PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL READINESS, DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES, AND THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONALISM

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PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL READINESS, DEVELOPMENTALLY
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A Project
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Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

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by
Brittany Kristine McAllister
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ABSTRACT

Research supports the knowledge that there exist many models on and definitions of school readiness within early education. Additionally, research shows that utilizing developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) produces positive short and long term results for students; indicating the effectiveness and necessity for DAP in the classroom. The study sought to inform teachers via presentation on the subjects of school readiness and DAP; as well as gain insight on the barriers teachers face in utilizing their school readiness and DAP knowledge base in the classroom. To accomplish this, the study used a pre-survey, presentation with discussion, and a post-survey to collect information on teachers' knowledge and beliefs, teachers' levels of professionalism and autonomy, as well as gain insight on how useful the presentation was for teachers. Results show teachers gained information from the presentation but may be unable to use this information in the public setting. These results are based on direct feedback from teachers, as well as the effect size of teacher's responses on ranking school readiness characteristics and DAP/DIP items before and after the presentation. Regarding what teachers know about these topics, results indicate variance on teachers' ideas on school readiness. Responses were sorted into three themes; specific skills, different areas of development, and the importance of early experiences. Teachers also had, on average, an appropriate ranking of DAP/DIP teaching practices in the classroom, with scores that grew stronger for some teaching practices after the presentation.
Additionally, multiple-choice questions on teacher autonomy and teacher professionalism show that most teachers feel they are treated as professionals and autonomous in their positions. However, despite these results, a discussion on barriers of implementing an appropriate model of school readiness as well as DAP portrayed a much different scenario with teachers in the public setting. In fact, this study found that teachers in the public setting are very much limited by administrators in their ability to utilize ideas, curriculum, and assessments they view as appropriate in the classroom. As such, future research should seek to reach the school administrators to gain insight on the basis of their decisions, as well as educate them on the research supporting successful learning in the early education classroom.
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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to every teacher and mentor who has not only imparted knowledge, but also inspired and encouraged me. Never forget that your work is some of the most important; it changes lives.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

School readiness has been under speculation for quite some time in the education field. While there have been many definitions and models on school readiness, this study utilizes the definition developed by the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP). That is, school readiness uses the ecological model and comprises five dimensions of development: physical development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognitive and general knowledge (Zaslow et al., 2000). The ecological model represents the concept of not only having the child prepared for school, but having the child’s support system involved and prepared as well (CRP, 2007). This concept may take shape, for example, in any of the following: parents who are prepared to support and assist their child in their learning, schools that support their teachers and students, or communities that offer effective programs to provide assistance for both parenting and student assistance. This definition, as suggested by the NEGP, is used because it gives appreciation to readiness being for the whole child as well as his or her environment.

The NEGP is the result of the Goals 2000: Educate American Act of 1989 (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). This legislation, along with many other pieces of legislation, has been influential to both early childhood and K-12 education. This includes the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 1965, the Improving
America’s School’s Act (IASA) of 1994, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, the Good Start, Grow Smart Initiative of 2002, and others, which have contributed funding, regulations, and resources to the education field, with the intention of assisting students in being ready and successful in school (GSGS Interagency Workgroup, 2006; Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003; Parlakian, 2010).

Perceptions of school readiness vary within the field of education. Studies such as the one from Mashburn and Henry (2004) investigate these differences. Findings from the study indicate that both preschool and kindergarten teachers tend to focus on more basic skills when making assessments (Mashburn & Henry, 2004). Researchers also found preschool teachers’ assessment ratings to be less valid compared to kindergarten teachers’ assessment ratings (Mashburn & Henry, 2004). A study from Lewit and Baker (1995) looks at perceptions of school readiness from parents and teachers. Researchers found that 60% of parents rated academic skills as highly important for school readiness, while only 10% of teachers did the same; suggesting that teachers’ perceptions may more closely resemble the NEGP definition of school readiness (Lewit & Baker, 1995). Another important study investigates perceptions on school readiness through focus groups of professionals and parents (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Findings suggested many tensions exist concerning school readiness for both professionals and parents; therefore, Wesley and Buysse (2003) have various suggestions for addressing these tensions and enhancing school readiness.
Developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) are a group of concepts that have been shown to contribute to higher levels of school readiness (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994). DAP refer to appropriate instruction practices for young children’s learning, influenced by theorists such as Brofenbrenner (1979) and Piaget (Huffman & Speer, 2000). Many studies exist that support DAP being used in the classroom. These include studies like the one by Huffman and Speer (2000), which found that DAP promote academic achievement in inner city schools. Another study by Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, and Sparling (1994), found DAP positively related to higher school readiness and cognitive skills with children in a Head Start program. Also, one study by Hohmann, Baret, and Weikart (1978) investigated the DAP High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, which showed better cognitive skills in children. Two longitudinal studies from Schweinhart and Weikart (1993; 1997) looked at the DAP High/Scope project. Their findings indicated higher rates of high school graduation, higher monthly income, and lower rates of arrest for those who were in the DAP program (Schweinhart & Weikart 1993; 1997).

Another study by Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, and Hernandez (1991) investigated personal beliefs regarding developmentally appropriate practices for teachers as compared to what is required in their teaching setting. So where a teacher may hold modern DAP beliefs, he/she may be prevented from acting on their education and/or personal beliefs because their school system may hold more traditional views (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991).
Researchers indicate this is a result of low teacher autonomy, a component of teacher professionalism (Day et al., 2007; Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003; Sockett, 1993; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005).

The field of education has varied definitions of teacher professionalism. Similar domains typically include content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and skills, collaboration among colleagues, and teacher autonomy (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003; Sockett, 1993). Specifically, teacher autonomy refers to the teacher’s ability to utilize his/her skills, knowledge, and experience regarding the child and what they know about child development to make appropriate and effective decisions (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Studies show higher rates of teacher autonomy lead to high rates of job satisfaction, teacher empowerment, collaboration among colleagues, as well as an overall sense of professionalism (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Autonomous teachers are also more likely to go beyond the minimum requirements in assisting their students (Tschannen-Moran, 2005). As such, teacher autonomy and professionalism are important concepts to consider when addressing child outcomes and more specifically, school readiness.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

History and Public Policy Affecting School Readiness

It is important to consider the history and public policy that has helped to shape what school readiness has become when examining the research and its implications. The Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 1965, by which President Lyndon B. Johnson enacted the war on poverty, gave funding to disadvantaged children who were thought to need help in schools (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). This funding, called Title I funding, was given to low-income schools with low-achieving students in hopes of improving academic achievement (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). In 1983, a report called A Nation at Risk was published (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). This report described the many ways in which public schools were not adequate for [all] children (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). The report described the decline in SAT scores, high illiteracy rates in young adults, and the increased need for remedial classes at the college level (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). With the report, recommendations were made to improve schools and student outcomes. These included changes in content and curriculum, student expectations, student time spent on class work, and teacher preparations (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003).

The results of the A Nation at Risk report would later inspire the reauthorization of ESEA in the form of the Improving America’s Schools Act.
(IASA) of 1994 (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). The major difference from Johnson’s ESEA was that this new legislation applied to all children, not just the impoverished (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). With this updated legislation, which relied on the suggestions within *A Nation at Risk*, curricula were shifted to become more standardized and test/assessment motivated (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). This shift was a result of the new legislation requiring schools and teachers to become more accountable for their students, with the intention of ensuring student success (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). Eventually, the essence of both ESEA and IASA would later become the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 for public schools (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003).

Long before NCLB was passed, the George H. W. Bush Administration introduced the Goals 2000: Educate America Act in 1989 (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). The President and all fifty governors held an education summit where the goals were developed and adopted (“National Education Goals Panel,” 2002). Subsequent to this, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) was formed; comprised of governors, members of congress, state legislators, as well as two administrators (“National Education Goals Panel,” 2002). The first of these goals was that by the year 2000, all children would come to kindergarten prepared to learn (Feeney et al., 2009). The remainder of the goals include that by the year 2000: the high school graduation rate will be at least 90%; students leaving fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade will demonstrate adequate competency in certain subject areas; teachers will have adequate access to professional
development opportunities; students will rank first in the world in science and math; all adults will be literate and able to function in a global society; all schools will be drug, alcohol, and weapon free; and schools will encourage and increase involvement of parents in their child’s education (“National Education Goals Panel,” 2002).

Overall, the goals were developed to improve teaching and encourage student success on a national level (Feeney et al., 2009). However, the first goal, all children would come to kindergarten prepared to learn, is an important concept to consider regarding school readiness. It has had a tremendous effect on the early education field and how school readiness is viewed and used (Feeney et al., 2009). This goal was the first to highlight the importance of school readiness and thus, was the first to place a large importance on children’s readiness to succeed in school (Feeney et al., 2009).

Whereas the intention of this goal is to prepare all children for school, it tends to place an emphasis on the scores the child receives, rather than on the progress a child makes over the course of the year (Feeney et al., 2009). Professionals have become inundated with concern for meeting certain guidelines, leaving less time and concentration on school transitions, rapport and relationships, and being able to utilize the ecological model overall (Meisels, 1998; Scott-Little et al., 2006). This goal of all children ready to learn seems to have shifted focus onto the attainment of certain results in children, rather than
what professionals can do to facilitate and scaffold the learning process (Meisels, 1998).

After NCLB was passed in 2001, the Good Start, Grow Smart Initiative of 2002 was passed and took hold (GSGS Interagency Workgroup, 2006). This initiative covers three areas of early childhood education. These include early learning guidelines, professional development plans, and program coordination (GSGS Interagency Workgroup, 2006). Early learning guidelines refers to each state developing their own guidelines for children ages three through five; these guidelines would come to look much like the standards seen in kindergarten through twelfth grade (Parlakian, 2010). These guidelines cover literacy, pre-reading, language, and pre-math skills (Parlakian, 2010). Under this legislation, the guidelines are voluntary at the federal level, and are only mandatory if they are required and/or supported by a state or territory (GSGS Interagency Workgroup, 2006). The second area, professional development plans, suggests that each state offer education and training opportunities to administrators and teachers (Parlakian, 2010). The intention here is to scaffold these professionals’ abilities with training to help their students be ready for school. The third area, program coordination, recommends that each state coordinate early childhood programs to further support students and their families (Parlakian, 2010). These can include programs such as Head Start, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the Child Care and Development Fund (CDDF), as well as others (Parlakian, 2010). Even with this legislation being voluntary in nature, it
has helped to begin the process of many states moving toward having early learning standards, training, and coordination within their programs (Wilcox-Herzog, 2009).

California has done many things to become more congruent with what the Good Start, Grow Smart Initiative suggests. In 2004, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Jack O’Connell, began the process of developing California’s preschool learning foundations (CDE Child Development Division, 2010). These foundations identify what knowledge and skills early childhood educators can expect to observe their students exhibiting in children’s first or second year of preschool (CDE Child Development Division, 2010). These foundations were developed over a three-year period and resemble that of the standards seen in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Volume 1 of the foundations was formally released on January 22, 2008 (CDE Child Development Division, 2010). The three-year period allowed for various forms of input to be collected, considered, and incorporated, as appropriate (CDE Child Development Division, 2010). This process included input from the following: four statewide stakeholder meetings, fifty-three statewide public input sessions, four public hearings, and public commentary received through the cde.ca.gov website in April, May, and November of 2007 (CDE Child Development Division, 2010). Certainly a great deal of effort was made to ensure the preschool learning foundations were developed in a way that was inclusive of input from many sources statewide;
including researchers, early childhood educators, advocates, and parents (CDE Child Development Division, 2008).

The intent and purpose of the preschool learning foundations is to strengthen preschool education and improve school readiness for all children. They are meant to advance and clarify the understanding of young children’s learning, as well as support and enhance instructional practice (CDE Child Development Division, 2008). The intent is that all early childhood professionals will utilize these foundations in a way that will better prepare all preschool children in acquiring the skills and knowledge they will need in kindergarten (CDE Child Development Division, 2008). The foundations cover academic content areas as well as social-emotional development and English language development for English language learners (CDE Child Development Division, 2008). The academic content areas covered include language and literacy, and mathematics (CDE Child Development Division, 2008). Initially, content areas were intentionally aligned with California’s kindergarten academic content standards to aid preschoolers in being ready to build on these areas once they reach kindergarten (CDE Child Development Division, 2008). Under the same intentions, California preschool learning foundations have now been aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for K-12, which replaced academic content standards (Ong, 2012). With CCSS, an emphasis has been placed on the importance of successful education experiences even in early learning, as
CCSS are intended to bolster students for college and career success starting in kindergarten. (Ong, 2012).

Today, NCLB continues to influence the field of early childhood education on the national level, through the programs that were developed under the law. The Early Reading First and the Even Start programs were developed by NCLB and continue to be active. Also, Good Start, Grow Smart continues as the federal early childhood initiative. There are many federal programs that are supported by the Good Start, Grow Smart initiative. This includes the Child Care and Development Fund, which supports families with vouchers for child care, as well as federal funding to the state level (GSGS Interagency Workgroup, 2006). Head Start and Early Head Start are two additional programs that also receive support in the way of funding agencies that qualify under the federal Head Start Learning Framework, which has also now aligned itself with the CCSS (GSGS Interagency Workgroup, 2006; Ong 2012). Title I preschool funding provides federal assistance to local school districts (GSGS Interagency Workgroup, 2006). Also, there are special education grants for both local schools, as well as grant funding for infants, toddlers, and families for aiding in early intervention (GSGS Interagency Workgroup, 2006). All of these programs and funding efforts, along with the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, exist to continually support and improve the quality of early childhood education for all children, and ultimately to support school readiness and student success (Klein, 2016).
The new Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 is the update and replacement for NCLB, under the current Obama Administration (Klein, 2016). The law will take full effect during the 2017-2018 school year, and will make several changes to the education system (Klein, 2016). These include changes in accountability plans and systems, how low-performing schools are handled, how states intervene with struggling schools, testing practices, standards, English language learner education and special education, teacher evaluations, and funding (Klein, 2016). More specifically to the field of early childhood education, the legislation will recognize the importance of early childhood education and supports the field to collaborate with K-12 to ensure and bolster student success (Samuels, 2016). This is supported in the way of providing funding for states to use and encourage the development of early childhood programs (Samuels, 2016).

Existing Models of School Readiness

The Community Research Partners (CRP) report describes that there has been incredible difficulty in defining the term school readiness (2007). There has been general agreement that children should possess specific skills upon entering school, however, there are many different viewpoints as to which skills are pertinent for being school ready (CRP, 2007). As a result, there are many different models that seek to define school readiness.
The maturational model sees school readiness as a matter of maturational readiness (CRP, 2007). That is, school readiness would solely focus on the level of maturation in cognitive, psychomotor, and emotional skills, regardless of child’s age (CRP, 2007). Thus, when the child has come to mature appropriately in these areas, he/she should possess skills deemed necessary for success, and considered ready to attend school (Feeney et al., 2009). For example, if the child were not showing maturation in a specific area, a maturationist would seek to alter the curriculum to fit around the child’s specific needs. In today’s schools, specific preformed curricula typically do not allow time or flexibility to align the curriculum based on the child’s needs, even if the child is not making progress in one or more areas (Feeney et al., 2009). There then exists the need to hold a child back due to a lack of maturational readiness (Feeney et al., 2009). This decision typically comes from understanding that the current education system will not wait for the child and the extra year is intended to give the child time to catch up (Feeney et al., 2009).

The environmentalist model bases school readiness on children’s attainment of social skills through their environment (CRP, 2007). An assessment based on this model might rely on a parent’s report of the child’s readiness (CRP, 2007). Combining both the environmentalist and maturational models into one cohesive model has been used; it takes into account the child’s school readiness based on his/her social experiences as well as his/her maturation (Andrews & Slate, 2001).
The constructivist model defines readiness as being based on the acquisition of skills from more advanced peers or adults (CRP, 2007). An assessment based on this model is similar to that of the environmentalist model, but can include input from various adults such as parents, teachers, and other adults in contact with the child (CRP, 2007). This means the definition of and criteria for assessing school readiness often changes from school to school and even class to class (Feeney et al., 2009).

The cumulative-skills model describes readiness as the acquisition of certain skills that are needed before going to school to learn additional skills (CRP, 2007). This means the child must possess certain relevant skills and capabilities; these skills are seen as necessary and act as a foundation on which attending school will build an education (Andrews & Slate, 2001). Relying on this model, skills tend to be examined by administering an exam similar to an entrance exam. This model looks similar to the maturational model in expecting certain skills to be present for school readiness, with the exception that the maturational model would suggest changing the curriculum to meet the child’s needs and maturational readiness. Instead, the cumulative-skills model relies solely on a checklist of skills and school readiness assessments.

The ecological model, also known as the transactional or interactionist model, bases the idea of school readiness on the entire ecological system for the child (CRP, 2007). This means that not only should the child be ready, but the child’s whole support system as well. This includes early experiences, families,
communities, services, and early learning settings and schools (CRP, 2007). This model recognizes that children come from different backgrounds and their skills when entering school are affected as such (Feeney et al., 2009). The main focus of this model does not reside necessarily on what characteristics the child possesses or must possess to be ready, but rather, what involved adults can do to scaffold and support the child’s success in school (Feeney et al., 2009). This is the model the NEGP uses and regards as being most appropriate for young children.

Defining School Readiness

With the existence of so many models on school readiness, many researchers, organizations, and programs often see school readiness differently and use different sets of criteria to assess children. The definition developed by the NEGP comprises five dimensions of development for children, as well as incorporating the ecological model (Zaslow et al., 2000). The dimensions to be assessed are physical wellbeing and development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge (Zaslow et al., 2000). Overall, this definition of school readiness encompasses the idea of having the whole child ready for school, with adults present and able to support the child with their educational needs (Feeney et al., 2009).
There is research evidence to support that the ecological approach is an appropriate one. For instance, the following study looked at readying schools for at-risk children through a program called Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) (Curtis & Simons, 2008). The program was launched by the W.K. Kellogg foundation, and emphasized development of infrastructure to support school readiness, early care, and early education within applicable schools across the United States (Curtis & Simons, 2008). From the researchers’ observations and review of the literature, they found that essentially an ecological model should be followed to ensure school readiness and success in all students (Curtis & Simons, 2008). This was shown in the SPARK schools as they often performed extraordinarily better than schools in their surrounding area (Curtis & Simons, 2008). After reviewing the collected data and current literature, the researchers found nine pathways to ready schools for children. They are: “child success in school; a welcoming atmosphere; leadership; connections to early care and education; connecting culturally and linguistically with children and families; parental involvement; partnering with the community; using assessment results for individual student progress and improving school performance; and quality improvement including professional development and training” (Curtis & Simons, 2008).

Unlike the schools in the Curtis and Simons study (2008), most teachers and schools currently utilize the maturational and/or cumulative-skills models when assessing school readiness in children. This is shown through the use of
standardized checklists as means of assessment and the emphasis placed typically on one area of development, cognition or general knowledge (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2006). The ecological model takes a more appropriate approach in recognizing readiness for school in that it takes into account the multiple components that affect school readiness, not looking just to the child and his/her multiple areas of development, but also to those around the child who can provide assistance with any areas that require additional support (CRP, 2007).

Perceptions of School Readiness and Readiness Assessment

Perceptions of school readiness vary among and between parents, children, school districts, principals, legislature, program directors, teachers and others. This variance appears to be due to state, school, and program differences, along with differences in education and personal beliefs and perceptions (Mashburn & Henry, 2004). The following study looked at differences among preschool and kindergarten teachers in assessing children in three areas: kindergarten readiness, communication skills, and academic skills (Mashburn & Henry, 2004). The teachers’ assessment ratings were then compared to the direct assessment of each child. It was found that both kindergarten and preschool teachers based their ratings on more basic skills, tending to ignore more advanced skills, such as expressive language or solving applied problems (Mashburn & Henry, 2004). In addition, preschool teachers had a lower association between their ratings and the direct assessment (Mashburn & Henry,
This means that overall, compared to kindergarten teachers, preschool teachers’ ratings were less similar to the direct assessments made. These greater differences in ratings imply that assessments made by preschool teachers may be less valid than that of kindergarten teachers. As a result, Mashburn and Henry (2004) made many suggestions.

Mashburn and Henry (2004) suggested providing training opportunities for teachers to facilitate a more universal understanding of what school readiness is and how to look for it. Next, they proposed using only kindergarten teachers to administer these assessments (Mashburn & Henry, 2004). This suggestion is made due to their results indicating that teachers’ level of education is associated with the validity of the assessment (Mashburn & Henry, 2004). More specifically, the results of assessments from the kindergarten teachers were found to be more valid and more closely resembling that of the direct assessments made. Mashburn and Henry (2004) suggest the reason for higher assessment validity is due to higher education levels among kindergarten teachers compared to preschool teachers. Thus, it seems that if training opportunities were provided for preschool teachers regarding assessment, assessment validity may increase among these teachers.

Next, Mashburn and Henry (2004) suggest having a careful eye on validity of the assessment, especially pertaining to teacher bias. The results of this study indicate that care and caution must be taken in preparing and executing assessment tools to ensure they are valid and help to control for teacher bias.
Teacher bias refers to the differences among the ways in which teachers understand and view school readiness (Mashburn & Henry, 2004). These differences can greatly affect how teachers rate student performance and therefore, can affect validity of the assessment given (Mashburn & Henry, 2004). However, attempting to control for teacher bias and validity could require a rigid definition of school readiness, as well as an inflexible administration of the actual assessment (Mashburn & Henry, 2004). To avoid this, it is imperative to take into consideration input from the teaching professionals who work with young people everyday. Not only are these professionals a good source of first hand information, having their input will encourage teacher buy-in (Campbell and Anketell, 2007). Teacher buy-in refers to teachers believing in the work and curriculum with which they work (Campbell and Anketell, 2007). It is an essential component for any educational program to be effective.

A study by Campbell and Anketell (2007) sought to contribute in an effort to create a statewide program in Pennsylvania. The program was geared toward assessing children with disabilities that included teacher buy-in (Campbell & Anketell, 2007). One goal of the study was to gain an understanding of existing practices in identifying program differences, regional differences, and best practice differences across the state. Another goal was to gain understanding of what the teachers’ perspectives were on assessment and the implementation of a statewide assessment program. This study found that general opinions on the
advantages of a uniform assessment system for families would be: the
assessment process would be easier; the process would be more
understandable; the assessments would be less stressful for children and their
families; and the process would reflect the family priorities and concerns
(Campbell & Anketell, 2007). Overall, the teachers did not feel that one
assessment could do the whole job in assessing the developmental abilities of
children.

A similar study looked at twenty focus groups comprised of both
professionals and parents, to investigate their meaning of school readiness
(Wesley & Buysse, 2003). The findings indicated differences in opinions of what
school readiness meant. The professionals’ concept of readiness was different
than that of the parents’, with the professionals’ ideas of school readiness being
more closely linked to state suggestions (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). There were
many tensions identified with regard to school readiness. These include: the
performance pressure assessments bring to children, their families, and
teachers; a conflict between state set expectations and personal beliefs
regarding school readiness; and inconsistency in defining kindergarten eligibility
on both skills criteria and chronological age (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Wesley
and Buysse (2003) make three major suggestions for making school readiness
assessments: promote strategies that foster school readiness, “not just the
outcomes that define it”; increase accountability within professionals through
workshops and training; and promote emotional and social development as the
foundation for children being ready for school. Another major suggestion is that children should not be denied entry into school due to a failed screening, nor should they be held back in kindergarten due to failing to meet local criteria (Wesley & Buysse, 2003).

Another study that examined school readiness perceptions looked at perceptions of school readiness from both parents and teachers. A study conducted by Lewit and Baker (1995) examined three national surveys that looked at both teacher and parent perceptions on readiness, and what characteristics a child should possess to be considered ready for school. The study also looked at parents and teachers beliefs on the proportion of children they believe to be ready for school (Lewit & Baker, 1995). The survey was done with parents and teachers because these two groups typically have the decision-making power in whether a child is deemed ready for school or not (Lewit & Baker, 1995). The authors noted the great complexity and difficulty in attempting to directly measure children on a national level regarding their characteristics necessary for readiness (Lewit & Baker, 1995). This difficulty in directly measuring school readiness is due to the vast number of definitions of school readiness, assessments, and policies in place from state to state and even school to school, as described earlier.

Results of this study found that regarding the concept of readiness, teachers rated the characteristic of being physically healthy, well nourished, and rested as the most important (Lewit & Baker, 1995). After physical health,
teachers then rated the other most important as “communication skills, enthusiasm, and taking turns” (Lewit & Baker, 1995). In fact, both teachers and parents found all these characteristics to be necessary for success (Lewit & Baker, 1995). However, a major difference found between parents’ and teachers’ ratings was that 60% of parents viewed basic academic skills as being important for readiness, while only 10% of teachers felt the same (Lewit & Baker, 1995). These findings suggest that teachers relate more closely to the NEGP definition of school readiness than parents tend to, recognizing that early education is multifaceted and not purely academics-based.

The results regarding the proportion of children ready for school were taken from two national surveys; the National Household Education Survey (NHES) and the National Survey of Kindergarten Teachers (NSKT) (Lewit & Baker, 1995). The NHES was a parent report on the assessment given of their child by the teacher. Parents reported that 63% of the children were assessed as having all five top characteristics necessary for school readiness (Lewit & Baker, 1995). This indicates that based on teacher-administered assessments, 63% of the children were found to be ready for school. These characteristics include health, communication, enthusiasm, taking turns, and restlessness (Lewit & Baker, 1995). Parents reported that 89% of the children had four of the five top characteristics needed for readiness (Lewit & Baker, 1995). With parents indicating a higher percentage of children being ready for school compared to that of the assessments, there does seem to be a difference between how
readiness is perceived across difference viewpoints, such as with parents, teachers, and what assessments show.

For the NSKT survey, teachers were asked what proportion of their students were ready for school (Lewit & Baker, 1995). This proportion was found to be 65% school ready and 35% of children not school ready (Lewit & Baker, 1995). Teachers were also asked to compare the percentage of children ready currently with children they taught five years prior (Lewit & Baker, 1995). Twenty-five percent of teachers indicated that current children were more school ready for school than the previous children; while 42% felt children were less ready than those five years before them (Lewit & Baker, 1995). This report does not indicate a positive outlook for increasing school readiness, but Lewit and Baker (2005) also remind the reader that these results are taken from teacher’s opinions and do not compare them to actual assessments. Another point to consider is that researchers did not appear to control for age of entrance with regards to teacher’s perceptions of overall school readiness.

Another issue addressed in the study is readiness in terms of the school being ready and able to serve its children (Lewit & Baker, 1995). Lewit and Baker indicate that often times, children are held back because not only is the child not ready, but the school may lack the resources to be able to help the child in need (Lewit & Baker, 1995). Lewit and Baker (1995) suggest that holding a child back is not beneficial to the child, but rather can be detrimental to their overall outcomes. This reason for holding children back is congruent with the reasons a
maturationist might hold a child back (Feeney et al., 2009). It also works on the ecological model, recognizing the need to have not only the child ready for school, but also the child’s school and support system ready as well (CRP, 2007).

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

An important group of concepts that contribute to higher levels of school readiness are developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994). DAP refer to the instruction practices that are considered appropriate for young children’s learning, as outlined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991). The NAEYC has developed guidelines and principles for teachers, establishing DAP for children birth to eight years old (NAEYC, 2009).

There are five categories of guidelines regarding DAP: teaching to promote learning, facilitating a caring community in the classroom, developing curriculum to achieve goals, establishing relationships with families, and assessing children’s learning and development (NAEYC, 2009). The core of DAP refer to the concept of “intentionality” on the part of the teacher (NAEYC, 2009). “Intentionality” is the idea that teachers make good decisions, which is done by not only looking at the child, but also the cultural and social contexts the child lives in, as well as what the teacher knows in regards to child learning and development (NAEYC, 2009). DAP are not just supported by the NAEYC, they...
are based on theoretical approaches from Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Piaget (Huffman & Speer, 2000).

Under the theoretical approach from Bronfenbrenner (1979), child development is believed to be enhanced by the child’s environment. In this, the environment should allow the child to be able to observe and engage in “ongoing patterns of progressively more complex activity” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This should be facilitated by individuals who have built rapport and trust with the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Linney and Seidman (1989) also purport that learning should be facilitated in environments where students have continuity and feel safe to participate. Also, children should be offered the “opportunity, resources, and encouragement” to participate in any classroom activities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Huffman & Speer, 2000).

DAP also relies on Piaget’s constructivism (Bredekamp, 1993). This is the theory that children “actively construct” their reality and that learning can be facilitated by offering children opportunities to participate and engage in the environment (Bredekamp, 1993). Thus, the environment that the teacher provides should be organized in a way that best caters to all the children’s needs (Huffman & Speer, 2000). Also, DAP suggest that it is the process of learning that is most important rather than the end product (Huffman & Speer, 2000). For example, a completed project is less important to a child’s learning experience than the overall process by which the child arrived at the finished product. Social interaction is also an important component of DAP, with teachers facilitating
interaction, not only between the teacher and children, but also between peers (Huffman & Speer, 2000). DAP also place importance on the consistent use of student-initiated activities and play, and less emphasis on teacher-directed activities (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & DeWolf, 1993). Teacher-directed activities refer to activities that have the teacher actively directing students while students remain seated, passively listening and learning rather than actively participating (Huffman & Speer, 2000). This is also known as didactic instruction (Huffman & Speer, 2000).

Multiple studies have shown that DAP are appropriate and effective for students in the academic, behavioral, and social areas of development (Huffman & Speer, 2000). A study by Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, and Sparling (1994) found that in a sample of children in Head Start, DAP were positively and significantly related to school readiness and cognitive performance. Another study looked at DAP and academic achievement (Huffman & Speer, 2000). Making comparisons of academic achievement to the amount of DAP used in the classrooms for inner-city children, results showed that DAP classrooms promote significantly higher academic achievement (Huffman & Speer, 2000). More specifically, researchers found that students had better skills for applied problems as well as better letter and word recognition (Huffman & Speer, 2000). One study was conducted that investigated children who were taught using the DAP High/Scope Perry Preschool Program; results showed significantly better cognitive skills (Hohmann, Baret, & Weikart, 1978). Longitudinal studies done by Schweinhart and Weikart
also show positive long-term outcomes for children taught under the DAP High/Scope Perry Preschool Program. In particular, results from the studies indicated higher rates of high school graduation, higher monthly incomes, and fewer arrests when compared to their counterparts (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993; 1997).

Conversely, studies conducted on developmentally inappropriate practices (DIP) indicate poor outcomes for children. DIP is qualified by an emphasis on highly structured didactic instruction and a focus on basic academic skills (Huffman & Speer, 2000). In a study conducted by Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, and Milburn (1995), DIP showed negative outcomes on several measures of motivation for children. Results from a study by Marcon (1995) showed negative outcomes for inner-city children. By fourth grade, these children experienced lower levels of school achievement than their counterparts (Marcon, 1995).

Looking at more long-term effects, one study showed that children taught with DIP experienced poorer social adjustment through high school (Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larner, 1986). Other studies have also indicated negative emotional and social outcomes for children (Hart, Burts, & Charlesworth, 1997; Stipek, Feiler, Byler, Ryan, Milburn, & Salmon, 1998).

Unfortunately, most teachers do not use DAP in their instruction (Huffman & Speer, 2000). One study of 103 kindergarten classes looked at the rates of DAP and DIP used in the classroom (Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner, 1991). It was found that only approximately 20% of classrooms met the minimum standards for
DAP (Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner, 1991). As research suggests, student academic achievement and overall social and emotional outcomes are expected to be better under DAP and therefore, DAP should be used in the classroom (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994; Hart, Burts, & Charlesworth, 1997; Hohmann, Baret, & Weikart, 1978; Marcon, 1995; Huffman & Speer, 2000; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993; 1997; Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larson, 1986; Stipek, Feiler, Byler, Ryan, Milburn, & Salmon, 1998; Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, & Milburn, 1995).

An important concept to keep in mind is that the difference of use of DIP and DAP in instructional practice ultimately affects student outcomes, as well as school readiness skills (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991). A study conducted by Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, and Sparling (1994), examined Head Start classrooms, investigating the level of DAP in the classroom and compared to a test of school readiness skills as well as a mental processing measure. The level of DAP in classrooms was measured using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994). The scale used that measured mental processing was the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994). Also used was the Preschool Inventory, a scale used to measure school readiness skills (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994). Teachers were also asked to complete the Adaptive Social Behavior Inventory and Vineland Communication Domain to gain insight into children's levels of behavior, and communicative and social development (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, &
Sparling, 1994). Additionally, a home screening questionnaire and parent interview were collected to gain insight into the children’s home lives. (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994).

Results indicated students performed better in classrooms that utilized DAP (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994). These results were true for the students, regardless of their home environment (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994). For teachers’ ratings on behavior and social development, DAP classrooms showed no advantage over DIP classrooms (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994).

Studies have suggested that when the classroom is child-focused with the teacher as a facilitator of learning, development is enhanced (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994). The researchers purport that increased performance on the mental processing and school readiness measures may be due to a number of factors (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994). These factors may include: the idea that DAP activities are more interesting and engaging for children; an increased level of interest on the child’s part may contribute to a higher level of attention span; skills and knowledge are presented through multiple avenues in DAP classrooms, providing an experience for the child that is more “generalizable” to a variety of settings; and exposure to multiple adults who can provide different and more positive interactions (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994).

Teachers who are more inclined to use direct instruction in the classroom
are known as being more traditional, not necessarily viewing student-initiated activities as being especially beneficial to student learning (Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner, 1991). Conversely, modern teachers typically recognize the importance of student-initiated learning and use this to their advantage in their instructional practice (Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner, 1991). Differences between traditional and modern teachers vary based on their personal beliefs, also known as implicit theories; teacher education, also known as explicit theories; and the program/school at which teachers teach (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991).

Regarding teachers’ school setting, researchers suggest a teacher may be modern in his/her beliefs, but may work in a very traditional setting and have limited teacher autonomy (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991). Teacher autonomy refers to the level of decision-making power a teacher has with regard to running their classroom and teaching their students (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Typically, preschool teachers experience little inconsistency between their belief system and what they practice in the classroom (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991). This is an interesting concept to consider, since findings among kindergarten teachers are not the same (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991). On the contrary, kindergarten teachers show higher rates of inconsistencies between how they teach and how they believe they should teach (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991). This result is suggested to be a consequence of low levels of teacher autonomy
for kindergarten teachers, as compared to their preschool teacher counterparts (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991). Teacher autonomy is a major component of professionalism (Day et al., 2007; Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003; Sockett, 1993; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005).

Teacher Professionalism

The concept of professionalism maintains a varied definition for each career field. There are sports professionals, medical professionals, law professionals and more. For the sake of the study, the concept of being a professional teacher is explored. American culture does not necessarily equate professionalism with being a teacher; however, teachers should not be underestimated, as they are vital components to the learning process for all children (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Since American culture does not necessarily view teaching as a professional position, investigating the self-perspective of teachers and how they view professionalism may provide beneficial insight. First, a look at teacher professionalism defined.

Isenberg and Jalongo (2003) identify professionalism for early childhood educators as being comprised of six characteristics. The first characteristic is fair ethical performance (Katz 1987, as cited by Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). Ethical performance for these professionals is crucial due to their “clientele”, or students, and the fact that they are a population of high vulnerability and no power (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). An ethical professional should work to include all
children in feeling capable and equally included in quality learning experiences (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). The next characteristic of professionalism for early childhood educators refers to possessing high amounts of necessary expertise and skill as well as flexibility under unfamiliar conditions (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999, as cited by Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). That is, not only should the teacher be well-educated and prepared to best serve their students, he/she should also be able to handle new and unfamiliar situations appropriately (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003).

The third characteristic that Isenberg and Jalongo identify as a characteristic of professionalism is the possession of knowledge and skills that surpass that of the common layperson (Wise & Liebbrand, 1993, as cited by Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). This refers to a teacher knowing what to do and how to do it given any educational setting. An important point to consider that Isenberg and Jalongo (2003) make is that teachers need to not only have a wealth of knowledge, but also wisdom; the ability to effectively access and utilize their knowledge.

Autonomy in practice is the fourth characteristic that is identified for teacher professionalism (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). Teachers who have autonomy are trusted to do their jobs without their actions being micromanaged from a supervisor (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). They have decision making power and are trusted to utilize their knowledge, skills, and past experience to handle each situation.
The fifth characteristic of professionalism identified by Isenberg and Jalongo is appropriate compensation (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). That is, professionals should be aptly compensated for their effort and work (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). However, Isenberg and Jalongo (2003) point out that typically, early childhood educators who are in the private school setting are typically not compensated as well as their public school counterparts. For example, early childhood education directors are typically paid less than first year teachers in a public school setting (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). The authors suggest that early childhood educators have been exploited to the point of subsidizing preschool and child care services (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). They explain that maintaining low expectations for early childhood educators’ education effectively allows pay to remain low and therefore, maintains a lower overhead for the child care center and parents to have to support (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003).

The last characteristic that Isenberg and Jalongo identify in professionalism is being a part of and being professionally recognized by a professional organization (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). There are organizations that early childhood educators are automatically a part of, with the only requirement being that they work with or have an interest in working with children (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). One example of this type of membership is with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). Another association that exists is the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE), whose members only
qualification be that the member is concerned with early childhood teacher education (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). The NAEYC, in conjunction with associations such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards (NBPTS), is working to create a career ladder for early childhood educators to follow (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). The hope here is to give teachers the opportunity for specific levels of professional development, defined by standards and requirements under the NAEYC (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003).

Overall, Isenberg and Jalongo (2003) recognize that professionalism does not solely exist at the individual level with each professional responsible for his or her own professionalism, but also collectively as a field. As such, it’s important to recognize that the authors have identified some characterics of professionalism which exist at the field level, with suggestions that the field as a whole help the general population view early childhood educators as true professionals (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003).

Teacher professionalism is also defined in the *Moral Base for Teacher Professionalism* (Sockett, 1993). Professionalism, according to Sockett (1993), is comprised of five categories: character, subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, commitment to continuous improvement, and relationships beyond the classroom. This definition focuses more on the individual characteristics of professionalism than what Isenberg and Jalongo identify. Character refers to the personal qualities the teacher may possess such as perseverance or patience.
Sockett’s (1993) assertion is that evaluations should shine more light on the character of a teacher and less on the actual act of teaching. And while the two are not mutually exclusive, Sockett (1993) suggests these evaluations should pull the focus from just performance and include both character and performance.

Knowledge base is also important when considering teacher professionalism (Sockett, 1993). There are two distinct types of knowledge, subject and pedagogical. Subject knowledge refers to having the understanding of what teachers are teaching, while pedagogical knowledge refers to teachers having and utilizing tools and techniques to transfer the subject knowledge effectively (Sockett, 1993). The latter includes abilities like maintaining efficient classroom management and delivering the curriculum in effective ways (Sockett, 1993). Sockett (1993) contends that modern education pays more attention to the level of pedagogical knowledge, unfortunately leaving other areas of professionalism unevaluated.

According to Sockett (1993), professional teachers should be “committed to change and continuous improvement.” Professional teachers understand that they may need to adapt their teaching to individual students to fulfill their education needs. The final category Sockett (1993) identifies for professional teachers is relationships beyond the classroom. This category refers to teachers working collaboratively as well as serving a wider role outside the classroom. Professional teachers understand the importance of working with others within
the school to enhance their teaching while at the same time, sharing effective tools with colleagues (Sockett, 1993).

A study conducted in 2005 sought to gain a better understanding of teachers and their perceptions of professionalism (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). This study based its definition of professionalism on Sockett’s article, *Moral Base for Teacher Professionalism* (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). The study was conducted as an exploratory focus group for teachers in elementary education, recording opinions from teachers on what a professional teacher should encompass (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Results indicated parallels between how Sockett and teachers both define professionalism.

Regarding the category of character, teachers agreed that certain personal qualities were important to teacher professionalism. Results showed that teachers had the most to say regarding character, and also possessed the most consistency when compared to the other categories (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). The teachers gave many examples of the qualities that comprise professional character. These include: being flexible, maintaining composure, being nurturing, maintaining a friendly demeanor, having patience, being organized, having confidence, and acting as a role model for students (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Teachers also indicated a professional teacher’s character would be “conscientious, creative, dedicated, [and] goal oriented” (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Professional teachers should also “care about what they do, take pride in their work, have good morals, [be] ethical in and out of school,
adhere to code of conduct/ethical behavior, set high standards for self and students, go above and beyond to do the job, [and be] open to new ideas/receptive to suggestions” (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). As for appearance, teachers indicated that professional teachers should dress professionally and appropriately for school (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Professional teachers should also maintain a positive attitude, have respect for their students, be passionate about education, be dedicated, and put children and their education first (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005).

Finally, professional teachers should take risks for the benefit of their students, be eager to learn new techniques, see teaching as their career, look forward to coming to school to teach, and be enthusiastic about teaching (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Tichenor and Tichenor (2005) contend this plethora of characteristics would be difficult maintain in one single teacher on any given day. However, the identification of so many characteristics indicate that the category of professional character is one that holds much clout in the education field and should not be taken lightly.

In this study, teachers recognized the importance of subject knowledge with responses such as “possess content knowledge,” “have a knowledge of curriculum,” and “be knowledgeable in all areas of certification” (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). However, teachers placed more importance on pedagogical knowledge than on subject knowledge, a result that resembles the views of modern education (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Tichenor and Tichenor (2005)
claim that this result lends support to Sockett’s argument that the modern field of education places too much emphasis on pedagogical professionalism, leaving the other areas lacking. Other comments from teachers regarding both subject and pedagogical knowledge include being reflective, motivating students, incorporating innovative teaching techniques, implementing curriculum efficiently, applying learning theories, being articulate and using proper English, implementing discipline strategies appropriate to subject and child, using a plethora of teaching strategies, and more (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005).

Teachers also recognized a need for commitment to continuous improvement and change. There was general consensus that professional teachers are reflective and evaluative of their teaching for the purpose of improving their teaching skills (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Teachers indicated also, that professionals should stay current in the field, continue their education and maintain a role as a lifetime learner, seek out and attend workshops to aid their practice in the classroom, actively seek out classroom resources to aid instruction, as well as initiate and implement necessary changes as appropriate (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005).

The final category addresses teacher’s relationships beyond the classroom. This category was not one that was as heavily discussed; however, teachers still described the importance of their role outside the walls of their classroom (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Group interviews revealed that teachers expect professionals to demonstrate the following: successful communication
with colleagues, parents, and the community members; be a positive example and mentor for colleagues both in and outside of the class; contribute to school decisions; be cooperative with and show respect for all parents, school employees, and community members; collaborate with and show concern for fellow colleagues; and contribute to professional organizations (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005).

One study conducted by Day, Flores, and Viana (2007) looked at changes in policy affecting teachers’ sense of professionalism for teachers in Portugal and England. Both countries have been under educational reform. Most recent changes for both countries have led to an increase in public scrutiny of teachers and the education system, bureaucratization, greater accountability on the part of the teacher, and increased management of teachers (Day, Flores, & Viana, 2007). Researchers indicate that increases in areas such as these can contribute to a decrease in teacher motivation and job satisfaction, and a decrease in teachers’ sense of professionalism (Day, 1999; Helsby 2000). Results for the study indicate that teachers in both England and Portugal see themselves as being professional in the traditional sense (Day et al., 2007). In this study, traditional professionalism refers to concepts such as discretionary decision-making, teacher’s work, moral purpose, and teacher autonomy (Day et al., 2007). Specific characteristics of professionalism were ranked differently among elementary teachers in England and Portugal (Day et al., 2007).

In this study, specific characteristics for being professional include:
continuing learning, commitment, care, moral and social purposes, discretionary judgment, collaborative cultures, and task complexity (Day et al., 2007). The top three ranked characteristics were continuing learning, commitment, and moral and social purposes for teachers in England, and care, commitment, and continuing learning for Portugal (Day et al., 2007). Researchers purport that care has fallen down the list for English teachers because of the increased pressure on them to produce desirable student test results (Day et al., 2007). This assertion appears to be confirmed with 85% of the English teachers saying that new national policies have changed what it means to be a professional in the field today (Day et al., 2007). With national policy changes in both Portugal and England, researchers asked teachers if any elements of their jobs had been encouraged or discouraged since the changes (Day et al., 2007).

Overall, both English and Portuguese elementary school teachers indicate the discouragement of the professional characteristics of discretionary judgment, commitment, care, and moral and social purpose (Day et al., 2007). Specifically, teachers shared that it was the increase in inspections and in-class monitoring that was associated with the loss of moral and social purpose (Day et al., 2007). Characteristics that were identified as being encouraged are collaboration, continuing learning, and task complexity (Day et al., 2007). Researchers noted that the Portuguese teachers had less agreement about what characteristics were encouraged and discouraged, as well as how to define professionalism (Day et al., 2007). These differences were largely attributed to a lack of
communication and training on the newly inducted national policies (Day et al., 2007). Teachers confirmed this attribution, as they indicated they desire more support, communication, and training on new policies (Day et al., 2007).

Teachers in both countries indicated disappointment with the implementation of the new national policies (Day et al., 2007). They indicated that implementation has been poorly executed in that they did not receive information in a timely manner, and they did not receive proper training or resources to fulfill their new expectations and responsibilities (Day et al., 2007). Their experience with an increase in bureaucratization led to an increase in workload, which led to less time for meeting children's individual needs, giving feedback, planning, and collaborating with colleagues (Day et al., 2007). Overall, teachers in both countries felt their sense of professionalism had been compromised by the policy changes (Day et al., 2007). From this article, it is important to see that policy changes may have an affect on teachers and their own definition and sense of professionalism.

Teacher Autonomy and Decision-Making Authority

Many definitions of teacher professionalism incorporate and place importance on teacher autonomy as a component of professionalism (Day et al., 2007; Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003; Sockett, 1993; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Although the concept may not be identified explicitly as teacher autonomy, each of the definitions incorporate the importance of some decision-making power on
the part of the teacher (Day et al., 2007; Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003; Sackett, 1993; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Teacher autonomy generally refers to the level of decision-making ability a teacher has with regard to running their classroom and teaching their students (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). An article from DemirkasImoglu (2010) purports that teacher autonomy is one of the most important components of professionalism. To explain, Friedman (1999) contends teacher autonomy is a means of strengthening teachers, both professionally and personally. Autonomy also functions as a buffer against pressures teachers face (Friedman, 1999). Forsyth and Danisiewicz (1985) argue that professional teachers' tasks are complicated and significant and with this complexity, teachers should have the power to handle these situations appropriately.

One study conducted by Tschannen-Moran (2009) looked at teacher professionalism constrained by high levels of bureaucratic orientation in their schools. In other words, the study examined teacher professionalism relative to teachers who experience high levels of stringent rules, little or no decision-making authority, and harsh consequences (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Bureaucratic orientation refers to the concept of decision-making power placed solely with the administration and higher powers of the school system, with little or no power resting with teachers (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Bureaucratic orientation is said to contribute to unnatural communication, unnecessary micromanagement, an abundance of regulations, and harsh consequences for disobeying rules (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). The researcher suggests that a
bureaucratic orientation also promotes the hampering of effective communication between teachers and administration, the decrease of morale and motivation among teachers, as well as stifling of efficiency and effectiveness of teachers (Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

To investigate, this study employed the Teacher Professionalism subscale from the School Climate Index (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). This scale measured the faculty’s trust among their colleagues at the school to (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). This subscale examined teachers’ perceptions of their colleagues in the categories of taking their work seriously, being committed to teaching, and going beyond expectations in meeting the needs of their students (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Findings from this subscale indicated that in schools where there were high levels of teacher professionalism and low levels of bureaucratization, teachers have respect for their colleagues’ efforts and capability (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Teachers are more likely to be enthusiastic about their work as well (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Teachers who work in schools that have high levels of teacher professionalism are also more likely to collaborate and work cohesively (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Collaboration is an important component of professionalism in and of itself, according to Tichenor and Tichenor (2005). For schools with a more bureaucratic orientation, findings indicate that teachers are less likely to collaborate or to go beyond minimum expectations.

This study also examined professional orientation of principals (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). This concept refers to how principals view their
faculty, either allowing for more decision-making power on the part of the teacher, less, or no real decision-making power at all (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). To measure this, the Enabling Structure Scale was used (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). A more professional orientation, viewing teachers as professionals with decision-making authority, is one that has lower levels of centralization, formalization, and standardization (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). That is, a less bureaucratic orientation for teachers promotes a higher level of professionalism (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Results also indicate that teachers possessed a higher level of trust in their administrators when the administrators treated teachers as professionals (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Treating teachers as professionals in this case is done through flexibility with rules (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Conversely, schools that had high levels of bureaucratization experienced high levels of distrust for administrators among the teachers (Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

Additional scales that were used are the Faculty Trust Scales (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Three subscales were used to determine faculty trust in the principal, colleagues, and students and parents (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Findings suggest that the level of bureaucratization influences trust among colleagues (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). That is, the less bureaucratization that exists in the school, the more trust faculty has in their colleagues (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Lower levels of bureaucratization was also associated with higher levels of trust in parents and students (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). An interesting
result showed that even when principal trust was low, teachers might incorrectly perceive a flexible orientation towards rules and were less likely to conduct themselves professionally (Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

From this study, it is evident that a model of leadership orientation and trust is shown to be more effective in fostering teacher professionalism than a highly bureaucratized model (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). As the author suggests, schools who adopt a highly bureaucratic orientation do so at the expense of teacher professionalism (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). That is, if principals are interested in fostering a higher level of teacher professionalism at their school, they should do so by being flexible, trustworthy, refrain from micromanaging teachers, and encourage teachers to utilize their professional judgement in making decisions (Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

A study conducted by Pearson and Moomaw (2005) examined the relationship between teacher autonomy and work satisfaction, empowerment, job related stress, and professionalism. Teacher autonomy is described in this study as having the freedom to decide what is best for the classroom and students, as well as the ability and freedom to act on those decisions (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Teacher autonomy has been suggested to be related to improving work satisfaction, empowerment, job related stress, and professionalism (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Authors used the Teacher Autonomy Scale (TAS) to measure levels of autonomy among their sample of teachers (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Independent items were used to measure work satisfaction, empowerment, job
related stress, and professionalism (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005).

Results showed the strongest link residing between professionalism and perceived empowerment (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). That is, teachers who felt empowered were more likely to view their work as being professional (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Another association that was found was as curriculum autonomy increased, job-related stress decreased (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). This would suggest that teachers who are in control of their own curriculum experience less job-related stress. Also, as general autonomy increased, so did empowerment and professionalism (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). This would imply that teachers who had freedom of practice felt more empowered and felt more professional. Job satisfaction was related to professionalism and empowerment (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Those teachers who were satisfied with their jobs felt more professional and more empowered than those who were not as satisfied. Another result was that job-related stress decreased as job satisfaction, professionalism, and empowerment increased (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). This suggests that teachers who enjoyed their job, felt professional and empowered experienced less job-related stress.

The results of this study are important in considering teacher autonomy in schools (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). Teacher autonomy and decision-making authority has been described by researchers as being an important component in teacher professionalism (Day et al., 2007; Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003; Sockett, 1993; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). This study helps to reinforce the importance
and necessity of this component of professionalism.

Summary

Within the education field, there exists many variations of what it means for a child to be considered school-ready. There has been great difficulty in the field on reaching consensus for what school readiness means. However, the NEGP has developed an appropriate definition of school readiness, with emphasis on multiple developmental domains, as well as taking an ecological approach in preparing children for school. Studies have shown that the definition as provided by the NEGP is one that is appropriate for children. However, most teachers do not employ this definition of school readiness in their classrooms.

According to studies, developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) encourage better outcomes within many developmental domains, as well as better outcomes for skills necessary for school readiness. Research has shown that many teachers do not employ DAP in their classrooms. This may be due to personal beliefs or legislative or school administrative requirements. It has been found that preschool teachers do not typically experience incongruence between belief and practice, as is true for kindergarten teachers. This difference may be attributed to different levels of professionalism, and more specifically, teacher autonomy.

American culture does not readily recognize early childhood education teachers as professionals. Also, varied definitions of teacher professionalism
exist. Similar domains include content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and skills, collaboration among colleagues, and teacher autonomy. Teacher autonomy refers to the teacher’s ability to utilize his/her skills, knowledge, and experience regarding the child and what they know about child development to make appropriate and effective decisions. Studies show that higher rates of teacher autonomy lead to high rates of job satisfaction, teacher empowerment, collaboration among colleagues, as well as an overall sense of professionalism. Autonomous teachers are also more likely to go beyond the minimum requirements in assisting their students. As such, teacher autonomy and professionalism are important concepts to consider when addressing child outcomes and more specifically, school readiness.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain teacher feedback on a presentation based on current research regarding school readiness and developmentally appropriate practices (DAP). This study also sought to gain insight on the perceptions of school readiness among preschool and kindergarten teachers, their perceptions of DAP, as well as teachers’ self-perceived levels of professionalism and autonomy.

Participants and Demographics

Participants were recruited from public and private schools in Lancaster, California and California City, California. The sample consists of the following groups: 6 public kindergarten teachers (28.6%), 13 private prekindergarten teachers who work primarily with four-year-old children (61.9%), and 2 teachers described as teaching “Other” (9.5%). The “Other” group included one special education teacher and a teacher who teaches three-year-olds. The “Other” group was excluded from results, as the grade level taught is not within the targeted sample. In addition, one participant’s results were also not included, as they did not agree to the informed consent. Any teacher that agreed to participate was given a $5 gift card to Starbucks as well as refreshments before, during, and
after the participant presentation. Gift cards and refreshments were distributed regardless of actual teacher participation.

Additional information was collected on the demographics of the sample. All participants in every group identified as being female. Teacher age varied within and between groups. Private prekindergarten teachers, on average, fit into the 35-44 years of age category, and the public kindergarten teachers, on average, fit into the 45-54 years of age category. Years of experience varied among and between groups. Private preschool teachers on average had 14.23 years of experience with a minimum of 3 years and a maximum of 35 years of experience. Public kindergarten teachers had an average of 22.17 years of teaching with a minimum of 16 years, and a maximum of 30 years of experience. Education level and rate of pay were also varied between groups. Public kindergarten teachers reported having a 4-year degree (66.7%) or master’s degree (33.3%) and reported making $60,001-$70,000 a year (16.7%) or $70,001 a year or more (83.3%). Private prekindergarten teachers reported having some college (38.5%), a 2-year college degree (53.8%), or a 4-year college degree (7.7%); and reported making $10,000 or less a year (30.8%), $10,001-$20,000 a year (46.2%), $20,001-$30,000 a year (7.7%), and $30,001-$40,000 (15.4%).

Measures

For this study, a pre-survey, presentation, and post-survey were given to participants. Both the pre-survey and post-survey included questions that asked
teachers to rank characteristics of school readiness 1-15 with 1 being most important and 15 being least important, and questions that asked teachers to rank DAP and DIP teaching practices with 1 being the most developmentally appropriate and 10 being the most developmentally inappropriate. These ranking questions were asked in the pre-survey and post-survey with the intention of gaining insight on how useful or information the presentation was for teachers, according to how their answers changed from pre-survey to post-survey. The pre-survey also included Likert scale questions regarding teacher autonomy and teacher professionalism, as well as open-ended questions asking teachers to expand on those Likert scale questions. The post-survey included Likert scale questions asking if the teachers learned from the presentation, how likely teachers are to use the information in the presentation, as well as participants’ demographic information. The post-survey also included open-ended questions on what teachers found most informative, as well as what could have been more informative in the presentation.

Pre-Survey

The pre-survey was administered to participants prior to the presentation. The pre-survey asked open-ended questions asking participants: to describe school readiness, what they knew regarding DAP, to explain in more detail participants’ feelings regarding their being treated as a professional, and if they felt a sense of professionalism to be helpful in teaching in the classroom. A multiple-choice questionnaire was given using a Likert scale of 1-5 with 1 being
“Always,” and 5 being “Never.” This included questions on how able teachers are in creating and implementing activities and curriculum of their own, how able teachers are in setting and implementing guidance policies of their own in the classroom, how able teachers are in determining assessment procedures in the classroom, and if teachers feel a sense of professionalism in the classroom. One multiple-choice question asked if a sense of professionalism is helpful in the classroom, with a Likert scale of 1-5 with 1 being “It’s extremely helpful” and 5 being “It’s extremely unhelpful.” Additionally, the pre-survey included questions that asked teachers to rank characteristics of school readiness on a scale of 1-15 with 1 being most important and 15 being least important; as well as rank DAP and DIP teaching practices with 1 being the most developmentally appropriate and 10 being the most developmentally inappropriate. For the question on ranking characteristics of school readiness, items were borrowed from a portion of the Kindergarten Teacher Survey on Student Readiness (KTSSR) by Heaviside and Farris (1993). The remaining questions on the survey were developed by the researcher.

Presentation

The presentation given to the teachers was based on current research regarding school readiness and developmentally appropriate practices. The presentation defines and provides examples for DAP/DIP and school readiness, as well as outlines important factors to consider and use in the classroom. Within the presentation, a discussion was held between the presenter and participants.
on possible barriers to utilizing information within the presentation in their teaching. Having the presentation in between the pre-survey and post-survey intended to measure if teachers’ ideas and ratings regarding DAP and school readiness changed after seeing the informational presentation, as well as how they compare to teachers teaching other grades and in different settings.

**Post-Survey**

Following the presentation, a post-survey was administered to participants. It included two questions from the pre-survey that asks teachers to rank characteristics of school readiness on a scale of 1-15 with 1 being most important and 15 being least important; as well as rank DAP and DIP teaching practices with 1 being the most developmentally appropriate and 10 being the most developmentally inappropriate. For the question on ranking characteristics of school readiness, the items were borrowed from the Kindergarten Teacher Survey on Student Readiness (KTSSR) by Heaviside and Farris (1993). The remaining questions on the survey were developed by the researcher. Participants were also asked Likert scale questions, including: if they learned anything from the presentation with 1 being “A great deal” and 5 being “None at all,” and how likely the participants were to utilize the information from the presentation with 1 being “Extremely likely” and 5 being “Extremely unlikely.” Participants were also asked open-ended questions such as what participants found most informative about the presentation, and what could have been more
informative. These questions intended to give teachers the opportunity to report back directly on the usefulness of the presentation.

Additionally, Participants were asked the following questions in the post-survey regarding their demographics: what type of class they teach; do they work for a private or public school/program, how many full years they have been teaching; their highest level of education; their level of income; their race/ethnic background; their current age; and their gender.

Procedures

Schools/programs in Lancaster and California City were called and asked by telephone if they would be interested in having their teachers participate in an educational presentation and surveys. A brief explanation of the presentation and study was given to each school/program official, as well as information on incentives for teacher participation. If the school/program official held interest in their teachers participating, a Letter of Approval was provided for review and completion. If a Letter of Approval was completed, a presentation was scheduled and a flyer was given to the school/program official for disseminating presentation and incentive details to the teachers. Presentations were scheduled during a date and time most convenient for the teachers, and on school grounds in a room of the school/program official's choosing.

Prior to the presentation, kindergarten and preschool teachers were invited to participate in the surveys and presentation. Potential participants were
provided refreshments prior to the start of the presentation, as well as during and after the presentation. Potential participants were also provided a numbered envelope containing the numbered informed consent, pre-survey, and post-survey documents. Participants were asked to read and complete the informed consent and return it to their envelope. Participants were advised that if they did not agree to participate at any point in the surveys or presentation, even after checking “Yes” on the informed consent, they would still be provided incentives and were free to leave at their discretion, with no consequence.

Participants were then asked to quietly complete the pre-survey and were given as much time as was needed for all participants to complete the survey. A title sheet was stapled to the front of the post-survey to prevent participants from confusing the two surveys and to ensure participants viewed and answered post-survey questions only at the appropriate time. Upon completion of the pre-survey, participants were asked to return the pre-survey to their envelope to preserve anonymity and confidentiality of answers. Once all pre-surveys were returned to their respective envelopes, the presentation was given. All questions, comments, and discussion topics were explored and answered as they arose throughout the presentation. Upon the completion of the presentation, the participants were asked to complete the post-survey and return it to their envelope once completed. Participants were instructed to seal the envelope and return it to the researcher. All participants were given a $5 Starbucks gift card and refreshments regardless of their level of participation.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

School Readiness

To gain some understanding about teachers' knowledge, in terms of school readiness prior to the presentation, teachers were given an open-ended question during the pre-survey, which asked them to describe school readiness. All teachers gave several varied responses and as such, the researcher organized these responses by observed themes. These themes include: being ready across many areas of development, specific skills identified for school readiness, and the importance of early experiences.

Many responses within both groups looked at several areas of development and were not solely focused on specific skills necessary for school readiness. For example, several private prekindergarten teachers reported: “being ready to learn. Children learn best when they are emotionally, physically, socially, mentally, and spiritually ready,” “school readiness is based on a child's developmental age and not their cognitive development or chronological,” “school readiness is a child's developmental age not chronological age or cognitive level,” and “whether the child is mentally, physical, and emotionally ready.” Some public kindergarten teachers also gave responses noting the importance of looking at many areas of development, such as, “preparing students for their education - socially, behaviorally, emotionally, and academically.”
Both groups also identified several specific skills they believed to be necessary for school readiness. The private prekindergarten teachers’ responses included: “socialization, problem solving, staying on task, following directions,” “able to share, able to sit for a few min., able to communicate needs,” and “can sit still for at least 30 min, take 3 step directions, self control, finish simple tasks.” Many public kindergarten teachers gave answers that were very focused on specific skills as well. For example: “a child having a minimal amount of skills, socializing without hurting someone physically, a child who is ready to pretend play, a child who pick up written material and appears to be reading the material.” It’s noteworthy to find that between both groups of teachers listing specific skills across more than one area of development, teachers’ responses are not solely focused on academic skills but rather skills over various areas of development.

A couple responses also highlighted the importance of early learning experiences for being school ready such as: “kindergarten readiness - #1 Students have had experiences that have provided opportunities to cooperatively interact with other peers and authority figures. Students have had experiences that have provided background knowledge of books and letter and numbers. Students have been given opportunities to constructively play (blocks, glue, scissors, crayons/pencils),” and “exposure to a preschool setting or homeschooling, social/academic skills are already taught in some fashion.” These themes all point to the fact that teachers in both groups have a good idea of what school readiness should look like by identifying specific skills, including
many areas of development, and public kindergarten teachers also have an understanding about the importance of early experiences for school readiness.

Teachers were also asked to consider school readiness characteristics and rank the items by level of importance, in both the pre-survey and post-survey. This was an effort to gain feedback on teachers’ knowledge prior to the presentation, as well as after the presentation to help indicate its level of usefulness. These scores were taken to better understand how teachers view school readiness and how teachers view different school readiness characteristics with more or less importance. The intent here was to see if teachers rank characteristics regarding the whole child or highly academic skills, and if those scores changed after the presentation. The items are as follows: “is physically healthy, rested, well-nourished,” “finishes tasks,” “can count up to 20 or more,” “takes turns and shares,” “has good problem-solving skills,” “is enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities,” “is able to use pencils and/or paint brushes,” “is not disruptive to the class,” “knows the English language,” “is sensitive to other children's feelings,” “sits still and pays attention,” “knows the letters of the alphabet,” “can follow directions,” “identifies primary colors and basic shapes,” and “communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in child's primary language.”

In figure 1, the Cohen’s d values are shown for both groups’ responses on ranking school readiness characteristics in both the pre-survey and post-survey. Prekindergarten teachers had a medium effect size for the following items: “can
count up to 20 or more" where \(d=0.61\), “is enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities” where \(d=0.71\), and “communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in child’s primary language” where \(d=0.55\). That is, private prekindergarten teachers ranked “can count up to 20 or more” as slightly less important, and ranked “is enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities” and “communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in child’s primary language” as slightly more important for school readiness.

Also displayed in figure 1, public kindergarten teachers had a very large effect size for “has good problem-solving skills” where \(d=1.75\), a large effect size for “is able to use pencils and/or paint brushes” where \(d=0.89\) and “communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in child’s primary language” where \(d=0.88\), and a medium effect size for “is enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities” where \(d=0.64\) and “can follow directions” where \(d=0.74\). That is, public kindergarten teachers ranked “has good problem-solving skills” as much more important, ranked “is able to use pencils and/or paint brushes” as more important, ranked “communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in child’s primary language” as less important, ranked “is enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities” as slightly more important, and ranked “can follow directions” as slightly less important for school readiness. Other items ranked and shown in Figure 1 reported a small to no effect size and subsequently little effect by the presentation on these items. The changes in the
aforementioned items indicate the presentation may have influenced teachers’ responses from pre-survey to post-survey for those items.

Figure 1. Cohen’s d Values for School Readiness Characteristics
There are also some interesting findings for the lack of change from pre-survey to post-survey. For instance, across both surveys, both groups most highly valued the characteristic “is physically healthy, rested, and well-nourished.” That is, all teachers in the sample placed the highest importance on the student’s health being integral and a foundation for school readiness and success, which is inline with research on school readiness. Also, most academic items were ranked toward the other end of the spectrum, being less important overall than other school readiness characteristics with both groups.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Teachers were asked to rank teaching practices that, according to research, are either categorized as DAP or DIP. Scores were taken to gauge what teachers know regarding DAP and DIP teacher practices. Also, to gain insight on how informative the presentation was for the teachers, scores were taken in the pre-survey as well as the post-survey. There were 5 DAP items and 5 DIP items considered in both pre-survey and post-survey. The items considered DAP are as follows: “utilizes learning centers,” “facilitates hands on experiences,” “allows free play in the classroom,” “gives choices to students,” and “encourages questioning and problem solving.” The items considered DIP are as follows: “focuses on basic academic skills,” “follows a rigid curriculum,” “utilizes direct (didactic) as sole or most common method of teaching,” “teacher asks the questions,” and “emphasizes ROTE learning.” A mean score of 1.00-
5.00 indicated that the item is considered DAP, whereas a score of 5.01-10.00 indicated that the item is considered DIP. On average, in the pre-survey, both groups of teachers ranked DAP items as DAP, with an average score of 1.00-5.00 and DIP items as DIP with an average score of 5.01-10.00. Mean scores changed from the pre-survey to post-survey for many items, indicating possible influence and usefulness of the presentation. To explore the effect size and meaning of these changes, Cohen’s d values as well as the direction of the changes are examined.

In Figure 2, Cohen’s d values are shown regarding DAP and DIP items. These values indicate the effect size of each item from pre-survey to post-survey. Noteworthy effect sizes existed within both groups. For private prekindergarten, a large effect size existed with the items “utilizes learning centers” where \( d=1.13 \), “encourages questioning and problem solving” where \( d=0.90 \), and “emphasizes ROTE learning” where \( d=0.83 \). There was also a medium effect size with “teacher asks the questions” where \( d=0.73 \). For public kindergarten teachers, there was a very large effect size for the item “utilizes learning centers” where \( d=1.45 \). Medium effect sizes existed with the follow items as well; “facilitates hands on experiences” where \( d=0.51 \), “allows free play in the classroom” where \( d=0.62 \), and “teacher asks the questions” where \( d=0.51 \). The remaining items had either a small or no effect size to report.
Figure 2. Cohen’s d Values for Items on Developmentally Appropriate Practices

The direction of the change from pre-survey to post-survey on these items is equally as important as the effect size itself. With private prekindergarten teachers: “utilizes learning centers” was ranked more highly as DAP, “encourages questioning and problem solving” was ranked less highly as DAP,
“emphasizes ROTE learning” was ranked more highly as DIP, and “teacher asks
the questions” ranked slightly more highly as DIP after the presentation. For
public kindergarten teachers, “utilizes learning centers,” was ranked much more
highly as DAP, “facilitates hands on experiences” and “allows free play in the
classroom” were ranked slightly less highly as DAP, and “teacher asks the
questions,” ranked slightly higher as DIP after the presentation. These changes
from pre-survey to post-survey have implications to the usefulness of the
presentation.

Additionally, to gain an understanding of teachers’ current knowledge of
DAP, teachers were given an open-ended question asking them to describe DAP
prior to the presentation. All teachers reported on what they knew regarding
DAP. Themes included: meeting the child where they are at and not where they
should be, emphasized the importance of children going through developmental
stages and at their own pace, placed less importance placed on academic skills,
and noted specific teaching practices. Teaching practices included: facilitating
hands-on experiences, allowing child-led activities, using open-ended
questioning/problem solving, and allowing free play, dramatic play, role-play in
the classroom. All of their responses were in line with what would be considered
DAP.

Example responses are included for both groups. Private prekindergarten
teachers gave responses such as, “it's based on what they are capable of doing
at age,” “not all children develop at the same rate, so it is often hard to teach
children who are not at the same level as others,” “that every child develops at their own pace. One child at a certain chronological age may develop slower than other children younger or older or same age,” “all children develop at their own pace,” “one should meet the child were they are at,” and “young children need free play with lots of choices. Role-play and dramatic play. Open ended questions and lots of exploring.” Public kindergarten teachers gave responses such as, “the use of developmentally appropriate practices are crucial in the development of the student. Students are highly successful when allowed to go through the appropriate developmental stages. Pushing students past these stages, without allowing them to experience them is setting students up for failure,” “children are being pushed to know too much academic at too young an age with too impoverished of a background. Too many activities in [kindergarten] are expecting kids to deal with more than they are capable of,” “everyone’s brain goes through stages of gaining new knowledge. Each at a different rate,” and “hands on, children get to explore/solve problems, activities kid lead, music good for learning, also movement, teaching to age.”

Presentation Usefulness

The questions that were in the pre-survey and post-survey asking teachers to rank characteristics of school readiness, as well as rank DAP and DIP items, both have implications for the usefulness of the presentation. That is, items with a meaningful effect size may have been influenced by the presentation
given. The results for ranking school readiness characteristics show that in general, some academic items were ranked lower, and other characteristics ranked higher in importance. For DAP and DIP items, although on average, the items were identified appropriately, many of the scores became more strongly DAP or DIP, respectively, in the post-survey.

In addition to the ranking questions included in both surveys, participants were also asked open-ended questions regarding the content of the presentation. Teachers were asked, “What did you find most informative about the presentation?” Answers varied among and between groups. A majority (84.6%) of the private prekindergarten teachers gave answers regarding their increased or confirmed knowledge of DAP/DIP and how to utilize them in the classroom. Answers collected included statements such as “[this is] a confirmation of my current teaching practices,” “I found that I tend to use a lot of [DIP], simply because it’s ‘easier.’ I will try to use more DAP in my classroom,” and “[DAP] creates lasting effects which can help in the future.” A small portion (15.4%) of private prekindergarten participants did not report on content of the presentation but rather the presentation overall, with answers that included “the presentation was very clear and to the point,” and “it was put together well.” All public kindergarten teachers’ responses were also concentrated on DAP and DIP (100%). Responses included “I like that the other [kindergarten] teachers are finally opening up to [DAP]. They are still very hesitant to do centers, etc. for fear of being in trouble with administration,” “listening to the teachers gave me insight
and ideas. The research justified the approaches of the experienced teachers. This is my first year teaching [kindergarten] here and it is shocking to discover how inappropriate Common Core is in [kindergarten],” “reinforced what educators already know. Politicians and admin need to get on board with DAP,” “Research SUPPORTS kids having free time and play time,” “that DAP has long term effects!” and “the research shows DAP is needed and beneficial.”

Participants were also asked “what could have been more informative?” regarding the presentation given. For private prekindergarten teachers, 30.8% of teachers gave feedback for making the presentation more informative. These responses include “ideas for hands on experiences to promote learning,” “more examples on how to turn [DIP] in to more [DAP],” “share ideas of DAP learning/types of centers and uses,” and “stress the point of allowing children to question.” Sixty percent of the public kindergarten teachers also gave responses regarding how the presentation could be more informative. These included “a handout with research for us to look at later,” “a video showing the difference between DAP and DIP,” and “maybe a few sample lessons would have been informative.”

Teacher Professionalism

To gain insight about self-perceived levels of teacher professionalism and autonomy, teachers were asked multiple-choice questions as well as open-ended questions in the pre-survey that addressed these topics. As the results in table 1 shows, most teachers feel as if they are treated as a professional in their schools
and that this is important and helpful in their classroom. More specifically, teachers were asked, “Do you feel as if you are treated as a professional in your school?” Private prekindergarten teachers reported, “Always” (38.5%), “Most of the time” (38.5%), or “Sometimes” (23.1%). The public kindergarten teachers reported, “Always” (33.3%), “Most of the time” (33.3%), “About half the time” (16.7%), or “Sometimes” (16.7%). Teachers were also asked, “Do you feel a sense of professionalism helps you with teaching in the classroom?” Private prekindergarten teachers reported, “It’s extremely helpful” (75%), “It’s somewhat helpful” (16.7%), or “It’s neither helpful nor unhelpful” (8.3%). The public kindergarten teachers reported, “It’s extremely helpful” (66.7%), or “It’s somewhat helpful” (33.3%).

Table 1. Multiple-choice Responses on Teacher Professionalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>How Often</th>
<th>Private Prekindergarten</th>
<th>Public Kindergarten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel as if you are treated as a professional in your school?</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>38.50%</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>38.50%</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>About half the time</td>
<td>16.70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>23.10%</td>
<td>16.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel a sense of professionalism helps you in the classroom?</td>
<td>It’s extremely helpful</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>66.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s somewhat helpful</td>
<td>16.70%</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s neither helpful or unhelpful</td>
<td>8.30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s somewhat unhelpful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s extremely unhelpful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To expand on the aforementioned multiple-choice questions on teacher professionalism, participants were given the opportunity to describe their multiple-choice answers. Teachers were first asked to describe their answer on if they feel they are treated as a professional in their school. Private prekindergarten teachers gave responses regarding their appearance and how young they looked affecting professionalism levels, being micromanaged, being seen as a glorified babysitter by parents, and that working collaboratively increases their professionalism. Examples of private prekindergarten teachers’ responses include “I look young for my age and I’m quiet, so people think I am young or inexperienced,” “my opinions/suggestions matter,” “sometimes I’m seen as a professional, but most of the time in preschool are seen as babysitters,” “sometimes I think the supervisor needs to stop micromanaging teachers. We know our students best and sometimes they need to trust that the teachers are doing a good job,” and “we have opportunities to glean from experienced teachers and plan things together.”

Public kindergarten teachers gave responses on if they feel they are treated as a professional in their school. Teachers discussed administration not understanding or trusting in the teachers, administration not understanding what children need to be ready for school, not being heard with their ideas by administration, concern for being test-driven, and feeling like a babysitter. Their responses included statements such as, “I feel that the administration does not understand the needs of a young child entering school. We are pushing
academics over developmental needs for our students," “even though I've worked for as long as I have, I am only expected to handle the behavior problem students. I feel like a babysitter with lack of support," “we are a test driven society. Testing and report cards are what drives us ☹,” and “parents do not show the respect, [school principal]- most of the time, district - don't know us at all.” These responses with both groups point out some issues with how teachers are treated as professionals, despite their reporting high levels of professionalism within the multiple-choice responses.

Teachers were also given the opportunity to describe their multiple-choice answers regarding their feelings of professionalism being helpful in the classroom. Private prekindergarten teachers spoke about dressing professionally to increase professionalism, the benefit positive praise would give teachers, that parents and children respond well to professional teachers, and a feeling of comfort in their environment being helpful with teaching. Examples of responses gathered include “I try to dress/act as professional as possible, and find that some parents pick up on that,” “it would be encouraging to get (younger teachers need this) a ‘well-done’ once in a while instead of being treated like children,” “it is sweet to see the fruit of our teaching through children's responses and parents' comments,” “parents give credit to your knowledge,” and “the child will feel more comfortable and more likely to listen and obey.”

The public kindergarten teachers gave responses that spoke about the importance of being prepared, being given autonomy is helpful and inspires
teachers to do more for their students, and the concern for standards and testing focused teaching. Examples of their responses include: “being prepared is professional. Having done the work to become certified helps me feel prepared,” “being expected/allowed to do what you know is best for your students makes you want to do more, work harder,” “when working with children, common sense works best, but being professional with the parents is helpful,” “standards and expectations are the start and the end of instruction. We all have the same goals and problems and treat all with respect for the training that we all have,” and “too much pressure for children and teachers to test and report! 😞”

Teacher Autonomy

Table 2 shows results on self-perceived levels of three areas of teacher autonomy for both groups of teachers. Teachers were asked, “How able are you to create and implement activities/curriculum of your choosing?” Private prekindergarten teachers reported, “Always” (38.5%), “Most of the time” (46.2%), “About half the time” (7.7%), or “Sometimes” (7.7%). The public kindergarten teachers reported, “Always” (50%), “Most of the time” (33.3%), or “Sometimes” (16.7%). Teachers were asked, “How able are you to set and implement guidance policies in your classroom?” Private prekindergarten teachers reported, “Always” (23.1%), “Most of the time” (61.5%), “About half the time” (7.7%), or “Sometimes” (7.7%). The public kindergarten teachers reported, “Always” (33.3%), “Most of the time” (50%), or “Sometimes” (16.7%). Teachers were also
asked, “How able are you to determine assessment procedures for the children in your class?” Private prekindergarten teachers reported, “Always” (7.7%), “Most of the time” (46.2%), “About half the time” (15.4%), “Sometimes” (23.1%), or “Never” (7.7%). The public kindergarten teachers reported, “Always” (16.7%), “Most of the time” (33.3%), or “Sometimes” (50%). These responses were a bit surprising as the aforementioned open-ended responses on teacher professionalism point to a lack of autonomy within both groups of teachers.

Table 2. Multiple-choice Responses on Teacher Autonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>How Often</th>
<th>Private Prekindergarten</th>
<th>Public Kindergarten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How able are you to create and implement activities/curriculum of your choosing?</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>38.50%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>46.20%</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>About half the time</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>16.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How able are you to set and implement guidance policies in your classroom?</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>23.10%</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>61.50%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>About half the time</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>16.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How able are you to determine assessment procedures for the children in your class?</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>46.20%</td>
<td>33.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>About half the time</td>
<td>15.40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>23.10%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion During Presentation

A discussion was held at the end of each presentation focusing on barriers of implementing characteristics of school readiness and utilizing DAP in the classroom. The discussion with private prekindergarten participants raised no immediate barriers to implementing characteristics of school readiness and utilizing DAP in the classroom. On the other hand, the discussion held with public kindergarten teachers raised multiple barriers to implementing characteristics of school readiness and utilizing DAP in the classroom. Barriers discussed included the use of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) which has elevated academic requirements of students and thus possibly implementing DIP for younger students, such as reading in kindergarten; the lack of regard for DAP within CCSS; an increase in intensive and age-inappropriate testing; a lack of funding to provide resources necessary for utilizing DAP such as funding for centers in each classroom; and an overall misunderstanding from local school administrators of what is necessary for student success. Overall, the discussion with the public kindergarten teachers raised multiple concerns regarding the barriers teachers face in working with younger students in the public setting.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

School Readiness

Teachers were asked to rank characteristics of school readiness by importance, and were also given an open-ended question asking them to describe school readiness. Teachers among and between groups had a plethora of different responses in describing school readiness, and as such were sorted into common themes. Two themes were found in private prekindergarten teachers’ responses; they included maturational readiness in several areas of development and specific skills across several areas of development necessary for school readiness. Three themes were found with public kindergarten teachers’ responses, including maturational readiness in several areas of development, specific skills across several areas of development necessary for school readiness, and early learning experiences contributing to school readiness. One notable difference within the group of responses that named specific skills was that public kindergarten teachers were more highly focused on academic skills. Even though these groups of teachers are all concerned with school readiness, this variety in responses and different themes may be due to several factors. Different factors between groups may include: different levels of education, different teacher perspectives, and the fact that each group of teachers works with a slightly different population. It makes sense that kindergarten teachers in
general might be more concerned with early learning experiences, as children often enter kindergarten with a wide range of different skills compared to their peers, due to their home environment and early learning experiences. Overall, these results coincide with the research, which shows there are many different models, perceptions, and definitions for what school readiness should look like in a child (CRP, 2007; Mashburn & Henry, 2004). This finding helps to confirm the need for additional training and a concerted effort to teach, utilize, and support the definition developed by the NEGP (Zaslow et al., 2000).

For the ranked items on school readiness, in general, all groups of teachers shared similarities in their rankings of school readiness characteristics and their importance. For instance, all groups for the pre-survey and post-survey ranked “is physically healthy, rested and well-nourished” as the most important characteristic children need for school readiness. This finding is congruent with the findings of the study by Lewit and Baker (1995), in which teachers found the characteristic of being physically healthy, well nourished, and rested as the most important characteristic for school readiness. Additionally, both groups of teachers placed much less importance overall on characteristics that were more academically based, such as “can count up to 20 or more,” “identifies primary colors and basic shapes,” and “knows the letters of the alphabet.” These are interesting findings when compared to the research by Mashburn and Henry (2004), on preschool and kindergarten teachers assessing for school readiness. The findings found both kindergarten and preschool teachers based their ratings
on more academic skills and not more advanced skills such as solving applied problems (Mashburn & Henry, 2004). The current study’s findings may indicate a shift in teachers’ perceptions of what is important for school readiness compared with this study. This potential shift could be attributed to shifts in teacher education, as well as changes with the arrival of early learning guidelines and professional development plan with the enactment of the Good Start, Grow Smart Initiative (GSGS Interagency Workgroup, 2006). Overall, this finding would need to be replicated in a larger study with more participants, in several groups of teachers, and across different settings and locations.

Examining the differences in rankings of school readiness characteristics provided some interesting results. For the private pre-kindergarten teachers, the meaningful effect sizes were found with the following items: “can count up to 20 or more” as slightly less important, and “is enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities” and “communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in child’s primary language” as slightly more important for school readiness. For the public kindergarten teachers, the meaningful effect sizes were found with the following items: “has good problem-solving skills” as much more important, “is able to use pencils and/or paint brushes” as more important, “communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in child’s primary language” as less important, “is enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities” as slightly more important, and “can follow directions” as slightly less important for
school readiness. These changes indicate that teachers ranked more academically focused skills lower in importance after the presentation.

These findings indicate the presentation may have influenced teachers in the different groups for various characteristics of school readiness. For example, even though many of the academic characteristics were already ranked relatively low in importance in the pre-survey, some were ranked even lower in importance after the survey across all groups. The presentation may have brought light to characteristics of school readiness that had not previously been valued or even considered as important to teachers compared to academic characteristics. It was also interesting to see how the ranking of “communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in child’s primary language” changed for private prekindergarten teachers - where importance increased, and with public kindergarten teachers - where importance decreased. Perhaps this difference could be attributed to expectations each group of teachers may have for their student population, and the fact that they serve slightly different populations. These changes overall indicate a maintained theme of less importance towards more cognitive and academic skills compared to other skills.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

There were some interesting results with the participants ranking DAP and DIP items. Results indicate that both groups of teachers, on average, have an overall good grasp on what is developmentally appropriate for the classroom,
and what is not. And while individual rankings varied among and between
groups, mean scores of each group for pre-survey and post-survey indicated that
all DAP items were rated as DAP, while all DIP items were rated as DIP. What is
exciting is the effect size of many items and how the strength of the ratings
changed from the pre-survey to the post survey. That is, many items were shown
to be more strongly DIP or DAP, respectively, after the presentation. This result
could indicate the usefulness of the presentation for teachers as individuals
ranked more items appropriately as DIP and DAP after the presentation. This
speaks to the importance of providing meaningful and engaging workshops,
presentations, and training for teachers who are concerned with DAP.

Though it’s clear the results show that teachers already have a good idea
of what DAP and DIP are, public kindergarten teachers still asked many
questions regarding its implementation and use in the classroom, both asked in
the presentation and on the post-survey open-ended question on how the
presentation could be more informative. This interesting observation shows
teacher buy-in for DAP, which is important for any educational concept or
program to work (Campbell & Anketell, 2007). It also is indicative that teachers
know, on average, what DAP should look like, but there may not be the authority,
resources, or administrative support to actually utilize DAP in the classroom.
Many of the discussion points with the public kindergarten teachers were
cal  c  e  n  t  e  d  w  i  t  h  ho  w  t  e  a  t  h  e  r  s  a  r  e  u  n  a  b  l  e  t  o  u  t  i  l  i  z  e  DAP as well as their personal
view of what school readiness looks like, due to barriers such as the new and
more academically demanding Common Core State Standards (CCSS), stringent and inappropriate assessments, lack of administrative support and understanding, and a lack of funding for DAP resources such as being able to set up and use centers in the classroom. The discussion with the public setting teachers had a tone of frustration and tension, as teachers want to do what is best for their students but feel somewhat unable to do so.

Presentation Usefulness

One of the purposes of the study was to give a useful and informative presentation that would be helpful to teachers. When teachers were asked about what was most informative, 84.6% of private setting teachers focused heavily on topics of DAP and DIP to be most informative while 100% of public setting teachers concentrated their answers around DAP being most informative. This trend appears despite all teachers overall having a good sense of DAP and DIP in their rankings on the pre-survey. Some teachers did not know that DAP and DIP have long term effects as reported by Schweinhart and Weikart (1993; 1997) and Schweinhart, Weikart, and Larner (1986). Some teachers reported confirmation of their current knowledge and beliefs, learning new information on DAP, and the realization they were using DIP unknowingly in the classroom, perhaps because it is “easier.”

The teachers were also asked to report how the presentation could be more informative; answers including the following requests: more examples of
DAP and DIP, examples provided through use of videos and DAP sample lessons; information on how to best actually use DAP in the classroom; providing a handout with the information for teachers to take with them; and more emphasis and examples of how to integrate more hands-on learning in the classroom. These suggestions are important for future research on this topic and thus should be considered.

The ranking questions regarding DAP/DIP items, and characteristics of school readiness also gave insight on how effective the presentation was for teachers. For example, with the rankings of school readiness characteristics, the presentation may have influenced teachers by highlighting the importance of a variety of school readiness characteristics across many different areas of development, and not solely focusing on or placing highest importance on academic characteristics. Also noteworthy, were the changes seen from pre-survey to post-survey with DAP/DIP items. After the presentation, many items were reported to be more strongly DIP or DAP, respectively. This result may indicate the usefulness of the presentation for teachers regarding DAP in the classroom. Overall, this supports the idea that it is important to provide meaningful and engaging presentations and training for teachers in this field.

Teacher Professionalism and Teacher Autonomy

The multiple-choice questions regarding teacher professionalism, on average were higher than expected, with many teachers feeling they are treated
as a professional either always, most of the time, or sometimes. In addition, most teachers reported that a sense of professionalism is extremely helpful or somewhat helpful in the classroom. However, despite the multiple-choice answers indicating that all groups of teachers feel a sense of professionalism and somewhat a sense of teacher autonomy, the open-ended questions and discussion on barriers painted a much different picture for teachers in the public setting.

Questions regarding teacher professionalism and teacher autonomy produced some interesting results when compared to teachers in the public setting and their discussion points on barriers to utilizing DAP and appropriate characteristics of school readiness. Many public kindergarten teachers spoke on their frustration with new and DIP requirements of students, as well as a lack of support and resources in implementing DAP, and utilizing their personally valued characteristics of readiness. These reports shed light on teachers not feeling a sense of professionalism and autonomy from their administrators, as administrators do not consider or value what the public teachers know and value regarding their students’ education.

This is a continued issue in the field of public education when looking back to the research (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991; Day et al., 2007; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). The study by Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, and Hernandez (1991) reported similar results in that even though a teacher may hold more DAP beliefs, they may be prevented from utilizing their education and
beliefs because the school system holds and enforces a more DIP belief system. This seems to ring true for the teachers in the current study. Also, as with Day et al. (2007), recent policy changes may have had an effect on this study’s teachers’ feelings of support and sense of professionalism overall.

In fact, the setup of the public schools is very much in line with the bureaucratic orientation described by Tschannen-Moran (2009). That is, decision-making power is placed at the top with the school administrators, and does not necessarily gain input from or give power to the teachers in the classroom. This is a disappointing finding, as research shows that teacher professionalism and autonomy are important for teachers and their students; higher levels of bureaucratization lead to stifling efficiency and effectiveness of teachers, as well as promotes high levels of teacher distrust for administrators (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Thus, perhaps a concerted effort should be made in researching administrators belief systems regarding DAP and DIP, what leads them to apply heavier emphasis on DIP in the classroom, and how to educate administrators on DAP and its effectiveness on early learning in the classroom.

Limitations

While this study may give insight into the world of early education teachers, limitations are observed in this study in a number of areas. First and foremost, validity of the study is limited due to relatively low participant numbers in each group of teachers. Also, the groups of teachers included in this study are
limited to private prekindergarten and public kindergarten teachers in the cities of Lancaster and California City. The groups of teachers in this study also serve two different populations of students. The students in the public setting are more likely to be from a severely impoverished lower socioeconomic status as observed and reported by public teachers; whereas students in the private setting are more likely to be from a higher socioeconomic status. Thus, teachers in these different settings are serving a different population of students and responses may be influenced because of this factor.

Limitations exist with the pre-survey and post-survey as well. Even though teachers were given a large envelope with the informed consent, pre-survey, and post-survey to preserve teacher confidentiality, and a cover sheet was provided to clarify and identify the post-survey, teachers may have glanced at the post-survey before it was time, or looked back to the pre-survey while completing the post-survey. This could alter how teachers respond in both surveys, altering the results overall. Limitations also exist with social validity; responses in the post-survey may be attributed to teachers giving answers they thought the researcher might be seeking, and may not necessarily be reflective of what teachers learned in the presentation. Additionally, limitations exist with the questions within the surveys. The question in the pre-survey asking if teachers feel they are treated as a professional in their school seems to be worded in a way that is vague and does not necessarily get at what the researcher intended. That is, the researcher hoped to gain feedback on how teachers are treated as professionals in their
schools by administration, and not necessarily how they are treated as professionals by parents of students - though it is relevant and interesting as well.

**Future Directions**

Future studies could make various additions to and improvements on this small study. The study could be expanded to include more teachers in more geographic areas, who serve a variety of student populations, as well as include public and private transitional kindergarten teachers, private kindergarten teachers, and public prekindergarten teachers. A greater number of participants serving a variety of student populations and expansion of teacher groups would give an overall better and more valid picture of teachers' knowledge and experiences regarding school readiness, DAP/DIP, teacher autonomy, and teacher professionalism.

Future studies that seek to further research in this area should also make improvements to the presentation given. Based on teacher responses of how the presentation could be more informative, the presentation should include the following: more examples of DAP and DIP and through different mediums such as videos and DAP sample lessons; information on how to best operationalize DAP and reduce DIP in the classroom; providing a handout with the information and research presented for participant use later; and more emphasis and examples of how to integrate more hands-on learning in the classroom.
Additionally, if the study is expanded, questions in the pre-survey and post-survey should be reexamined. Specifically, a question on professionalism directly addressing teachers’ feelings regarding how they are treated as professionals by school administration should be included; the question in the pre-survey on professionalism is very broad in the current study.

Another direction to take on future studies could be to focus researching administrators’ belief systems regarding DAP and DIP. This could include looking at what leads them to apply heavier emphasis on DIP in the classroom as well as stringent inappropriate assessments. In addition, perhaps it could be beneficial to give a presentation to administrators with an aim on informing and educating them on DAP and its effectiveness on early learning in the classroom. In the public setting, administrators most often hold the key on making decisions for curriculum and assessments for students. As such, it is clear a concerted effort should be made to reach this population with regard to DAP in the classroom.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to collect information from teachers regarding their perceptions of school readiness, their perceptions of DAP, as well as teachers’ self-perceived levels of professionalism and autonomy. The study also sought to gain insight on how useful a presentation on DAP/DIP and school readiness would be for teachers. It was found that teachers’ ideas on what characteristics are necessary for school readiness vary widely among and
between groups, and this trend is supported by previous research. It was also found that overall, teachers have a pretty good idea about what is DAP and DIP in the classroom. However, even with this knowledge, it does appear that teachers benefitted as a result of the presentation given. This is shown in the results that teachers on average, ranked many DAP items as more DAP and ranked many DIP items as more DIP in the post-survey. Also, open-ended questions point to the usefulness of the presentation; noting that teachers learned something new and/or confirmed what they new to be true regarding DAP, school readiness, and what is important for children to know.

One additional notable conclusion to make from this study is the idea of reaching out to public administrators, based on responses from teachers in the public setting. Researchers should focus on gaining insight on administrators’ belief system, as well as other factors that contribute to their development and enforcement of teaching practices, curriculum, and assessments in the classroom. Also, researchers could make an effort of educating administrators on DAP practices in the classroom in the form of a presentation, to help administrators make and enforce decisions with a research-oriented knowledge base. This suggestion is brought by the knowledge that teachers have low autonomy in the public setting, and thus reaching out to administrators may have a larger impact overall on teachers’ ability to utilize research-based teaching practices and views in the classroom.
APPENDIX A

LETTER OF APPROVAL
Letter of Approval

To Whom It May Concern:

Ms. Brittany McAllister is conducting research in partial fulfillment of her Master of Arts degree at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), under the direction and supervision of her advisor, Dr. Wilcox-Herzog.

Ms. McAllister has my permission to conduct research regarding teacher perceptions on school readiness and professionalism at __________________________. As part of her research, Ms. McAllister has my permission to give a live-audience presentation, as well as administer a short pre and post survey to self-selected teachers related to this project, and may use the results of this project per teacher permission. I understand that all research practices will be carried out as approved by CSUSB’s Institutional Review Board, and in accordance with the “Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct,” as identified by the American Psychological Association.

If at any time I have any questions regarding this research, I may contact Ms. McAllister or her advisor using the contact information below:

Brittany McAllister, B.A. Amanda Wilcox-Herzog, Ph.D.
909-379-3250 909-537-7431
mcallisb@coyote.csusb.edu awilcox@csusb.edu

Sincerely,

_______________________________________________
Signature

_______________________________________________
Name of Organization

_______________________________________________
Date
APPENDIX B

ADVERTISING FLYER
YOU'RE INVITED TO AN EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATION ON:

School Readiness & Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Who qualifies?: Any teacher who currently teaches kindergarten or preschool
When?: ________________________________
Where?:

What is it?: You will be asked to complete a short survey prior to the presentation, watch the presentation, and complete a short survey afterwards.

What do I get?: For your attendance and participation, you will receive light refreshments as well as a $5 gift card to Starbucks!

This presentation will be given as part of a master’s degree research project for Brittany McAllister B.A., under the supervision of project advisor and professor, Dr. Amanda Wilcox-Herzog. If you have any questions about the presentation or the study, please contact Brittany at 909-379-3250 or mcallisb@coyote.csusb.edu.
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT
Informed Consent

Please read this entire form completely. You are being asked to participate in a research study. This consent form will help to inform you about the study and help you decide if you would like to participate or not.

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to understand the usefulness of a presentation on school readiness, developmentally appropriate practices, and teacher professionalism. This study is being conducted by Brittany McAllister, under the supervision of Dr. Amanda Wilcox-Hertzog, Professor of Psychology, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Department of Psychology Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee of the California State University, San Bernardino, and a copy of the official Psychology IRB stamp of approval should appear on this consent form. The University requires that you give your consent before participating in this study.

DESCRIPTION:
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a short survey before and after a live presentation. You will be asked to answer questions based on how informative the presentation was for you. These tasks are to be completed before and after the presentation, and should not take longer than 50-60 minutes, including the presentation. Once you finish the questions, your participation in this study will be at an end.

PARTICIPATION:
Your participation is voluntary. You are free to not answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to not participate, there will be no consequence to you. Choosing to not participate will not affect your employment or standing as an employee of your employer.

ANONYMITY:
Your information and responses will be coded and will not include your name, email, or any other personal information. Your name or specific place of employment will not be collected at any time. We will delete all of your information upon the completion of this project, which will be on or before December 31, 2016. Essentially, no one will know your answers or level of participation.

DURATION:
The presentation is expected to take 40-50 minutes, and the pre and post survey are expected to take about 5 minutes each to complete. Upon completion of the survey, your participation in this study will be at an end.
RISKS:
You may experience stress from trying to understand the content and/or attempting to answer the questions. There is also a small risk of a breach of confidentiality, as surveys will be completed in a public space, though we will take stringent measures to protect your privacy.

BENEFITS:
There are no direct benefits to you, however we hope your answers will allow us to understand the usefulness of the presentation on school readiness, developmentally appropriate practices, and teacher professionalism. As an incentive for your participation, you will be given a $5 gift card to Starbucks. The gift card will be granted to you, regardless of your overall amount of participation. Also, you may feel your contribution to the study is important, which may be rewarding.

CONTACT:
Please feel free to ask any questions you have about the study, your participation, and anything else that may be uncertain. You may contact myself, Brittany McAllister at 909-379-3250 or mcallsb@coyote.csusb.edu; or my advisor Dr. Amanda Wilcox-Hertzog, Professor at 909-537-7431 or awilcox@csusb.edu.

RESULTS:
At the completion of this study, a copy of this published project will be available at the Department of Psychology, California State University, San Bernardino by December 31, 2016.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

☐ Yes, I agree
☐ No, I do not agree
APPENDIX D

PRE-SURVEY
Pre-Survey

Pre Survey
1. How would you describe school readiness?

2. Please rank each characteristic of school readiness in the left column 1 through 15; with 1 being the most important and 15 being the least important characteristic for school readiness.
   - ______ Is physically healthy, rested, well-nourished
   - ______ Finishes tasks
   - ______ Can count up to 20 or more
   - ______ Takes turns and shares
   - ______ Has good problem-solving skills
   - ______ Is enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities
   - ______ Is able to use pencils and/or paint brushes
   - ______ Is not disruptive to the class
   - ______ Knows the English language
   - ______ Is sensitive to other children’s feelings
   - ______ Sits still and pays attention
   - ______ Knows the letters of the alphabet
   - ______ Can follow directions
   - ______ Identifies primary colors and basic shapes
   - ______ Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in child’s primary language

3. What do you know regarding developmentally appropriate practices?
4. Please rank the following teaching practices 1 through 10; with 1 being the most developmentally appropriate practice and 10 being the most developmentally inappropriate practice:
   ______ Utilizes learning centers
   ______ Focuses on basic academic skills
   ______ Follows a rigid curriculum
   ______ Facilitates hands-on experiences
   ______ Utilizes direct (didactic) instruction as sole or most-common method of teaching
   ______ Allows free play in the classroom
   ______ Teacher asks the questions
   ______ Gives choices to students
   ______ Encourages questioning and problem-solving
   ______ Emphasizes ROTE Learning

5. How able are you to create and implement activities/curriculum of your choosing?
   ○ Always
   ○ Most of the time
   ○ About half the time
   ○ Sometimes
   ○ Never

6. How able are you to set and implement guidance policies in your classroom?
   ○ Always
   ○ Most of the time
   ○ About half the time
   ○ Sometimes
   ○ Never

7. How able are you to determine assessment procedures for the children in your class?
   ○ Always
   ○ Most of the time
   ○ About half the time
   ○ Sometimes
   ○ Never
8. Do you feel as if you are treated as a professional in your school?
   ○ Always
   ○ Most of the time
   ○ About half the time
   ○ Sometimes
   ○ Never

   Please describe your answer below:

9. Do you feel a sense of professionalism helps you with teaching in the classroom?
   ○ It's extremely helpful
   ○ It's somewhat helpful
   ○ It's neither helpful nor unhelpful
   ○ It's somewhat unhelpful
   ○ It's extremely unhelpful

   Please describe your answer below:

Question 2 adapted from Heaviside and Farris (1993). Other survey questions developed by Brittany McAllister.
School Readiness
Developmentally Appropriate Practices

A Presentation for Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers

Presented by Brittany McAllister, B.A.,
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Letter of Informed Consent

• Please remove the letter of informed consent from your envelope.

• Please read the letter and check yes if you agree to participate.

• Please place the completed letter of consent back into your envelope.

• If you have any questions regarding this letter of informed consent, the presentation, or the study overall, please raise your hand.
What is School Readiness?

- There has been general agreement that children should possess specific skills upon entering school, however, there are many different viewpoints as to which skills are pertinent for being school ready (CRP, 2007)

- What is school readiness to you?
What is School Readiness According to the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP)?

Five Dimensions of Development
- Physical well-being
- Social and emotional development
- Approaches to learning
- Language development
- Cognition and general knowledge

Ecological Model
- *School readiness is dependent on the child’s entire ecological system*
  - Early experiences
  - Family
  - Community
  - Early learning/School

(Zaslow et al, 2000)
Why Use this Definition?

- Supporting Research (Curtis & Simons, 2008)

- Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK)
  - Emphasized development of infrastructure to support school readiness
    - Ecological model
  - Results indicated much better performance overall in SPARK kids as compared to children in the surrounding area
How can we promote school readiness in the classroom?

- Write/use curriculum that encompasses the Five Dimensions of Development
- Follow the Ecological Model
- Utilize Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) in the classroom
What are Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)?

- An important group of concepts developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) that contribute to higher levels of school readiness (Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling, 1994)

- Developmentally Appropriate Practices
  - *Five categories of guidelines*
    - teaching to promote learning
    - facilitating a caring community in the classroom
    - developing curriculum to achieve goals
    - establishing relationships with families
    - assessing children’s learning and development
What are Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)? (contd.)

- Core of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)
  - “Intentionality” is the idea that teachers make good decisions by looking at:
    - The child
    - The cultural and social contexts in which the child lives
    - What the teacher knows in regards to child learning and development

- Developmentally Inappropriate Practices (DIP)
  - Emphasis on highly structured didactic instruction
  - Focus on basic academic skills
Examples of DAP vs. DIP

• DAP
  ➢ Utilizes learning centers
  ➢ Facilitates hands-on experiences
  ➢ Allows free play in the classroom
  ➢ Gives choices to students
  ➢ Encourages questioning and problem-solving

• DIP
  ➢ Emphasizes ROTE Learning
  ➢ Utilizes direct (didactic) instruction as sole or most-common method of teaching
  ➢ Follows a very rigid curriculum
  ➢ Teacher asks the questions
  ➢ Focuses on basic academic skills only
What do you think?

- Developmentally Appropriate Practice?
  - Miss Mary stands in front of her class and teaches her students about the seasons. She explains that there is Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. She has a picture of each one to show the differences between the seasons. The students sit at their desks and quietly listen to Miss Mary explain the seasons. After some time, Miss Mary moves on to her next subject to teach.
Developmentally Inappropriate Practice!
What do you think?

- Developmentally Appropriate Practice?
  - Mr. Frank has his classroom setup in a very specific way. He has several different learning centers set up for his students. Some of these centers include a library, a wet sandbox center, a center for building blocks, a center with puzzles, and a dress-up center. Mr. Frank allows children to choose their preferred center. Mr. Frank observes and comments/questions as needed, encouraging students in each of their respective centers.
Developmentally Appropriate Practice!
Benefits of Utilizing DAP

• Short term results
  ➢ DAP are positively and significantly related to school readiness and cognitive performance (Bryant et al., 1994).
  ➢ DAP classrooms promote significantly higher academic achievement, better skills for applied problems, better letter and word recognition (Huffman & Speer, 2000).
  ➢ Significantly better cognitive skills (Hohmann, Baret, & Weikart, 1978).

• Long term results
  ➢ Higher rates of high school graduation, higher monthly incomes, and fewer arrests compared to their counterparts (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993; 1997).
Downfalls of Utilizing DIP

- DIP are positively related to negative outcomes on children’s motivation (Stipek et al., 1995)

- Children taught with DIP showed lower levels of achievement by 4th grade (Marcon, 1995)

- Children taught with DIP had poorer social adjustment in high school (Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larner, 1986)
What to Avoid in Your Classroom

- Avoid didactic instruction
- Avoid focusing on basic academic skills rather than the process of learning
- Example of Miss Mary
  - What could she have done differently to teach the seasons to her students?
How can you utilize DAP in your classroom?

- Be intentional in your teaching. Teach with regard to the students, the cultural and social contexts in which they live, and your own education and abilities.

- Consider the five dimensions of DAP
  
  - Teach to promote learning
    - Encourage the process of learning, rather than the end result
  
  - Facilitate a caring community in the classroom
  
  - Develop a curriculum to achieve goals –
    - Allow students to create, rather than duplicate
  
  - Establish relationships with families
  
  - Assess children’s learning
    - Fit curriculum to students’ needs
Group Discussion

• We talked earlier about what school readiness looks like to you. Do you feel there are any barriers in being able to utilize your personal definition of school readiness?

• Do you feel there are any barriers in your personal preference for utilizing developmentally appropriate practices?
Any Questions?
THANK YOU!!

Your participation in the presentation and surveys is greatly appreciated!
APPENDIX F

POST-SURVEY
Post Survey
Post Survey

1. Please rank each characteristic of school readiness in the left column 1 through 15; with 1 being the most important and 15 being the least important characteristic for school readiness.

- _____ Is physically healthy, rested, well-nourished
- _____ Finishes tasks
- _____ Can count up to 20 or more
- _____ Takes turns and shares
- _____ Has good problem-solving skills
- _____ Is enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities
- _____ Is able to use pencils and/or paint brushes
- _____ Is not disruptive to the class
- _____ Knows the English language
- _____ Is sensitive to other children’s feelings
- _____ Sits still and pays attention
- _____ Knows the letters of the alphabet
- _____ Can follow directions
- _____ Identifies primary colors and basic shapes
- _____ Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in child’s primary language

2. Please rank the following teaching practices 1 through 10; with 1 being the most developmentally appropriate practice and 10 being the most developmentally inappropriate practice:

- _____ Utilizes learning centers
- _____ Focuses on basic academic skills
- _____ Follows a rigid curriculum
- _____ Facilitates hands-on experiences
- _____ Utilizes direct (didactic) instruction as sole or most-common method of teaching
- _____ Allows free play in the classroom
- _____ Teacher asks the questions
- _____ Gives choices to students
- _____ Encourages questioning and problem-solving
- _____ Emphasizes ROTE Learning

3. Did you learn anything from this presentation?
   - ○ A great deal
   - ○ A lot
   - ○ A moderate amount
   - ○ A little
   - ○ None at all
4. How likely are you to utilize any of this information in your classroom?
   - Extremely likely
   - Somewhat likely
   - Neither likely nor unlikely
   - Somewhat unlikely
   - Extremely unlikely

5. What did you find most informative about the presentation?

6. What could have been more informative?
Demographic Questions
7. Which type of class do you teach?
   ○ Prekindergarten/Preschool class
   ○ Transitional kindergarten class
   ○ Kindergarten class
   ○ Multi-grade or ungraded class with at least some preschool and/or kindergarten-age children
     (please specify) ____________________________
   ○ Other (please specify) ____________________

8. Which of the following do you work for?
   ○ Private school/program
   ○ Public school/program

9. How many full years have you been teaching? ________________

10. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Optional)
    ○ Less than High School
    ○ High School / GED
    ○ Some College
    ○ 2-year College Degree
    ○ 4-year College Degree
    ○ Masters Degree
    ○ Doctoral Degree

11. What is your current rate of pay? (Optional)
    ○ $10,000 or less a year
    ○ $10,001 - $20,000 a year
    ○ $20,001 - $30,000 a year
    ○ $30,001 - $40,000 a year
    ○ $40,001 - $50,000 a year
    ○ $50,001 - $60,000 a year
    ○ $60,001 - $70,000 a year
    ○ $70,001 or more a year
12. What is your race/ethnic background? (Optional)
   - White/Caucasian
   - African American
   - Hispanic
   - Asian
   - Native American
   - Pacific Islander
   - Other (Please describe) _____________________________

13. What is your current age? (Optional)
   - 18 to 24
   - 25 to 34
   - 35 to 44
   - 45 to 54
   - 55 to 64
   - 65 or over

14. What is your gender? (Optional)
   - Male
   - Female

Question 1 adapted from Heaviside and Farris (1993). Other survey questions developed by Brittany McAllister.
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