected that these teachers would hold positive associations of developmentally appropriate practices paired with negative associations of current academic standards. The kindergarten teachers participated by completing a survey, attending one individual interview, and one group discussion. Results indicate that the participants do not hold negative associations of current academic standards and believe that developmentally appropriate practice does mitigate some externalizing behaviors in students. Lastly, this study found that teachers believed that student's externalizing problem behaviors were not linked directly to academic standards, but rather to internal traits related to each individual student.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is a concept that was promoted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children in the early 1980's to emphasize the differences between early childhood and elementary education (Bredekamp, 1997). DAP should be, most prominently, concerned with matching the developmental level of each student with the appropriate level of classroom instruction (Carta et al., 1991). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), arguably DAP's biggest supporter, emphasizes the value of understanding the whole child in terms of their social, emotional, and physical needs in the classroom rather than solely focusing on the cognitive aspect of early childhood education (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006).

Many organizations build standards to uphold and support the development of professional practices; the field of early childhood education is no different. Starting in the early 1900's, professionals in the education field began to see a need for more consistency in the kindergarten classroom. The international kindergarten union worked together to create new standards that were to be followed consistently by all teachers (Bredekamp, 1997). These standards evolved into the DAP guidelines developed by the National Association of Nursery Education (NANE), later named NAEYC. NAEYC's guidelines focused upon the goodness of fit of instructional practices to each individual child (Carta et al., 1991). These guidelines made it explicit that teaching should be tailored to the developmental level of each student, as not all children learn in the same way or at the same pace. Play was also emphasized as an important way for young

children to gain and spread knowledge. These standards had a very strong appeal to most parents and educators as they portrayed the child as having an active role in the education process (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Van Horn et al. 2005).

NAEYC DAP guidelines are heavily influenced by the works of Piaget and Vygotsky. Piaget believed that children should direct their own learning and build upon the foundations they already possessed (Fowler, 2017). Piaget's stage theory states that all children move through stages of development, but not necessarily at the same pace. These ideas are central to the beliefs of DAP proponents. DAP guidelines also heavily showcase Piaget's view that children construct most of their knowledge through active exploration. This is naturally congruent with children's intuitive and curious nature during the preoperational stage of development, the Piagetian stage that corresponds with most preschool children's cognitive development (Feldman, 2004; Van Horn, Karlin, & Ramey, 2012).

Vygotsky believed that children learn to reason and process information through their interactions with other children and adults. Teachers can carefully scaffold learning by creating active learning environments where positive interactions may occur. Vygotsky describes scaffolding as a process where teachers can recognize an emerging skill and use that as a guide for the child. Through scaffolding, teachers can show students the process of problem solving for the specific task and slowly remove their assistance as the students gain mastery of the skill. This process takes the child from a general to a more mature understanding of the skill at hand (Daniels & Shumow, 2003).

Constructivist theory combines the thoughts of Piaget and Vygotsky and fits with DAP proponent's beliefs that instructional content that far exceeds the realm of the

child's current developmental level will, at best, lead to minimal acquisition and rote memorization, and, at worst, will result in failure, decreased motivation, and unnecessary child stress. Teachers should aim for challenging, yet perceivably achievable content for their young learners (Carta et al., 1991). According to Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006), learners construct most of their knowledge through interactions with their environment that challenge their current way of thinking or their beliefs. For example, at first, when a young child works on a puzzle, she may believe that any piece can fit together. Through exploration, her belief will change as she works to figure out how to make the pieces fit together. During this process, her teacher may scaffold the experience by prompting the student with phrases such as "which kind of piece do you think goes here" or "I wonder what would happen if you tried this puzzle piece." With this kind of engagement, learning is most likely to occur when a task is challenging but still perceived to be achievable.

According to Huffman and Speer (2000), the efficacy of using developmentally appropriate practices to increase learning is well established in research literature. For example, cognitive performance and school readiness increased in a group of Head Start students when teachers followed a developmentally appropriate curriculum (Bryant et al., 1994). Similarly, kindergarteners in classrooms rated as having high levels of DAP, showed significantly higher cognitive skills when tested in first grade (Frede, Austin, & Lindauer, 1993). In a study by Huffman and Speer (2000), kindergarten and first grade students preformed significantly better on rote learning tasks as well as applied knowledge skills when placed in moderate level DAP classrooms versus students who remained in lower DAP classrooms.

However, when considering problem behaviors and DAP, there appears to be a significant gap in the research. Some studies note that the use of DAP in the classroom results in students exhibiting less stress behaviors and experience reduced anxiety and depression (e.g. Burts et al., 1992; Hart et al., 1998; Van Horn et al., 2005; Van Horn et. al., 2012). A stressor can be anything that requires more adaptation from the child than would a typical day. With this being said, most studies provide little to no information about DAP's relationship with externalizing behaviors such as acting out, verbal or physical aggression, or damage to property. Young students with externalizing traits often experience worse outcomes; therefore, the link between implementing DAP and student's externalizing symptoms is critically important. The purpose of this study was to gain teacher's perspectives about the behavioral struggles of children who maintain externalizing behavior problems in classrooms where developmentally appropriate practices are intact.

History and Development of Developmentally Appropriate Practice Guidelines

To fully understand the implications of DAP on our students, it is important to know and understand how it has evolved throughout the years. As early as the beginning of the 1900's leaders in education began to realize a need for organization and alignment of the early education curriculum. At this time there was a booming market for out-of-home childcare and an extremely wide variety in the scope and sequence of current early education, specifically in the learning that occurred in pre-school and kindergarten settings. For this reason, the field of education began to look for a way to obtain accreditation and certification systems for its educators. During this process, a group of nineteen professionals worked together to discuss and agree upon the most appropriate

way to teach young children. This collaboration resulted in three famous reports: one by Susan Blow that advocated for a structured, teacher-directed education, one by Patty Smith-Hill that advocated for play-based, child-centered education, and one by Lucy Wheelock that formed a compromising, middle ground between the two prior reports. Later, Patty Smith-Hill formed the National Association of Nursery Education (NANE) in order to create humane standards for the exploding populations of out-of-home childcare. As educational and childcare demands continued to soar throughout the 1930's, NANE published its first full set of childcare standards. From this point forward, tension began to steadily mount between educational standards and what classroom practices were deemed as best for child development (Bredekamp, 1997).

After NANE published its childcare standards, the early education system fell into a standardized pattern with little variability or progression. By the 1980's, perceptions that US children were falling behind academically, compared to other countries, skyrocketed. This worry triggered the beginning of a rapid downward escalation of academic practices and the encouragement of didactic, teacher-directed, learning styles (Van Horn et al., 2005). During this time NANE was rebranded as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and released the first set of DAP guidelines in 1987 as a solution to the current public dissatisfaction toward the early educational system. NAEYC's guidelines centralized the child as an active learner and participant in the educational process. These guidelines acknowledged teachers as classroom experts; however, the guidelines specified educators must be explicitly knowledgeable in the following three areas: (a) general principles of human development and learning, (b) individual characteristics and experiences of the students in their

classrooms, (c) social and cultural contexts in which their students exist (Bredekamp, 1997; Van Horn et al., 2005).

In addition to setting a protocol for early education, the NAEYC standards in 1987 opened a door for discussion about the quality of elementary student's education and, in particular, the downward escalation of public-school curriculum. From this point forward, more was expected from students at an earlier age. During this time, many schools began using educational approaches such as rote learning and whole group instruction in hopes of increasing knowledge acquisition and pleasing the disgruntled public. These practices often occurred at the expense of child-initiated activities such as exploratory play and projects (Bredekamp, 1997).

In the mid 2000's, DAP guidelines went through yet another overhaul and now follow the framework of intentional teaching (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). This framework is similar to the prior standards but also considers the child's interests, social/emotional wellbeing, and their culture when making academic decisions. The 2009 revision encompasses the idea that teachers should create different academic goals for individual students and carefully consider which method of instruction would be most beneficial. This framework falls somewhere between the child-centered and didactic-focused methods while still following a developmentally sensitive model. Epstein (2006) explains that in the intentional teaching model both 'child-guided,' instances where the child negotiates activities, and 'adult-guided,' instances where a teacher directs the learning, are crucial to the early educational process. This combination of variables requires educators to carefully differentiate instruction across students in their classroom. (Erickson, 2018).

Instructional Methods Related to DAP

Level of DAP in the classroom often comes down to the educators preferred teaching style. Instruction methods tend to vary between teachers and settings; however, most commonly, practices tend to fall within either the child-centered or skills-centered dichotomy (Morrow et al., 2011). Regardless of preference, there is a plethora of disagreement in the literature when it comes to these instructional methods; both methods have been shown to have positive and negative aspects. It is also important to note that most research on this topic revolves around literacy acquisition. Children who receive literacy education early achieve more than those who do not (e.g. Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Snow et al., 1998), but the selection of the best instructional method remains controversial (Erickson, 2018).

According to Erickson (2018), child-centered instruction tends to focus on increasing children's social, emotional, and physical growth, whereas the didactic, skills-based approach tends to focus more intensely on direct instruction and repeated drills. Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) state the didactic method falls in line with the theory of behaviorism. In behaviorism, learning occurs as a response to something in the child's environment, for example, a teacher-produced stimulus. Also, in this theory, children have been found to learn more quickly when their errors are corrected immediately as to stop them from acquiring false knowledge. This view can be further characterized as teacher directed learning that consists of rote memorization and drill and practice routines. In contrast, child-centered practices tend to fall in line with the works of Piaget and Vygotsky. Piaget and Vygotsky believed that children learned through self-discovered experiences within their environment and that teaching outside of the child's

current level of understanding was not useful. The child centered method emphasizes understanding the whole child including their social, emotional, and cognitive needs in the classroom. In this view, it is important that children have the opportunity to learn through physical and social experiences; furthermore, instruction should be informal and relevant to each child (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006).

Many people blame strict learning standards, such as the ones created by acts like No Child Left Behind (NCLB), for the switch from a preference for child-centered learning to today's mostly didactic focus, but learning standards in general are not the root of the problem. In 2002, NAEYC published a position statement to clarify their perspective on the validity of using learning standards with early learners. NAEYC addressed the concerns of the public by warning that there were risks for young children if learning standards were not applied correctly. They continued by providing advice for the structure of learning standards. The position statement reflected four key requirements: (1) learning standards should emphasize developmentally appropriate outcomes; (2) learning standards should be created in an informed and inclusive process; (3) assessment and implementation strategies should be appropriate for young children; and (4) learning standards should be accompanied by strong support from childhood programs, professionals, and families (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 2002).

In 2006, Barbara Bowman, a former president of NAEYC, spoke about learning standards at a NAEYC professional development keynote address. At this address she wanted educators to understand that having learning standards does not mean every child will follow the same academic path. Rather, learning standards provide a clear vison for

what we hope each student will learn (Bowman, 2006). While NAEYC was working to show the benefits of developmentally appropriate learning standards, the organization's efforts seemed to be largely ignored as standards such as NCLB and Common Core clearly stated milestones students must surpass by the end of each grade. By requiring students to acquire specific knowledge by the end of each grade level, the education system fails to account for what is developmentally appropriate for each student. Another issue that stems from the current NCLB standards is that they were not specifically created with the learning needs of young children in mind. The standards for kindergarten students directly mirror those of other grades with content being the only differentiating factor. In turn, this means most kindergarten standards do not reflect the core values of NAEYC's DAP recommendations (Erickson, 2018).

Because of standards that do not coincide with DAP, such as the ones set by NCLB and Common Core, teachers have to make difficult decisions in the classroom when it comes to which instructional method they will employ. They must choose if they believe it is more important to push academic instruction, DAP, or the most difficult task, a combination of the two. Interestingly, the learning standards implemented by NCLB do not prescribe a specific teaching method to ensure student success. This means teachers are free to choose whichever instructional style they prefer. Even so, the strong focus on academic achievement appears to persuade most educators to use didactic instructional methods. Those that do choose to promote a child-centered classroom often face strict administrative and parental pressures discouraging them from using DAP on a daily basis (Goldstein, 2007a).

While it is clear that child-centered education provides more opportunity for implementing DAP in the classroom, these instructional practices have a few educational drawbacks that are worth noting. According to Shoval, Sharir, & Shulruf (2014), a major difficulty in trying to incorporate solely child-centered learning is that not all children are successful in self-directing their activities toward learning. Most children will gravitate toward play that involves social or gross motor skills rather than academic skill building. Teachers may also find it difficult to scaffold an entire classroom's learning at one time as there are many simultaneously occurring and changing dynamics inside the kindergarten classroom. Using this model, it is unlikely that all children will receive the required amount of support needed for consistent learning. Lastly, teachers may receive criticism for using DAP in the classroom as administrators, parents, or upper-grade teachers may not understand its necessity (Goldstein, 2007a).

These reasons explain why educators make the decision to implement a didactic style classroom. However, the didactic method also includes its own set of negative aspects. While research shows that there are appropriate times when highly structured, teacher-led methods can show their benefit, this educational method often fails to account for individual differences and the differentiated learning styles of students (Parker & Neuharth Pritchett, 2006). Researchers Pyle & Luce-Kapler (2014), state that a didactic, skills-focused approach typically consists of whole-class instruction layered with repeated drills. This can prevent educators from noticing the needs of individual children as their skill levels develop at different paces. This impact is more pronounced when children are between the ages of 5-7, as a major shift in cognition takes place. During this time, it is normal to see a wide range of cognitive functioning. This range of cognitive

abilities is yet another reason that differentiated, child-centered instruction is an essential component of early education (Erickson, 2018).

Accountability Era: Impact on Instructional Practices and DAP

In 2001 the No Child Left Behind act was created. This act mandated academic standards in mathematics and language arts for third through eighth grade students. These standards also require annual testing to denote mastery in these areas. With the enactment of NCLB in 2001, teachers had to reevaluate the way they incorporated subjects into their day as to include things not previously considered necessary. With this pressure, teachers often feel guilty or irresponsible for teaching topics that did not make it on the list of NCLB learning standards, even if they believe the children will benefit from the lesson. Despite these pressures, teachers in Goldstein's 2008 study admit that they continue to make instructional decisions based upon their own predispositions and not only from the pressure they feel from current learning standards and members of their administration. It is important to consider that educators are simply individuals interpreting and deciding how to accomplish these standards rather than technicians who all fix a problem in the same manner. Simply put, all educators go about teaching learning standards in a different, individualistic manner (Goldstein, 2008).

Goldstein (2007b) mentions that with new curriculum standards associated with NCLB, all grades have to adapt to new expectations, but no grade was affected more drastically than kindergarten. Kindergarten in the U.S. has been changing rapidly since the early 2000's. With these changes, kindergarten teachers are facing educational demands that were previously left to higher grade level educators. Not only is it best practices to meet student's needs developmentally, but now kindergarteners must master

a variety of standard mandated skills. “This has created a phenomenon known as accountability shove down (Goldstein, 2007a).” Directives such as Common Core and NCLB, now known as ESSA, have emphasized a stronger focus on the child’s cognition and test scores rather than their social and behavioral growth which should be considered equally as important (Alford et al., 2016). Haberman (1991) suggests that this kind of environment stifles student curiosity and limits academic achievement. Research suggests standards and mandates like these may cause teachers to stray from child-centered practices in favor of skill acquisition and repeated drills in order to improve academic outcomes. While strong academic scores are a glaring positive, at what cost are they to the children’s social and behavioral skillset (Erickson, 2018)?

Before NCLB, public school kindergarten was not ruled by the standards typically placed on early education classrooms. Kindergarten classrooms were considered too vastly different to be included seamlessly with the grades 1-12. This shielded kindergarten from most administrative scrutiny allowing teachers a wide range of freedom and independence to teach their students in whatever way they thought would best serve their students (NAEYC, 2005). Now the divide between didactic and child-centered practices is a blurred area where kindergarten teachers are mostly preparing their students for elementary school academic standards while doing their best to squeeze in as many developmentally appropriate experiences as their limited time will allow (Erickson, 2018).

Teacher Perceptions Related to DAP

According to Erickson (2018), a common theme in the DAP literature is teacher perceptions of pushed down academics and their correlation with changes in the way

DAP looks in the classroom. Research suggests that many teachers feel forced to produce results due to standards like ESSA and Common Core, but, more often than not, knowledgeable professionals still make an effort to include DAP in their curriculum. Most teachers struggle with the disconnect between their beliefs about best practices and the increasingly narrow curriculum they are provided (Goldstein, 2007a). The literature summarizes the inner battle as the presentation of two extremes: teachers' strong desire to provide children with developmentally appropriate experiences vs. teachers' requirement to teach a mandated curriculum. This dilemma is much of a double-edged sword; by addressing the learning standards teachers ensure that students are prepared for the academics of the next grade, but this neglects the benefits of using a developmentally appropriate approach which can increase students social and problem-solving skills (Goldstein, 2007a).

According to Goldstein's 2007a study, teachers commonly feel pressure due to the current accountability and learning standards. This often causes teachers to move away from using DAP in the classroom. For example, kindergarten teachers in Goldstein's 2007a study explained that they felt pressure not only to increase the rate at which children met academic standards, but they also felt intense pressure from parents and first grade teachers. It is typical to find teachers who believe in and value DAP, as it is best practice and socially accepted, but when looking into the discrepancy between beliefs and teacher actions in the classroom, most will attribute their lack of DAP to environmental stressors such as strict administrators or a necessity to meet achievement standards (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Goldstein (2007a) explains that implementation guidelines for DAP standards are meant to provide learning goals and are

not a prescribed curriculum. This should free up kindergarten teachers to incorporate DAP into their instructional approaches in ways that philosophically and procedurally fit within their values and beliefs; however, the heavy emphasis on high achievement has made it tough for teachers to justify the use of play and other DAP in their daily routines. In a study by Parker and Neuharth-Prichett (2006), researchers collected qualitative data from 34 kindergarten teachers in an urban setting. Parker and Neuharth-Prichett developed a six-question survey and interviewed each individual participant. Interestingly, the teachers had been organized into three groups indicated by their teaching style: DAP focused (9 teachers); didactic focused (9 teachers); and combination (16 teachers). Regardless of instructional style, all 34 teachers agreed that the structure of kindergarten had made a distinctive switch from a developmental focus to a more rigorous, academic focus. One teacher noted that previously kindergarten focused on social learning and exploration, whereas now the focus feels like preparing the children for the academic rigors of first grade. One teacher in the study suggested, "I think this is what first grade used to be, (p.71)" emphasizing the effects of pushed down academics.

All 34 teachers in Parker and Neuharth-Prichett's 2006 study also noted the pressure they felt to ensure student readiness for first grade. The researchers found teachers that lead a child-centered classroom were more likely to feel this pressure than those who led a didactic style classroom. All 9 child-centered teachers incorporated much more DAP in their daily activities, and this contributed to their worry that their students may not meet first-grade teachers' expectations. For the 16 teachers who combined instructional methods, only about half felt the same kind of intense pressure. Some of the participants attributed this pressure to first grade teacher expectations; however, many of

the teachers in this study also noted that the pressure they were feeling was internal. The teachers had a strong urge to assure that their students did well and were prepared for first grade. A majority of the teachers also stated they were able to alleviate some of their stress by openly communicating with the first-grade teachers and fully understanding their expectations.

Goldstein (2007b) found that teachers felt upset by the removal of play centers and other developmentally appropriate areas in place of more standardized academic demands. The teachers explained that they valued the role that play takes in the development and growth of children. They were also disappointed in their school systems choice of removing centers in the classroom such as housekeeping and kitchen areas. One teacher expressed that more than anything else, she felt like she was trying to be a first-grade teacher to a class of kindergarteners. Another teacher in the study added that she felt as though she were pressuring her 5-year-olds to act like 10-year-olds. With the new academic standards, all teachers in this study agreed that they now must cover much more content in a year than previously; this has several negative implications, namely, teachers must cover more information per day and their overall pace must be much quicker. With such a full schedule they teachers often feel an extreme pressure to fit everything in (Goldstein, 2007b). Another teacher mentioned that she used to be able to do things with her students just for fun, but that has been eliminated for more time spent on language and mathematics.

Play Related to DAP

In addition to teacher perceptions of DAP, the issue of play is one of the most common themes that appears in the literature. The concept of play for young learners is

often portrayed as something vastly different than academic learning. However, according to a literature review by Hart et al. (1997), by the end of one academic year direct instruction classrooms showed smaller gains in behavior and academic outcomes than those shown by children involved in play based or DAP focused classrooms. In other words, instruction type plays a critical role in student engagement which leads to student achievement. Through purposeful play and other developmentally appropriate classroom instructional practices, children develop stronger social-emotional skills. This means children develop higher levels of self-regulation at a younger age resulting in less internalizing and externalizing problems in the future (e.g., Berk & Meyers, 2013; Elias & Berk, 2002).

All 15 kindergarten teachers in Pyle and Danniels (2017) qualitative study actively value what play can provide for their students. Teacher 12 summed up the holistic side of this approach by stating that play in the classroom "gives them [the students] the opportunity to grow physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively, (P.280)." Nine teachers within this study viewed play as not only a developmentally appropriate activity, but also as an academic tool. These teachers describe play as a valuable activity that allows the students to explore, make mistakes, investigate, and participate in trial-and-error learning. These nine teachers also agreed that opportunities for traditional or free play exist alongside teacher-guided play. The other six teachers in this study remained divided on the decision to include scaffolded academic experiences into play or simply let students free play. Pyle and Danniels (2017) criticize the value of simple free play even though it may be the most developmentally appropriate. Instead, they actively endorse teacher-directed play as a way to encourage children's cognitive,

emotional, and social growth. Teacher-directed play does not have to occur at the expense of DAP; this type of play can present the opportunity to mix DAP and academic instruction. This connection, however, does not usually occur organically. Teachers play an important role by scaffolding academic experiences into young student's play.

Academics Related to DAP

Another important factor of DAP to consider is academic benefit. In a literature review by Van Horn et al. in 2005, the researchers compared the results of 17 studies involving academic achievement between classrooms with more or less DAP. These studies were chosen because they were quantitative, rather than qualitative in nature. The authors were looking to compare the results from multiple studies and reevaluate the statistical procedures used in each. They found that several of the 17 studies would have non-significant findings if the original authors used more appropriate statistical procedures. After recalculating and comparing these 17 quantitative studies the findings were mixed and varied by student age and subject area. For example, direct, didactic instruction produced better academic outcomes for reading; however, for math, science, and social skills, where visuals and manipulatives are important, the child-centered, developmentally appropriate frame of teaching produced better academic outcomes.

In a study by Stipek et al (1998), the researchers found similar results to those found in Van Horn et al. (2005). Stipek et al. (1998) collected data from 42 classrooms comprised of 228 preschool and kindergarten students. Four types of data were collected over the course of the research: teacher experience, child achievement, child enjoyment, and child behavior. When considering academic achievement, Stipek et al. (1998) found the classrooms with less DAP showed higher achievement in both reading, math, and on the

McCarthy numeric scales. Longitudinal research suggested that these gains were maintained through second grade. However, students in higher DAP classrooms showed better achievement on the McCarthy puzzle-solving task and often scored higher on oral vocabulary. This literature may lead us to conclude that teachers that incorporate both didactic and DAP teaching styles across different subjects may produce students with more academic success than those who stick directly to one teaching method.

Behavior Related to DAP

We should also consider the effects of DAP on children's behavior in both the present and future. If incorporating more DAP into children's school life shows fewer negative behaviors, such as externalizing problems and office referrals, then its impact may be well worth the extra effort it takes to implement, even if there were varying academic benefits. Van Horn et al. (2005) also looked into the behavioral side effects of incorporating more or less DAP within the 17 articles they reviewed. Here the researchers found much more consistency and positive effect than for academics. Most of the behavior and DAP research in kindergarten students revolved around stress. The researchers gathered that all students show some levels of stress throughout the day; however, it seems that children in high DAP settings may become more stressed during ridged activities, and children in lower DAP settings seem to be stressed be more open-ended settings. For example, several of the studies from Van Horn et al.'s literature review cited that children in less developmentally appropriate classrooms showed stress while working in whole group activities and students in high DAP settings showed more stress during activities like transitions. Overall, they found the classrooms with more

DAP produced students with more positive prosocial outcomes ranging from increased creativity to reduced stress.

Alford et al. (2016) examined data previously obtained in a 2010 research project. The research included data from 91 teachers and 450 pre-kindergarten through second grades students across 21 schools. The researchers were interested in how students responded behaviorally in relation to style of teacher instruction. Out of all the research reviewed, only two results were significant. One significant result showed students in classrooms rated as having higher DAP were more likely to be on task, working cooperatively with their peers, and freely exploring their environment. The authors' second significant finding indicated students in didactic, or less developmentally appropriate classrooms were more likely to be distracted or off task and showed overall less positive behavioral, motivational, and academic outcomes. A study by Stipek et al. (1998) also added to the social skills side of DAP research, the students in higher DAP classrooms made larger gains on problem solving and language skills. Children involved in high DAP classrooms were also less likely to experience significant stress and anxiety and scored higher on positive prosocial attributes, creativity, and positive attitude toward school. Children in the didactic setting scored an overall more negative affect and were more likely to be noncompliant to teacher requests.

Jones & Gullo (1999) participated in an ongoing research project involving 293 first grade students who had recently graduated from an early education center in the area. The author's purpose was to link how teacher's beliefs affected their instructional practices in the classroom. In this study they found that classrooms in which teacher's beliefs reflected DAP produced students with higher levels of social competence than the

children in either of the other two comparison groups. Conversely, teachers who believed their role was solely to deliver information and that children were the passive recipients of knowledge lead to students that were less creative and less socially competent overall as compared to the high DAP class.

In summary, the research about the academic and behavioral impact of DAP points to a few reoccurring themes. First, results for the academic benefits of DAP are mixed and divided between subject area. Second, the research reported mixed results on the academic benefits of DAP in the classroom (Van Horn et al., 2005), but an important and recurrent finding in the literature is the benefits of using a mixed instruction technique (Stipek et al., 1998). The research supports using an instruction method that incorporates both child-centered and didactic-style learning depending upon the subject. For example, it is beneficial to the student, in subjects such as reading, to receive direct, explicit instruction whereas science or math may be better in a more exploratory setting. Third, the research that links positive behavior outcomes and DAP is extraordinarily narrow and typically only points to reduction of internalizing behaviors. Overall, there was very limited information focused on the impact of DAP on externalizing problem behaviors.

Study Purpose

The phenomena of pushed down academics has created a large divide amongst the teaching community splitting most educators into two camps: child-centered or didactic-focused. Teachers have recognized both positive and negative aspects of DAP and reported ambivalence when deciding how much DAP to work into their daily routine. Basic learning standards, (also considered beginnings of pushed down academics), were

originated for the purpose of assuring that students are ready for the rigors of the next grade, but they have also developed into a mountain of stress for many classroom teachers and students.

DAP in the classroom is helpful for increasing children's social competencies and lowering internalizing behaviors such as stress and anxiety (McMullen, 1999), but questions still remain when considering more severe problem behaviors and their relation to DAP in the classroom. The body of research related to DAP is lacking in its guidance for how to support children with problem behaviors, in particular, those with externalizing or disruptive behaviors. I found limited research focused on the relationship between DAP and its use in mediating children's externalizing behaviors. Children with externalizing behavior problems are at risk of school failure because of the impact of their problem behaviors on their ability to benefit from classroom instruction and activities. According to Hart, Maharaj, and Graziano (2019), children that receive treatment for externalizing problems have been found to have high levels of school readiness and ability to transition into the early school years after PreK.

These consequences have a cumulative effect in that when children miss out on instruction due to their externalizing behaviors, this limits their ability to benefit from more advanced instruction as they move from preschool to formal schooling. Early intervention is key in helping these children become successful in a more structured classroom setting. DAP likely varies in its level of implementation across the majority of our kindergarten classrooms meaning that its positive impact on behavior also varies. In my view, when DAP is implemented as intended, it serves as a foundational tier one technique for classroom management and promotes social/emotional development and

self-control that limits the development of more severe externalizing problem behaviors. Tier one serves the academic and behavioral needs of 80-90 percent of students within each grade and throughout each school (Wexler, 2018). However, at what point do teachers see Tier one DAP as not being sufficient for supporting children with externalizing behavior problems? Does it work for some students and not others? If so, why is there this difference? Can DAP be tweaked in ways to better fit individual student needs? Overall, I hypothesize that throughout the following interviews I will not only find the answers to these questions, but I will likely find a negative association of current academic standards paired with a positive association of DAP in the classroom.

CHAPTER II: METHOD

Participants

Participants were recruited from Wilson County Schools, a suburban school setting located in Middle Tennessee. The goal was to recruit three current kindergarten teachers with early childhood teaching licensure, across three different schools within the school district. Due to the current global pandemic and lack of response to various recruitment attempts, the final participant pool consisted of three teachers from two different elementary schools. The participants each noted having a degree in early childhood education and years of experience varying from 10-24 years.

Procedures

Written informed consent was collected from all participants. This study consisted of five phases: Survey, Classroom Observations, Individual Interviews, Data Analysis, and Group Discussion. I collected survey and interview data over the course of several weeks in December of 2020.

Phase One: Survey

The survey, see appendix A, was placed in each participant's mailbox at their respective schools that so they could retrieve it without contact at their convenience. The survey was 19 questions long, and it was expected to take no more than 20 minutes to complete. The survey included questions about each participant's years of experience, degree specifications, teaching style, their opinions of DAP, and level of DAP they perceive themselves to use in the classroom.

This short survey was adapted from NAEYC's DAP checklist which was specifically designed to assist administrators address best practices when talking to

teachers about DAP (Clarke, 2016). There were no current norms available for the NAEYC version of the survey. Some questions were modified to fit the setting and circumstances of the study; however, the main difference was this study's version of the survey utilized a Likert scale rating system rather than an open-ended answer system. Likert Scale descriptors ranged range from 'very descriptive of my practices' to 'not at all descriptive of my practices.' See Appendix A for a copy of the survey. I was not interested in computing the Likert scale ratings into quantitative results and did not compute internal consistency. Instead, I carefully reviewed each teacher's results to help me gather an idea of each teacher's perceived level of DAP use in their classroom. As I reviewed each survey, I noted where each participant was similar to the group and how their answers individualized their own teaching style. I used my interpretation of the survey results as a conversation starting point in each teacher's individual interviews.

Phase Two: Classroom Observations

I spent approximately two hours, over the course of data collection, observing in each participant's classroom. This included both periods of direct instruction time (math or literacy instruction) and some more independent activities for the students. I observed DAP being used in the classroom in order to gain a better understanding of what DAP looks like firsthand. I examined things such as classroom set-up, rules and expectations, how each teacher responds to and engages with their students, and the handling of transition times.

Phase Three: Individual Interviews

In phase three, I interviewed each of the three teachers, one-on-one, to gain additional perspective of their views of developmentally appropriate practices in the

classroom. All interviews were conducted over a video conferencing platform called Zoom. Each interview was recorded for the purpose of being transcribed and analyzed for themes in the data.

The purpose of this interview was to expand upon the participant's answers from the original survey and to probe further discussion of how each participant perceives that DAP affects their student's behavior, particularly students that frequently show externalizing traits. The list of discussion questions (see below for samples) was sent to the participants in advance to ease any anxieties about the meeting and to give them time to prepare and thoroughly think about their answers. Each interview was semi-structured in nature, meaning there was a list of questions on hand to prompt discussion; however, I was open to the direction the conversation took as it happened. My intent was for the interview to last no more than 30 minutes in order to respect the participant's time and to more easily fit into a teacher's planning or break time. One interview did run slightly longer than the 30-minute time frame, while the other two ran between 20 and 30 minutes in length.

Some questions that were used to facilitate discussion follow: "Can you describe what implementing developmentally appropriate practices means to you?", "What does it look like when you use developmentally appropriate practices in your classroom?", "How do you feel the current academic standards affect your ability to implement developmentally appropriate practices in your classroom?", "Do you feel the current academic standards are developmentally appropriate for your students?", "How do you feel your implementation of DAP affects your student's academic outcomes? Behavior outcomes?", and "Do you have students in your classroom exhibiting behaviors that are

difficult to manage, despite your implementation of DAP?" The creation of these specific questions was driven by the purpose of this study and were partially adapted from the NAEYC position statement on developmentally appropriate practices (NAEYC, 2009).

Phase Four: Data Analysis

After each individual interview, the audio was transcribed into word document format using a program called Otter.ai. This program helped to transcribe each interview into word document format. Each word document was input into a program called MAXQDA, or Max Qualitative Data Analysis. This program is used to code and analyze different types of qualitative data. Using MAXQDA, the transcribed interviews were coded. I coded seven different perceptions: (a) negative perception of DAP in the classroom; (b) positive perception of DAP in the classroom: (c) negative perception of current academic standards: (d) positive perception of academic standards: (e) negative perceptions of DAPs role in mitigating problem behaviors: (f) positive perceptions of DAPs role in mitigating problem behaviors; and (g) Other. This category provided room for any prominent perceptions I had not previously noted.

After each set of interviews were transcribed and coded, I looked for reoccurring themes and patterns in the data. I looked specifically to see if there were themes connecting positive associations of DAP with behavior management and to see if there were positive associations of DAP paired with negative associations of academic standards as these associations are at the center of this study's purpose. I also analyzed the data to see if themes emerged that I did not consider in the study purpose. Using this data, I developed points to facilitate meaningful discussion in the final group interview. Some of these points included what works and doesn't work when considering DAP, why

some students are not being reached by what I view as a tier 1 strategy, and what can we alter in order to better serve students that present with externalizing problems.

Phase 5: Group Discussion

All 3 participants took part in a group discussion via Zoom that lasted approximately 30 minutes. Some discussion points, derived from the survey and previous interviews, were sent to the participants in advance. Topics discussed included common themes and perceptions that appeared in the data from interview one and were noted in the previous section. This final discussion session allowed participants to use the themes I gathered from the surveys and interviews to create and share problem-solving strategies that may help teachers better serve their students that present with behavior concerns in the future.

CHAPTER III: RESULTS

Survey Results

Unremarkably, the results of the survey were very similar between participants. Each teacher reported high levels of DAP use in their classroom. See Table 1.

Table 1
Individual Answers Provided on DAP Survey

Questions	Teacher One	Teacher Two	Teacher Three
1	Mostly Descriptive of my practices	Mostly Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices
2	Mostly Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices	Mostly Descriptive of my practices
3	Mostly Descriptive of my practices	Mostly Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices
4	Mostly Descriptive of my practices	Mostly Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices
5	Somewhat Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices
6	Somewhat Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices
7	Mostly Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices
8	Not Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices	Somewhat Descriptive of my practices
9	Mostly Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices
10	Not Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices	Very Descriptive of my practices
11	Yes	Yes	Yes
12	Somewhat	Yes	Yes
13	Somewhat	Yes	Yes
14	Somewhat	Yes	Yes
15	Yes	Yes	Yes
16	Somewhat	Yes	Yes
17	Yes	Yes	Yes
18	6 of 6 strategies checked	6 of 6 strategies checked	6 of 6 strategies checked
19	5 of 5 learning formats checked	5 of 5 learning formats checked	5 of 5 learning formats checked

**See Appendix A for full survey*

Each participant reported that it "very descriptive of their practices" to use various learning formats (e.g., large and small group instruction, learning centers, outdoor time, and use of a daily schedule) to promote developmentally appropriate learning for their

kindergarten students. Each participant noted it was “Not very descriptive of my practices” in the area of checking with other teachers/service providers about each student’s well-being and progress toward their goals. While all participants appeared to be very student oriented, they did not appear to be as cognizant of student progress outside of the realm of their own classroom. All participants rated themselves as “Very descriptive pf my classroom” when asked about the area of noticing the factors that influence each individual child. These factors include things as child’s mood, health, engagement, mental health, etc. Overall, each teacher’s answers on the survey support their use of developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom.

Observation Summary

I spent between one to two hours in each teacher’s classroom in order to observe how each participant’s classroom environment and practices align with developmentally appropriate practices.

Classroom Setting

One of the most notable aspects of each classroom was their center set-up. Each class featured an assortment of centers for students to explore including art stations, kitchen/ home living stations, building and puzzle stations, reading stations, and technology stations. Each classroom was organized, colorful, and engaging for its students. Students in all three classrooms were seated in a small group setting rather than in individual desks. The walls in each classroom were covered with educational posters and organizers that were simple to read, brightly colored, and offered visual reinforcement of the skills in which the students were learning. Each classroom had a distinct poster displaying classroom rules. The rules were short, simple, and to the point.

The rules were typically limited to 3 to 5 ideas that centered around being kind to classmates, working hard, and following directions. Lastly, all classrooms appeared organized despite the number of activities available to their students in each classroom. For example, each classroom had specific areas for student supplies and places to turn in papers or other work. Each station or center appeared to be self-contained, and the students seemed to be in the habit of organizing the area when they were finished. Each station in the classrooms either had bookshelves or had its items neatly packed away in storage containers.

Routine and Handling of Transitions and Disruptions in Routine

Each class had a clear routine that was partially dictated by the school's master schedule and partially crafted by each individual teacher. Teacher one noted, during my first observation, that her students knew her routine and understood that they could pick a station to play at upon classroom arrival (which happened to be when I was there). Her students appeared to be able to direct themselves to the appropriate morning activities without much additional prompting from the teacher due to the regularity the classroom's daily schedule provided. There were still some occasions when students needed reminding for things like keeping their voices low or being kind to each other, but overall, the typicality of a daily routine appeared to help students stay on task and mitigate disruptive behaviors. When generalizing this idea across classrooms, it was clear that all participants in the study followed daily routines. If the routines were different from normal, each teacher was sure to explain why and how that would affect the student's day. For example, when observing in teacher three's class, the internet at the school had gone down. The students were expecting to do a video math lesson this day

but were unable to complete. The students were sad, but compliantly returned to their seats when their teacher said that they would make it up with two math videos tomorrow. The students were able to move on with their written math work, but it was clear that the disruption in their schedule led to more unwanted behaviors than were expected. The students were very talkative and needed many prompts to sit, work quietly, and pay attention to the lesson. The students also appeared wiggly and fidgety in their seats throughout this direct instruction math lesson.

Another thing that I observed as helpful in curbing problem behavior was prompting and transition warnings given by the participants. When it was almost time to change tasks, all of the participants would give their students reminders. For example, teacher one once said to her students, “You have five minutes until carpet time, you may want to start cleaning up.” It was a gentle prompt for the students to begin transitioning from a preferred activity to a less preferred activity. While these prompts are developmentally appropriate and seemed to work well in all classrooms, they did not prevent stragglers from being upset or behind when it was time to transition. There were often one to two students in each class that needed additional prompting or one-on-one attention in order to transition from one task to another. While these students did not seem to elevate to the point of a disruption, they often needed the teacher’s attention for several minutes. While this may seem miniscule, if there are several minutes of lost instructional time for every transition that the classroom must go through each day, that can end up being hours of missed instruction cumulatively.

Teacher Instruction Related to Behavior

The participants engaged in instances of direct instruction and child directed learning. The participants also often used center rotations as a way to work in small group or individual instruction. For example, one teacher allowed the students 15 minutes in a center of their choice while she worked one-on-one with each student on sight word fluency. Even during direct instruction, I observed occurrences of developmentally appropriate practices. For example, teacher two often used child friendly language, positive praise, and actively activated prior knowledge while walking through her lessons. Teacher one also demonstrated DAP by giving her class verbal prompts and reminders paired with visual and auditory cues when asking students to answer questions. It was noted that students displaying behavior problems often needed additional prompting or one-on-one instruction when changing tasks, but overall, the students responded well to these classroom environments.

Behavior Implications Based Upon Observations

It was observed that some students with externalizing traits still required extra prompting, attention, and one-on one interaction in order to comply and blend in with the class, despite teachers providing DAP. Most of the time, the student's that required individualized attention or prompting appeared to have skills deficits or external factors, such as medical diagnoses, that disadvantaged them to the complete benefits of using DAP in the classroom. For example, some students I observed needed additional help to stay organized and understand how to pack or put away their belongings. Similarly, some students with deficits in attention or hyperactivity also needed additional prompting in order to participate fully in the classroom. This may indicate that, despite a high level of

DAP, students displaying externalizing and internalizing traits may always require additional support in order to be successful in the classroom.

Interview One Summary

I coded seven different perceptions: (a) negative perception of DAP in the classroom; (b) positive perception of DAP in the classroom: (c) negative perception of current academic standards; (d) positive perception of academic standards; (e) negative perceptions of DAPs role in mitigating problem behaviors; (f) positive perceptions of DAPs role in mitigating problem behaviors; and (g) Other to encompass opinions I had not previously expected. Occurrences of each code were noted in Figure 1 as follows:

Figure 1
Occurrences of Negative Codes in Interview One

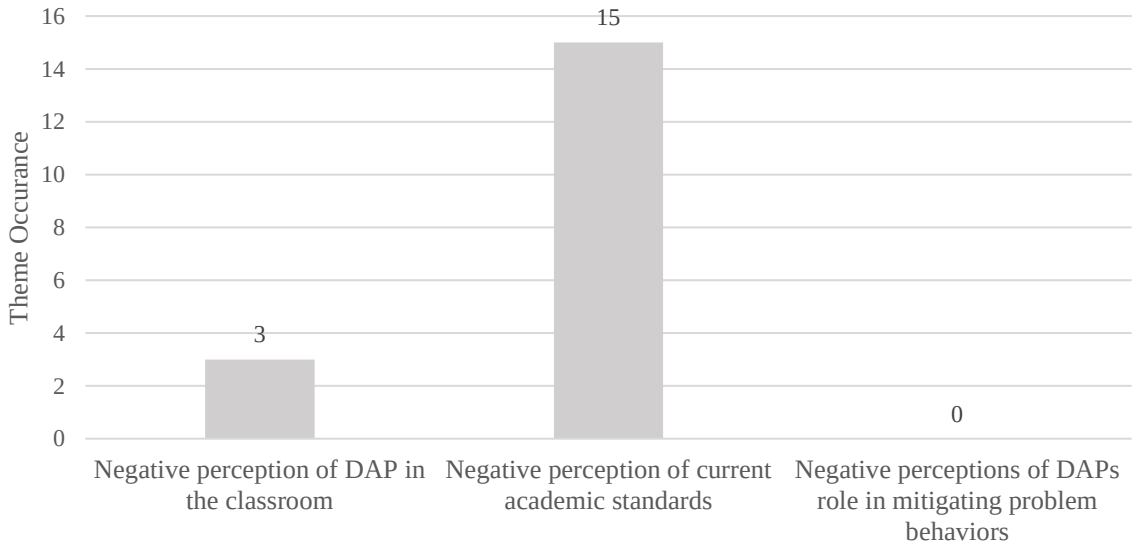
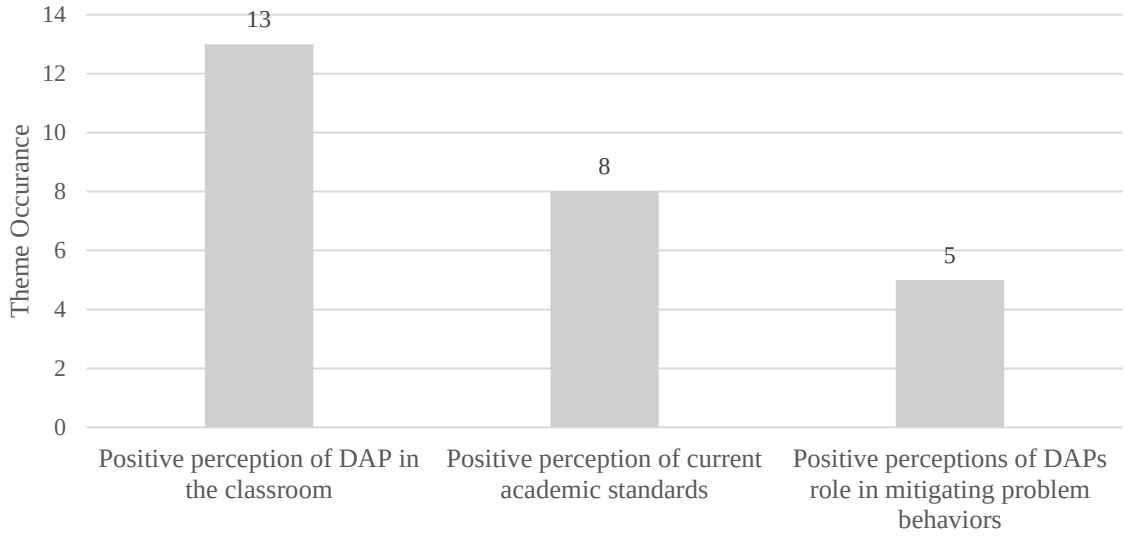


Figure 2
Occurrences of Positive Codes in Interview One



Negative Associations of DAP in the Classroom

There were three coded sections of the various interviews that noted negative associations of DAP in the classroom. I did not expect to find this association. Upon digging further into this theme, I found that all negative associations of DAP were paired with anxious feelings regarding their principal's views regarding the use of DAP. On multiple occurrences, the participants stressed that they can sometimes feel anxious that their administration favors drill and practice instruction versus exploratory or play-based learning. The participants agreed that in previous decades, it was more acceptable for students to learn through play, but now, with the push down of academic standards, administration may not view play-based learning as beneficial as it was in the past. Teacher two stated specifically, "We're fortunate our principals have young children, and they know that they need to play. So, they're a little more laid back than some

administrations, but, at the end of the day, they're concerned of their bosses walking in kindergarten."

Positive Associations of DAP in the Classroom

There were approximately 13 coded sections showing positive perceptions of DAP in the classroom shared during the first round of interviews. The most frequently occurring theme I found in this area pertained to DAP and teachers' ability to cater to a wide range of skills in the classroom. Teacher three noted, "I have students in my room that can read probably on a fifth-grade level and spell revisions. Then I have some that can't write the letter A. So absolutely, it is the phase. It's the whole point of, you know, starting school in kindergarten." Her comment demonstrates the wide skill range that is often seen within a kindergarten classroom. My interviews with the other two participants also reiterated that DAP allows teachers to differentiate their instruction and practices based upon their student's skill level.

Negative Associations of Academic Standards

The hypothesis of this study states that teachers will likely have negative interpretations of current academic standards paired with positive interpretations of DAP. I coded 15 negative interpretations of current academic standards, in interview one, that were similar to the opinions presented in current research. All participants noted that the standards used to teach kindergarteners today are very different than those used in previous decades. Teacher one noted that, "you just think kindergarten is what it was in the 80's, or the 90's. It's not." They also agreed that the standards are more academically rigorous which eliminates time that teachers previously had for things like movement breaks and play-based learning. Teacher three added, "they [those who create the

standards] want it to be all work, work, work, when a lot of developmentally appropriate things for kindergarten needs to be more play focused." The participants all noted that with the push down of the standards, it can be difficult to incorporate the amount of movement needed to keep a kindergartener engaged, especially if the teacher is using drill and practice type instruction.

Positive Associations of Academic Standards

The opinion the participants gave that I least expected was that the current academic standards were, overall, appropriate for kindergarten students. My hypothesis for this study centered around finding that the participants would have negative interpretations of the current academic standards paired with positive associations of using DAP. This is what I found most commonly in the current research; however, the participants opinions that the current standards can be appropriate for kindergarten students is just opposite of that idea. Teacher one went on to explain, "you know, most of them can do it. I mean, they really can. And, if you had told me 20 years ago that kindergarteners could do this, I would have said no way no how they can." Each participant noted that the standards have undoubtedly changed, but it's more important how the educator teaches the standards rather than just considering the appropriateness of the standards themselves. Surprisingly, to me, each of the participants even carried positive perceptions of the new academic standards. Teacher three laughed while saying, "I can match a standard to anything!" Teacher one also noted that she can match a current standard with all the centers in her room. Teacher two displayed positive feelings about the current academic standards when she noted, "I think it's[education] changing for the better in the sense that these kids can do a lot more than what we expect them to do." The

participants also noted that the changing standards aren't all to blame for student's behaviors like many people think. All three participants noted that they were able to take these newer standards and incorporate them into their instruction in developmentally appropriate ways within their classroom. This strategy appears to reduce the number of challenging behaviors they see.

Positive and Negative Associations of DAP and Problem Behavior

When considering DAPs role in mitigating problem behaviors in the classroom, no negative associations were found. The participants noted the using DAP in their classroom would not be the magic wand that solved all of their problems, but, overall, they agreed that they found no downside to incorporating DAP. Each teacher agreed that the use of DAP in the classroom results in positive social-emotional growth in their students; however, they also note that there is a plethora of external factors that impact students that DAP alone can't solve. Some factors that participants brought up included the student's homelife, socioeconomic status, maturity, or medication intake. When asked why DAP was not effective in mitigating all behavior problems, teacher two added, "my kids just aren't all created the same. They all learn differently, but it's more than just how we learn, it's the baseline of how our brain is wired." She also noted, "school is not their entirety of their life. They also have so many other circumstances going on." Teacher one told me a story about how one of her students with externalizing traits needed different circumstances than her other students. If she left him at his desk, he seemed to learn little to none of the lesson being taught, but when sent to the carpet in the back of the class, he could wiggle, jump, and spin while listening to the lesson. Her point was that by meeting that child where he was, he was more able to learn, despite his externalizing behaviors.

Moreover, all participants urged me to think about the child as a whole rather than only who they are when they are at school. Each student is an individual, and a one size fits all approach is not likely to mitigate the struggles of every student.

Other Perceptions of DAP

The last area coded throughout the first round of interviews was other factors that I had not previously considered. I expected this area to be broad; however, there was only one central theme connecting DAPs effectiveness, or lack thereof, to classroom behavior. The theme centered around the varying age range of kindergarten students. Teacher two noted, "every year, I've got four-year-olds in my room, and every year, I have six-and-a-half-year-olds in my room. There's a huge developmental gap between a four-year-old and a six-and-a-half-year-old." All participants touched on this topic in some way. The consensus among the participants was that the vast differences of maturity in kindergarten students is a large mitigating factor in whether DAP works for them. By this they mean that teachers can, and do, work to make sure that their practices align with what is deemed to be best for kindergarten students, but the major differences in age and maturity will ultimately determine what is necessary for each student's behavior and academic success. There seems to be a broad level of what DAPs are best for a kindergarten classroom, but then there is also a process of needing to drill down to notice each individual student's needs because they are in a different place developmentally. What's appropriate for some students may not be appropriate for all. Each participant agreed that with such a wide range, it can be difficult to differentiate behavior support.

Teacher one also noted that not only does this age difference affect the student's mental maturity, but also their development. I heard the participants agree that what is

developmentally appropriate for a four-year-old is different than that of a six-year-old and trying to teach them all using a blanket DAP method just won't work. The participants had similar feelings toward student behavior. They noted that what's appropriate behaviorally varies with age making it difficult to reach each individual student with the same behavior strategies. This discussion highlighted the importance of following developmentally appropriate practices, but also that it can be difficult to appropriately differentiate DAP when the age and developmental gap is so large.

During this discussion, the participants also noted the importance of differentiated instruction to fit each student's varying academic needs. Teacher's, especially those in this study, can agree that developmentally appropriate practices are important for their student growth and well-being, but they are not solely the end all be all of how to best instruct kindergarten students. This idea is reasonable considering that DAP is thought to be a tier one behavior management strategy. Given this, teachers are likely to continue to have students that require more intensive behavior interventions in the future, despite their use of DAP.

During this conversation, the teachers also noted several suggestions as how to more directly address the needs of students with externalizing problems in the classroom: (a) include more access for students to the school counselor; (b) calm down rooms; (c) social skills groups; and (d) lessen the red tape around the getting a student evaluated for behavior problems.

Interview Two Summary

Given these results and themes, a list of five additional discussion questions were developed for the group interview. The purpose of this interview was for the participants to meet and discuss differing opinions that may have come up in interview one. If differing opinions were found, which was rare, the participants were provided with both opinions and they were discussed. A secondary purpose of interview two was for the participants to work together to come up with possible solutions for difficult situations going forward. Each question presented in the interview was analyzed for instances of things that the participants experienced that either did or did not work in each given situation.

Pressure from Administration

All participants agreed that they have felt some variant of pressure from their administration to be more standard and drill and practice oriented. Teacher three added “I mean, we've specifically been told you cannot have kitchens. You cannot have playdough. You cannot have Legos, and all of that.” The other participants agreed to hearing similar things from their administration as well. While this is the communicated expectation, all of the participants in this study admitted that they continue to have centers and developmentally appropriate toys in their classrooms. Teacher two noted playfully, “I’d rather give the student the appropriate tools for success and ask for forgiveness later,” in response to teacher three’s statement about items that were not allowed in the classroom. Teacher one added, “If they [administration] see your kids and how well they're doing, they're going to leave you alone.”

When asked what would be helpful going forward regarding administrative pressure, teacher one explained that in the past the state had attempted to run a large in-service about kindergarteners learning through play for both kindergarten teachers and their administration. Only one of the two in-service programs were completed, and the program seemed to just dissolve. The other participants appeared interested in this in-service. Everyone agreed that the current administration in their district was incredibly lenient when it came to what each teacher could or could not do within their own classroom; however, there are schools and school systems not far from home that have administration that can be much less flexible. The participants agreed that if in-service training similar to the one mentioned above took place, it would allow kindergarten teachers to gain more support for the use of DAP in the classroom.

Ways to Differentiate Instruction

Another one of the most common themes in interview one was the need to differentiate instruction for kindergarten students because of the wide range of age, and maturity levels, and the effectiveness of small group learning when students with similar characteristics are grouped. I asked the participants what works about differentiating instruction the way you currently do it, and what would help you accomplish it better. Teacher two added, “Everything we do is productive, or in small groups, in kindergarten. So that's the number one way we differentiate. Number two is literacy centers. These centers are easy to differentiate because you've got different groups not only that are meeting with you, but then when they go either back to their seat or to a different station, their step is different.” All of the teachers agreed that the literacy and math centers were an essential part of their class. It is important to note that small group/ individual work

routine is a prime example of how many kindergarten teachers, purposely or inadvertently, are intertwining both newer academic standards and DAP. Differentiated instruction and allowing students to learn by exploration during center time are staple pieces of a kindergarten classroom. By incorporating math and literacy centers into the classroom, students can work towards academic standards in a developmentally appropriate way.

Another topic of discussion was the involvement of educational aides in the classroom. It was proposed that the use of aides could assist teachers in both providing DAP in the classroom and with differentiating their instruction. The participants expressed mixed feelings in this area. One participant started the discussion by saying, “I find it beneficial when using aides if they have a to-do list. So, if the kids are off task, I can just say pull X kiddo and do this.” The other participants agreed with this sentiment. The participants agreed that, at times, having an aide in the classroom can be helpful for both themselves and the students in their classrooms, especially if there are students that need extra one-on-one work on a topic; however, there are also drawbacks to having aides in the classroom. Teacher two noted that, “every two weeks, I make a list of kids that need to be worked with, whether that be letter sounds or whatever. I just have a bucket, and I've got everything that those aides need. Because we have some aides that can come in and just kind of blend in with the class. They help kids that they know to help, but we have some aides that come in and tend to be a little less help. Those aides just need some direction.” Teacher one adds to the conversation by saying, “Sometimes, when I do have aides in here, I feel like it can become a little more circus-like than

helpful." None of the participants currently have aides in their classrooms. They appear to hold a neutral overall outlook on the helpfulness of aides in the classroom.

Positive Interpretations of Current Academic Standards

Much of the research I read before conducting this study focused on teacher opinions of DAP and current academic standards. Many studies highlighted many negative associations of the current academic standards; therefore, I fully expected the participants in this study to share the same beliefs. In interview two, the participants reiterated their positive interpretations of the current standards (which again contrasted with the hypothesis of this study) but did bring up a current issue in their classrooms. Teacher three brought up, "We're struggling a little bit with the lack of standards in our new curriculum. The point of our new curriculum [adopted this school year] was so we would all be on the same page. However, the lack of curriculum standards and the lack of deep literacy texts, are causing us to have to dig deeper into the state's academic standards to make sure everything is being covered." She went on to say, "when we have a curriculum that doesn't align with the standards all the time, we have to fill in the gaps with everything else. So that's probably more of a frustration than the actual standards themselves." The other two teachers agreed that it can be quite frustrating when there are specific things that you must teach, but those things are not expansive enough to meet state academic standards. The consensus from all three teacher was that it's often more about figuring out how to teach the standards in a developmentally appropriate way than struggling with the actual standards themselves.

Because of the participants positive view of the current academic standards, I asked what advice they would give a newer teacher regarding the academic standards.

Teacher one's advice was, "Simply do the best you can do. It's important to show up every day with the mindset that you're going to do what's best for your students." She was adamant that when your intentions are good, and you follow best practices everything will fall in place. She went on to say, "Don't be afraid to advocate for your students if they need a break but do always push them to do their best. Know that they can do this. They can read, write, and do whatever the standards are asking them to do. Don't get standard tunnel vision. Just have fun with it." Teacher three echoed that she completely agreed and added, "You just need to have a good attitude." Lastly, teacher two gave this advice for new teachers when regarding academic standards, "The biggest thing with new teachers is just that it can be overwhelming really fast. You've got to find … [experienced teachers] to come alongside you. You have to have some seasoned teachers in your life that help you figure out how to teach and how to implement the standards that are expected of us. At the same time, you also have to do what's best for the kids."

Externalizing Behaviors and What's Next

In interview one, all three participants agreed that using DAP in the classroom helps to mitigate some externalizing behaviors in students; however, the teachers in this study also agreed that no matter the level of DAP implemented in their classroom, there will still be students who exhibit externalizing traits. The example teacher one gave of her student needing to move to the back of the classroom and wiggle and move during instruction is a prime example of this. While she used DAP to allow the student a better opportunity to learn, using that strategy did not eliminate the behavior itself. The consensus of the group was that this is due to the extraneous variables placed on each student outside of school. The participants noted things such as homelife, mental health,

medical health, and maturity as common factors that need to be considered as contributing stressors when asking why DAP doesn't resolve externalizing behaviors in the classroom. The teachers gave many examples of factors that prevent behavior success including excessive sleepiness, hunger, anger, aggression, and inattentive and hyperactive behaviors that appear not to be caused by anyone in the school environment.

When discussing what we could do better reach these students, the participants had many ideas. Teacher one added, "I feel like if they[students] have academic needs, they're[administration] quick to give us help, but if it's behavioral needs, I feel like the help is slower coming. I think it would be helpful to have a sensory room and someone that could take them for sensory breaks. Some kids really do need that. Most importantly we need to meet those kids where they are." She went on to talk about several student's that required specific strategies due to homelife or medical variables. Teacher two mentioned that she had had students in the past that were recently accepted into foster care. Prior to that they were likely more preoccupied with things like safety and food insecurity than what their behavior was like in the classroom. Similarly, she added that she had many students in the past with mental health disorders or medical conditions that either caused skills deficits or simply more difficulty complying with the rules and routines of a kindergarten classroom. Her point was clear that sometimes it is necessary to take that extra step for these students and make accommodations that are appropriate for them. That is the core of what developmentally appropriate practices is. Teacher three added, "I feel like as teachers, we have to look at the whole child. We think about who they are living with, did they eat breakfast this morning, or did they sleep last night. I worry sometimes the only thing that's looked at [by administration] is their star status,

and that is not an accurate representation of the child in my classroom." Teachers one and two also noted that thinking of the whole child helps them to fill in the gaps of what that child needs from them each day. Teacher one gave the example of one of her students not being able to afford valentines for her class's exchange. She helped the student hand make valentines during small group so that she wouldn't feel left out, isolated, or embarrassed. All participants agreed that small, but important, gestures like this contribute to better behavior outcomes in their classrooms.

Age and Maturity Gaps in Kindergarten

Another central theme found in interview one was the massive differences in age and mental maturity across kindergarten students. The participants noted that they often have young five-year-olds and older six-year-olds in the same class. Practices that are developmentally appropriate for a new five-year-old can be very different than what's appropriate for a six-year-old. When noting what doesn't work the participants agreed that you can't expect the same level of work from every student. This statement was counterintuitive to me in the beginning. I had originally believed that the same level of work was expected from all students at the same time. They are all in the same grade and moving through the curriculum at roughly the same pace, so why wouldn't I expect the same level of work from each student. After some explanation it became clearer. Teacher one explained that she has five-year-olds that can read on a third-grade level but can't yet perfect writing their letters and then she has six-year-olds that have mastered writing that can't read. Developmentally the students in a kindergarten classroom are on very different levels. This conversation rounded back to highlight how important it is to differentiate instruction in the kindergarten setting.

The topic of attending preschool also came up when discussing this age and maturity variance. Surprisingly, the participants agreed that preschool attendance didn't seem to play a big role in mitigating the rate of problem behaviors in the kindergarten classroom. Teacher two noted that many preschool programs are only 3-4 days a week and typically only last a half day. She went on to say that even when kids attend these programs, preschool academics appear to be disconnected from both a smooth transition to kindergarten and from what's developmentally appropriate for the students. The other teachers agreed but noted that not all preschool programs are bad. Teacher three pointed out that sometimes preschools try to be too much like kindergarten and students are not developmentally ready for that at three or four-years-old.

When asked what would help close the developmental gap in kindergarten, the participants agreed that there will never be a change until the birthday cutoff is moved to an earlier date. This is a decision made at the state level and the participants felt that it was out of their hands. Teacher one noted, "a bulk of our kids that have behavioral issues or academic issues that require RTI (response to intervention), besides those that have a significant special need, have fall birthdays." The other participants agreed with this statement. The participants noted that they feel they are much less likely to refer older kindergarten students for special education evaluations as well. They suggested that the birthday cutoff for kindergarten be pushed back to at least June or July rather than August 30th. Teacher two also noted that it even if the birthdate was pushed back, it shouldn't mean that all early five-years-olds should be kept out of school if they are developmentally ready. The participants agreed with this statement and concluded that there should be a more thorough assessment process in place to analyze younger students

developmental readiness for kindergarten. While changing the birthdate needed to enter kindergarten would solve some of the problems the participants face in their classroom and would mean a more homogeneous age group in kindergarten, it would also be harder on many families who may have to care for a child at home for another year. Each teacher agreed that this was a drawback. We circled back to our previous discussion regarding preschool. It was suggested that in lieu of being able to send their students to kindergarten, it may be beneficial if more public preschools were made available. The participants agreed that this was an option, but they were not convinced it would solve any future developmental or behavioral difficulties in kindergarten students.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

Research shows that teachers that provide DAP in their classroom, especially those who capitalize on a variation of didactic and child-centered learning, produce students with better academic outcomes (Van Horn et al., 2005). With respect to DAP's influence on behavioral outcomes, a few studies displayed that students in high DAP classrooms were more likely to be on task, socially competent (linked to lower levels of externalizing problems), and experience fewer internalizing problems such as anxiety or stress (e.g., Alford et al., 2016; Stipek et al., 1998; Jones & Gullo, 1999) but little research specifically linked DAP and externalizing problem behavior. Externalizing behaviors can include a variety of behaviors directed at others including aggressive tendencies such as hitting or shoving and disruptive behaviors such as hyperactivity and rule breaking (Quistberg & Mueller, 2020).

Many teachers note that kindergarten today can feel very much like what older grades experienced in the past. In the whirlwind of pushed down academics, it is clear that both the expectations and requirements placed on kindergarten students and teachers has changed. Kindergarteners appear to be held to both higher academic and behavioral standard than those in previous decades (Goldstein, 2007), but at what cost? This study aimed to look at the connection between the push down of academic standards, students with externalizing issues, and how DAP affects these issues.

I gathered teachers' opinions via a short survey and individual and group interviews about how implementing DAP in their classrooms affects their students' academically and, more importantly for the purpose of my thesis, behaviorally. More specifically, I was interested in how DAP supports students with disruptive or

externalizing problem behaviors. I hypothesized that each teacher would hold a positive view of the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices paired with a negative view of the current push down of academic standards. I also expected that teachers who implement developmentally appropriate practices are likely to have students that respond better in both their overall academic performance and externalizing behavior outcomes.

Interpretations and Implications of Key Findings

It was apparent that for the three participants in the study DAP is a crucial and concrete piece of kindergarten education. The hypothesis of this study surrounded teachers having negative interpretations of pushed down academics while holding positive interpretations of implementing developmentally appropriate practices. The views of the participants in this study were surprisingly different from that expectation. All participants held positive regard for the current academic standards and felt that kindergarten students were capable of achieving them. This varies from the overall negative outlook on academic standards I found in the research.

I believe that the level of experience in this group of participants is a huge factor in this opinion. The participants each have 10 or more years of experience in a kindergarten classroom. They have witnessed the change in the academic standards, but they are also well practiced in finding ways to incorporate more difficult standards in developmentally appropriate ways. The participants noted that the learning standards themselves were not viewed as the villain, it's how teachers choose to teach them. The participants explained that if the standards are taught in a developmentally appropriate way, then kindergarten students are capable and bound to learn and grow. The

participants reiterated on multiple occasions that they felt kindergarteners are capable of much more than most teachers previously believed.

Regarding, DAPs effects on problem behavior, I expected that classrooms that were DAP centered would have more success in mitigating externalizing behaviors. The teachers in this study made an excellent point to explain that while DAP is helpful in mitigating some problem behaviors, teachers are not likely to eliminate all problem behaviors just by using it. When I observed, it was clear that the teacher's levels of DAP supported them appropriately handling the student's externalizing problem behaviors. However, the teachers gave examples of situations where DAP did not completely solve the underlying issue. For example, teacher one had mentioned that she allowed a student to go to the back of the classroom and move and jump around during her lessons. Ultimately, he gained more academic knowledge and was not distracting the other students, but he continued to jump around.

The participants urged me to understand that there are many external factors that cause students to display externalizing traits that do not stem from the stressors associated with more difficult academic standards. From talking with the participants, I gathered that the use of DAP in classrooms is both necessary and beneficial but is not the all-in-all solution to eliminating students' externalizing behaviors. It is important to notice the individual factors that may be fueling each child's problem behaviors. For example, it is important that we be cognizant of each child's homelife, mental health, and other factors that affect their day-to-day life. If we can be both developmentally appropriate and provide more intensive help when needed, such as additional behavior support and more access to school counselors, it is likely that we could further reduce

externalizing behaviors in the classroom. It also appears that it could be beneficial to increase the amount of mental health support that is available to kindergarten students.

A finding of this study relevant for new teachers are that the current academic standards do not have to be viewed as unachievable, scary, inappropriate for kindergarten students or incompatible with DAP. Teachers who hold both a positive view of the standards and a positive view of DAP will ultimately benefit their students. The participants in this study encourage newer teachers to seek mentorship and partner with other educators to help breakdown the standards. Once the standards are broken down, they can be taught in a developmentally appropriate way, which reduces behavior problems and increases social-emotional learning. By working with more experienced educators, newer teachers can also build their confidence and gain a positive perspective of learning standards. This helps to increase the overall effectiveness of their teaching and can help them to advocate for both their students and their practices.

Another implication of this study is the need for the state to reconsider the birthdate cutoff for kindergarten students. With such a wide developmental range in one classroom, it appears to be increasingly difficult for teachers to keep their classrooms developmentally appropriate for all age ranges involved. The participants also noted that many of their most challenging students, both behaviorally and academically, were students with birthdays near the birthdate cutoff. The participants in this study believe that using DAP in their classrooms is an achievable tier one standard to appropriately differentiate academic instruction and behavior regulation, but they also admit that it can be difficult to navigate the increasingly large developmental gap between students that start school early with lower developmental levels and those who come to school later.

The participants also shared the opinion even while pre-k is becoming more and more accessible to families, it may not be the solution we are striving for. Ultimately, with pushed down academics, if kindergarten now feels like first grade, it is likely that many of these pre-k programs will feel like kindergarten used to (Parker and Neuharth-Prichet, 2006). The teachers in this study worried that some pre-k programs follow a strong academic focus rather than what is developmentally appropriate for the student. It is wonderful if a student attends pre-k and is academically ready for kindergarten; however, their social, emotional, and physical development can be just as important.

Limitations

This study includes several limitations. First and foremost, it was conducted during the Covid-19 global pandemic. Covid-19 impact on school schedules and students and teachers may have impacted how students react to developmentally appropriate practices and how teachers view them. I attempted to temper these effects by limiting the recruitment pool to teachers with over three years of experience. All teachers in this study had ten or more years of experience.

Also, all interviews in this study were held virtually. This can cause the interviews to feel less personal. Without as much personal connection between the researcher and participants, this may have impacted the quantity and quality of data provided. This could cause less openness and generally more stereotypical responses. Next, participants were chosen via a convenience sample in the district where I work. The participant sample size is also very small at three participants. Due to these factors, this study may not generalize to the general public and the opinions shared by these participants may not correlate with the opinions of kindergarten teachers in other districts

or states. More research would be required with a larger sample in order to identify the generalizability of these results and implications.

Lastly, a major limitation of this study was that while productive conversations took place, many of the conversations leaned toward academic outcomes and learning standards rather than behavior outcomes. This is partially due to the lack of additional questions directly related to the study's main purpose. Many of the participants answered the questions regarding behavior with answers as anticipated; however, they should have been prompted to fully elaborate or give examples to further our understanding of the causes and implications involved in the relationship between DAP and externalizing behaviors.

Future Research

It is recommended that future research attempts to replicate these results with a larger sample size to ensure accuracy and generalizability and to further delve into the behavioral component of this discussion. While the bulk of current research displays teachers with negative interpretations of the compatibility of DAP and academic standards, this study found the opposite. Each participant held a strong opinion that the current academic standards are both achievable and can be taught in a developmentally appropriate manner. This study indicates that it is possible that teachers can believe the current academic standards are appropriate for kindergarteners, instruct their students while using developmentally appropriate practices, and use those practices to mitigate the amount of problem behavior seen in their classrooms.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: DAP SURVEY

Survey of Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Kindergarten Classrooms

Background Information:

Teacher Name: _____

Years of Experience (teaching kindergarten): _____

Highest Achieved Degree: _____

Licensure Type: _____

Please think of the interactions you have had with the students in your classroom over the past month and rate each described interaction on the following Likert scales:

1. I knew everything I needed to know about each child today. I noticed each child's mood, apparent health, and general sense of well-being and engagement.

4 – Very Descriptive of my practices

3 – Mostly Descriptive of my practices

2 – Somewhat Descriptive of my practices

1 – Not Descriptive of my practices

2. I have checked in with each child's family recently, either through drop-off conversations, written notes, or emails, to provide updates and receive updates.

4 – Very Descriptive of my practices

3 – Mostly Descriptive of my practices

2 – Somewhat Descriptive of my practices

1 – Not Descriptive of my practices

3. I feel as though I had a good relationship with each child today. I expressed warmth and appreciation for each child's presence and efforts today.

4 – Very Descriptive of my practices

3 – Mostly Descriptive of my practices

2 – Somewhat Descriptive of my practices

1 – Not Descriptive of my practices

4. I have taken stock of my student's progress and mastery related to the objectives.

4 – Very Descriptive of my practices

3 – Mostly Descriptive of my practices

2 – Somewhat Descriptive of my practices

1 – Not Descriptive of my practices

5. I have made records of each student's progress through notes from observations, interviews, and conversation.

4 – Very Descriptive of my practices

3 – Mostly Descriptive of my practices

2 – Somewhat Descriptive of my practices

1 – Not Descriptive of my practices

6. I have observed each child in different contexts and settings?

4 – Very Descriptive of my practices

3 – Mostly Descriptive of my practices

2 – Somewhat Descriptive of my practices

1 – Not Descriptive of my practices

7. I ask the student's families for information in relevant areas?

4 – Very Descriptive of my practices

3 – Mostly Descriptive of my practices

2 – Somewhat Descriptive of my practices

1 – Not Descriptive of my practices

8. I have checked in with other teachers/aides about each student's well-being and success toward their goals?

4 – Very Descriptive of my practices

3 – Mostly Descriptive of my practices

2 – Somewhat Descriptive of my practices

1 – Not Descriptive of my practices

9. I thoughtfully consider, based on children's level of engagement, whether to move on or allow more time on this unit/theme/skill.

4 – Very Descriptive of my practices

3 – Mostly Descriptive of my practices

2 – Somewhat Descriptive of my practices

1 – Not Descriptive of my practices

10. I consider whether language and/or home culture is influencing children's performance in each area?

4 – Very Descriptive of my practices

3 – Mostly Descriptive of my practices

2 – Somewhat Descriptive of my practices

1 – Not Descriptive of my practices

Please answer the following questions by circling 'Yes', 'No', or 'Somewhat' while thinking of the students in your classroom.

11. I am familiar with the objectives of my student's learning for today/this week/this unit?

1- Yes

2- No

3- Somewhat

12. I know the objectives for physical development for my students' age range (fine motor and gross motor).

1- Yes

2- No

3- Somewhat

13. I know the objectives for social and emotional development compared to my students' age.

1- Yes

2- No

3- Somewhat

14. I know the objectives for approaches to learning, including enthusiasm, attention, persistence, and flexibility appropriate to my students' age.

1- Yes

2- No

3- Somewhat

15. Do the objectives for today/this week build on what we did previously?

1- Yes

2- No

3- Somewhat

16. Does my classroom environment match the objectives?

1- Yes

2- No

3- Somewhat

17. Does it look cheerful, tidy, and interesting for the children?

1- Yes

2- No

3- Somewhat

18. Have I been using a wide range of teaching strategies this month, including (check all that apply to your practices):

- ____ modeling problem solving
- ____ sharing my thought processes out loud
- ____ encouraging students and acknowledging good work
- ____ providing new information such as facts and new vocabulary
- ____ demonstrating correct ways to do something and giving direct instruction
- ____ giving specific feedback on areas for improvement
- ____ giving assistance and asking questions to advance each child's level
- ____ adjusting the level of challenge (simplifying or adding complexity) to meet each child's level

19. I have been using various learning formats, including (check all that apply to your practices):

- ____ large groups (whole class together):
- ____ small groups
- ____ play/learning centers
- ____ outdoor time when the child can do what he/she wants
- ____ daily routines (taking advantage of arrivals and departures, snack times, transitions)

APENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building,
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129
FWA: 00005331/IRB Regn. 0003571

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Thursday, December 10, 2020

Protocol Title	***A Study of Developmentally Appropriate Practices***
Protocol ID	**21-1075 7iv**
Principal Investigator	**Elizabeth Johnson** (Student)
Faculty Advisor	Monica Wallace
Co-Investigators	NONE
Investigator Email(s)	*epv2d@mtmail.mtsu.edu; monica.wallace@mtsu.edu*
Department	Psychology
Funding	**NONE**

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU IRB through the **EXPEDITED** mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category *(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior.* A summary of the IRB action is tabulated below:

IRB Action	**APPROVED for ONE YEAR**
Date of Expiration	**12/31/2021** *Date of Approval:* 12/10/20 *Recent Amendment:* NONE
Sample Size	TEN (10)
Participant Pool	*Target Population:* Primary Classification: **Healthy Adults (18 or older)** Specific Classification: **Kindergarten Teachers**
Type of Interaction	☒ Virtual/Remote/Online interaction ☒ **In person or physical interaction – Mandatory COVID-19 Management**
Exceptions	1. Multi-method data collection involving in person surveys and Zoom interviews 2. Contact information is permitted for coordinating this research 3. Audio/video recording are permitted
Restrictions	**1. Mandatory ACTIVE Informed Consent.** **2. Other than the exceptions above, identifiable data/artifacts, such as, audio/video data, photographs, handwriting samples, personal address, driving records, social security number, and etc., MUST NOT be collected. Recorded identifiable information must be deidentified as described in the protocol.** **3. Mandatory Final report (refer last page).** **4. The protocol details must not be included in the compensation receipt.** **5. CDC guidelines and MTSU safe practice must be followed**
Approved Templates	*IRB Templates:* Zoom interview consent template and email recruitment *Non-MTSU Templates:* In person survey informed consent
Research Inducement	NONE
Comments	The student PI goes under the name "Paige"

Post-approval Requirements

The PI and FA must read and abide by the post-approval conditions (Refer "*Quick Links*" in the bottom):

- ***Reporting Adverse Events:*** The PI must report research-related adversities suffered by the participants, deviations from the protocol, misconduct, and etc., within 48 hours from when they were discovered.
- ***Final Report:*** The FA is responsible for submitting a final report to close-out this protocol before **12/31/2021** **(Refer to the Continuing Review section below)**. REMINDERS WILL NOT BE SENT. **Failure to close-out or request for a continuing review may result in penalties** including cancellation of the data collected using this protocol and/or withholding student diploma.
- ***Protocol Amendments***: An IRB approval must be obtained for all types of amendments, such as: addition/removal of subject population or investigating team; sample size increases; changes to the research sites (appropriate permission letter(s) may be needed); alternation to funding; and etc. The proposed amendments must be requested by the FA in an addendum request form. The proposed changes must be consistent with the approval category and they must comply with expedited review requirements
- ***Research Participant Compensation:*** Compensation for research participation must be awarded as proposed in Chapter 6 of the Expedited protocol. The documentation of the monetary compensation must Appendix J and MUST NOT include protocol details when reporting to the MTSU Business Office.
- ***COVID-19:*** Regardless whether this study poses a threat to the participants or not, refer to the COVID-19 Management section for important information for the FA.

Continuing Review (The PI has requested early termination)

Although this protocol can be continued for up to THREE years, The PI has opted to end the study by **12/31/2021** **The PI must close-out this protocol by submitting a final report before 12/31/2021 Failure to close-out may result in penalties that include cancellation of the data collected using this protocol and delays in graduation of the student PI.**

Post-approval Protocol Amendments:

The current MTSU IRB policies allow the investigators to implement minor and significant amendments that would fit within this approval category. ***Only TWO procedural amendments will be entertained per year*** *(changes like addition/removal of research personnel are not restricted by this rule).*

Date	Amendment(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

Other Post-approval Actions:

The following actions are done subsequent to the approval of this protocol on request by the PI/FA or on recommendation by the IRB or by both.

Date	IRB Action(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE	NONE

COVID-19 Management:

The PI must follow social distancing guidelines and other practices to avoid viral exposure to the participants and other workers when physical contact with the subjects is made during the study.

- The study must be stopped if a participant or an investigator should test positive for COVID-19 within 14 days of the research interaction. This must be reported to the IRB as an "adverse event."
- The MTSU's "Return-to-work" questionnaire found in Pipeline must be filled by the investigators on the day of the research interaction prior to physical contact.
- PPE must be worn if the participant would be within 6 feet from the each other or with an investigator.
- Physical surfaces that will come in contact with the participants must be sanitized between use
- **FA's Responsibility:** The FA is given the administrative authority to make emergency changes to protect the wellbeing of the participants and student researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the FA must notify the IRB after such changes have been made. The IRB will audit the changes at a later date and the FA will be instructed to carryout remedial measures if needed.

Data Management & Storage:

All research-related records (signed consent forms, investigator training and etc.) must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application.

The data must be stored for at least three (3) years after the study is closed. Additional Tennessee State data retention requirement may apply (*refer "Quick Links" for MTSU policy 129 below*). The data may be destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity of the research subjects.

The MTSU IRB reserves the right to modify/update the approval criteria or change/cancel the terms listed in this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:

- Post-approval Responsibilities: http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/FAQ/PostApprovalResponsibilities.php
- Expedited Procedures: https://mtsu.edu/irb/ExpeditedProcedures.php
- MTSU Policy 129: Records retention & Disposal: https://www.mtsu.edu/policies/general/129.php

APPENDIX C : EMAIL REQUESTING PARTICIPATION

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building,
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

IRBF007b – PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

All the fields are mandatory. The IRB will not make changes to the font size or style. No images will be allowed and there will be no exceptions to all the requirements. The IRB may impose additional restrictions and requirements during the review. The approved email script will be sent in a locked format but the PI will be able copy and paste the text.

INSTRUCTIONS
Use this script for email recruitment

Subject line(s) for email recruitment: Must clearly state that the invitation is for a research study. MUST NOT contain compensation or other inducement details in the subject line

RE: Research Participant Recruitment

Body of the script/email:

(The following protocol information can either presented in the top as it is shown here, or it can be inserted in the text below as long as the information is clear to the reader that this email is about a research study)

Dear [redacted],

Hello, my name is Paige Johnson, and I am a graduate student at Middle Tennessee State University. I am working on a research study involving kindergarten teachers' opinions of developmentally appropriate practices and how students with disruptive behavior respond to your classroom management procedures. Please read on if you are interested in becoming a participant.

Study Description & Purpose – I want to know your opinion about the success of using developmentally appropriate practices to support appropriate student behavior in the classroom. I am particularly interested in hearing about those students with disruptive behavior problems and how they respond. Participants will be asked to fill out a survey, allow me to observe periodically in their classrooms, attend one individual Zoom interview, attend a brief follow-up interview, if necessary, and attend the final group Zoom interview. Active participation and discussion of developmentally appropriate practices is requested.

IRB Details:

- *Protocol Title*: A Study of Developmentally Appropriate Practices
- *Primary Investigator*: Elizabeth Paige Johnson
- *PI Department & College*: Psychology, *Middle Tennessee State University*
- *Faculty Advisor* **(If PI is a student)**: Monica Wallace, MTSU
- **Protocol ID:** 21-2075 7iv **Approval Date:** 12/10/2020 **Expiration Date:** 112/31/2021

Target Participant Pool – The target participant pool would be kindergarten teachers with an early childhood education degree. It would be most beneficial for the participants to have at minimum 3-5 years of kindergarten teaching experience.

Risks & Discomforts – There apears to be no more then Minimal Risk involved in this study. Although the methods and procedures used in this study will be considered as no more than minimal risk to the participants, this study will be conducted in an environment where the research participants will come in physical contact with other individuals. Therefore, the following precautions will be made to reduce the effects of COVID-19 infection.

- ***The investigators will follow these precautions:***
  - The PI will sanitize every tables and chairs with disinfected wipes before and after using the room where data collection is implemented. Research materials will be distributed in advance to reduce direct contacts.
  - The PI will self-assess his symptoms and contact with anyone that is tested positive for Covid-19 or that has Covid-like symptoms.
  - The PI will check with the participants if they are sick or have had close contact with a person who is tested for Covid-19. If a participant is sick or had a close contact with a person who is positive for Covid-19, the participation will be delayed until the participant get a negative Covid-19 test result or the participant will complete the 14 days of quarantine.
- ***The participants will be expected to adhere by the following measures:***
  - The participants must wear their masks all the time when the data are collected.
  - The participants must sit on the assigned seats for each of them to keep social distancing at all time.

Benefits – Your opinions and suggestions will be compiled and I hope to create a handout with suggestions that other teachers might find helpful, particulary teachers who have less experience and or possibly currently in a teacher education program.

Additional Information – Participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any point. Total time requirement over 2-5 weeks is expected to be 3-4 hours.

Compensation – No compensation

Contact Information – Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns regaurding this study: Elizabeth Paige Johnson epv2d@mtmail.mtsu.edu or johnspai100@wcschools.com. .

Please email me back if you are interested in enrolling in this study Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to working with you!

Yours Sincerely,

Elizabeth 'Paige' Johnson