

VETERAN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS
OF CHANGES OVER TIME
IN THE KINDERGARTEN

THESIS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate and document the changes that kindergarten teachers have seen take place in kindergarten and to record kindergarten teachers' opinions of these changes.

A pilot study was conducted to narrow down the changes that have taken place in kindergarten. Three kindergarten teachers with various years of teaching kindergarten were used. Ten common threads of commentary were chosen and used as the basis for the actual study.

Seventeen kindergarten teachers with nine or more years of teaching experience in kindergarten were the subjects. All seventeen kindergarten teachers were personally interviewed by the same researcher in the Rochester, New York area. The kindergarten teachers were from urban, suburban and rural public school systems.

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Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate and document the changes kindergarten teachers have seen take place in kindergarten and to record kindergarten teachers' responses to these changes.

Questions to be Answered

1. What changes have veteran kindergarten teachers seen take place in kindergarten since they began teaching kindergarten?
2. What are teachers' responses to the changes that have taken place in kindergarten?

Need for the Study

The American Heritage Dictionary (second edition) defines change as: "to give a completely different form or appearance to; transform."

Kindergarten has gone through such transformation. A kindergarten that was once established to be a "garden for children" has been altered considerably. Such as curriculum, background knowledge, and length of the school day.

David Elkind echoes this change by stating: "Few would argue that what was once taught and expected to be learned in many kindergartens is profoundly different from what it was two decades ago" (Egertson, 1987).

Societal, economic, political and family changes have impacted the changes that have been observed in kindergarten. Many of the changes that have taken place in kindergarten have become somewhat controversial and have been questioned by early childhood professionals, administrators, teachers and parents. There is a need to further investigate these changes.

It is important to find out how experienced kindergarten teachers view these changes. Little research to date has investigated teachers' responses to the changes that have taken place in kindergarten.

Definitions

Veteran kindergarten teachers: For this study veteran teachers are teachers that have been teaching kindergarten for nine years or more.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to document the changes veteran teachers have seen take place and their responses to these changes. Little research to date has dealt with the issues of kindergarten from a veteran kindergarten teachers' point of view. Therefore the research here gives veteran teachers that opportunity.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate and document the changes Kindergarten teachers have seen take place in Kindergarten and to record Kindergarten teachers' responses to these changes. The questions to be answered were:

1. What changes have veteran Kindergarten teachers seen take place in Kindergarten since they began teaching?
2. What are teachers' responses to the changes that have taken place in Kindergarten?

"Child's garden," meaning Kindergarten, was the creation of Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), a German philosopher and teacher (Zorn, 1983). Froebel's premise back in 1837 was to establish an environment in which young minds could grow through structured games and activities (Zorn, 1983). Froebel's curriculum was child-centered but structured. It is made up of manipulative objects, for example plastic and wooden balls, cylinders and cubes. By playing

with these objects, children could explore the various natural relationships which existed in the greater universe, and do so in a manner completely natural to them. There were also constructive activities such as weaving, sewing, and paper folding. This gave children the opportunity to learn as well as express themselves artistically (Spodek,1985).

Froebel's Kindergarten teachers were to foster a loving, nurturing atmosphere for the children and to respond sensitively to the particular needs of each child. Interestingly, this task was given exclusively to men. Only after Froebel was married did this restriction pass (Rudolph and Cohen,1984).

In 1856 the first Kindergarten in the United States was established in Watertown, Wisconsin by a Froebelian disciple, Margarethe Schurz. Schurz's influence spread. By 1870 there were over 400 Kindergartens in 30 states operating in the United States. In 1873 St. Louis became the first city in the nation to incorporate Kindergarten in public education. These Kindergarten teachers were directed by another Froebelian disciple, Susan Blow. Blow insisted that her trainees teach in the morning and study theory in the afternoon (Bickers,1989).

By 1966 60% of 5-year-olds attended kindergarten (O'Brien,1989). Today over 94% of 5-year-olds are attending some form of kindergarten whether it be public, private or church sponsored (Duncan,1987).

Froebel's child-centered kindergarten remained relatively unchanged up until the 1950's. Webster (1984), a 30 year veteran kindergarten teacher recalled that, "The crucial elements of the kindergarten program, during the 1950's was the child. My role as an educator was to observe, listen, help and most of all, guide" (p.326).

Due to societal, economic, and political changes, the educational philosophies undergirding the kindergarten of the 1950's is not valid for today's kindergartens (Peskin,1988). Today most kindergartens have little resemblance to those of the Froebelian era. The curriculum of today's kindergarten focuses on specific skills to be learned, accompanied by great pressure on children to succeed (Moyer,Egertson and Isenberg,1987). Kindergarten classrooms are being characterized by direct teaching of discrete skills, particularly in reading and math. To accomplish this the skills are broken down into many small linear segments (Egertson,1987).

Many kindergarten teachers are asked to use commercial texts that present information and activities inappropriate for the age of the children in which they are targeted for (Moyer, Egertson and Isenberg, 1987). Soderman (1984) states:

What is being taught to kindergarten children today is what was expected of the first grader 15 years ago. During the 1960's, in our fright that we were falling behind the Russians technologically, we made dramatic changes in our educational programs. The result in kindergarten programs was an emphatic move away from socialization and process toward an identifiable product. That product was reading (p.12).

Other skills that are taught are social studies, science and math. In many kindergartens there is standardized testing that accompanies the academic programs. This type of testing has been called unreliable by some and has resulted in the serious problem of labeling children at an early age (Partridge, 1987).

O'Brien (1989) cited the International Reading Association with their concerns over the present day kindergarten:

1. Many pre-first grade children are subjected to rigid, formal pre-reading programs with inappropriate expectations and experiences for their levels of development.

2. Little attention is given to individual development or individual learning styles.
3. The pressures of accelerated programs do not allow children to be risk takers as they experiment with language and internalize concepts about how language operates.
4. Too much attention is focused upon isolated skill development or abstract parts of the reading process, rather than upon the integration of oral language, writing and listening with reading.
5. Too little attention is placed upon reading for pleasure; therefore, children do not associate reading with enjoyment. (p.296)

The Educational Research Service (ERS) conducted a study of kindergarten programs and practices in American public schools (Bickers, 1989). ERS reported that 22 percent of the responding teachers and 29 percent of responding principals described kindergarten's primary focus as academic skills and achievement. An additional 62.9 percent of responding teachers and 62.6 percent of responding principals reported that the primary focus of kindergarten was academic readiness and preparation for later schooling.

There are several circumstances that might explain the changes that have occurred in kindergarten. The influx of pre-kindergarten programs for one. In 1961 approximately 15

percent of America's children attended school before they reached kindergarten age. In 1991 more than 45 percent of children aged three to five attend some form of educational program (Cutright, 1991). Between 1978 and 1985 the number of licensed day care centers grew 234 percent (O'Brien, 1989). Elkind (1987) writes, "Never before in U.S. history have so many infants and young children been enrolled for extended periods in regular out-of-home programs (p. 8).

It is not uncommon to find pre-kindergarten programs in which children spend prolonged periods of time sitting at tables trying to complete pencil paper tasks which would be inappropriate even for substantially older children (Egertson, 1987). In many cases parents look for such programs believing that it will give their child a "leg-up" on their education. Dematteis (1980) states, "There is also pressure from principals and school boards that the earlier a child is taught, the better and sooner the child will learn." (p. 1).

Since a majority of children have had some type of pre-kindergarten experience prior to attending kindergarten. Some argue, therefore, that kindergarten should get ready for more enhanced academic demands (Duncan, 1987). Many of

the past goals, responsibilities, and functions of the Kindergarten have been assumed by pre-Kindergarten programs (Peskin, 1988).

Duncan (1987) and others emphasize that today's children are different than thirty years ago. Children are exposed to a great deal more information and environments. The influence of television, travel, computers and improvements in communications in general have contributed to the child's better understanding of the world. In spite of these major sociological and technological changes, developmental rates have not accelerated. Nor are children more intelligent than they used to be. Only the variety and intensity of early experiences have changed (Elkind, 1987).

Webster (1984) writes, "This fact remains unchanged through the years: The children are just five and still have the basic needs of their age group whether or not they have been in nursery school for three years and know how to read" (p.329). Several researchers such as Belsky (1986) indicate a growing concern that children who have been in group care since infancy are beginning to show insecurity in attachment relationships and greater social maladjustment in the preschool and early school-age years. Young

children still need supportive environments, rich in direct experiences that are meaningful to them.

Not only have children's experiences changed over the past thirty years or so, the family structures themselves have also changed. According to the 1990 Census Bureau figures one in four children live with a single parent (Kutner, 1991). Back in 1960, that proportion was one in ten. Among minorities the numbers are even higher. Approximately 61 percent of black children live with single parents, as do 33 percent of Hispanic children. The federal government estimates that about 61 percent of the children born in 1987 will spend some time in a single parent home before they are 18 (Kutner, 1991).

All children currently living with two parents have not always had it that way. In 1985 (the latest figures available), one in six of those children was in a step family. By the turn of the century those numbers are projected to be about one in four (Kutner, 1991). What would Ozzie and Harriet say?

Our thinking about women has also changed. In the 1960's it was common for women to be questioned about their maternal instincts if they put their children in some type of out-of-home

program to go to work (O'Brien, 1989). Between 1970 and 1980 the number of mothers who worked outside the home and had children under six increased 34 percent. By 1984 that number had increased to 48 percent (Rothenberg, 1984). Today, mostly out of economic necessity, 60 percent of women who have children under six are in the labor force (Becker, 1991).

With today's fast paced society, technological advances and a majority of both parents working who has time to read to their children? Jim Trelease (1989), author of The New Read-Aloud Handbook, thinks parents do. He writes:

With the passing of the thirty hour work week, the American worker has never spent less time on the job or had more free time. The question is: How do we spend that time? Male and females spend an average of six hours a week shopping, and each averages thirty hours a week watching television. Contrast those figures with the 1986 study that found working mothers spending an average of only eleven minutes of quality (one-on-one) time with a child daily (thirty minutes on the weekends). Working fathers devoted even less - eight minutes daily and fourteen minutes on the weekends. Mothers at home hardly improved the scores, devoting only two minutes more each day. If there is a time shortage, guess who's getting the short end (p.xxii).

With such limited quality time being spent with children, reading or even quality communicating can not be accomplished successfully.

Television has also changed the family and children. In America 98 percent of the homes have a television with the average home owning 2.3 sets. These televisions are on an average of seven hours and one minute a day. The average Kindergarten graduate has logged more than 6,000 hours of television, more time than it takes to obtain a bachelor's degree (Trelease, 1989).

Summary

The research indicates that several changes have taken place in Kindergarten. The social, economic, political, and technological changes have had a major influence on the changes that have taken place in Kindergarten. The increase in pre-Kindergarten programs have changed the expectations on children. Increased use of academics in Kindergarten has caused controversy in early education research. The changes that have taken place in family structure and finances have also affected today's Kindergartens

Chapter III

Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate and document the changes kindergarten teachers have seen taken place in kindergarten and to record kindergarten teachers responses to these changes. The questions to be answered were:

1. What changes have veteran kindergarten teachers seen take place in kindergarten since they began teaching kindergarten?
2. What are the teachers responses to these changes that have taken place in kindergarten?

Methodology

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted using three teachers with various years teaching kindergarten (3,10,17). The teachers were from three different school districts in the Rochester, New York area. They were interviewed by the researcher and asked to report changes observed throughout their years as kindergarten educators. The purpose for this was to put together common threads that could be

used in the actual study. This method also allowed the researcher to narrow down the changes that have taken place in kindergarten.

Teachers with various years experience in kindergarten were used in an effort to better represent the overall population of kindergarten teachers. Also, these teachers may have viewed the changes in a different manner.

Subjects

Seventeen kindergarten teachers were personally interviewed by the same researcher in the Rochester, New York area. Kindergarten teachers from urban, suburban, and rural public school systems were chosen. All had been teaching kindergarten for nine years or longer. The average of those interviewed was 18.5 years. Also fifty-nine percent of the teachers interviewed taught half day kindergarten programs while the remaining forty-one percent taught a whole day program.

Procedure

After the pilot study was conducted and the comments from all three teachers reviewed, changes discussed by all three teachers were identified to create the common threads needed for the study. Ten of the common statements were then used as a

guide line for the interviewing of the seventeen veteran Kindergarten teachers. The interviews were tape recorded with the teachers' permission. Only one teacher refused to be tape recorded, and in this instance the teacher was script-taped. All teachers were asked the same initial question "What changes have you seen take place in Kindergarten from the time you started teaching at this level until the present time?" If the teacher did not state one or more of the common threads it was posed to him/her in a question. The common threads were:

1. Portions of what was formally taught in first and second grade are now being taught in Kindergarten.
2. Kindergarten has become more academic (pencil/paper) learning and less social learning.
3. Teachers are finding that they have to provide students with background experiences that in the past students had already encountered. (e.g. nursery rhymes)
4. Nursery schools are teaching more academics (pencil paper or skills) and giving children less social time.
5. There is more integrating of subject areas (e.g. Social studies, math, reading and writing.)
6. Parents of today spend less time with their children.
7. Children have less homestyle experiences (e.g. making cookies, going to the zoo.)
8. Children of today are read to less frequently.

9. Children of today are talked to less frequently.
10. Television has been a big influence on children.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed descriptively and appears in chapter IV.

Summary

A pilot study was conducted using three kindergarten teachers who had various years of experience teaching kindergarten. All three teachers were from different school districts. From the pilot study ten common threads were discovered. These common threads became the basis for the actual study and were posed as questions if the veteran teacher did not make mention of one or more of them. Seventeen veteran kindergarten teachers were interviewed from urban, suburban, and rural public school districts. The data was descriptively analyzed.

Chapter IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate and document the changes Kindergarten teachers have seen take place in Kindergarten and to record Kindergarten teachers responses to these changes. The questions to be answered were:

1. What changes have veteran Kindergarten teachers seen take place in Kindergarten since they began teaching Kindergarten?
2. What are teachers responses to the changes that have taken place in Kindergarten?

Findings and Interpretations of Data

The purpose of this research was to investigate and document the changes that veteran Kindergarten teachers have seen take place in Kindergarten. Therefore the analysis of the results will be carried out descriptively. Each of the statements will be explained here and can also be found in the Teachers' Response Table.

1. One hundred percent (100%) of the teachers interviewed agreed that portions of what was taught in first and second grade are being taught presently in Kindergarten.

2. Seventy-six percent (76%) of the teachers interviewed agreed that kindergarten has become more academic (pencil/paper) learning and less social learning. The 24% of the teachers that disagreed with this statement stated that they saw other schools becoming more academic, tried the academic program for a year themselves, but decided that it was inappropriate for their kindergarten children. These teachers had the freedom to make this choice, where as other school districts did not give this type of freedom to its teachers.

3. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the teachers interviewed agreed with the statement that teachers are finding they are having to provide their students with background experiences that in the past they have already encountered. For example students knowledge of nursery rhymes. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the teachers that disagreed with this statement found no difference in the background knowledge that students have already encountered.

4. Seventy-one percent (71%) of teachers interviewed agreed that nursery schools are teaching more academic (pencil paper or skills) and giving children less social

- learning time. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the teachers were unsure of the status of nursery schools and did not agree or disagree with the above statement.
5. One-hundred percent (100%) of the teachers interviewed agreed that there is more integrating of subject areas. (e.g. Social studies, math, science, reading and writing.)
 6. One-hundred percent (100%) of the teachers agreed that parents spend less time with their children than in the past.
 7. One-hundred percent (100%) of the teachers interviewed agreed that children have less homestyle experiences. (e.g. making cookies, cooking, going to the zoo etc.)
 8. One-hundred percent (100%) of the teachers agreed that children of today are read to less frequently at home.
 9. Ninety-four percent (94%) of the teachers interviewed agreed that children of today are talked to less than in the past. Six percent (6%) of the teachers interviewed disagreed with the above statement.
 10. One-hundred percent (100%) of the teachers interviewed agreed that television has been a big influence on children.

Teachers' Respose Table

TEACHERS

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
S	1.	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
T	2.	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	D	D	D	D	A
A	3.	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	D	A	A	A	D	D	D	D	D	A
T	4.	A	A	A	A	A	A	U	A	A	A	A	A	U	U	U	U	A
E	5.	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
M	6.	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
E	7.	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
N	8.	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
T	9.	D	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
S	10.	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A

Agree - A

Disagree - D

Undecided - U

SUMMARY

Of the 17 teachers interviewed 100% agreed with common thread statements 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10. Seventy-six percent (76%) of the teachers agreed with statement 2. The 24% that disagreed with statement 2 were from the same rural school and were allowed to choose their own curriculum to best meet the needs of their kindergarten classes. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the teachers disagreed with statement 3. The 35% that disagreed found no significant difference with this statement. Seventy-one percent (71%) agreed with statement 4, the remaining 29% were undecided. Ninety-four percent (94%) of the teachers interviewed agreed with statement 9, the remaining 6% disagreed. It appears that there is a significant amount of teachers that agree with the statements.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate and document the changes kindergarten teachers have seen take place in kindergarten and to record kindergarten teachers' responses to these changes. The questions to be answered were:

1. What changes have veteran kindergarten teachers seen take place in kindergarten since they began teaching?
2. What are teachers' responses to the changes that have taken place in kindergarten?

Conclusions

The results of this study confirm that changes have taken place in kindergarten. This is based on the observations and responses that veteran kindergarten teachers have made to the changes that have taken place in kindergarten.

Kindergarten teachers reacted to the first two common threads in much the same way. The common threads seemed to intertwine. Kindergarten teachers have seen an increase in

academics and the flow of the curriculum has moved down upon them (except for one school which will be discussed later). These veteran teachers have had little or no control over these changes. Changes have been imposed upon them by the State, Federal government and their own school system. The philosophy of school administrators was also a factor. Many teachers felt frustrated that more curriculum had been added but nothing taken away. In these increased academic classrooms the curriculum is very structured by time and materials.

Commercial workbooks and worksheets were a common sighting, not that teachers agreed with them. In contrast the child centered classroom where children learn through play was a much more desired method of teaching. This was the method that was the foundation for the first Kindergartens. A phrase coined by a teacher that reflects the more recent method is, "skill'em, drill'em and kill'em." This same 25 year veteran Kindergarten teacher once taught second grade and feels she is teaching some of that same curriculum.

Another group of teachers all with over 15 years experience believed that workbooks tell whether or not the students understand the

mechanics of a workbook but not the content which they intended to teach. Many teachers observed that the kindergarten focus has changed from "learning through play" or child centered to a more "pencil paper" oriented learning. A 19 year veteran summed it up this way, "The child has been forced to fit the curriculum rather than the curriculum fitting the child."

The teachers felt that the academics in kindergarten has put a great deal of unnecessary stress on the children. To help alleviate some of this stress (and some of stress on the teachers) teachers are integrating their curriculum. With the immersion of "Whole Language," kindergarten teachers are finding it easier to integrate subject areas. This allows them the opportunity and strategies to cover the vast amount of curriculum that needs to be covered. A kindergarten teacher stated that by doing this it takes away some of the stress of teaching, thus taking some of the stress away from the learner.

"What kindergarten was in the 1950's and 1960's is what nursery schools are like today." This is how one kindergarten teacher put it and it is not all that surprising when considering the changes that have taken place in kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers have observed an increase in

the amount of academic learning in nursery and preschools. Teachers are also observing an increase in the number of parents who are seeking such nursery and preschools. They feel it may give their child a better edge on their schooling. Teachers for the most part disagree with this point. Children are not being given the chance to be children. In many instances the academic oriented nursery and preschools are a version of Kindergarten. Teachers have noticed that an increasing number of students recall doing a "Kindergarten" project the year before.

Background experiences and background knowledge from past to present has also changed. Kindergarten teachers that were interviewed blame these changes on the changing expectations of families and society. These changes were observed to be for the most part negative. As mentioned earlier in the research, there has been an increase in two income families and single parent families.

Mostly for economic reasons the traditional "Leave it to Beaver" family is not the norm for today's world. Mom staying home with the kids while dad brings home the bacon has all but disappeared. With this, so have some of the childhood experiences such as making cookies (from

scratch of course). This simple task gives young children several skills: how to measure, mixing, sequencing, timing, observing, listening, speaking, sense of smell and taste. Kindergarten teachers mentioned that in our fast paced society children are not getting the opportunity to see mom or dad cook or prepare meals as did children in the past. Although this may seem trivial it is not. Kindergarten teachers relate this to children not seeing their parents go through the process of starting something and going through the steps to a finished product (dinner).

Teachers are having to provide more and more students with prior knowledge. It can no longer be taken for granted that all children come to school with knowledge of: nursery rhymes ,stories colors, numbers, that the sounds the letters in the alphabet encode, letter names or the letters that make up their names.

The simple things are being overlooked. Instead of parents giving their children several different kinds of experiences such as the zoo, museum, park, neighborhood get togethers, ball games etc..there has been an increasing number of parents who have the tendency to save up for a big experience like Disney World or a theme park, but not the little things. With these trips

parents and children are not seen as discussing them. Thus minimizing the learning experience that does not often happen.

This leads into another common thread. Are children today talked to less? One-hundred percent of the kindergarten teachers interviewed thought so. This has been linked back to our changing society and parents not having or taking a great deal of time to talk or maybe even more importantly listen to their children. Today's world has become faster paced with priorities that have wandered from the truly important.

Teachers are finding that parents are reading less to their children and reading less themselves. Both of which are very important for children to observe. Children are not getting the important concepts related to stories and story language.

Television also plays a factor in all this; the "electronic baby sitter" as some refer to it. Although such shows as Mr. Rogers and Sesame Street have been viewed as very good for children they account for only a small percentage of what children view. The average kindergarten graduate has logged nearly 6,000 hours of television time. That is 6,000 that was not spent talking, reading, questioning or imagining (Watterson, 1991).

Observations and Additional Findings

The interviews with the Kindergarten teachers led to several additional findings. Some of these findings echo the societal changes mentioned earlier. Kindergarten teachers have noticed an increase in the number of single parent families. Especially the teenage mother, who has not even met all her childhood needs. Divorced and dysfunctional families have also increased.

One of the more increasing scenes are the step or mixed families, where the children of one divorced parent becomes a new family with the children of another divorced parents children.

The integration of curriculum through whole language was one of the more surprising findings. Kindergarten teachers who were trying whole language or who had been doing it for a short time were impressed with its results. They felt that they could get much more curriculum covered in a day and at the same time lessening the stress put on the children. Teachers found that by using whole language children were less likely to distinguish learning abilities among their peers. This is important because children will become better risk takers if they are not intimidated by their peers. This method greatly reduces the

pencil paper tasks and allows students to have more hands on experiences.

A surprising finding was that kindergarten teachers found that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of students who come to school with speech problems. Eighty-three percent of the teachers interviewed noticed such an increase. The teachers attribute this to the, over mentioned, societal changes and the pattern of parents communicating less with their children. Also being read to less and the influence of television.

Ten of the teachers interviewed taught a half day program while the remaining seven taught a whole day program. This was not a heated issue among the teachers interviewed. Their main focus was the children and what was in their best interest. However the teachers who taught a half day program would like to see their schools switch to a whole day program, "IF" nothing else was added to their already bulging curriculum.

Four veteran teachers that were interviewed all taught in the same school. These teachers saw the changes happening to their school and were able to stay away from the strict academic trends into which other schools were falling. They were fortunate enough to have administrators who backed

their knowledge and experience in early education. Their knowledge and courage put them on the cutting edge. What these teachers have been doing other schools that were visited were just starting to do. The teachers were faced with the same societal changes. Yet they provided a rich, child centered learning environment.

A not so surprising finding was how teachers viewed their changing role. They found themselves not just being teachers but record keepers, secretaries, psychologists, counselors, disciplinarians, sex educators and second parents.

Implications for the Classroom

The nature of Kindergarten programs must change to meet the needs and capacities of the children. Children should be exposed to an activity/experience based environment so that their maximum potential can be met. The increased use of hands on, manipulative materials to promote inquiry and problem solving should be used. Programs should be more of an outward extension of the home rather than a downward extension of the school. The curriculum should be matched to the child with consideration of the child's developmental stage.

Parents and schools must work together. Involvement is essential if parents are to understand the purpose of Kindergarten education. Parents need to assist in achieving Kindergarten goals and reinforce those learnings in the home. Parents must be encouraged to seek developmentally appropriate programs for their Kindergarten children by informing administrators and school boards of their expectations of such programs.

Teacher's judgement should be given much more consideration in designing programs that meet the best interests of all the children. After all, teachers are our best resource in the education of our young children.

Further Research

The findings and observations of this study raise questions for further inquiry.

Research should focus on our best kindergarten teachers. Researchers need to discover what makes a great kindergarten teacher and find the strategies they use in their classrooms that make them and their students successful.

Curriculum specialists need to work with early childhood education experts and kindergarten teachers to ensure what will be taught is developmentally sound for young learners.

Additional research on the increased speech difficulties, brought out by this study, should be looked into. Strategies to improve language learning needs to be shared with parents as well as educators.

Studies on other primary grades should be conducted to determine what effects the changing kindergarten has had on them.

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