KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION OF ONE LOW RETAINING KINDERGARTEN TEACHER: A CASE STUDY

By

KELLY RAHHAL BAKER

Bachelor of Science
University of Oklahoma
Norman, Oklahoma
1984

Master of Science
Central State University
Edmond, Oklahoma
1988

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
May, 1995

KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION OF ONE LOW RETAINING KINDERGARTEN TEACHER: A CASE STUDY

Thesis Approved:

Kathryn Castle
Thesis Adviser

Susan DBS

David Yellin

Nona Lane

Larry M. Perkins

Thomas C. Collins
Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am most grateful for my major adviser, Dr. Kathryn Castle, whose belief in me was a great source of encouragement throughout my doctoral program, and in particular during the completion of my dissertation project. She has inspired me to think deeply about what it is that we do with children in the schooling process; I consider it a great privilege to have worked with her. I extend my appreciation to committee members Dr. Russell Dobson, Dr. Mona Lane, Dr. Larry Perkins and Dr. David Yellin, whose insights and guidance pertaining to my study were quite beneficial.

I must thank Sarah, the teacher who gave so generously of her time, and who welcomed me into her world. I found her thoughtful approach to teaching refreshing. Her classroom truly is a place where children thrive.

I am grateful to my father, who dreamed this dream for me long before it became a reality, and without whom it would not have come true. Thanks also to my mother, whose tremendous pride in me means so very much. Many other family members and friends supported and encouraged me throughout the course of my doctoral study, and though too

numerous to name, I thank them collectively for their love and prayers.

Finally, I thank my husband, Paul, whose very presence in my life is a gift from God. Without your desire for my best, the completion of this degree would not have been possible - I am so grateful for your love.

I dedicate this work to my precious little Brandon, in the hope that kindergarten will be a happy place for you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Introduction

Accountability in American education has become synonymous with rigidity, prescription and standardization in regard to school curriculum, policies and practices. Not only are public school teachers held accountable for student achievement, but students themselves must now prove their acquisition of readiness before grade entrance is permitted. Inherent in the first national goal established by President Bush and the nation's governors is the suggestion that children must possess readiness before school entry: "By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (National Governors' Association, 1990). Further, according to Chester E. Finn Jr., former U.S. assistant secretary for Education Research and Improvement, "Clear minimum standards at every grade level ensure that only children who can meet them will go on to the next level" (Marzollo, 1990, p. 90).

In reflecting on the current practice of retention in the early grades, it seems that Finn's concept of a fixed curriculum, mastered by attaining the minimum standards

required for grade level entrance is a commonly held one (Nason, 1991). It should be noted that in the present study, the terms retention, nonpromotion, transitional placement and extra-year placement were used interchangeably; use of each of these terms indicates the practice of giving children an extra year, by way of delayed kindergarten entry, or by adding one year of formal schooling either prior to kindergarten or first grade.

Evidence of this readiness approach to grade entrance is revealed in the trend toward nonpromotion of young children in public schools. Kindergarten entrance is being delayed for many who, based on chronological age, are legally eligible to begin school (Peck, McCaig, & Sapp, 1988; Shepard & Smith, 1986). In addition, a number of children are recommended for a second year in kindergarten in response to the idea that readiness is lacking (Shepard & Smith, 1986; Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989). Further, transitional classes continue to grow in number, in keeping with the belief that many children simply aren't "ready" to be placed in the expected grade (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; May & Kundert, 1992).

The growing practice of nonpromotion can be challenged by a considerable body of research which suggests not only the lack of desirable results of nonpromotion, but indeed, the ill-effects of this practice (Goodlad, 1954; Holmes & Mathews, 1984; May & Welch, 1984; Niklason, 1987; Peterson, DeGracie & Ayable, 1987; Shepard & Smith, 1986, 1989b). So

convincing is this research that the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the largest professional organization for educators of young children, advocates a strong position against retention calling for practices in which:

> Children are not "promoted" nor do they "fail." Because children progress through sequential curriculum at different paces, they are allowed to progress in all areas as they acquire competence. Retention is avoided because of its serious impact on children's self-esteem and the fact that the practice of retaining children in a grade for another year disproportionately affects male, minority, very young, and low-income children. The program is designed to serve the needs of the children; the children are not expected to change to fit the program. (NAEYC, 1987, p. 76)

In spite of the significant research available as to the real, undesirable effects of extra-year programs, the practice of retention persists. Consequently, many in the field of early childhood education continue to question this inappropriate practice.

Of particular interest is the knowledge which guides teachers concerning extra year placement practices. Kamii (1981) says that "teachers today generally base their practice on their common sense and intuition about what feels right rather than scientific knowledge of how children develop" (p. 5). In regard to nonpromotion, and more specifically, the teacher who refrains from nonpromotion practices, this statement is worthy of attention and exploration.

Statement of the Problem

With the significant amount of research available which suggests that the "gift of time," achieved through nonpromotion or delayed kindergarten entrance, may not only fail to be helpful, but may indeed be harmful (Ferguson, 1991; Gredler, 1984; Holmes & Mathews, 1984; Mantzicopoulos & Morrison, 1992; May & Kundert, 1992; May & Welch, 1984; Niklason, 1987; Shepard & Smith, 1986, 1989b), an examination of the continuation of this practice is critical. The "gift of time" is a term widely used by those who support extra-year placements; most notably, the Gesell Institute of Human Development has popularized the term as well as the practice of extra year placement. The Institute aggressively promotes developmental placement as the most effective method for placing children in the early grades.

Developmental placement implies that children be screened to determine a developmental age which, according to the Institute, should be the basis for grade placement (Ames, 1986; Ilg, Ames, Haines & Gillespie, 1978). The concept of developmental placement naturally results in extra year placements for those children whose developmental age indicates a supposed lack of readiness for first grade.

A great many teachers are adamant in a belief that developmental placement works; that, for more and more children, it is the solution to potential problems they would otherwise encounter in school (Hall, 1986; Lamb,

1986). Many of these same teachers provide very child-centered environments for their students, focusing on holistic teaching and sensitivity to the needs and interests of each individual child. Based on classroom practices, it would appear that these teachers have a real understanding of child development as it relates to appropriateness in the classroom.

However, an opinion that children are not ready to learn seems to contradict a principal belief from a child development perspective: that children are mentally active and are always ready to learn, and that, with respect for individual differences in growth and development, children should be expected to progress through sequential curriculum at different paces, with no thought being given to the notion of promotion or retention (Bredekamp, 1987). There seems to be a contradiction in teachers' beliefs and practices. On what basis, then, are these teachers making placement recommendations? Perhaps a more significant question has to do with the kindergarten teacher who is not supportive of extra-year placements. What can be learned about the knowledge construction of one low retaining kindergarten teacher, which may inform the field in collective consideration of this issue?

Smith and Shepard (1988) found that teacher beliefs about kindergarten readiness and practices diverge from research findings on the effects of placement in extra-year programs. Teachers who are classified as nativists, that is

those who believe development occurs as a process of unfolding which is uninfluenced by environment, retain a much higher percentage of children than those classified as non-nativists. Still, according to Smith and Shepard, a majority of kindergarten teachers, nativist or non-nativist, endorse retention as a viable and helpful intervention. Their findings also suggest that teacher beliefs and retention practices are related to how teaching and learning opportunities are structured within school settings. According to Donald P. Sanders (1981), thinking and acting patterns of an institution which manifest the processes of educating also manifest in themselves the "theories of educating" which are implemented in a particular setting. Further, he asserts that most institutional arrangements are based upon unquestioned conventions.

Teacher beliefs about readiness and retention, then, appear to be related to school structure, and derived from personal and practical knowledge. Yonemura (1986a) found that teachers' personal knowledge was as important to professional practice as was technical knowledge of teaching. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1984) and Elbaz (1983), relatively few of the teachers they studied held implicit theories which were based on reliable knowledge of child development and learning; instead, teacher decisions were grounded in personal or practical knowledge.

Teachers who recommend extra-year placements for no or few children, however, apparently make decisions from a different perspective; from a knowledge which challenges the practice of giving children the supposed "gift of time." An in-depth study of one such teacher may provide valuable insight as to the personal and practical knowledge constructed which leads to few recommendations for extra-year placements.

Background

Retention in the early grades remains a primary strategy employed by educators for the prevention of or solution to academic failure (Niklason, 1987; Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Nason, 1991). This is a rather curious fact, since the practice of nonpromotion has been repeatedly challenged, and its ineffectiveness bemoaned throughout the past century. As early as 1909, there was recognition within the field of education that retention was cause for alarm (Shepard & Smith, 1989b). John Goodlad (1954) found significant differences between promoted and nonpromoted groups of children, favoring the promoted group with respect to social and personal adjustment. Goodlad admonished that "...assigning grade labels and promoting or failing children at specified periods represents just so much lost motion when the philosophy of school progress is that of 'taking each child from where he is to where he can go.'" Further, Goodlad urged, "It is hoped that...promotion and

nonpromotion would have no place in our educational vocabulary, just as they now merit no rightful place in forward-looking educational thought and practice" (p. 26-27).

More recently, May and Welch (1984) challenged the notion of developmental placement, which encompasses nonpromotion, delayed kindergarten entry and extra-year programs. This study responded to the suggestion of the Gesell Institute of Human Development that as many as fifty percent of all school problems, including underachievement, could be alleviated if children were placed in grade levels according to a developmental age (Ilg et al, 1978). Findings of the study were directly contradictory to the Gesell claim, however, with the children placed according to developmental age (retained) obtaining lower scores of achievement than those of the same developmental age who were promoted.

Shepard and Smith (1987a, 1989; Shepard, 1989) have studied extensively the effects of nonpromotion and developmental placement, through examining results of many independent studies as well as conducting a study in the Boulder, Colorado school district. They consistently found that retained children are worse off than their promoted peers with regard to personal adjustment and academic achievement. Further, they reported that a large proportion of the public school dropout population has been retained, suggesting that retention may be a contributing factor to

dropping out of school. Additional cause for concern is the evidence they report indicating that not only does kindergarten retention fall short in achieving its intent, but that it actually promotes the continuation of inappropriate kindergarten curriculum (Shepard & Smith, 1988a, 1988b). The research of Shepard and Smith suggests that whether the reason for extra-year placements is academic or developmental, effects of kindergarten retention are consistently the same - no positive gains for nonpromoted children, and sometimes, negative effects for those children (Shepard, 1989).

The issue of nonpromotion is closely related to another significant, alarming trend, that of testing as gatekeeping. Various tests are being used to deny school entrance or grade level promotion, rather than for their intended purposes. Perhaps even more alarming is the fact that many of these same tests do not have established validity and reliability; still, educators persist in using these tests, often solely, as the basis for determination of grade level placement (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Meisels, 1985, 1987b, 1989). Tests whose psychometric properties are questionable, being used in a manner which is incongruent with their intended purposes, represents unethical and unacceptable practice, and can only serve to harm children in the educational process (Kamii, 1990; Meisels, 1989; Peck, McCaig & Sapp, 1988).

Whether or not retention of young children represents desirable practice is a very complex issue, and yet, much research does suggest the ill-effects of the practice. The practical knowledge upon which classroom teachers act, as well as the personal beliefs they bring to the school experience are naturally and necessarily informative when considering such an issue. Moreover, if many teachers' practical knowledge in this regard is misleading, as Smith (1989) purports, attempts toward individual studies involving teachers who refrain from recommending retention seem a logical and necessary avenue for further understanding. What personal and practical knowledge informs their decision-making?

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to attempt to understand and illuminate the knowledge construction of one particular teacher, a low-retaining kindergarten teacher, in regard to extra-year placements. An in-depth study of one teacher's beliefs and practices will extend the Smith and Shepard (1988) study on teachers' beliefs as related to extra-year placements. Specifically, the study will attempt to present a very clear picture of one teacher, not only in terms of stated beliefs, but in terms of classroom practices as well, in the hope that this perspective will illustrate and provide insight as to the knowledge which guides the low-retaining teacher. According to Schubert (1990), "The

voices of teachers, their ideas derived from experience in the life-worlds of educational settings, are seldom acknowledged as viable knowledge..." (p. 99). This study is not only an attempt to acknowledge a teacher perspective as valuable, but also to recognize teachers as stakeholders, who assume an awesome responsibility in parental consultation and placement recommendations, and who are viewed as capable of making sound professional decisions. A case study of this nature will not only reveal further insight as to teachers' decisions concerning extra-year placement, but will also reveal specific factors or experiences leading to one teacher's construction of knowledge which is supportive of children's continuous progress.

Significance

"Blaming and labeling the individual for the shortcomings of the institution are old problems that social theorists have studied in many different contexts" (Shepard & Smith, 1988a, p. 141). Indeed, many believe that through the practice of retention, the problems of the public school are being placed on the children. Nonpromotion certainly seems incongruent with the established knowledge base in the field of early childhood education. From that perspective, the need for educators to adapt to the normal, but wide range of variability among children in a classroom is clearly understood and accepted (NAEYC, 1990). In view of

what is known about how young children strive to make sense of their experiences, in their own ways, and in their own time, retention does not seem a viable option.

Historically, public education in America has been and continues to be scrutinized by those within the field as well as the general public. The children have been "studied," teaching methods examined, and conclusions drawn. Strange as it seems, a primary player in the schooling process is rather invisible in the search for answers to educational dilemmas; that player is the teacher. In the current study, a teacher's process of knowledge construction will provide a valuable and critically important addition to the retention research.

High numbers of teachers report that what they do in the kindergarten classroom is in direct conflict with their beliefs (Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Steinberg, 1990). It seems reasonable to wonder, then, whether teacher perceptions of empowerment affect thinking in regard to retention practices. Are teachers autonomous in making educational decisions? Katz (1975) writes that the models of schools as factories are characterized by teachers' lack of authority to alter arrangements for children who do not fit the grade-level mold. Teacher autonomy, or lack thereof, may be a factor in how knowledge about readiness and retention practices is constructed.

DeVries and Kohlberg (1987) introduce the notion of the "practitioner's fallacy" - that is, the assumption that the

teacher should be concerned about "what works" as defined by one's own experience or that of others (p. 14). This concept, rooted in behaviorist theory, focuses on what the teacher does and short-term assessments of the child's acquisition of transmitted information; in other words, right answers and good behaviors are the indicators of "what works." Smith's (1989) study of teacher readiness and retention beliefs suggests that the practice of nonpromotion might be an example of the "practitioner's fallacy." This notion of what works regarding readiness and retention in the short term, then, may be another factor in how knowledge is constructed.

Through a case study involving one teacher's world of beliefs and classroom practices, the teacher's process of knowledge construction will become more evident. A teacher's thinking as to when, if ever, and how a child should be selected for retention, how and why the totality of classroom practice should be planned and implemented in particular ways, and any other factors which influence his/her decision-making in terms of placement may prove quite revealing. Duckworth (1987) has said that, "No amount of theory can affect children in schools except as it becomes a fundamental part of a teacher's thinking" (p. 84). It is imperative, then, that teachers engage in the "negotiation process that attempts to culminate in consensus on better informed and more sophisticated constructions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 110); otherwise, a significant gap

exists in the extensive research that has been conducted pertaining to retention. This study will investigate a kindergarten teacher's construction of knowledge regarding retention, and will offer this teacher as one voice in the negotiation process to which Guba and Lincoln referred.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of the present study was to investigate one low-retaining kindergarten teacher's construction of knowledge as it relates to extra-year practice. Extra-year practice, or retention, is certainly not a new phenomenon, but has become quite a prevalent practice prior to first grade. Several related areas which will inform the above-stated purpose have been identified for review, as follows:

1. Trends in Kindergarten Curriculum
2. Concepts of Readiness
3. Assessment
4. Effects of Kindergarten Retention and Extra-year Placement
5. Teacher Beliefs/Knowledge
6. Constructivist/Phenomenological Research

Trends in Kindergarten Curriculum

> A modern progressive primary-grade room does not look unlike a kindergarten room...the same informal organization is carried on with the children gradually assuming more and more responsibility for the conduct of the room. Children are given the opportunity to carry out their own aims and purposes and to judge their results...as in the kindergarten, the children move about freely, working individually or in small, self-organized groups...the subject matter of the first grade is related to and grows out of the activities...while acquiring information and developing

> skills are not overlooked, the emphasis is on social living and the development of character. (Whipple, 1929, p. 260-261)

The purposes and teaching methods characteristic of kindergarten programs have changed drastically throughout American history and continue to be greatly varied. Whipple seems to base his description of a first grade program on the assumption that kindergarten programs of the time were child-centered classrooms, conducive to young children's natural activity; in recent years, however, kindergarten programs have become more structured, rigorous, academic settings. Many assert that this shift in the kindergarten experience is at least in part responsible for the increased practice of extra-year placement prior to first grade (Seefeldt, 1985; Walsh, 1989). Therefore, the evolution of the kindergarten curriculum is relevant to this study, and will be the focus of this review section.

Kindergarten began in 1837 in Germany, founded by Friedrich Froebel. The term kindergarten, literally "children's garden," intimates Froebel's belief in education through music and movement, spontaneity and creativity, independence, play and outdoor experiences. He did, however, develop a curriculum composed of music, plays, stories, riddles and games, as well as materials designed to teach specific concepts. Froebel's concept of kindergarten included development of mind, body, and soul (Bryant & Clifford, 1992).

In 1856, the first American kindergarten was established, and by the 1880s, hundreds of kindergarten classes were in place in public schools in the United States (Ross, 1976). However, in becoming integrated into the public school system, according to Bryant and Clifford, "kindergartens lost some of their old identity" (1992, p. 150). Reportedly, some first grade teachers were not supportive of kindergarten teaching practices, and believed that discipline should be more emphasized.

This challenge of the kindergarten curriculum reflects the fact that the debate over what constitutes appropriate kindergarten curriculum is not new. A strong student of strict Froebelian thought, Elizabeth Peabody argued in the late 1800s that formal teaching of reading and writing were not kindergarten methods, and should not be touted as such (Ross, 1976). "Froebel's theory of education," Peabody wrote in a personal letter, "sought to open a child's mind rather than to fill it, and in the process it considered individual differences and a child's creative impulses" (Ross, 1976, p. 16). Peabody's point of view was not shared by all educators, however; the serious controversy that ensued is not unlike the current debate as to whether or not formal academics should be taught in kindergarten.

The early 1900s saw another internal conflict among advocates of the kindergarten movement, again with regard to curriculum. Froebelian methods had been strictly practiced in American kindergarten classrooms, eventually leading many

to questions whether or not the rigid adherence to his materials and teaching strategies was most effective in meeting children's needs; indeed, some even suggested that Froebel himself would have opposed the literal interpretation of his philosophy. In an article published in 1906 by Grace Owen, she noted that "Froebel's program appeared to have been 'simple and informal' and his subject matter, such as animals, shepards, and beehives, was drawn from the German child's immediate experience" (Ross, 1976, p. 72). Owen suggested a return to this approach to kindergarten, more informal and natural, as she understood Froebel to have conceptualized it.

Patti Smith-Hill became a vocal participant in this debate, supporting many of Froebel's ideas such as the encouragement of self-expression, the focus on whole child education, the importance of play, and the tenet of growth in child development going from the simple to the complex; however, she "advised her students to adopt a responsive rather than a tightly structured approach to each day's work" (Ross, 1976, p. 77). The kindergarten model that persisted reflected a compromise between strict Froebelian principles and progressivist ideas (Spodek, 1982), and exemplified what is now know as the traditional American kindergarten. By and large, the kindergarten in public schools maintained its child-centered focus, with academic skills being presented only informally, until the middle of the twentieth century (Spodek, 1992; Walsh, 1989). A

portion of narrative from a 1954 state education department guide illustrates the expectations of classroom practice in the 1950s:

> Children select their own activities and move about freely. Many different kinds of work are in progress at the same time. Some children are painting a barn; some are working at the carpentry bench; some are modeling animals for a circus. One child is listening to a phonograph record. Three are working out a dramatization of a story in dress-up clothes. Housekeeping and transportation toys are evident...Large crayons, paints and brushes encourage work at the easel. One child is looking for animal pictures in the picture books on a table. (Uphoff, 1990, pp. 3-4)

This description conjures up a vision of what Uphoff suggests would be a 4-year old program in the 1990s, yet at the date of publication it was directed to first grade teachers. Perhaps this was a reflection of the fact that primary grades had been influenced by the presence of kindergarten classes in the public schools (Ross, 1976).

In recent years, however, kindergarten has begun to move away from its strong tradition of child-centered education, toward an emphasis on academics. As early as 1952, it was reported that the goal of kindergarten was shifting from a focus on growth and development of the child to one of preparation for primary school. Gans, Stendler and Almy reported that "Under such a setup the kindergarten is seen as a year of settling down for children, of adjusting to sitting still and following directions, so that they will be better prepared for a more rigorous attack on the 3Rs during first grade" (Spodek, 1982, p. 182).

America's desire to compete with other countries is often cited as an impetus of the curricular turn toward academics in kindergarten (Bryant & Clifford, 1992; Ross, 1976; Spodek, 1982). "Sputnik prompted widespread fears that America was falling behind the Soviet Union in technological sophistication, so a major effort to teach America's children more, younger and faster began" (Uphoff, 1990, p. 4). Other influences contributed to the kindergarten transformation as well. According to Spodek, (1982), by the 1970s, a majority of 5-year old children (over 80 percent) were attending kindergarten, so that rather than being the exception, as it had been previously, kindergarten as the entrance to formal schooling was now the rule. A 1991 survey revealed that among current first and second graders, approximately 98 percent attended kindergarten. According to one source, "The first day of school now arrives at the age of three or four for an unprecedented 2.5 million children - nearly 40 percent of all potential preschoolers and more than triple the 1965 rate" (Salholz, Wingert, Burgower, Michael & Joseph, 1987, p. 56). Shepard and Smith (1988a) also point to the widespread availability of kindergarten as one cause of the curriculum escalation. More recently, Karweit suggested that "one unintended effect of mandatory kindergarten may thus be an acceleration of the kindergarten curriculum" (1992, p. 82).

The focus on young children's intellectual capabilities appears to be another factor in the coming of academics to kindergarten. The works of Jean Piaget, J. McVicker Hunt and Benjamin Bloom, among other theorists, received much attention in the 1960s (Ross, 1976; Seefeldt, 1985; Spodek, 1982), and the concern for child development was superseded by the quest for academic achievement. However, many suggest that these research findings were misinterpreted to mean that children's learning could be accelerated, and that they could be taught utilizing methods previously reserved for older children and adults (Elkind, 1986; Moyer, Egertson & Isenberg, 1987; Seefeldt, 1985; Spodek, 1982).

With the 1960s, reliance on standardized testing began to increase, and over a period of several years, infiltrated not only the primary grades but kindergarten classrooms as well (Medina & Neil, 1988; Meisels, 1989; Perrone, 1981; Spodek, 1982). Thus, curriculum change was in part, an outgrowth of the testing movement. The focus of instruction shifted to emphasize the teaching of isolated skills as opposed to higher order thinking, and a "one right answer orientation" as opposed to thoughtful, explanatory approaches to problem-solving. This narrowing of the curriculum amounted to teaching as testing; unfortunately, much of what had been recognized as valuable in the traditional kindergarten practice was jeopardized by the testing movement.

In addition to the aforementioned factors resulting in the curriculum push down, many mention pressure from parents as an influence (Price, 1984; Shepard & Smith, 1987b; Spodek, 1985). Contemporary parents have been described as "older, wealthier and more achievement oriented than their counterparts of just a decade ago" (Price, 1984, p. 59). Parental pressure, then, partially explains the demand for an academic kindergarten curriculum.

The literature is replete with descriptions of the kindergarten which is currently experienced by young children; it bears little resemblance to the traditional kindergarten. Durkin (1987), in a study of 42 kindergartens, found that curriculum consisted mainly of whole-class instruction, involving commercial materials such as workbooks and basal readers. Shepard and Smith (1988a, 1988b) assert that the second grade curriculum has been pushed into the first, and the first grade curriculum into kindergarten.

On changes in kindergarten in recent years, the Educational Research Service (ERS) reports that 85% of kindergarten classes stress academic achievement; that in almost 70% of kindergarten classrooms reading is taught; and that most kindergarten classes use the first grade curriculum of 30 years ago (ERS, 1986). In a study of kindergarten trends in Virginia, the "most commonly heard description was 'kindergarten is what first grade used to be'" (Walsh, 1989, p. 385). Teachers in that study felt

pressure resultant of state mandates requiring specific skill acquisition, as well as from parents and first grade teachers.

Hatch and Freeman (1988) found that kindergarten programs are increasingly academic and skill-oriented, and that kindergarten teachers may implement programs which conflict with their stated beliefs about how young children learn and develop. Similarly, Steinberg (1990) reports that "Kindergarten has become a skill-based, academically oriented program" (p. 8). Under pressure from parents as well as mandates to prepare children for standardized achievement tests and the rigors of first grade, many kindergarten teachers feel compelled to emphasize formal, academic instruction.

According to Seefeldt (1985), "That happy kindergarten scene of children dressing up, building with blocks and painting is too often being replaced by vistas of workbooks, rote memorization, and high-pressure academics" (p. 13). Another source reports, "We have an avalanche of anecdotal evidence regarding increased academic expectations, more pressure on teachers to stress drill on a limited number of facts and skills, and greater use of worksheets and workbooks" (Schultz, 1990, p. 2).

In a study of one school district, it was found that kindergarten classes emphasized "rather academic tasks presented to children in a context that required them to sit passively in large groups at desks most of the time, and

"reflected a rather narrow view of what the program might be, or of what capacities in the children could be challenged by the curriculum" (Katz, Raths & Torres, 1987, p. 29). This same study described an over-reliance on testing in kindergarten, as well as curricula that was dominated by decontextualized experiences rather than relevant, experiential events. The suggestion was made that the curriculum was lacking in terms of intellectual rigor, and that "some concern about intellectual climate was warranted" even in the schools these authors contend to be the best they know of (p. 28).

Hymes (1991) reported in 1983 that kindergarten curricula in many states had moved away from the traditional, child-centered approach toward a curriculum dominated by workbooks, leaving little time for play. He also found that various states were debating the issue of half-day versus full-day kindergarten, with the most important advantage to full-day classes being the need to get kindergartners ready to read. One school official stated that "many children need a longer day in kindergarten in order to prepare for first grade" (p. 272).

Many in the field object to the trickle-down of curriculum, citing the deleterious effects of a narrowed emphasis, of drill and practice on isolated skills, and of generally highly formalized activities as opposed to a traditional, play-oriented curriculum (Elkind, 1987; Kamii,

1985). The academic teacher-directed classroom practices, a research monograph reported,

> are not based on current theory or research in the field of early childhood education, child development or developmental psychology; they are based on behaviorist theory. They have appeared since the late 1950s and are not the traditional American model. (Peck, McCaig & Sapp, 1988, p. 34)

The evolution of the kindergarten curriculum might be summed up in the words of Moyer, Egertson and Isenberg: "There is still a year of school called kindergarten" but there is "a mismatch between the curriculum and the 5-year-old child" (1987, p. 235).

The possible harm which results from the curriculum escalation has been attested to repeatedly (Elkind, 1987; Kamii, 1982; Katz, 1988; Price, 1984; Seefeldt, 1985; Shepard & Smith, 1988a, 1988b). In addition to extra-year placements, children may experience self-fulfilling failure prophecies, loss of the desire to learn, limited opportunity for intellectual growth, a lack of autonomy and general feelings of incompetence. According to Shepard and Smith (1988b), "The clearest victims of inappropriate curriculum are the children who are judged inadequate by its standards, children who can't stay in the lines and sit still long enough" (p. 37).

It has been estimated that in some districts across the United States, 10 percent to an overwhelming 60 percent of kindergarteners are considered unready for the academic

demands they will face in first grade (Shepard & Smith, 1988b). According to Meisels (1992),

> The rising numbers of early childhood retentions and the increase in extra-year early elementary programs reflect the problem of trying to force children to learn concepts, skills and facts that are inconsistent with their developmental abilities and that are presented in ways that are unsuitable for young children's styles of learning. (p. 156)

Further Shepard and Smith assert that removing children considered to be unready only exacerbates the problem of the escalating curriculum. "The subtle adjustment of curricular expectations to the capabilities of an older, faster-moving group can be demonstrated in the research literature on school entrance ages" (1988b, p. 37).

Clearly, the push down of the primary curriculum has profoundly influenced the kindergarten experience, and from the perspective of the child, the results are distressing. Without a doubt, the curricular shift, at least in part, accounts for the increased practice of extra-year placement. Ironically, as stated previously, extra-year placement actually promotes the continuation of the curriculum escalation; the supposed remedy for the inappropriate curriculum, then, actually serves to impede progress toward appropriate classroom practices.

In response to the unrealistic demands of the academic kindergarten, many have addressed the need for reform. Elkind (1986) posits that contemporary research only serves to confirm that young children learn through active exploration and manipulation of concrete materials; it does

not suggest that young children's intellectual development can be accelerated, or that young children are more capable than in the past.

Walsh (1989) suggests a struggle between those who view children as "waiting passively for nature to run its course" (p. 388), and those who would set goals and objectives for children, strongly emphasizing academics. Extra-year placement is supported by both groups, as apparently, the curriculum is viewed as fixed and rigid in either case. Walsh asserts that neither group sufficiently addresses children's needs. "On the one hand, hard-headed objectivism is espoused; on the other, sentimental subjectivism is espoused" (p. 388). The solution, according to Walsh, rests with a focus on the interaction between the internal and the external, and a focus on both children and curriculum.

In light of the prevalence of a rigorous, academic orientation in kindergarten classrooms, the early childhood profession has called for a return to child-centered, integrated approaches to teaching (Bredekamp, 1987). Strategies which emphasize meaning and relevance, active exploration, and always, a focus on the child as the center of the curriculum, represent a move toward the kindergarten that respectfully promotes the development of the whole child, and away from the curriculum escalation and the harmful practice of extra-year placement.

This section of the review has addressed the evolution of the kindergarten curricula, factors resulting in the

academic kindergarten curriculum, and the detrimental effects of the academic kindergarten curriculum, one of which is the increased incidence of extra-year placement.

Concepts of Readiness

The term readiness has long been used to refer to prerequisite skills which children must possess before they may profit from further related instruction (i.e., math readiness, reading readiness). Currently, however, the concept of readiness is a complex one, carrying different meanings for different people, and is very much related to the issue of extra-year placement; therefore, the readiness issue will be the focus of this review section.

With the advent of the first graded school in the U.S. in 1948, the problem of age-grade fit came into being (Pratt, 1983). When grade levels had been rigidly defined, students who could not fulfill the grade requirements were not viewed as ready for the next grade, and thus, failed. In the early part of the 20th century, large numbers of children were being nonpromoted as a means of remediating their lack of readiness for the next grade (Shepard & Smith, 1989).

More recently, Pitcher (1963) spoke to the rigid grade structure, addressing the school's need to be ready for the young child. He suggested that the responsibility for accommodating children's varying needs rests with teachers and programs, rather than with individual children. His

concern may be seen as a precursor to the current call for programs which appropriately address the normal developmental variance found in any group of young children.

Goodlad, speaking about educational practices of this time period, said that, "Children most needing the enrichment of early childhood education were denied admission to kindergarten for failing to make the necessary score on standardized tests" (Goodlad & Oakes, 1988, p. 18). This notion of supposed academic unreadiness is a familiar one, in light of the current practice of testing for kindergarten entry.

The Gesell Institute of Human Development makes a distinction between learning readiness and school readiness, emphasizing that all children are ready to learn, but that not all children are ready for a particular grade level, as determined by chronological age (Ilg, Ames, Haines, & Gillespie, 1978). School readiness is defined by the Institute as the "[a]bility to cope with school environment physically, socially, and emotionally, as well as academically, without undue stress, and to sustain in that environment" (The Gesell Institute of Human Development, 1982, p. 9). Further, they assert that it is most important that children be ready for a given grade, and that there is sufficient research evidence finding that as many as half of school problems could be alleviated by placement in the correct grade, based on readiness.

School readiness has become a concern across the country in recent years, and is reflected in the national goals for education set forth by President George Bush and the nation's governors. The very first goal proclaims that "by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (National Governors Association, 1990). This goal has been the subject of much discussion, as it has been interpreted to have discrepant meanings; nevertheless, it illustrates the fact that readiness is an issue on the forefront in education.

School readiness is addressed in a lengthy position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1990). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) asserts that the notion of school readiness is based on the erroneous assumption that there is a set of prerequisite capabilities which children must possess before entering school. In response to the fact that this concept of readiness blames children for lack of opportunity, the position statement calls for a commitment to the provision of services for children and families prior to school entry, an effort that will enhance opportunities for children, and decrease the gap of inequity among children in the early years.

Additionally, the statement calls for a recognition that "[a] basic principle of child development is that there is **tremendous normal variability** both among children of the same chronological age and within an individual child.

Therefore, readiness expectations which focus on the acquisition of selected skills and abilities do not reflect the complex nature of children's development." A third important point made in the statement is that kindergarten and primary grade curricula should be appropriate; that is, in light of how children develop and learn, schools should "provide meaningful contexts for children's learning rather than focusing primarily on isolated skill acquisition" (p. 22).

The statement charges that there exists no measure of readiness which takes into account the complex nature of child development and early learning, and that possesses sufficient psychometric qualities to warrant use in determining children's school entry and grade placement. "Therefore, the only legally and ethically defensible criterion for determining school entry is whether the child has reached the legal chronological age of school entry" (p. 22). Finally, according to NAEYC, schools must be prepared to meet the normal, varying needs of individual children as they reach the legal age of entry.

Kagan (1990) asserts that with regard to the first national goal, the concept of readiness has been poorly defined and interpreted in a variety of ways. She traces the concept of readiness back to Pestalozzi and the late 1800s, and the term itself to the 1920s. An attempt is then made to clarify the issue of readiness and what it means.

Kagan suggests that learning readiness generally refers to the developmental level at which one has the ability to profit from attempts toward learning specified material, and that learning readiness is influenced by various sources such as motivation, development in the various domains, and health. The construct of learning readiness applies to all ages, acknowledges that development is individually varied and dynamic, and that the content in early schooling should likewise be; this view, according to Kagan, leads to approaches in education which attempt to foster readiness.

School readiness, on the other hand, implies a fixed, rigid level of development which children must demonstrate through fulfillment of school and curricular requirements. School readiness, Kagan suggests, typically applies only to prekindergarten and kindergarten levels, and supports a view that curriculum is fixed, and that readiness is to be expected, rather than fostered in the school setting.

A third concept of readiness, as discussed by Kagan, is maturational readiness. Maturational readiness, like school readiness, implies that a child must demonstrate a particular standard prior to entering school; like learning readiness, however, maturational readiness acknowledges that children develop at individual rates, and thus will not all reach the standard of school readiness at the same time. This view leads to the assessment of readiness through the use of various instruments, to determine whether school

entry, or placement in an extra-year program will be most profitable.

In light of renewed attention to the theoretical proposition that learning precedes development, indeed that development is encouraged through learning experiences, Kagan offers a fourth notion of readiness; this view, gaining in popularity, acknowledges that children are always ready to learn, and can profit from environments supportive of their individual learning and development. This thinking in relation to readiness "transfer the burden of proof of readiness from children to schools, making readiness a condition of the institution, not of the individual" (p. 274).

Kagan concludes that a combination of strengths from the various readiness approaches should lead to a focus on equity and individualization. Among other things, equity refers to access; that is, the right which all children have to enter school based on legal, chronological age. Individualization refers to, among other things, the need for the institution to be individually responsive to and supportive of children's varying developmental needs, through appropriate instructional practices rather than extra-year programs. Kagan's ideas about readiness lead to the notion of readying schools for children.

In a clarification of the readiness goal, Engel (1991) articulates the opposition of many professionals to practices of kindergarten retention, escalating curriculum,

tracking of students, and standardized testing of young children. Engel emphasizes that the intent of the first national goal focused on the need to provide health services and quality preschool experiences for all children from birth to school age, and to provide parents with support and training in the development of necessary parenting skills. This notion of readiness implies preventative action which would ensure that children be adequately cared for prior to school age, and thus, fewer children would enter school at a disadvantage.

The resource groups for the readiness goal summarized progress toward achievement of that goal (1991); the position was again emphasized that practices which serve to deny school entry or lead to labeling and tracking of young children were rejected, and were not the intent behind the first national goal.

In an article aptly titled, Goal 1: Problem or Promise, NAEYC points out that the terminology of the readiness goal is problematic, as it might be interpreted to suggest support for readiness testing of young children and subsequent placement in extra-year programs. However, they posit, the goal itself is an opportunity; resultant of goal number one, early childhood professionals have been able to engage in meaningful dialogue and hope to influence policy-making in regard to investing in the lives of young children proactively, brightening the educational future for all children (NAEYC, 1992).

More recently, Kagan (1992) again points to the lack of consensus on the definition of readiness, and calls for collective action toward the readiness goal in the form of "supporting institutions that can nurture young children - families, early care and education settings, schools, media, workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities - must be regarded as the national prerequisite for a healthy, viable America" (p. 52). This, Kagan says, will lead to a more meaningful understanding and influence of the readiness concept in the future.

In a keynote address at NAEYC's annual conference, Ernest Boyer (1993) suggested that

> school readiness means good health; universal preschool education; good parenting; a family-friendly workplace; television that enriches rather than degrades children's understanding of our world; neighborhoods that encourage learning; connections across generations; school that are 'ready' for children; and appropriate, responsible assessment of children. (p. 56)

Boyer goes into further detail about the importance of a total, national commitment to all of the aforementioned points, as a means of achieving the promise and possibility inherent in the readiness goal. Perhaps most closely related to the extra-year placement issue is Boyer's assertion that schools "must be prepared to accept all children as they are and nourish their potential...it's absolutely unacceptable for educators to prejudge children and begin to separate them at an early age, into winners and losers" (p. 56).

Based on a study of the meanings of readiness for kindergarten in three different communities, Graue concluded that "[r]eadiness was more than something in a child or something used by a teacher. It was a product of the interactions of people invested in the kindergarten experience, used by them differentially depending on their roles" (1993, p. 254). Graue asserts that the meaning of readiness has more to do with beliefs held by adults than with children's behavior. Since readiness is a social construct and since practices associated with readiness greatly impact children's educational opportunities, Graue recommends that efforts focus on broadening adults' views of children and of kindergarten, so that educational experiences for children will be enhanced, and sorting children according to levels of readiness will be unnecessary.

In a recent article, Kagan speaks once again to the issue of readiness and the meaning it conveys. She suggests that "the foremost responsibility of the ready school is to create environments that nurture children's development and learning" (1994, p. 232). Once more, Kagan emphasizes that readiness must be established in institutions. Institutions characterized by a focus on the whole child in the context of the family, on individual needs of children, and on entry and promotion practices which respect children's developmental needs, according to Kagan, are among descriptors of a truly ready school.

In this section of the review, the focus has been on the various meanings ascribed to the term readiness as related to both children and the educational institution.

Assessment

An alarming current trend in early childhood education is the tendency toward testing young children in a manner inappropriate to their developmental abilities, and for purposes inconsistent with the capabilities of the particular instruments being used (Kamii, 1990; Meisels, 1987, 1989; Perrone, 1991). Extra-year placements are being made for children, often based on the results of a single test, most notably the Gesell School Readiness Test (GSRT), whose psychometric properties are questionable (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Meisels, 1987). Thus, assessment of young children is inexplicably related to extra-year practice, and will be the focus of this review section.

On the selection of readiness tests, McLaughlin (1981) suggests, among other things, that the selection of a potentially useful test should come from a reliable source, such as Buros' Mental measurement Yearbook, and that information from a readiness test should not be used apart from a more thorough approach to assessment. McLaughlin seems to affirm the caution of others, that readiness test results should not be used as the sole criterion regarding placement decisions (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Meisels, 1989; Perrone, 1991).

According to Meisels (1987b), children are being labeled as "unready" for placement in the expected grades on the basis of tests without established validity. Meisels asserts that in a number of screening tests, neither reliable nor valid, are being used to place children in classes; he challenges this practice as abusive to children.

Specific to the GSRT, Meisels suggests that the test is commonly recommended as capable of performing as a screening instrument, a purpose for which it is wholly inadequate (1987a, 1987b). This is consistent with the personal experience of this researcher as to the function of the GSRT, as purported in a Gesell training workshop (Ferree, 1988).

Of one study claiming predictive validity of GSRT (Wood, Powell & Knight, 1984), Meisels suggests a variety of flaws in the research. Besides the small size and nonrepresentativeness of the population, and the undefined outcome measured for school success, the predictive ability of the test as used is completely unfounded, since the authors made adjustments based on assumed validity of the very thing they were to prove; the developmental age (DA) as derived from the GSRT.

Representatives of the Gesell Institute of Human Development (GIHD) defend the test and its uses, claiming that DA does indeed predict school success, more effectively than chronological age (Gesell Institute of Human Development, 1987). They claim the test measures maturity,

which they assert to have great impact on school success or lack thereof, and that it is distinctly different from I.Q. tests. They cite one study to have established predictive validity of GSRT, claiming a positive relationship between predicted kindergarten readiness and sixth grade school performance. Meisels (1987a) refutes this claim, however, stating that reporting only in correlations does not allow for analysis of accuracy, and that in this case, the positive correlations reflect only the extremes.

Information from the Ninth Mental Measurement Yearbook with regard to the GSRT comes from various sources; however, reviews are fairly consistent in reporting the psychometric shortcomings of the test. Kaufman (1985, p. 607) contends that the authors of the tests have not been responsible to report the information mandated by the APA guidelines. More specifically, Kaufman cites unrepresentative norms, inadequate administration and scoring directions, and lack of established reliability and predictability among the flaws of the GSRT.

Naglieri (1985, p. 608) suggests similar problems with the test, citing potential for misuse or misinterpretation. Bradley's review (1985, p. 609) is also negative, and he emphasizes that there is no long-term evidence to support placing children based on GSRT scores. Waters (1985, p. 610) also states the lack of established reliability, limited reference to validity, limitations in the normative

data, and a lack of attention to assessment of social development.

Graue and Shepard (1989) examined the GSRT in terms of predictive validity. While findings suggested modest predictive validity for standardized test scores, and a small positive relationship between Gesell DA and report card assessments in first grade, the GSRT was found to have low validity for predicting first grade success. The use of the GSRT for placement of children was not supported; the authors purport that in typical samples of kindergarten classes, more than half of the children predicted as unready by the test would be successful if promoted.

In another investigation of the psychometric properties of the GSRT, Lichtenstein (1990), formerly of the GIHD, reported that the instrument has much in common with standardized I.Q. tests. The author of this study reported high levels of agreement between teacher readiness ratings and GSRT placement recommendations. However, a disproportionate number of children, more than half of the sample, were identified as unready by both teacher ratings and the GSRT, according to Lichtenstein. This author cites unacceptable levels of reliability, and suggests that the tendency to perceive children as unready is directly proportionate to the extent of training from the GIHD, or the use of the test in the district. He concludes that the GSRT does not appear to be technically adequate to determine grade placement.

Freberg (1991) evaluated chronological age (CA) and GSRT results as predictors of SAT performance in kindergarten. Her results indicate that both CA and DA as assessed by the GSRT are good predictors of SAT scores in kindergarten. In a recent study, however, (Porwancher & DeLisi, 1993), the authors were in agreement with Naglieri, Kaufman and Lichtenstein, concluding that the GSRT was significantly related to I.Q. scores.

The Gesell Development Assessment (GDA) is another of the Gesell tests that was investigated in terms of psychometric properties. The GDA was used to assess a sample of 4-6 year old children; 182 of those children were retested at age 8 1/2. The author of this study (Walker, 1992) suggests moderate reliability and predictive power, and reports that experienced judges differ in DA assessments and placement recommendations. Walker recommends, among other things, that children be evaluated by more than one examiner, that placement be based on other sources of information in addition to the test, that scores are most effective for ordering children in terms of maturity within their own reference groups, and that examiners should remain open-minded in terms of ongoing evaluation, and in terms of the possibility of children's changing developmental status.

Meisels (1992b) comments on Walker's study, suggesting that the discrepancy of the mean DA, being two to seven months below chronological age, suggests a problem with the test rather than a lack of readiness on the part of the

children. His interpretation of the test is consistent with the findings of Lichtenstein, reported above. Meisels asserts that Walker's data demonstrate the reliability of the GDA, but not the validity.

Shepard (1992) critiqued Walker's study as well. A distressing result, she says, is that trained Gesell examiners consistently assess DA younger than chronological ages to children reported as the original norm group. Shepard calls this a "logical impossibility and damning to the credibility of the assessment results. The recorded performance of over fifty percent of the very children who previously defined normal and average development was here judged as developmentally young," according to Shepard (p. 48). The author cites problems with normalization, validity and reliability, concluding that findings do not support use of the Gesell tests for placement in the estimated twenty percent of school districts in the nation currently using them.

Fedoruk (1989) speaks about the medical model of screening, stating that it is logical since a particular illness can be determined as either present or not present. Applied to kindergarten screening, however, the medical model is inadequate, according to Fedoruk, as there is not a clear, single cause for school failure. The misapplication of this model to kindergarten screening to first grade success, he asserts, results in children being viewed as deficient, with no regard being given to the various factors

which influence development and school success. Perhaps his suggestion could be interpreted to mean that the concept of the readiness test is an oversimplification of factors leading to school success or failure, and therefore is not sufficient for use in determining school entry and grade placement.

Developmental screenings, reportedly, are designed to identify those children who may require special education services, and who may profit from modified programs, while readiness tests are designed to facilitate curriculum planning (Meisels, 1985, 1987b). The point is made that reliability and predictive validity must be established for developmental screening tests, and that reliability and content validity are important psychometric properties of readiness tests; neither kind of test is designed to determine grade placement, and therefore, should not be used for that purpose, according to Meisels. However, many suggest evidence that readiness tests are being inappropriately used to determine grade placement (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1987; Meisels, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1986).

Besides the questionable nature of the tests themselves, there are other problematic aspects of using standardized tests with young children. Many purport that children are not good test takers, and that paper/pencil tests are not good indicators of first grade success (Glickman & Pellegrini, 1988; Perrone, 1991). Authors of one study observed kindergarten children to exhibit

behaviors and make comments indicative of stress as a result of standardized testing sessions (Fleege, Charlesworth, Burts, & Hart, 1990).

In addition, many have cautioned about the cultural bias inherent in readiness tests, and the possibility of ethnic segregation when these tests determine grade placement (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Neil & Medina, 1988; Perrone, 1991). Perrone (1991) also suggests that testing results in labeling of children, which may lead to diminished educational opportunities for those children. Finally, the use of tests with young children drives the curriculum toward more measurable outcomes, and away from quality, activity-oriented experiences most helpful to children's development (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Grace & Shores, 1992; Kamii, 1990; Perrone, 1991; Spodek, 1982). Clearly, formal testing of young children results not only in the questionable practice of extra-year placement, but in a plethora of other distressing outcomes as well.

Kamii (1990) called for a halt in achievement testing prior to third grade, due to the inability of tests to measure children's learning, and the resulting pressure toward inappropriate classroom practices. Other concerned professionals have decried the improper use of testing for placement of children in the early grades (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Meisels, 1989). The NAEYC published a position statement on standardized testing (1988), citing the improper use of readiness tests and developmental

screenings for grade placement, the potential negative effects of extra-year placement based on such tests, and the disproportionate number of low income and minority children identified as unready by such tests. The position statement calls for cautious use of standardized tests with young children:

> Rather than to use tests of doubtful validity, it is better not to test, because false labels that come from tests may cause educators or parents to alter inappropriately their treatment of children. The potential for misdiagnosing or mislabeling is particularly great with young children, where there is wide variation in what may be considered normal behavior. (1988, p. 41)

The statement goes on to suggest that the burden of proof for the validity and reliability of tests rests with the test developers and advocates for their use.

In a position statement of the Association for Childhood Education International (1991), teachers and parents are encouraged to oppose the use of tests results for making any important decisions about children. Further, the statement calls for a halt in the testing of children from preschool through the second grade.

A Statement of the Campaign for Genuine Accountability asserts that standardized tests should not be a basis for placement decisions, as they are too inaccurate (Fairtest, 1990). At the time of publication, the statement included seventy-six endorsement signatures, representing a cross-section of disciplines in the form of national, state and

local associations and organizations, as well as individuals.

Appropriate assessment for young children is addressed by the Southern Early Childhood Association in a position statement (1990); criteria for appropriate assessment includes among other things, the necessity of validity, attention to development of the whole child, the need for assessment to be continuous, to involve repeated observations and to utilize various methods. Additionally, according to the statement, assessment should not include the use of standardized tests.

According to Leavitt and Eheart (1991), assessment requires information from parents, recorded observations of the children at play in daily interactions and routines, with all of the information being organized into a comprehensive assessment. Assessment should provide a picture of a child, and should facilitate teachers' curriculum planning and implementation. According to the authors, "By enhancing our understanding of children, we can be more responsive to them and supportive of their play and development" (p. 9).

Further, a resource group, appointed by the national Education Goals panel, recommended that teacher observation and portfolio assessment be implemented by 1995, to enhance the assessment and evaluation of young children (Grace, Shores, Brown, Arnold, Graves, Jambor & Neill, 1992). This recommendation is consistent with the definition of

assessment voiced by Bredekamp and Rosegrant, as "the process of observing, recording and otherwise documenting the work children do and how they do it" (1992, p. 22). Among the principles they set forth to guide assessment are the notion that assessment should result in benefits to the child, and that assessment should demonstrate children's overall strengths and progress. Finally, Shepard (1994) asserts that, though tests have been and are being used to "track children into ineffective programs or to deny them school entry," more appropriately, "assessments should demonstrate the richness of what children do know and should foster instruction that builds on their strengths" (p. 212).

This section of the review has focused on the problems with tests which are used to place children in extra-year programs, the misuse of such tests, and the negative effects which may result from their use with young children.

Effects of Kindergarten Retention and Extra-year Placement

The practice of giving children an extra year of formal schooling, through grade repetition or retention, delayed entry, or placement in extra, "transitional" grades has been and continues to be extremely controversial in the field of education. This section will present evidence directly related to this issue.

Extra-year placement is a practice that has persisted for over a century in American education. In his three year

report to the National Education Association in 1874, W. T. Harris voiced his distress as a result of the inflexibility of the school system, stating that "...annual promotions held back students who might be moving through the curriculum at a more rapid pace, and many students, failing to be promoted a second time, withdrew and were permanently lost to the school" (Angus, Mirel & Vinovski, 1988, p. 219). Additionally, as early as 1904, concern was expressed by Superintendent W. H. Maxwell of the New York schools over the use of retention as a method of remediating students (ibid, p. 220).

During the early part of the 20th century, the problem of nonpromotion and the occurrence of school dropout, termed at that time retardation and elimination, respectively, were the foci of much debate. Superintendents and others interested in reform collected data locally, and the controversy continued. While many reforms were suggested, implemented, and deemed either successes or failures, educators' primary concern remained the problems of age/grade "fit" - that is, what was to be taught at each level, whether one or two age years per level should be considered normal, and what standards of "fit" schools should attempt to achieve. According to Angus, Mirel and Vinovskis (1988), though reformists "...were prepared to experiment with a host of devices to improve age/grade 'fit,' and thus the efficiency of their systems, they did

not take the simple expedient of placing children in grades based on chronological age alone" (p. 227).

A related occurrence in the early to mid 1900s was the continuing work of Dr. Arnold Gesell, who conducted clinical observation of children for a period of forty years, resulting in norms of child development which Gesell translated into developmental age descriptions. The work of Dr. Gesell and his colleagues, first at the Yale Clinic of Child Development and later at the Gesell Institute of Human Development, is most notable in promoting the concept of developmental placement (Ilg, Ames, Haines & Gillespie, 1978), and thus, extra-year placement. They advocate individual readiness assessments to be administered to each child prior to kindergarten, first and second grades. According to Ilg (1965, p. 1), "The importance of having children fully ready for beginning a given grade should not be underestimated." Further, it is stated that "...research as well as reports from schools around the country consistently show that as many as fifty percent of school problems could be prevented or remediated by correct placement."

In support of developmental placement, the Gesell Institute published a paper entitled, Respecting Growth and Development of Children: Policies and Practices (1989). One of the major points made in the paper is that the Institute is strongly opposed to academic retention or extra-year programs which segregate children academically,

or result in homogeneous ability grouping. This is significant, as a distinction is made between developmental age placement resulting in extra-year placement, and extra-year placement in the form of academic retention. The reader is encouraged to consider this distinction cautiously, as much research suggests that results of extra-year placement are the same, regardless of the reasons for and method of placement. This research will be included as a part of the current section.

A final word from the Gesell position paper appears in small print:

> Extra time for developmentally young children should be as much guaranteed right as special services for handicapped children. School districts or professionals who insist that all children should be promoted annually based solely on their age, discriminate against children whose overall rates of maturity are not in keeping with the grade in question. Schools should make it possible for children to progress through their educational careers at different rates, without penalty, in order to provide the best opportunities for individual success. (p. 17)

The Gesell research in support of developmental placement is discussed in the book School Readiness (Ilg et al., 1978). Few actual comparison studies are cited, however. Evidence from one study is given to suggest the agreement between developmental assessment scores and teacher judgments of a child's readiness; a close examination by the reader reveals that the agreement consistently decreases through third grade, which is as far as the study is documented.

An unpublished study from Visalia, California (Ilg et al., 1978) reports that in one school, before developmental placement was undertaken, there were fifty-eight referrals outside the school for special help in one year. The following year, with developmental placement, there were only eight such referrals. This was a one-year study, with no record of any follow-up.

Another study describes the results of having kept a group of first graders in Garden Grove, California as a control group, while the kindergarten children the next year were placed developmentally (Ilg et al., 1978). Reportedly, 65% of the control group read below grade level, while only 8% of the developmentally placed children read below grade level. It appears that these children were tested at the end of the first grade year, although the information given is somewhat vague. No longitudinal data is provided, and only reading ability is emphasized.

An additional study cited describes a developmental placement program that had been in place for two to three years in a California town. Three schools were compared, one being termed a traditional school, one being an Elementary and Secondary Education Act school, and one characterized by a developmental placement program. The results given are that, while the traditional school started out highest in reading in kindergarten, within one year the developmental placement program was "far out in front," and the traditional school had "lost considerable ground" (Ilg

et al., 1978, p. 13). It is left to the reader to interpret these results; it is also noteworthy that children were apparently being assessed on reading skills in kindergarten in these classes.

Two additional studies are discussed in the book, for the purpose of giving credence to the effectiveness of extra-year placement. One is an unpublished study in which the author purports the effectiveness of grade retention based on parental responses to a Likert Scale questionnaire. A final study reports that Dr. Richard Walker, a staff member at the Gesell Institute, followed a group of second graders who had repeated the school year on the basis of immaturity. For these forty-eight children, 73% had higher grades after re-placement, with the average report card grade going from C- to B (Ilg et al., 1978). Again, the reader is cautioned as to the significance of these findings, as there is no control group or longitudinal data provided, and since, apparently, 27% of children spending a second year in the same grade did not improve in terms of report card grades.

The position of the Gesell Institute, as suggested in the previous studies, appears to be that repeating a grade must be considered an acceptable alternative, as some children will be overplaced. According to the authors,

> Our own experience with hundreds of cases of repeating has been extremely favorable, and research by ourselves and others bears out the value of having a child repeat when the necessity is indicated. In practical experience, we find that if parents and school present

> the situation in a favorable light, most children do accept the idea positively. (Ilg et al., 1978, p. 15)

Indeed, many others have asserted the effectiveness of developmental placement and thus, extra-year programs. Some focus attention on extra-year placement as an intervention for students who are chronologically the youngest of their grade level groups. The claim is that younger children in classes perform poorly in comparison to their older classmates; this assertion is known as the birthdate effect. Sweetland and De Simone (1987) found that most youngest children (three month birth-quartile) did less well on measures of academic performance than older peers, through grade four. This effect diminished significantly in grades five and six. Breznitz and Teltsch (1989) did a follow-up study of the effect of school entrance age on academic achievement and social-emotional adjustment. They concluded that the youngest children continue to do less well through fourth grade in math and reading comprehension, based on standardized test scores. Differences in social and emotional adjustment had virtually disappeared by grade four, however.

Langer, Kalk and Searls (1984) also found that older children in grade levels tended to outperform their younger classmates academically until age 9, when differences decreased. By age 17, the birthdate effect was not a predictor of school success, as differences due to age no longer existed. Uphoff and Gilmore (1985) conducted and

reviewed studies of the birthdate effect; they concluded that chronologically older children in a grade tend to receive more above average grades and achieve higher standardized test scores than younger classmates, and that younger children are far more likely to have failed a grade and to have been referred by teachers and diagnosed as learning disabled as compared to older, same grade children.

Gullo and Burton (1992) state that "...findings regarding age of entry are clouded at best" (p. 176). They cite studies which report that young children perform at a lower level academically then older children, as well as those which demonstrate the disappearance of this age effect in later years. Their own study did not focus on age of entry in isolation, but examined effects of age of entry, number of years of preschool, and sex on academic readiness at the end of kindergarten. Their analyses indicated that if children were the youngest in their class, and had been in school only one or two years (kindergarten only, or one year of preschool plus kindergarten), they did not score as high on a standardized readiness test as older classmates; if children were the youngest in their class, however, and had been in school for three years (two years of preschool plus kindergarten), no difference was found on test scores between them and their older classmates. Their findings also appear to support the notion that the birthdate effect diminishes over time spent in school.

Dietz and Wilson (1985) studied the effects of age upon entrance to kindergarten and later school achievement. No significant differences in achievement were found in the youngest, middle and oldest group at kindergarten, second or fourth grade levels. These authors concluded that a child's birthdate has little or no effect on academic achievement. Results of another study (Bickel, Zigmond, & Strayhorn, 1991) determined that age of entrance to first grade was not a good predictor of success. Though older children did slightly better in first grade, four years later, the age of entrance had no effect on academic performance or placement in special classes.

Bickel et al. (1991) cite many studies which find that the youngest children do not perform as well academically as compared to older children, but suggest that these findings do not justify delaying school entry (one form of extra-year placement). They assert that many of the studies are characterized by methodological flaws, incompleteness, or lack of controls; that youngness is relative (there will always be a youngest group in a given grade); that effect sizes reported in the studies are small; and that effect sizes become even smaller over time. Finally, they claim that if older children do outperform younger children, the problem lies in curricula that are not sufficiently individualized to meet the needs of the learner.

Others are in agreement with these claims; a synthesis of research (Shepard & Smith, 1986) reveals that differences

due to the birthdate effect are very small, and diminish over time. This synthesis, along with the writings of others (Gredler, 1980; Karweit, 1992; Meisels, 1992a; NAECS/SDE, 1987; Peck, McCaig & Sapp, 1988) verify that children who are youngest in the first grade are at a slight disadvantage, but the difference is small, and most studies show that the birthdate effect disappears by the end of the third grade. Further, these authors posit, increasing entrance age for all, or creating extra-year placements for individuals only result in a new youngest group. Wide variations in development will always occur in any group of same grade young children, as is the nature of child development. Policies which encourage extra-year placement and thus, older kindergarten and first grade students may actually result in further acceleration of the curriculum in the early grades (Karweit, 1992; Meisels, 1992a; Shepard & Smith, 1986) as curriculum is gradually adjusted toward the older students. Additionally, encouraging individuals to delay entry potentially broadens the gap between students of high and low socioeconomic status; those who can afford an extra year in a quality preschool or daycare setting will enter kindergarten as older, more experienced children alongside younger children who have not had the same kinds of economic advantages (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Meisels, 1992).

In a book entitled, Real Facts from Real Schools (Uphoff, 1990b), numerous studies are reviewed, some of

which have been reviewed in other places and some which are unpublished studies. Uphoff's findings appear to support the idea that developmental placement is necessary, particularly in view of the present day, inappropriate curricular demands which prevail. Summaries of research results are provided; information is limited and thus, the reader cannot analyze beyond the authors' interpretations. Bredekamp stated that these studies are "not in the public domain because they have not appeared in peer-reviewed journals" (Coburn, 1991, p. 8). Additionally, May and Kundert (1992) cite lack of control and other methodological problems with many findings which suggest the effectiveness of developmental placement. Karweit (1992) also questions the findings related to the effectiveness of extra-year placement or kindergarten retention, stating that much of the research is flawed in design, through "lack of random assignment or equivalent control groups and failure to adequately identify the basis of comparison (comparison of comparable children after equal time or at equal age)" (p. 83).

Various anecdotal accounts appear to give credence to the practice of extra-year placement (Curry, 1982; Freisen, 1984; Hall, 1986; Lamb, 1986); while the experiences shared are certainly valid, they are lacking in terms of scientific support. However, one proponent of this practice stated that professionals "...cannot minimize the harm it [overplacement] can cause" (Hall, 1986, p. 279).

In a review of transitional programs, Brewer (1990) cites two studies reporting positive effects. The children in these studies reportedly experienced later school success after having spent a year in transitional programs. Brewer concedes, however, that children who are recommended for the transitional year but promoted anyway do no worse than their transitional counterparts, according to the available research. Brewer concludes that if transitional programs are appropriate they may serve to influence other kindergarten and first grade programs toward child-centered approaches, and that even if transitional programs don't help individual children over promoted counterparts, they may still provide good school experiences.

Uphoff makes similar suggestions (1990a), stating that transition classes, through demonstration, may encourage appropriate curriculum changes in kindergarten and first grade classes. He asserts that because many kindergarten and first grade classes are not developmentally appropriate, extra-year placement programs are necessary to protect "unready" children from suffering. Finally, he claims that if developmentally appropriate practice were available to all children, the need for extra-year programs would diminish greatly.

Bredekamp (1990) responds to Brewer and Uphoff by stating unequivocally that extra-year programs don't achieve their intended outcomes, and are potentially harmful, according to available research. She suggests that there is

no evidence to support claims that children are protected by extra-year programs. Additionally, she asserts that extra-year programs may actually hinder the change process toward developmentally appropriate practice, as kindergarten and first grade classes comprised only of those considered most "ready" for academic demands will not likely move toward more child-centered practices.

Much additional research has resulted in findings of no or negative effects from extra-year placement. One such study, conducted by Niklason (1987), involved 102 randomly selected students, and revealed that retention was not effective even for groups that some claim will be positively affected. Those with average or above intelligence, those retained and given supplemental academic instruction, and those retained in kindergarten or first grade did not experience positive results from the extra-year placement.

Holmes and Mathews (1984) conducted a meta-analysis of 44 controlled studies of the effects of retention on students. Their findings report that retained children experience less growth in regard to academic achievement, and score lower regarding personal adjustment, attitude toward school, behavior and attendance than their matched, promoted counterparts. Gredler (1984) reviewed findings regarding transition classes, and found that those children recommended for an extra-year placement but promoted anyway were not significantly different at the end of first grade than those who were placed in transition classes. In one

study, the transition group outperformed first grade counterparts in the area of first grade reading, but the advantage disappeared by third grade. The other study found lower self-esteem and self-confidence in transition students as compared to promoted counterparts.

Another study investigated the effects of early school retention, resulting from developmental age placement, on later academic achievement (May & Welch, 1984). Findings were of no significant difference between those recommended for extra-year placement but promoted, and those retained based on developmental age, in terms of academic achievement through third grade. Based on these findings, the authors concluded that extra-year placement yielded no positive effects regarding academic achievement.

In a review of literature focused on the effects of retention, Nason (1991) cited several studies which attest to the lack of positive results, and the possible negative effects of extra-year practice. Nason concludes that, "The retention of one-fourth to one-third of kindergarten children is alarming" (p. 303), and that studies have consistently confirmed the negative effects which result from retention. She also states that transitional programs are not a viable alternative, as "...most research has found them to be ineffective" (p. 304).

Two groups of kindergarten students, identified by the Gesell School Readiness Test as candidates for placement in developmental kindergarten prior to the regular kindergarten

placement, were compared in a follow-up study at the end of second grade. One group had attended developmental kindergarten, while the other had gone directly into kindergarten. No difference was found in the two groups on achievement test scores, or in social and academic development based on teacher ratings (Burkart, 1989). Another study investigated children's perceptions regarding retention, and reported that many children view retention as a punishment and a stigma, rather than a beneficial intervention (Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1986).

A review of the controlled studies investigating extra-year programs finds no report of higher academic achievement beyond first grade for students placed in extra-year programs as compared to those deemed equally unready but promoted anyway (Ferguson, 1991). Additionally, no differences were found in referrals for special services or teacher judgments of problematic behaviors or social-behavioral skills, with the exception of the teachers' ratings in regard to aggressive behavior, that rating being higher for students who had been in extra-year programs.

Mantzicopoulos and Morrison (1992) examined the impact of kindergarten retention on academic achievement and behavior, with results indicating an academic advantage of retained children during the second year of kindergarten over their matched promoted peers. However, the children were followed through second grade, and the advantage was not maintained past kindergarten. These authors purport

that "...research on elementary school nonpromotion is unequivocal...retention is not an effective policy" (p. 183).

Rhoten (1991) conducted an in-depth historical review of transitional grade placement and nonpromotion in the early grades, making a distinction between the two. With regard to extra-year placement in the form of transitional classes, Rhoten's review included 31 studies. Of those 31, she found that 11 reported positive effects of transitional grade placement, while 20 reported negative or no effects of transitional placement. Concerning the studies reporting positive effects, the author cautions as to the limitations of at least 9 of the 11, such as lack of control groups, lack of longitudinal data, contradictory data, and conclusions which are not supported by the data presented. Regarding the 33 studies focused on nonpromotion in the early grades, Rhoten found that 6 of them reported positive effects, while 27 reported negative or no effects. According to Rhoten, studies which concluded that nonpromotion was a beneficial practice

> ...generally tended to be studies which compared children who had been retained with their younger grade peers, studies in which children who had been nonpromoted were above grade level norms on tests but who were considered unable to meet higher district academic standards, or studies in which no comparisons were made to control groups. (p. 70)

Karweit (1992) cited a review of the evidence, as well as two well-designed studies which resulted in significant, positive effects for students placed in extra-year programs.

However, these studies confirmed that by the end of third grade, positive effects had vanished, leading Karweit to conclude that in general, there is no benefit of extra-year placement for children. Another study revealed that students placed in a junior kindergarten or junior first grade based on developmental age as determined by the Gesell School Readiness Test did not perform with any significant difference in terms of academic achievement at the end of first grade, when compared with promoted counterparts. Additionally, parent and teacher ratings of children's temperaments were not consonant with the assertion that developmentally young children are more active and more distractible than developmentally older children (Porwancher & DeLisi, 1993).

A study by Walsh, Ellwein and Miller (1991) revealed that younger, poor boys were more likely to be placed in extra-year programs than other groups; in this study, the group was 32 times more likely than older, nonpoor girls to be placed in an extra-year program. The authors found that socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and age are each moderately predictive of placement in an extra-year program. A number of other studies suggest that there is bias against particular groups inherent in extra-year practice; those groups include poor and minority children (Rose, Medway, Cantrell & Marus, 1981; Shepard & Smith, 1989), boys (Charlesworth, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1989), and younger children (Charlesworth, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1986, 1989).

Some have documented the high correlation between retention and the dropout tendency (Foster, 1993; Grissom & Shepard, 1989; Neil & Medina, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1987). According to Foster, "...retention is the second greatest predictor of school drop-out" (p. 40). It is interesting to note that a Gallup Poll response suggests that public thinking is erroneous regarding the relationship between retention and school drop-out. Thirty-two percent of parents polled responded that more of those who fail achievement tests and have to repeat a grade are likely to drop out of school, while 54% believe that more of those who fail achievement tests but are promoted anyway will drop out (22nd Annual Gallup Poll, 1990). Even more interesting is the fact that the responses of non-whites, who are reportedly more often affected by retention (Rose, Medway, Cantrell & Marus, 1981; Walsh, Ellwein, Eads, & Miller, 1991), were more in line with actual evidence. Forty-four percent of non-whites polled, as compared to 30% of whites, believe repeaters are more likely to drop out, while 41% of non-whites and 57% of whites responded that the promoted students would be more likely to drop out.

Lorrie Shepard and Mary Lee Smith, much quoted in the literature related to extra-year practice and this study being no exception, have studied extensively the effects of such practice. In 1985, these researchers completed a study of the Boulder, Colorado school district regarding kindergarten retention and transitional programs (Shepard &

Smith, 1987a). Forty pairs of children, half having been placed in an extra-year program prior to first grade and the other half not being extra-year placed, were matched with regard to sex, birthday, initial readiness and dominant language. Results were almost entirely of no differences; exceptions were a one-month ahead in math for extra-year students, and a slight difference in parent ratings favoring the nonretained students in terms of attitude toward school (as judged by parents).

Shepard and Smith examined data from many independent studies, and consistently found that children who are extra-year placed are worse off than their promoted peers regarding personal adjustment and academic achievement. They clarify that nonpromoted children do progress in the repeated year, but not as much as similar, promoted children (1987b). Of twenty-one well controlled studies of kindergarten retention, only one was found which supported the effectiveness of developmental placement, and this study only followed the children through first grade. Several of the studies found an advantage for transitional children in first grade, but the difference disappeared when children were followed through third or fourth grade. Self-concept or attitude measures showed no difference or negative effects from the extra-year placements. This research suggests that whether the reason for extra-year placements is academic or developmental, effects of extra-year placement prior to first grade are consistently the same; no

positive gains for nonpromoted children, and sometimes, negative effects for those children (Shepard & Smith, 1986, 1989b).

As reviewed by Foster (1993), a great many studies result in findings confirming that children who are recommended for retention but are promoted anyway do as well or better than similar, retained peers. Foster's conclusion is that "the definitive literature contradicts many popular beliefs about retention" (p. 42). Foster's review supports the lack of efficacy of retention in terms of academic achievement and personal adjustment, the increase in variability of developmental levels in a classroom, the high correlation with the possibility of school dropout, discrimination against poor, minority, male, younger and smaller children.

Finally, Meisels (1992a) reviews the effects of extra-year practice, asserting that these well-intentioned placements actually promote more harmful than helpful outcomes. His extensive discussion of research findings, both recent and historical, and with regard to kindergarten as well as other grades, is followed by his conclusion that "...it is virtually impossible to defend retention as a policy designed to improve student outcomes for young children" (p. 162). Meisels suggests that extra-year placement is actually a simplistic, yet harmful solution to a complex problem. He, like others (NASBE, 1988; Schultz & Lombardi, 1989), purports the need for a reorganization in

the early grades as the best approach to address the issue of readiness, stating that "...such an approach would reach out to individual children, asserting their right to be treated fairly, flexibly, and with knowledge of the developmental differenced implicit in their early school and life experiences" (p. 171).

This section of the review has focused on the effects of extra-year placement as a result of either chronological youngness, supposed developmental youngness, or academic difficulty. The available evidence leads to the unquestionable conclusion that, regardless of the reason for extra-year placement, the practice is generally not efficacious in terms of benefit to students; indeed, it appears that it may well be harmful in some cases.

Teacher Beliefs/Knowledge

Teacher beliefs appear to significantly impact retention selection. For instance, a great many professionals believe that, if parents and teachers handle retention decisions positively, then the practice will prove to be beneficial for children (Hall, 1986; Ilg, Ames, Haines & Gillespie, 1965; Shepard & Smith, 1988a). This belief is not supported by research, however, as reviewed previously in this chapter.

Indeed, that which is held to be true by one person may exist without sufficient, conclusive evidence to convince another that it is true. The belief, held true by one

person, may be viewed by some as inferior to knowledge, supposedly based on conclusive facts (Smith & Shepard, 1988); however, to one who holds the belief, it constitutes what is known to be true. Therefore, personal beliefs and personally constructed knowledge are very much related (Combs, 1982). With regard to extra-year practice, a focus on teacher beliefs will serve to inform the present investigation.

Spodek (1988) suggests that teachers' belief systems are instrumental in their determination of what constitutes good practice for children. "Teachers' actions and classroom decisions are driven by their perceptions, understanding and beliefs" (p. 162). Further, according to Combs, "Recent studies have demonstrated that what makes good teachers is not their knowledge or methods, but the beliefs teachers hold about students, themselves, their goals, purposes and the teaching task" (1988, p. 39).

Many have suggested that values and beliefs held by teachers, whether implicit or explicit, profoundly affect actions taken as well as the quality of relationships in the schooling process (Dobson, Dobson & Koetting, 1985; Yonemura, 1986a). "Teaching practices whether consciously or unconsciously chosen, are expressions of beliefs held by the teacher" (Dobson et al., 1985, p. 87). Further Rubin (1985) posits that attitudes and beliefs are relatively enduring, and not easily altered.

Additionally, the assertion has been made that beliefs are integral to a person's being, and that one cannot be stripped of beliefs in the act of teaching (Dobson, Dobson & Koetting, 1985); rather, professionals are encouraged to become aware of their belief systems, so as to develop consistency in actions, and to further their own professional development. Of a particular group of teachers with who she had worked, Yonemura (1986) stated,

> Their own needs, their own beliefs, and their own expectations made them unique, but these needed to be brought to consciousness and to be judged in terms of their impact on their lives and the lives of those they served. (p. 145)

Clearly, then, beliefs held by teachers are extremely significant, as actions grow out of beliefs, and those actions result in particular consequences for children in educational settings.

Speaking as to the relationship between beliefs and practical knowledge, Yonemura stated that "practical knowledge is a guide for action, and it is important to recognize that it is underpinned by values and beliefs that, for better or for worse, influence children's lives (1986a, p. 6). She also suggests that the practical knowledge of teachers has been devalued, and that teachers' knowledge in action should be recognized as valid.

Spodek (1988) expresses an awareness that teachers rely not only on formal knowledge gained in preservice programs, but on the sense they have made resultant of their everyday, practical experiences as well. In obvious agreement with

Yonemura, he states that "teachers' practical knowledge should not be disregarded...it is derived from the experience of teachers and validated within the context of daily practice" (p. 170). Further, he suggests that the practical knowledge of teachers is personally meaningful, and grows out of experiences as well as personal interpretation of those experiences. This process, he submits, is an essential part of the creation of the foundation for early childhood professional practice.

In most cases, according to Smith (1989), the practical knowledge held by teachers is extremely reliable; however, she asserts that in regard to extra-year practice, the practical knowledge (that is, the knowledge to which teachers have direct access) is incomplete and misleading. Generally, she explains, teachers follow students only through the retention year, and therefore, remain unaware that after third or fourth grade, any positive effects children experience as a result of extra-year placement will most likely disappear as compared to characteristics of similar, promoted counterparts (1989).

A study of teachers' beliefs regarding kindergarten readiness and retention was conducted under the "assumption that teachers' beliefs are best known by inference from their case knowledge" (Smith & Shepard, 1988, p. 310). Case knowledge was described as that which a teacher knows how to do, without necessarily being able to state what is known. In other words, case knowledge may be thought of as

knowledge rooted in action, in everyday, practical experience. In the Smith and Shepard study, interview questions were designed which would elicit responses as to the case knowledge of kindergarten teachers concerning retention, thus revealing beliefs held by those teachers.

The study resulted in, among other things, a classification of teacher beliefs as either "nativist" or "non-nativist," with the latter being subdivided into three categories. In short, teachers classified as nativist expressed belief that development and preparation for school result from a biologically fixed unfolding of abilities, and that the process cannot be influenced by parents or teachers. These teachers had a high rate of retention (defined by Smith, 1989, as ten percent or more), reflecting their belief that if a child lacked the readiness for kindergarten curriculum, the only solution was to allow the child more time for growth and development.

Non-nativists, on the other had, expressed belief that children's development could be influenced; these teachers, as might be expected, had a low rate of retention (less than ten percent). The non-nativist teachers fell into three groups: remediationists, who believe that instruction should be broken into manageable segments, and that poorly performing children can be remediated through additional instruction in the form of tutoring, academic assistance programs, and such; diagnostic-prescriptive teachers, who believe that lack of readiness is due to a specific,

necessary learning trait that is deficient, a trait which can be diagnosed and corrected through prescription of a particular training program; and interactionists, who believe that development and learning result from the interaction of the child's psychological nature with the environments he or she experiences. Interactionist teachers believe environments should be responsive to children's needs and interests, based on teachers' ongoing assessments of individual children.

In addition to the classification of teacher beliefs and the establishment of the relationship between beliefs and retention practice, Smith and Shepard also found that "teachers' beliefs about retention diverge from beliefs of parents and from propositional knowledge," and that "teachers' beliefs about developing readiness and retention practices are related to school structures" (1988, p. 313).

Tomchin and Impara (1992) examined teachers' beliefs about retention in grades K-7. Their findings indicated that, regardless of grade levels taught, teachers in this study believed that retention in grades K-3 can be beneficial to students. Of the educators teaching in grades K-3, a set of shared beliefs emerged, as follows (pp. 211-212): 1) Retentions are necessary for future success. Teachers expressed belief that retention could increase academic achievement and self-confidence, and that the younger the child, the more efficacious the extra-year placement would be; 2) Retention is mandated by the

curriculum. Some teachers suggested the push down curriculum was to blame for extra-year practice. Others, however, seemed to accept the curriculum, but noted that some children just couldn't meet expected standards, due to, among other reasons cited, lack of support in the home or supposed immaturity; 3) Retention reflects teachers' adherence to standards. Teachers' expressed viewed suggested that they might be judged by their peers in accordance with their adherence to standards; therefore, retention, for some, was important in order that only the "ready" students promoted would influence their reputations as teachers.

Of those teaching grades 4-7, there was disagreement about what student characteristics would warrant extra-year placement; additionally, these teachers were less likely to retain children than those teaching grades K-3. Still, as previously mentioned, the majority of teachers in this study believed that retention in grades K-3 could yield positive results for some students.

The authors of this study claimed that teachers' beliefs, as reported, were inconsistent with research findings as to the views of parents and children regarding retention. In addition, it was explained that accounts of retained children's future successes, to the exclusion of the failures retained children experience, are widely circulated, and may serve to distort teacher beliefs.

This section of the review has been comprised of literature citing the significance of teacher beliefs in general, of the validity of teachers' practical knowledge, and of teachers' beliefs specific to the issue of extra-year practice.

Constructivist/Phenomenological Research

The final section of the review will center on the type of research utilized in the present investigation. This discussion of phenomenological study, within a constructivist paradigm, will be quite brief however, as phenomenology, as a set of guiding principles for research will be further delineated in Chapter III.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), the conventional paradigm guiding research methodology is undergoing a revolution of sorts; their contention is that the constructivist paradigm logically follows as a result of this revolution. They posit that conventional approaches have been lacking in that, among other things, evaluation or research is inequitable because of its hierarchical orientation (in terms of power), in that there is no accommodation of value-pluralism, and in that there exists an overcommitment to the scientific paradigm of inquiry. They suggest that among the undesirable outcomes have been decontextualization of phenomena, an overreliance on

quantitative methods, and an attitude of closed-mindedness to possibilities beyond the claims of truth discovered.

The constructivist paradigm, Guba and Lincoln assert, methodologically "rejects the controlling, manipulative (experimental) approach that characterizes science" and instead proposes an interpretive process "that takes full advantage, and account, of the observer/observed interaction to create a constructed reality that is as informed and sophisticated as it can be made at a particular point in time" (1989, p. 44). Further, they suggest that constructivist research is responsive in that it responds in an equitable manner to all concerned parties, or "stakeholders," and that it is a cooperative effort toward more informed, sophisticated understandings, or constructions.

The present study is conducted from the constructivist perspective; it is a phenomenological case study approach, in keeping with Merriam's suggestion that "by concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity ('the case'), this approach aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon" (1988, p. 10). Phenomenology, and in this case, phenomenological case study, is a "human science research approach" (van Manen, 1990, p. 1), and is a "theory of the unique" (p. 7).

Merriam (1988) also acknowledges that the qualitative case study has its philosophical roots in phenomenology. The research concern, Merriam states, is one of process; of

a focus on the sense people make of their lives and experiences; of how they interpret those experiences, and of how they structure their social worlds. All of this, of course, is viewed through the perceptions of the investigator, as the researcher, the primary research instrument, cannot get outside of the phenomenon, but rather is responsive to it.

How does one "do" research? van Manen speaks of research as questioning the way the world is experienced, and to want to know the world in which we live.

> And since to <u>know</u> the world is to profoundly <u>be</u> in the world in a certain way, the act of researching - questioning - theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to <u>become</u> the world..then research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being. (1990, p. 5)

Human science, or phenomenology, according to van Manen, is concerned with the meanings of lived experiences. It is research activity characterized by thoughtfulness, and it is scientific in the broadest sense of the word. "Human science does not see theory as something that stands <u>before practice in order to inform it</u>. Rather theory enlightens practice. Practice (or life) always comes first and theory comes later as a result of reflection" (van Manen, 1990, p. 15). Further, on the broad scientific nature of phenomenology, van Manen says,

> To be a rationalist is to believe in the power of thinking, insight and dialogue. It is to believe in the possibility of understanding the world by maintaining a thoughtful and conversational relation with the world. Rationality expresses a faith that we

> can share this world, that we can make things understandable to each other, that experience can be made intelligible. But a human science perspective also assumes that lived human experience is always more complex than the result of any singular description, and that there is always an element of the ineffable to life. (p. 16)

Of phenomenological methodology, Merriam asserts that "one does not manipulate variables or administer a treatment. What one <u>does</u> do is observe, intuit, sense what is occurring in a natural setting" (1988, p. 17). "Human science researchers attempt to [give] thoughtful, complete, and full interpretive descriptions to such a degree that they resonate[s] with our sense of lived life" (van Manen, 1990, p. 27). Certainly, phenomenology is a science; however, its methods are flexible and unintrusive, yet rigorous in the sense of being self-critical and responsible. "The broad field of phenomenological scholarship can be considered as a set of guides and recommendations for a principled form of inquiry that neither simply rejects or ignores tradition, nor slavishly follows or kneels in front of it" (van Manen, 1990, p. 30).

Summary

This chapter was comprised of a review of the literature relevant to the present study, that being the knowledge construction of one low retaining kindergarten teacher. The areas identified for review were trends in kindergarten curriculum concepts of readiness, assessment, effects of kindergarten retention and extra-year placement,

teacher beliefs/knowledge, and constructivist/ phenomenological research.

CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter will consist of a discussion of the theory guiding this researcher, and the subsequent methodology to be utilized in the present study. The setting and data source, as well as the method for data collection and analysis will be addressed. Research questions will be posed, and a definition of terms provided. Finally, the assumptions and limitations of the current study will be presented.

Theory and Methodology

"Artistic approaches to research are less concerned with the discovery of truth than with the creation of meaning. Meaning implies relativism and diversity. The field of education in particular needs to avoid methodological monism" (Eisner, 1985, p. 9).

This research has its theoretical base in the interpretive, or constructivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). A premise of this paradigm is the belief that multiple realities or constructions exist, and that

individuals view the world in accordance with the sense they make of it. The interpretive aspect suggests that the researcher "attempts to make the world of lived experience directly accessible to the reader...endeavors to capture the voices, emotions, and actions of those studied" (Denzin, 1989, p. 10).

In addition, constructivist research implies an interactive, contextual view. One involved in a study, in this case, a classroom teacher, can only be understood as embedded in the physical, psychological, and social and cultural worlds in which one lives. And yet, the world a teacher lives in is simultaneously created as he or she ascribes meaning to it. A task of the researcher, then, is to illuminate the understandings, or constructions of an individual, which will naturally reflect particular circumstances, experiences and values.

Of great significance in the schooling process are teachers' interpretations and judgements about their own, their students' and their peers' behaviors and experiences. Interpretive research can serve to clarify the understandings which guide teachers' interpretations and decision-making. The teacher being "native" to the school setting, the researcher will strive "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise [sic] his vision of his world" (Malinowski, 1922, p. 25). This approach to research affirms the value of the views of the observed, in this case, the teacher. Through a process of

shared inquiry, the researcher can begin to construct a sense of how one low-retaining teacher has come to the knowledge she holds as valid regarding extra-year placement of young children prior to first grade.

The methodology employed in this study was a qualitative, phenomenological case study design. This phenomenological approach emphasizes a concern with process and meaning; the focus is on "how people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret these experiences, how they structure their social worlds. It is assumed that meaning is embedded in people's experiences and mediated through the investigator's own perception" (Merriam, 1988, p. 19).

In a qualitative case study, therefore, the researcher is the primary instrument utilized to gather and analyze data. The researcher as human instrument has the ability to be responsive to the context, adapting techniques in accordance with the circumstances, processing data, clarifying and summarizing as the study evolves (Merriam, 1988). Guba and Lincoln (1981) suggest that qualitative researchers "do what anthropologists, social scientists, connoisseurs, critics, oral historians, novelists, essayists and poets throughout the years have done. They emphasize, describe, judge, compare, portray, evoke images, and create, for the reader or listener, the sense of having been there."

In keeping with a phenomenological perspective (van Manen, 1990), this researcher's aim was to conduct this

study as a "caring act," which encompasses not only knowing the phenomenon in question in a cognitive sense, but also caring, being responsible to, and remaining aware of the uniqueness of the research participant in a pedagogical sense. Further, the present study was an attempt to acknowledge the abilities of a teacher to create and share knowledge with other teachers (Schubert & Ayers, 1992), here, in regard to extra-year placement and to do so in a manner respectful of the teacher, concomitantly giving the reader a sense of the participant's perspective - "of having been there" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

> Teacher lore refers to knowledge, ideas, insights, feelings, and understanding of teachers as they reveal their guiding beliefs, share approaches, relate consequences of their teaching, offer aspects of their philosophy of teaching, and provide recommendations for educational policy makers. (Schubert & Ayers, 1992, p. 9)

This concept of teacher lore makes clear the importance of dialogue among teachers as a way of constructing and modifying our knowledge about teaching and learning (Schubert & Ayers, 1992). The present study represents one teacher's voice in the necessary dialogue concerning extra-year placement of children prior to first grade.

Merriam (1988, p. 11) suggests four characteristics which are essential properties of a qualitative case study. The characteristics, and a discussion of each is as follows:

1. Case studies are <u>particularistic</u>, in the sense that the focus is on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon. The case is significant in terms of what it reveals about the phenomenon, and for what it might represent. The phenomenon presently being investigated

is one low-retaining teacher's knowledge construction in regard to the issue of extra-year placement to first grade.

2. A result of case study is a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study, thus, the term descriptive study. Thick description refers to a complete, literal description as well as an interpretation of the descriptive data.

3. Case studies are heuristic, in that they may provide the reader with insights as to how phenomena have evolved; by definition, case study implies that the resultant knowledge is a shared construction involving the reader, the researcher and the researched.

4. Case studies rely heavily on inductive reasoning. A researcher may have initial hypotheses, "but these expectations are subject to reformulation as the study proceeds. Discovery of new relationships, concepts, and understanding, rather than verification or predetermined hypotheses, characterizes qualitative case studies" (Merriam, p. 13).

Case study is an inductive approach involving a variety of methods of data collection. According to van Manen (1990, p. 30), a discussion of methodology should not "prescribe a mechanistic set of procedures," but should "animate inventiveness and stimulate insight." The procedures set forth in the current study will serve to guide the researcher, and yet are not viewed as rigid and fixed.

The nature of the research question in this study was a question of meaning, rather than a problem to be solved. An inquiry into meaning may lead to deeper understanding of a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990, p. 23). Further, this study involved no control of the participant; rather, the teacher participant had ownership in the process and the result, through the sharing of field notes and the ongoing dialogue

of information. This researcher maintained a "reciprocal research stance" (Schubert & Ayers, 1992, p. 17). Lastly, the desired result is a "holistic, intensive description and interpretation" (Merriam, 1988, p. 9) of the phenomenon, that being one teacher's construction of knowledge regarding extra-year placements. Careful consideration of the aforementioned three points as outlined by Merriam (1988) led this researcher to select a phenomenological case study design as most appropriate for the present research.

The Setting

In order to maintain the anonymity of the research participant and all persons to whom she refers, pseudonyms were used to identify the district, the school, and the participant.

The participant in this study, Sarah, teaches at Oak Elementary in a moderately sized southwestern state. The school district is located in a vibrant, progressive community that is very supportive of education. This is evidenced in that over thirty consecutive bond issues have been approved to construct new facilities, meeting the needs of a growing student population. Local support for education is also apparent in a Chamber of Commerce education committee, and a local endowment corporation. A collaborative effort between the school district and the Chamber of Commerce involves businesses and schools in sharing resources, in an effort to expand educational

opportunities and increase community involvement in education.

According to an open letter from the superintendent in this district, the system provides a challenging academic program enhanced by various co-curricular programs. Additionally, the letter states that great emphasis is placed on instructional programs and the responsibility to provide students with a quality curriculum. Further, according to the letter, every child is considered important and is viewed as an individual with unique needs.

This school district is comprised of twelve elementary schools, three middle schools, two mid-highs, one high school, and one pre-school special education center, and is currently the fifth largest school district in the state.

Oak Elementary is a middle class, self-contained school, including grades kindergarten through fifth grade. It is approximately thirty-three years old, and currently there are thirty-four grade level teachers in the building. There are five sessions of half-day kindergarten (three teachers), six teachers each in grades one through four, and seven teachers at the fifth grade level. There are three teachers for learning disability classes, two Chapter I remedial teachers, one speech pathologist and one counselor. There is a full time media specialist, one full time and one part time music teacher, a part time art teacher for fifth grade only, and one day a week, a teacher for students classified as gifted and talented.

This school is progressive in its approach to teaching. While the principal encourages teachers to follow district curriculum guides, their individual beliefs and teaching styles are respected. Teachers utilize various methods to strive toward district goals; use of textbooks is not mandatory, and some teachers opt not to use them. Many of the teachers in this building appear to implement activity-based curricula, providing opportunities for children to work cooperatively as well as individually. The mission statement for the school reflects a child-centered philosophy, as follows:

> Oak Elementary: Working Together for the Whole Child
> Our mission is based on a belief that learning is constructed through experiences. It is the intent of the school in cooperation with the home to facilitate the learner's engagement in the risk-taking experiences through which learning takes place. It is our view that lifelong learners, children and adults, have different learning styles, rates of learning, and that learning must be meaningful and relevant to the individual. The school will endeavor to provide the environment in which this process can flourish.

All conversations and observations took place on the school grounds, and most of them in Sarah's classroom, which is located in the K-1 corridor, and is described in detail in Chapter IV.

Data Source

In order to better understand a low retaining teacher's knowledge of extra-year placements prior to first grade, this researcher began by identifying one low retaining teacher. Those who retain fewer than ten percent are

classified as low retention teachers based on the research of Smith (1989). Initially, I sought to identify a teacher in a particular district with which I was quite familiar, believing that access would be gained easily there. The Early Childhood Coordinator in this district was the key person I considered to be knowledgeable with regard to numbers of children recommended for retention by each kindergarten teacher, as she is the person who collects and assembles that information annually. I learned, however, that there is no permanent record of the recommendations made for each teacher. The coordinator gladly volunteered the necessary records as to kindergarten teachers in the district, and their respective recommendations for retention for the 1991-92 school year. These teachers recommended high percentages of children for retention, ranging from twenty percent to nearly fifty percent; therefore, there was no candidate for this study in that particular district.

I then gained access to a second district in the area and requested the aid of the Elementary Curriculum Coordinator, who collects and assembles the kindergarten teachers' recommendations for extra-year placement in this district. It was found that for the current school year (1992-93), the average of the kindergarten teachers' recommendations for retention was slightly above ten percent. However there was one teacher who had a significantly lower number of recommendations; for the second consecutive school year, she was not recommending any

children for kindergarten retention. This teacher accepted the invitation to be a participant in the study. She is, as Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis have defined it, "an instance drawn from the class" (Merriam, 1988, p. 10) of low retention teachers, and therefore met the qualification necessary to become the participant in this investigation. The participant, Sarah, will be described in detail in Chapter IV.

Data Collection

"Enter into the world. Observe and wonder. Experience and reflect. To understand a world you must become part of that world while at the same time becoming separated, a part of and apart from" (Halcolm's Methodological Chronicle, quoted in Patton, 1990, p. 199).

Through the use of in-depth, conversational interviewing, this researcher hoped to enter the world of the research participant, and to reveal insight as to the meanings and experiences which have influenced a particular kindergarten teacher in her knowledge of extra-year placement practices. As previously stated, this researcher was an instrument, realizing that interpretations and understandings, which are constructions, cannot be shared as a result of fixed, rigid questions. Instead, the interviews were conversational; Douglas (quoted in Denzin, 1989, p. 43) has termed it creative interviewing, whereby "two or more

persons creatively and openly share experiences with one another in a mutual search for greater self-understanding."

Webb and Webb suggest that an interview is a conversation, but a "conversation with a purpose" (Merriam, 1988, pp. 71-72). In the current study, the purpose of the conversations was to gain insight as to the perspective of this low retaining teacher, and to illuminate the influences which have led to her particular knowledge in regard to extra-year placements. Thus, a primary mode of data collection was an ongoing series of informal interviews, or conversations which were taped and transcribed by this researcher.

Close observation (van Manen, 1990) was an additional means of data collection, and gave the researcher first hand experience in the life of the subject. Retention practices have previously been found to be related to teacher beliefs, those beliefs being classified as nativist and non-nativist (Shepard & Smith, 1988). Observation in the present case served to suggest whether teaching practices reflect a non-nativist view, which would give support to those previous findings.

Those same results purport that school structure may play a role in determining retention practices (wherein a more fluid structure, more broadly defined curriculum and more holistic teaching practices within a school correlate positively with lower retention rates). Observation as a research tool has allowed this researcher to make inferences

about the particular school structure. Whether and how the subject's beliefs and practices are influenced by school structure informed the question being investigated at present.

Through close, or experiential observation, the researcher had the means to provide a picture of the subject, in this case a teacher, in the context of the classroom, and further, in the context of the total school setting. Close observation suggests that the researcher, as much as is possible, became a part of the classroom community, as opposed to the idea of gathering data at a distance. Observation of this kind serves to keep the researcher "anchored in real life situations" of the subject (Merriam, 1988, p. 32), and was most helpful as a method for gaining understanding of this teacher as she relates with children on a daily basis.

Another important means of gathering data was the use of a dialogue journal, in which Sarah was invited to share her autobiography as a learner, her thoughts and early memories related to extra-year practices, and her philosophy of teaching. This also provided Sarah the opportunity to engage in reflective writing based on her thoughts coming from our conversations. This written dialogue served to continue and deepen our ongoing conversations. van Manen states that "Keeping a regular diary may help a person to reflect on significant aspects of his or her past and present life," and further that "...such sources may contain

reflective accounts of human experiences that are of phenomenological value" (1990, p.73). The journal, then, was a valuable source of relevant data which informed the research questions of interest in the present study.

Data was collected over a period of aproximately seven weeks, from March 31, 1993 to May 20, 1993. This research spent two half days a week in the classroom setting, for a total of 55 hours in the field.

"Thick description gives the context of an act; states the intentions and meanings that organize the action; traces evolution and development of the act; presents the action as a text that can be interpreted" (Denzin, 1989, p. 33). Thick description was generated out of the interviews, observation field notes and journal entries, in an effort to reawaken or show us the lived quality and significance of the phenomenon more fully and deeply (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). Consequently, the respondent's understandings may be shared and experienced by the reader and this researcher. The researcher was not only an instrument, but also a learner, attempting to make sense personally of the respondent's experiences and the knowledge she has constructed.

Data Analysis

Within a constructivist paradigm, data collection, analysis and interpretation occur continuously, so that the researcher is guided by the ongoing constructions of the

respondent. According to Lincoln and Guba (1989), respondents engage in commenting and critiquing constructions previously developed by themselves and others, so that individuals move toward more inclusive constructions. This is consistent with constructivist theory, in that exchange of perspectives is valued as necessary for growth to occur (Duckworth, 1987; Fosnot, 1989; Kamii, 1982).

Ongoing Analysis

Analysis involves the sense-making of the data, and in the present study, was an ongoing process that began as the fieldwork commenced. Analysis was conducted as follows:

*Following each session in the field, notes were made as to significant events or comments which were not tape recorded;

*Tape recorded conversations were transcribed within four to five hours after each session in the field;

*Field notes, including transcripts of conversations, observation notes, and journal entries were read after each session, and comments/questions were generated for the next session. This is in keeping with the suggestion of Bogdan & Biklen (1982, p. 149), that "In light of what you find when you periodically review your fieldnotes, plan to pursue specific leads in your next data collection sessions."

*Periodically, research questions were revisited in an effort to keep this researcher clearly focused on the phenomenon being investigated.

Through this continual process, Sarah was a collaborator of the research; that is, ongoing analysis allowed this researcher to think critically about what understanding could be gleaned from the data, and then to check that understanding with the participant. The ideas formulated during the collection/analysis period were then expanded after data collection had ceased.

Intensive Analysis

After fieldwork had ceased, analysis became the primary focus in this research endeavor. The steps involved in the intensive analysis were as follows:

*The data were reread several times to allow for thoughtful consideration of the ideas which had been generated;

*The data were then organized as to the two research questions guiding this study, and to the emergent ideas which portrayed significant events and relationships contributing to Sarah's construction of knowledge related to extra-year practice. This comprised the topical analysis of the data.

*Wholistic analysis was conducted as described by van Manen (1990). Wholistic analysis involved attending to the text as a whole in order to glean the significance of the

lived experience of this low retaining teacher. The organized data were reread numerous times, allowing the researcher to thoughtfully reflect on it while asking, "What phrase might capture the fundamental meaning of the data as a whole?" As van Manen suggests, thematic statements were then formulated which might convey those fundamental meanings.

Thematic statements are always inadequate, according to van Manen, as no statement can fully capture the meaning of lived experience. Still, thematic statements serve to express the essence of a phenomenon. "Theme is the sense we are able to make of something" and involves a "process of insightful invention" (p. 88). With this notion of theme in mind, the two thematic statements in the present study were formulated. These themes are considered essential, as this researcher found them to emerge consistently across data sources, and from session to session with the research participant. These themes literally permeated the data, and without them, the lived experience of this low retaining teacher loses its fundamental meaning.

Assumptions

Nature can only be viewed as "...constructed through some value window" (Lincoln & Guba, 1989).

Every researcher encounters what Martin Heidegger termed a "hermeneutical situation" (Denzin, 1989, p. 23). That is, every researcher brings preconceived ideas and

interpretations to the research study, and even the choice of a research topic is indicative of the values of the constructor. Assumptions are stated, then, to make clear the researcher's prior interpretations and constructions, which are based on personal experience. Several assumptions in the present study relate to the theoretical stance of this inquiry, and are as follows:

1. Personal meanings result from and represent different constructions; while some are more or less sophisticated or informed, one is not more valid than another.
2. Knowledge contructions, and therefore personal meanings are value laden.
3. Events must be viewed in context in order to be more clearly understood.

Additional assumptions relate more directly to the content of the present study, as follows:

4. Past research clearly articulates the lack of positive effects, and the possible ill-effects of retention, as reviewed in Chapter II.
5. High numbers of children are being referred to extra-year programs, as reviewed in Chapter II.
6. Teachers are well-intentioned in their efforts to help children, and strive to direct their practices to that end.

The final assumption, presented here, is most specific to the present study:

7. Various experiences and factors influence one's construction of knowledge, in this case, the particular knowledge constructed by a low retaining teacher in regard to extra-year placements; further, an examination of those factors may result in a more informed knowledge construction about a teacher's particular understanding and how it came to be.

These assumptions represent the personal constructions of the researcher, and are stated for the consideration of the reader.

Research Questions

"Framing research questions explicitly and seeking relevant data deliberately enable and empower intuition, rather than stifle it" (Erickson, 1986, p. 140).

The research questions guiding this study were intended to imply the value and significance of the classroom teacher's construction, and mental life for the study of teaching (Shulman, 1981). The questions to be investigated in this study were:

1. What is the knowledge expressed by one low retaining teacher regarding extra-year placements?
2. What factors have influenced this construction of knowledge?

Definitions

Kindergarten retention - a second year of kindergarten placement for a child who has completed one year of kindergarten, but is judged to be "unready" for first grade. Kindergarten retention may be recommended by teachers based either on supposed academic deficiency, or supposed immaturity. Efficacy of kindergarten retention is highly questionable, as reviewed in Chapter II, and resulting effects of kindergarten retention have not been found to be significantly different from other extra-year placements; therefore, in the present study, the term "kindergarten retention" will be used interchangably with the term "extra-year placement."

Nonpromotion - a second year of placement at the same grade level; holding a child in a given grade for a second year, when agemates move to the next grade level. This is much like kindergarten retention, although it is broader, in that it isn't restricted to kindergarten, but refers to retention at any grade level. This term will also be used interchangably with the term "extra-year placement."

Transitional first grade - also called developmental first grade and junior first grade, among other things, this is a special grade between kindergarten and first grade,

recommended for children judged "unready" for first grade, but not viewed as lacking enough to need a second year in kindergarten. Transitional classes, according to proponents, have a differentiated curriculum as compared to kindergarten, but are supposedly more appropriate than first grade curricula and therefore, better suited to developmentally young children. There is evidence, however, that T-1 curriculum is not distinctly different from first grade curriculum (Rhoten, 1991). Placement in transitional first, like retention, adds a year to a child's school career, and like retention, yields questionable results, as reviewed in Chapter II. This term, and the term "developmental first" are also used interchangably with the term "extra-year placement."

Developmental kindergarten - also called junior kindergarten, a special class in which children may be placed prior to kindergarten, often based on the results of a screening or readiness test. Many tests used are highly suspect as adequate predictors of childrens' future performance, and results are of questionable use for childrens' placement, as reviewed in Chapter II. This term, and the term "junior kindergarten" are used interchangably with the term "extra-year placement."

Delayed kindergarten entry - the practice of holding children out of school, and either placing them in preschool or perhaps keeping them at home, regardless of the fact that they are legally eligible to begin. Delayed entry is often recommended based on a screening or a readiness test. Parents sometimes choose to delay entry without a school recommendation, believing that their children will be at an advantage due to age. This term is encompassed by and used interchangably with the term extra-year placement.

Extra-year placement - encompasses all early placements made prior to first grade other than the normal school progression, that being kindergarten entry at state legal age, and moving from kindergarten to first grade the year following. Extra-year placements may be made based either on supposed lack of academic achievement, or on supposed immaturity, and results of these placements are highly questionable, as reviewed in Chapter II. Extra-year placement includes delayed kindergarten entry, kindergarten retention, developmental or junior kindergarten programs, and developmental or transitional first grade programs.

Developmental age - according to the Gesell Institute of Human Development, "...the age at which the child is functioning as a total organism - the social, emotional, intellectual and physical components are interdependent" (Ilg, 1965, p.1). Also called behavior age, these ages are derived from norms of child behavior based on the work of

Dr. Arnold Gesell. Many who support extra-year placement advocate that children be placed in grade based on developmental age, which is determined through the use of the Gesell School Readiness Test, rather than chronological age. The Institute suggests that a child's developmental age should be five years before kindergarten is recommended, and six years before entering first grade. In addition, according to the Institute, girls who are not fully five years of age and boys who are not fully five and one half years of age will most likely prove unready for kindergarten, and will best be served by placement in a prekindergarten program (Ilg et al., 1978).

Developmental placement - most notably promoted by the Gesell Institute of Human Development, school grade placements made according to developmental age rather than chronological, legal entry age.

School readiness - as defined by the Gesell Institute of Human Development, it is the "[a]bility to cope with school environment physically, socially and emotionally, as well as academically, without undue stress, and to sustain in that environment" (1982, p. 8-9). Further, "The importance of having children fully ready for beginning a given grade should not be underestimated" (Ilg, 1965, p. 1). School readiness is based on the idea that having reached a particular chronological age does not guarantee any particular level of development, and thus, does not indicate readiness for the work and demands of a given grade. This view of readiness translates into grade level curricula as fixed and rigid, and is supportive of extra-year placement practices.

Developmentally appropriate practice - practices for children, ages birth through eight years, which are considered to be most supportive of children's total development. Developmentally appropriate practice encompasses two major notions: age appropriateness, which is a recognition that children at different ages have different needs and abilities; and individual appropriateness, which is a recognition that children have individual needs based on cultural differences, variance in life experiences and other differences. An expanded definition, representing the current consensus of the early childhood profession, details general guidelines for appropriate practice in early childhood settings (Bredekamp, 1987).

Holistic teaching - rather than dividing the school day into traditional, subject area blocks of time, holistic teaching suggests that children's learning in subject areas is integrated primarily through learning centers and projects. Skill development is fostered as children use

skills in meaningful contexts, rather than through isolated skill practice. Holistic teaching also implies teaching to a child's social, emotional and physical development, as well as cognitive development; recognizes the interrelatedness of these domains, and the fact that one cannot teach to academic achievement, without consideration of the whole child.

Constructivism - a theory that explains the acquisition of knowledge as a process of construction from within, in interaction with the environment, rather than as one of internalization from it. This theory suggests that knowledge is constructed through individual mental activity, and the creation of relationships. Constructivist theory is based on more than sixty years of study conducted by Jean Piaget, including his investigations of how people learn. Constructivist theory implies that the learner is a scientist, seeking to understand his/her world, and is in a continual process of questioning, hypothesizing, investigating, exchanging ideas, and modifying understanding. Within a constructivist framework, discovery and invention are primary modes of learning.

Strengths and Limitations

Within a hermeneutic framework, a qualitative case study enables a researcher to consider the complexity of a specific phenomena. Therefore, a strength of this design is that various factors which may effect or contribute to any given phenomenon may be considered through a case study. Additionally, a combination of methods may be utilized; this triangulation, or combining of methods, further strengthens the case study approach (Patton, 1980). In the present study, methods consisted of conversational interviewing, close observations, and journal writing, as previously discussed.

This researcher, as the primary research instrument for this study, was cognizant of the interrelatedness of the

researcher and the participant in this study. In fact, this interaction was viewed as critical to the learning process of the investigator. Clearly, "objectivity in the conventional sense is an illusion" (Smith, 1987, p. 175). Instead, this researcher subscribed to van Manen's idea of objectivity, and thus remained "...true to the object. The researcher becomes in a sense a guardian and a defender of the true nature of the object...wants to show it, describe it, interpret it while remaining faithful to it..." (1990, p. 20).

As this research is interpretive by nature, the issue of subjectivity is also worthy of comment. The attempt in the present study to illuminate one teacher's construction of knowledge reflected this researcher's interpretation; therefore, results of the study can only approximate the participant's viewpoint. This is not viewed as a limitation, however, but is characteristic of the way individuals "know" one another. Thus, results of this study are an interpretation, and represent this teacher's construction of knowledge as the researcher has made sense of it. In this context, being subjective suggests that "one needs to be as perceptive, insightful, and discerning as one can be in order to show or disclose the object in its full richness and in its greatest depth" (van Manen, 1990, p. 20). Viewed as discussed here, both objectivity and subjectivity serve to strengthen this research endeavor.

It should be clear that a case study is specific in nature, and represents "a part - a slice of life" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 377), rather than a definitive and complete picture of the phenomena being investigated; the interpretive nature of this study having also been established, it would be inappropriate to generalize the results of the present study.

Summary

The present study has constructivism as its guiding paradigm, and is a phenomenological case study approach. The low retaining teacher identified as a case of the phenomenom being investigated, Sarah, was considered a participant in this research project. The methods of obtaining information in this study were in-depth, conversational interviewing with Sarah; close observation in Sarah's classroom; and written dialogue through the use of a journal shared by Sarah and this researcher. This chapter has also presented the methods for analysis, the research question, definitions and assumptions, and a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the present study.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

Data collection, analysis and interpretation occurred simultaneously in the present study, although analysis became more intensive after data collection was completed. The methods of data collection used in this research were close, or experiential observation, conversational interviewing, and journaling. These sources of data will be identified, parenthetically, within the text of this chapter.

Data were analyzed both topically and then wholistically. Categories surfaced around which the data were organized, as will be presented in the first section of this chapter. The data were also analyzed wholistically (van Manen, 1990), and two themes emerged, which were considered essential to the phenomenon being investigated, as will be presented in the last section of this chapter.

In this chapter, a description of Sarah's knowledge of extra-year placement, and factors which led her to construct that knowledge will be offered. In order to consider Sarah in that perspective, I first needed to know her in a

pedagogical sense, to attempt to make sense of who she is as a teacher, of how she has come to be, and then to consider the questions currently being investigated in that context. Sarah's knowledge and practice in regard to extra-year placement cannot be separated from the sum of her lived experiences. Therefore, in this chapter, I will tell her story, as I have made sense of it, with particular emphasis on her knowledge regarding extra-year placement practices and how she has constructed that knowledge.

Profile of the Teacher

Sarah is an experienced teacher, having taught for four years in special education, and fifteen years combined in either preschool, kindergarten or first grade. When teaching preschool, she also served as director of the program. Sarah holds teaching certificates in elementary education, early childhood/exceptional children and mentally retarded education from a state other than her current state of residence. In the state where she currently lives and teaches, Sarah holds an elementary and an early childhood certificate. She has a Masters Degree in Elementary Education, and also has taken several hours beyond her graduate degree.

In addition to teaching children, Sarah has taught early childhood education courses as an adjunct professor at a local university for two years.

She is in her second year at Oak Elementary, where she says, "I feel like I am flourishing here" (4-1-93 interview). She explains further that her principal has an early childhood philosophy, and is very supportive. Sarah came to early childhood education from special education, and found that, in her experience, these two areas of education seemed to be complimentary. After spending time as a preschool director/teacher, Sarah spent two years as a first grade teacher. In this position, Sarah "...felt my early childhood philosophy was in conflict with the other classes" (4-1-93 interview). What Sarah's peers were doing in the classroom was not appropriate in her mind, based on what she believed to be good practice for children. She believed that other teachers had "...adopted a more structured, rigid, 'more is better' philosophy" (4-5-93 journal entry). Sarah experienced great discomfort in this position, and felt that classroom practices as well as retention practices "...contradicted anything I'd been exposed to in college." Further, she said, "I belonged to NAEYC and read month after month articles that also exposed our classroom practices as incorrect" (4-5-93 journal entry).

When a kindergarten position became available, Sarah thought, "This is a dream come true" (4-1-93 interview). She believed that by moving to kindergarten, she would be able to reconcile the differences in her beliefs, and the

teaching practices and extra-year practices with which she struggled.

What she found in kindergarten, however, was the same kind of rigid expectation for children, and even more of a struggle with the issue of extra-year placement.

> I fled to kindergarten...only to find that the 'more is better' attitude had also infiltrated kindergarten. Somehow the push for keeping up with the Russian space program had panicked the education system and had trickled down to kindergarten. (4-5-93 journal entry)

After one year, Sarah moved back to first grade in a different building where she stayed for a year, followed by one year teaching half-day kindergarten in a different building. The half time position came as a result of Sarah's decision to resign and give up tenure in order to be at home more when her two children were very young. This, she explained, is consistent with her beliefs about young children, in this case, that parents' quality time influences development and is important (5-20-93 interview).

Sarah then accepted a position teaching first grade in a different district, where she spent six years in the same building. At that point, Sarah "...needed to move on in order to grow. I felt stifled there" (4-1-93 interview). Sarah remained in the same district, but requested a transfer to Oak Elementary, because she believed it was characterized by a more quality, child-centered approach. She is completing her second year in this building.

Through all of these experiences, Sarah has remained a low retention teacher; this, in spite of the fact that she

worked at the kindergarten and first grade levels in buildings where her understanding of appropriate expectations for children was not shared.

Physical Description of the Classroom

A visitor is greeted by children's work upon approaching the door to Sarah's classroom. Individual pictures and writing, as well as group projects invite one into the room, and send the message that children are important here.

Upon entering Sarah's classroom, an open space is evident, which appears to be a gathering place for the whole class, as well as several areas which have been sectioned off, and which suggest several kinds of activity that children may pursue. Materials are physically accessible to the children, on low shelves or on tables. The classroom is a "print rich environment" (Hall, 1987), with useful print scattered throughout. My first impression of the classroom was that it was "user-friendly," buzzing with activity, and conveying a sense of warmth and acceptance. This classroom seemed to me a <u>good</u> place to be.

Inside the classroom, I noticed the chalkboard to my right, which was labeled "word wall," and had several words posted, along with picture cues. There was children's handwriting as well, and one sign-up space which said, "share chair," and had five lines below it.

Directly in front of the chalkboard is a table, labeled "writing center." On the table is a typewriter, writing paper, two tubs of crayons, and a round container of pencils. To the center label, Sarah has added the message "6 friend limit." When I asked her about this, she explained that some of the children had difficulty deciding how many could work well together in certain areas, so they had decided how to limit the areas as a group. Limits are posted, she explained, but on a daily basis children can agree to change the limit in any given area.

Just past the writing table, there are cubbies for each child's journal and other writings they've done. These cubbies are on top of a shelf, but are well within the children's reach. The shelves extend beyond the cubbies, and a mailbox labeled "Mrs. Baxter" as well as two birds in a cage rest here.

Past the shelves and cubbies is a large home center area. Included in the area are a child-sized sink and stove, refrigerator, table and chairs, a cabinet and pantry and an ironing board. During the course of my visits, I was able to observe that the children move the furniture in the home area as they see necessary.

Rounding the corner you see the south wall, which is lined with windows above open shelves, many of which are filled with books, games and tubs of materials from which the children may select.

Along the east wall, the floor is tiled, and there is a paint easel, a sand table, a sink and a cabinet. The sand table is easily accessible to the children, and I learned through my observations that they may pull the easel away from the wall for use whenever they choose to paint. On the south end of this wall, above the easel, there are various food containers, napkins, and other sources of "environmental print" (Smith, 1979). The area is labeled "Words we can read."

The teacher's desk is in the northeast corner of the classroom, where there is also a shelf with teacher resource books. During the time that I was in this classroom, I never observed Sarah sitting at her desk. One has to look for her desk, as it is bordered by materials for the children's use; the teacher's desk is not a prominent piece of furniture in this classroom.

On the north wall, there is a bulletin board which includes a pocket chart as well as a calendar. The pocket chart displays words to a song about teeth, reflecting the current topic of study in the class. During the course of my observations, I learned that "calendar time" was not a time-consuming daily ritual; rather, it was very appropriately an incidental activity, taking place during one of two daily large group times. Children were invited to talk about special days they were having, and the date was recorded.

Along the north wall, at the east end of the bulletin board, a big book shelf displays several books which are accessible to children. Beside the shelf is a large big book holder that is filled with books. Next to this book rack is a folding, wooden puppet stage with several puppets, available for children's use. The book shelf, rack, puppet stage and a large rolling bin of unit blocks all serve to partition the room, with the teacher's desk on one side, and the large group rug area on the other side.

At the west end of the calendar, and perpendicular to it, stand a big book easel with an open big book, a chalk easel, and a teacher's chair. These two easels serve to enclose the large group rug area, which is called "home base," on the west side. Next to the home base rug, and under the calendar, there are two wooden strips on the base of the wall which hold books that children may choose to read.

In addition to the writing table, there are two other tables which provide small group work spaces. One rectangle table is placed in the center of the room next to home base, and a circle table sits on the tiled area. There is a reading tub, which looks like a trough that has been painted and lined with pillows, between the rectangle table and the home center. There are two wooden miniature playhouses, one in front of the south wall, and one next to the home center. These are mobile, and the children move them as they need to during the school day.

As previously mentioned, there is a great deal of meaningful print in the classroom in the form of charts, books, environmental print, and chalkboard writing, as well as explanatory labels for the children. For example, next to a large, wooden alphabet above the calendar, a sentence strip says, "Letters are so you can read." By the calendar, a label reads, "The calendar tells you the days of the week." Posted on the air conditioner are the words, "The air conditioner cools you off." In addition, phrases and quotes which speak to Sarah's philosophy of education for young children are placed throughout the classroom. Some examples:

"Readers learn by writing!" "Writers learn by reading!" "Thinkers learn by doing!"

"In our room: all mistakes are respected! All interesting errors are admired!"

"It is stillness we have to justify, not movement" - Susan Isaacs

"The best way to get kids to read is to surround them with so many books they stumble over them." - Robert Frost

"An ounce of motivation is worth a pound of skills."

"You may have tangible wealth untold; caskets of jewels and coffers of gold. Richer than I you cannot be - For I had a mother who read to me!" - Strickland Gillihan

These words are encouraging to Sarah, and they serve to support her in her classroom practice (5-20-93 interview). The labels suggest Sarah's belief in the importance of

children's activity, the value she sees in errors as important to learning, and her understanding that children learn to read and write through authentic reading and writing experiences; that is, experiences which involve children in reading and writing at individual levels of ability, with real reading materials and genuine purposes for reading and writing. In this manner, necessary reading and writing skills are learned in the context of their uses, as opposed to being presented in isolation.

Daily Classroom Schedule

*8:55 & 1:00 - Children enter, with much conversation and sharing among themselves and with Mrs. Baxter. Independent writing time begins immediately, and children retrieve their journals (from cubbies), find seats, and settle into writing. Some go to the board and sign up for "share chair." This is a very informal time, and Sarah interacts with the children as they write, but does not interfere. They bring their writings and drawings in progress to share with her, and initiate conversation about what they're doing. She is very available to them, but they are self-directed during this time.

The children share writings with each other, and often they contribute to one another's journals. I observed children moving from table to table, telling friends, "Look at my design," or "Look, I'm drawing Batman." I also observed children complimenting each other, saying things

like, "That's a good police car. Will you make one in my journal?" Working together in this way was encouraged in this classroom.

During this time, some children drew, others wrote with their drawings, and some just wrote. Print was being used and explored at a variety of levels, as is to be expected in view of the nature of emergent literacy (Goodman, 1986; Hall, 1987; Schickedanz, 1986; Smith, 1979). For example, some children used precommunicative writing, which is characterized by a lack of evidence of sound/symbol correspondence, and use of some symbols which are invented as well as some alphabet letters. Other children used semi-phonetic spelling, which implies that they have begun to make sound/symbol relationships (Gentry, 1984). When asked if their writing spelled a word, Sarah often responded to the children by saying, "I can read that!" If children asked Sarah how to spell a word, she would respond by asking, "How do you think it would be spelled?" or "Go get started and I'll come and help you in a minute." Most often, this would send them back to their journals, where they would think about the word, and spell it in a manner appropriate for their level of spelling development. In this way, through her questioning, Sarah encourages the children to think for themselves.

*Approximately 9:25 & 1:30 - Share chair time takes place next, after Sarah has given the children notice that it's time to finish journal writing for the day. Children gather

at home base, and those children who have signed up to share take turns sitting in the teacher's chair and sharing from their journals. This is still a very informal time, with children commenting spontaneously about the writing and drawing being shared. Sarah also makes encouraging comments, saying things like, "What an interesting design," or "Look how John is hearing sounds in his words."

After share chair, there is a short, teacher-directed time, which usually involves story reading and discussion. Calendar may also be addressed briefly, and children may sing songs, which are usually printed for them to see. During all of the large group time, children's comments are welcomed and conversation is encouraged. Sarah may also demonstrate print on the chalk easel, perhaps writing something related to the book they have read, or anything that may emerge from the conversation.

*Approximately 9:45 & 1:50 - Limited choice time, followed by a more open time of choice takes place during this period. Sarah has four predetermined weekly center areas which all children are asked to visit. They may do as many of those centers as they choose each day, or they may just do one a day. This is a time of limited choices, and includes a variety of options which change on a regular basis. Some examples of choices include illustrating small books, playing a math game with dice, free writing, and painting a mural.

The limited choice time is followed by more choice time with a broader variety of options from which children may select. There is no transition time from the initial choice time to the more open choice time; the children move at their own pace. After they complete at least one of the required daily centers, they may select any other area in which to work, as well as deciding with whom they will work. They may move freely from center to center,and most of the children have about forty minutes of unlimited free choice time. Some examples of the free choice centers which I observed are easel painting, sand table, home center, reading tub, puzzles, writing center, puppet theatre, manipulatives, blocks, and reading the room, which involves using the teacher's pointer to read from the print in the room or in the hall.

*Approximately 10:45 & 2:50 - Weather permitting, daily outdoor play takes place. During outdoor play, Sarah's class may be on the playground alone, or they may share the playground with one or both of the other kindergarten classes. The playground itself can easily accommodate all of the kindergarten children. The surface is asphalt, with a framed area surrounding the structures on which the kindergarten children play. The area within the frame is graveled, as a protection should a child fall to the ground.

There are a variety of structures, or big toys, for children's use. There are four slides, and several different types of climbing apparatus. There are four

different hanging bar areas, and four enclosed, bridge-like platforms, which may have one or two steering wheels mounted inside. There is also a balance beam in the framed area.

Most of the children spend the majority of their outdoor time playing on or around the equipment described above. They also run and play on the asphalt area around the frame, and between the frame and the school building.

As I observed and interacted with Sarah and the children on the playground, I noted that Sarah's behavior was congruent with what I observed in the classroom. Sarah remained alert to all of the playground happenings as she moved among the children, but she did not direct their play. Children did initiate conversation with her, and as was always the case when I observed, Sarah spoke to the children in a very genuine voice, and displayed real interest in and support for whatever a child might express to her. Playground interactions were consistent with classroom interactions observed.

*Approximately 11:05 & 3:10 - A second large group time brings the day to a close. In this block of time, Sarah often shares another story. Small groups of children may perform puppet shows for the entire class, or children may engage in what they call "the number game" or "the letter game." The number game involves guessing a given number with Sarah giving clues, either "higher," or "lower," until someone guesses the number she has written. The alphabet game is played with children in teams. Sarah holds up a

letter and within a team, members decide the letter name and a word beginning with that letter, and then offer their response. These are really exercises which allow children to practice known skills within the security of a cooperative framework. On several of the days I was present, children asked to play these games at the close of the day.

11:25 & 3:30 - Children are dismissed.

Interactions with Children

At any given time, conversations can be heard which suggest that Sarah encourages the children to be responsible for their own behavior, and to think for themselves. The children appear to feel a sense of ownership in the class and a sense of control. For instance, during a large group time (4-6-93 observation), a small group of children were bothered by others' hands and feet. Sarah said, "Who controls your hands?" And the children replied, "Us." She asked them who controlled their feet, and their whole bodies, and then she said, "So I don't have control of those things, do I? Only you do." This was her way of reminding them that it was their responsibility to treat each other respectfully.

Another day (4-13-93 observation), two children were involved in a conflict, and one came to Sarah tearfully explaining that his Lego building had been torn down by another child at clean-up time. Sarah asked, "And whose job

was that?" to which the child replied, "Mine." Sarah comforted the child, putting her arm around him and saying,"Yes, yours. I'm sorry he tore your building down. Have you talked to him?" The child walked away, and told the second child angrily, "I don't <u>like</u> it when you tear up my building!" The second child lowered his head and apologized, and then both went on with their work.

I talked with Sarah after class about this incident, and told her that the child who apologized really seemed sincere. Sarah explained that she did not require them to apologize because, "I don't want to make them say something they don't mean" (4-13-93 interview). This child, it seemed, was apologizing because <u>he</u> felt sorry about what he'd done, and not because he had been directed by the teacher to say certain words. Each time I observed children reporting the behavior of other children to Sarah, she responded with, "Have you talked to her/him?" This technique of encouraging children to work through problems together, without heavy reliance on the teacher, is an example of positive guidance, and suggests that Sarah is promoting the development of autonomy and self-control in her children.

There are other indications that the children in this classroom are viewed by Sarah as capable and competent, and are being encouraged to develop autonomy. The following vignettes are included to further demonstrate this point.

In introducing a story, Sarah encouraged the children to look at the book cover and speculate about the content. The book had a bird on the cover, and the children offered a variety of thoughts. Sarah asked at one point, "Can your guesses be wrong?" to which some children replied, "Yes," and some said, "No." Sarah responded, "All guesses are good. This is what grown-ups do when they choose a book. They try to figure out what the book's about" (4-6-93, observation).

During one observation (4-6-93, observation), as the day was coming to a close, the group was gathered for story sharing, and a child indicated that she had something to share. She sat in the teacher's chair and showed pictures and gave information about rattlesnakes from her magazine. The other children asked questions and made comments as she shared; when she finished, Sarah asked, "How many teachers are in our room?" Several children replied, "All of us," or "We all are." Sarah commented, "Yes, and Ashley taught us about rattlesnakes today."

Another day (4-29-93, observation), one child was upset because she did not get to sign up for share chair, and according to her, another child had signed up every day. This was at a time when the teacher had stepped out of the room, and I observed the child who was upset talking it over with the other child, who agreed that the next day, she would let her sign up. Again, the indication is that the children in this classroom are being encouraged to develop

autonomy, and this is evidenced in that they are able to work toward resolution through negotiation. The development of autonomy is also apparent in that when the teacher leaves the room children continue to be productively engaged, even without direct adult supervision.

Observing another large group time (4-29-93, observation), I once again saw evidence that Sarah encourages the children to think for themselves. She was reading a story about bees, and the children offered comments and questions. Sarah said, "We'll have to write those things down for our insect study - things we want to learn." Rather than stopping their thinking by giving all of the answers (Castle, 1989; Kamii, 1982), she is encouraging thoughtfulness on the part of the children.

I would characterize this classroom as open, in the sense that children were self-directed, responsible, actively involved and interactive with their peers. The children were quite capable of selecting activities and experiences they wanted to pursue, and Sarah interacted, observed, and remained available to them, but did not control or dominate their activity. The children initiated conversation with and involvement from the other children, Sarah and me. I was asked by several children to listen to their reading, to be an audience member for their puppet shows, or to look at whatever activity engaged them. I felt a sense of community in this classroom, based on

relationships of trust and respect which were evident to me as I became a part of the group.

Results

Results of Intensive Analysis

The Teacher's Knowledge About Extra-Year Placement. Sarah describes herself as an advocate for children (4-15-93 interview), and repeatedly expressed that the most important consideration for her in terms of extra-year placement is looking at what is best for the individual child. Sarah remembers the issue of retention from her childhood; she was the oldest child in her class, with the exception of a child who had been retained. Some assumed that Sarah must have been retained as well, and Sarah recalls that "This was, of course, embarrassing for me" (4-17-93 journal entry). Reflecting on this experience, she says, "As an adult teacher facing the dilemma of retention, it was difficult for me to swallow the Gesell Institute's claim that children are not (negatively) affected by an extra year" (4-17-93 journal entry).

Sarah believes that a teacher should:

> take kids where they are when they walk through the door in kindergarten - actually, any grade - because you can't expect them to be all the same; people just aren't that way. And it's important for them to be mixed in groups as far as their abilities and interests, because they learn from each other. (4-6-93 interview)

Sarah shared her thoughts with me as we talked about whether or not extra-year placement was good practice. "Well, I really don't (think it is), because everything I read, say, even in the past five years, has been against it, to the point that they're even saying it's harmful" (4-15-93 interview). "Even in the early 80s, D-1 was being found more harmful than helpful, but at that time not many dared to make that suggestion" (3-31-93 interview).

Sarah has limited teaching experience at the university level, and was enthusiastic about what a valuable learning experience that had been for her. She reflects on her experience teaching adults in relation to the subject of extra-year placement:

> We dealt quite extensively with Gesell and early retention. We had preschool teachers, D-1 teachers as well as undergraduates in the class. We tread very carefully on the subject...students really pressed the issue, so I brought in articles on the subject, both pro and con. I asked them to bring what they could find on the subject and we developed cooperative small groups to discuss. We all made some significant discoveries and we had many questions. Ultimately, we resolved that retention must be dealt with using extreme caution, individually, and <u>always</u> asking if this is in the child's best interest. This practice is what I use today. (4-17-93 journal entry)

In speaking more directly to her current practice in regard to extra-year placement, Sarah commented on district policy and how she has made sense of it.

> We're asked at the first of the year to go ahead and target children that might be retention or D-1 placement. I go ahead and target and do the observations on them that are required, and kind of keep a running idea of where they're at through the year. I feel like I kind of have to make an argument for what would be best for that individual child, and

> so far, I just can't come up with a good enough reason to hold a child back...I want to be responsible to the child. (4-15-93 interview)

In Sarah's practice, then, it seems as though she is building cases against extra-year practice for individual children, rather than building cases against children and their continuous progress. In keeping with this view, Sarah cites, more specifically, her knowledge related to this issue.

> There is no research to support retention. Long-term studies and research show that children who are retained don't do as well as others. Their drop-out rate may be higher, and the effects of retention on self-esteem are alarmingly negative. Children see retention as very stressful. It's time for teachers...to reconcile their teaching behaviors with accepted study and practice. We have to stop doing this to children and encourage teachers to meet children's needs... (4-17-93 journal entry)

Of her past extra-year placement recommendations, Sarah says, "I was never the teacher that retained the most...at most I might've recommended three, more likely two" (4-15-93 interview).

Sarah points to curricular expectations as a part of the problem of extra-year placement.

> What I have seen in some teachers...I look back, and think how first grade teachers wanted first graders to start the year out practically knowing everything that was in the first grade curriculum, and I saw kindergarten teachers expecting the same thing. The first thing they'd do, the first week of school is test them on their letters and letter sounds, and have them write their numbers. And any curriculum guide, even I think the most stringent one is going to say that those are skills to be achieved! (4-20-93 interview)

Sarah continues, on this escalation of curricular expectations:

> We have fallen victim to an effort to create a "generic" kindergarten and first grade class. The decision to hold a child back may be based more on a teacher's desire to create that generic grouping of children who function alike, think alike, play alike and simply are an easier lot to deal with that the normal, multi-functioning group...retention is illogical. We know that exposure to others on different cognitive, developmental, ability and interest levels enhance children's perceptions. (4-17-93 journal entry)

Speaking again as to her past extra-year practice,she explains further that this was during the time she taught in two different schools, one in particular, where the curriculum was characterized by, in Sarah's words, "...a heyday of push, push, push" (4-15-93 interview). While she still resisted extra-year placement, she says in terms of curriculum and teaching strategies, "I was influenced by that, somewhat, and I find myself even today, having to guard against that" (4-15-93 interview). Sarah continued, speaking of a relationship between appropriateness of classroom practices in kindergarten and first grades, and how that relates to extra-year practice. She is occasionally faced with pressure from parents, who:

> ...complain that they don't see any paperwork coming home and it's hard to measure progress. I have to sit back and not be defensive and try to explain to them. And some people, they're just not going to believe or agree...and you kind of fight a feeling of, "Well, they must just think I'm lazy or that I'm not a very good teacher if I don't do all this (paperwork)." And so it's a matter of reaffirming your beliefs, and some self-talk...you know, it's harder to teach this way. (4-15-93 interview)

Sarah expressed a belief that it is inappropriate for kindergarten and first grade children to be expected to sit

still, quietly and passively filling out worksheets, and that this kind of curriculum leads many teachers to view more children as unready, and to recommend them for extra-year placement. Nevertheless, she has been able to refrain from extra-year placement recommendations, for the most part, but it has not always been easy.

> I went to a workshop on Gesell, an all day Saturday deal, and I read up on Gesell, and he had quite a career, and was really quite respected by many people. And I thought, "Well, maybe I'm missing something. Maybe things have changed since I was in school." (4-15-93 interview)

At that time, teaching in a school where she believed the first grade classes were not developmentally appropriate, she thought that extra-year practice might protect children, and even today, she

> ...might be encouraged to go back to retaining, if I felt that I could protect a child from losing self-esteem, from feeling like, 'I can't cut it in here,' because they're teaching beyond their grade level. (4-15-93 interview)

Even though Sarah did recommend extra-year placements for some, but never more than two or three of forty to forty-five children, she was never comfortable with it.

> That was the first year we had developmental first grade in the district. And we had a wonderful D-1 teacher, who just had a wonderful program...and I knew at that time, in that particular school, that first grade teachers were not teaching to first grade students. They were teaching way beyond and only to the visual learner. There were probably two years there that I practiced retention, and struggled with it. (4-15-93 interview)

Sarah quit recommending extra-year placement, in spite of the pressure she felt, because her understanding was that

it was better for children to move forward. When asked why she is able to refrain from extra-year placement, while so many others around her persist in this practice, Sarah said,

> I can see...well, again, the research points to third grade and I've seen that with my own son that by third or fourth grade, things pull together for the very child D-1 is fashioned for...and in special education, and in early childhood, you're an <u>advocate</u> for those children. And I think we arm ourselves with research and try to have a good foundation for why we do what we do...we really need to do what's in the best interests of the child. (4-15-93 interview)

Throughout our conversations, Sarah maintained a strong position that children should be viewed as individuals, and evaluated in terms of individual progress. In terms of her understanding of the Gesell School Readiness Test, to which she had referred, Sarah said she had memory of an experience which led her to doubt the instrument's usefulness in terms of children's placement in classes.

> ...one of the professors at the University of Texas was talking about the test, and he pointed out that the gate that they build with blocks was terribly inappropriate for the age child that they were testing on, and he said that naturally, a child that's got one more year is going to be able to do it. He said that this just didn't jive at all with Piaget and the people we feel like did respectable research, done the right way with children. (4-20-93 interview)

Sarah spoke to the high number of children being retained, saying that she's heard teachers on a Gesell videotape as well as teachers she knows, say that in reality, probably half of their classes should be retained, but that their principals won't let them recommend that many. Her response is that "...they need to start questioning what they're doing instead of questioning the

children! (4-20-93 interview). "Shouldn't someone question their methods, if so few children are experiencing success? Shouldn't someone ask the children what they think?" (4-17-93 journal entry). Sarah continues:

> If something will benefit the child, then fine. But I can't help but think that some of the benefit is for the teachers, because if they hold kids back, they won't have to answer to first grade teachers, and they can save themselves some grief. (4-27-93 interview)

Sarah and I talked further about the fact that she is encouraged to identify children, early in the kindergarten year, for whom extra-year placement may be recommended. For the current year, there were only two children out of forty that Sarah saw as having characteristics of younger children which might be in excess of the normal, expected variability in a kindergarten class. Sarah shared her thoughts with me about those two children.

> What I saw at the beginning of the year for Kathy was that she came in very fearful; she was not comfortable at all. She'd just stand in the middle of the room and I'd help guide her toward a center. She never wanted to do share chair or anything that made her stand out in a crowd. But most of all I was concerned with playground behavior, because she didn't want to play almost the whole first nine weeks. She'd just stand back, and I'd encourage her, and that would just almost bring her to tears...I think because she must've been afraid I'd force her to go on the playground. We'd invite other children to try to play with her, and that just wouldn't do. So, little by little, I backed off from it and didn't mention it for awhile...what changed the situation for her was that Jennifer, who's now her best buddy in the world, started asking her to play and that just broke the ice. (4-27-93 interview)

Sarah goes on about the change she's seen in this particular child:

> With Kathy, it was a developmental thing. She is young, and her behavior was in line with that, and the family...I had the brother last year, and the first grade teacher and I have both reported them for abuse, but nothing can be substantiated. There are things there that I suspect might cause some of that behavior. But Kathy has <u>really</u> come out. Yesterday, she climbed high on one of the playground toys, and she's much more confident than she used to be...I feel real good about sending her on. If the first grade was real structured, she might fold, but not with our first grade. (4-27-93 interview)

Of the second child identified, Sarah explains:

> Bryan, he's an example of a little lost boy. For example, yesterday, we ate in the cafeteria. I'd sent home three notes about it. Bryan was late, and so I figured he wasn't coming to school, so we headed for the cafeteria, and here he came. I asked him if he had a sack lunch or money, and he just looked at me - he had no clue. Then, I looked at his dad at the door with no shoes and no shirt, like he'd just rolled out of bed. (4-27-93 interview)

As she continues with the possibility of an extra year for this child, Sarah says,

> With the characteristics I see in Bryan...one day early in the year he was scribbling on the wall, you know, like a toddler - like a two or three-year old would do - I <u>have</u> seen characteristics of a much younger child in Bryan. And then, you know, I do these little arguments with myself, "What would be best for this child?" And with his home situation, I just think he may always be a little bit slow. (4-27-93 interview)

On the possible negative effects of extra-year placement, Sarah speaks of concern that children may be labeled in a way that might lead to a negative self-fulfilling prophecy.

> You know, I think sometimes when kids get retained they get this little label, and then they're really doomed. It happened to my niece. She was retained in kindergarten, and then went right into Chapter classes for first and second grade...I was so upset. (4-27-93 interview)

She goes on to say that children may be labeled in a different way, in that they may be held up as examples in the classroom. She has seen that sometimes, the retained children, the older ones in the kindergarten class, get special treatment.

> Then, we have this special group of kids, who get all the strokes, and I think, "Well, sure, that's a first grader!" I saw this when I shared a room with another teacher. She would say to retained children, "See how well you can do this, now that you're a year older?" (4-27-93 interview)

Sarah is thinking about the New Zealand approach to kindergarten entry. In that system, she explains, children come to school on their fifth birthday and are integrated into an already existing group. Sarah believes this system might be more effective in

> ...meeting the needs of a child where he is and making the school program congruent with his needs rather than making him fit a preconceived notion of what a kindergarten child or a first grade child is like. (4-17-93 journal entry)

Sarah's knowledge about extra-year placement is a reflection of her personal beliefs and values held. If beliefs and values play a significant role in directing teacher practices, as many have suggested (Combs, 1988; Dobson, Dobson & Koetting, 1985; Oakes & Caruso, 1990; Shapiro & Kilbey, 1990), it seems reasonable to speculate that what a teacher believes, and bases his/her actions on, that teacher holds as valid. In other words, teacher beliefs, conscious or unconscious, reflect and guide teachers' personally constructed knowledge.

Smith and Shepard (1988) distinguish between beliefs and knowledge, and suggest that teacher beliefs refer to, among other things, that which is held to be true about development and early learning. This view suggests that although beliefs about development and early learning are varied, and may be derived from more or less reliable sources, a teacher's beliefs account for what is personally constructed as true, as valid knowledge. In light of the interrelatedness of beliefs, practices and knowledge, the discussion of Sarah's knowledge of extra-year practices will be expanded to include her beliefs relevant to this issue.

Sarah's beliefs about development and early learning reflect an interactionist view. Close observations and conversations shared with this researcher, as presented in this chapter, illustrate several interactionist beliefs held by Sarah. Among those, a few examples (paraphrased from Smith & Shepard, 1988) are a belief that she can influence children's development through the provision of appropriate experiences; that it isn't possible to predict when and how children will progress; that her assessments of children's growth are valid, and should be based on observation and knowledge of the child in context; that there is a wide range of normal variability in a group of five-year olds; and that she can provide for each individual child's growth and success.

Many accounts of observations which support these beliefs are documented in this chapter; statements made by

Sarah have also supported an interactionist view, and are offered here as evidence that she holds interactionist beliefs.

As to the unpredictable nature of growth and development, Sarah spoke of one of the two children she had considered to exhibit behaviors associated with younger children, in excess of the normal variability.

> People don't know, there's no crystal ball with a child...I could've never foreseen how much growth she's had, the progress even in this five month period. She has really blossomed. (5-10-93 interview)

In terms of assessing children's growth, Sarah's discussion of the two children targeted for a possible extra-year demonstrates her practice of viewing children in the context of their home lives as well as their school behavior. She spoke specifically of their home situations, and how the children's development might be influenced as a result (4-27-93 interview).

In addition, about assessment, Sarah expressed a view that knowing how to observe children is critical.

> When I was at the University of Texas, we did many classroom observations where the sole purpose was to watch children. I learned to observe... (5-20-93 interview)

> I don't think the elementary teacher, even the early childhood teacher, is trained to observe children and really learn about kids, and ask good questions, too. (4-29-93 interview)

Sarah suggests that in assessing, teachers should learn to focus on what children <u>can</u> do, rather than emphasizing what they cannot do; she is distressed that in her district, many

kindergarten teachers desire to modify report cards to emphasize a focus on attainment of narrowly defined skills, rather than reflecting a more holistic view of children, based in part on observation (5-20-93 interview).

Sarah has shared an understanding that all children vary in development, ability and interest, and has stated that because of this variance, they can challenge and learn from one another (4-6-93 interview; 4-17-93 journal). This belief is evident in her classroom, as there is no homogeneous grouping; rather, groups are self-selected, flexible and dynamic.

As to providing opportunities for individual children's growth and success, Sarah believes that teachers can and should be concerned with

> ...meeting the needs of a child where he is and making the school program congruent with <u>his</u> needs rather than making <u>him</u> fit a preconceived notion of what a kindergarten child or a first grade child is like. (4-17-93 journal)

Additionally, she believes

> ...there's a lot to be said about self-fulfilling prophecy. If we tell her daily that she's a wonderful kid and she's doing great - and I don't mean make it up and falsify what's occurring with her, but look for the positive in her and build those things, then that just spills on over into academics or whatever we talk about - she sees herself as empowered with the ability to do those other things, too. (5-10-93 interview)

Based on statements like these, and the additional data presented in this chapter, this researcher has characterized Sarah as holding non-nativist, interactionist beliefs, as defined by Smith and Shepard (1988). The interactionist

teacher believes that readiness develops in accordance with complex patterns of interaction between environmental influences, like those provided by teachers and parents, and the psychological nature of the child. Additionally, according to Smith and Shepard (1988),

> ...they believe that the environment and materials should be arranged by the teacher based on an ongoing study of each child and on what interests the child has that might awaken the process of learning. These teachers believe that the social configuration of the classroom makes a difference in how children develop and learn. Children also learn from and provide environments for each other and respond to the expectations that teachers and parents have of them. (p. 315)

Consistent with the findings of Smith and Shepard (1988), Sarah, a non-nativist, has a very low, almost nonexistent rate of retention. However, beyond this finding, Sarah's beliefs do not reflect the views of those discussed by Smith and Shepard. A majority of low retaining teachers speak favorably about extra-year practice, stating benefits like prevention of later retention and movement to high social and academic rank in class (Smith & Shepard, 1988). However, Sarah expresses a very different view. She cannot support extra-year practice, she says, "...because the long lasting effects are just too much to gamble" (4-29-93 interview).

> Research shows it increases chances of dropping out and also, just what it does to a child's self-esteem, and being a teacher, I've seen this occur with children in the classroom. But also, my personal experience, since I was an older child, I remember children's remarks. And I hear my own children...they always speak in negative terms. There's never...that this is a gift of

> time - children don't talk that way about this. They never perceive it that way. (4-29-93 interview)

Additionally, while Smith and Shepard (1988) found that a majority of teachers underestimated the degree of conflict parents experienced when faced with the extra-year decision, Sarah is more sympathetic and respectful of parents' feelings. Of the times when she has recommended extra-year practice, she says, in retrospect, "I wanted to hear what the parents had to say..." but, "I should've listened more..." (4-15-93 interview). Parents, she says, were struggling with the decision because they were very aware of their children's strengths (4-15-93 interview).

Sarah is cognizant of the negative feelings children may experience as a result of extra-year placement, as discussed in this chapter, while Smith and Shepard (1988) found that teachers underestimated these negative feelings. Further, Sarah's beliefs about retention are congruent with what Smith and Shepard call "available evidence" and as reviewed in Chapter II of this writing; Smith and Shepard, however, found that beliefs of the majority of teachers diverged from available evidence. Additionally, while Shepard and Smith found that training and experience didn't account for teachers' beliefs about extra-year practices, Sarah's training and experience appear to have influenced her beliefs in a substantial way, as discussed in this chapter.

Like some teachers interviewed by Shepard and Smith, Sarah has experienced pressure from first grade teachers to get children ready, to adopt a more academic curriculum, and to retain those children who could not perform in accordance with the rigid, first grade curricular expectations. While these pressures have influenced both her teaching practice and her extra-year placement practice in the past, to some degree, and while she continues to struggle with how that pressure should be handled, it does not appear to have influenced her beliefs, her personally constructed knowledge.

> ...I would feel confident that it would be better (to send a child to first grade), even if it were a real structured first grade; however, I have sent children and that first week of school, the first grade teachers came to me...and I almost feel that they are predisposed to see that this child doesn't measure up to their expectations. (4-29-93 interview)

Sarah continues in thinking on her past experiences and remembers that "...where I was before, it would be very likely that the first grade teacher would then talk the parent into placing the child back in kindergarten" (4-29-93 interview). In Sarah's view, once the child has been in first grade and seen himself/herself as a first grader, with first grade peers, replacing that child in kindergarten would be extremely devastating. This, at least in part, accounts for her lack of rejection of extra-year placement practice altogether.

> I've become much more vocal, and stronger in my position, and I can see that if I had the respect and support of the principal, I might go in and fight the

> idea of putting a child back once they'd been told they were going to first grade...I think that putting a child back just destroys that child. (5-10-93 interview)

Though Sarah states plainly that she cannot support extra-year programs (5-10-93 interview), she fears for the children who may experience a negative self-fulfilling prophecy due to another teacher's expectation of failure, or who may be replaced in kindergarten or developmental first grade after first grade placement. Speaking of a particular child, one who has been described in this section, and was targeted for an extra-year, Sarah speculates about what her recommendation would be if she were teaching in a building where rigid grade expectations were the rule.

> ...that's a good question - a tough question! If I didn't think that they would turn right around in September and put her back, and really traumatize her, then I would probably risk sending her ahead...I can't support extra-year programs, I really can't. (5-10-93 interview)

Sarah, then, like other teachers (Smith & Shepard, 1988), has struggled with pressure within a particular school culture; however, her curriculum practices and extra-year practices were not dictated by school culture. She maintained a view of curriculum and teaching practices which placed the needs of the child first (3-31-92 interview), and she never recommended more than two or three children per year, of forty to forty-five, for extra-year placement. Therefore, this researcher concludes that while Sarah's <u>practices</u> have been and continue to be challenged and slightly affected by school culture, her beliefs, her

personally constructed knowledge have not changed to reflect a particular school culture. Rather, she sought her current position in a school building where she could remain true to her beliefs, practices and knowledge in a more comfortable, supportive environment. Speaking about the difficulty she faced when sending children to first grade classes where she feared they would be replaced in an extra-year program, Sarah said, "That's one reason I transferred to this building, because I don't have to make those kinds of choices" (4-29-93 interview).

Sarah's beliefs about retention are decidedly different from those held by many kindergarten through third grade teachers (Tomchin & Impara, 1992). A majority of teachers at those grade levels expressed a belief that for some children, retention is necessary for future school success, that both academic deficiency and lack of maturity are valid reasons to retain a child, and that retaining children <u>early</u> in their school careers can help children develop positive self-concepts. They blame curricular changes and the expectations of higher grade teachers in part for the necessity of retention.

The epistemological base from which Sarah appears to be guided in her extra-year practice, as in all of her teaching interactions, is constructivism, or interactionism. As these two terms have been defined elsewhere in this writing, definitions will not be repeated. In brief, however, Sarah's view suggests a knowledge that children are capable

and competent learners who grow and develop at different rates, as they interact with and are influenced by others and the environment, and that schools must be structured to fit individual children. This is consistent with the knowledge base in early childhood education regarding the nature of children and learning (Bredekamp, 1987).

On the other hand, in the view of this researcher, the epistemological base for extra-year practice is logical positivism, which holds that humans are "...to be shaped and molded to fit the proper scheme of things" (Dobson, Dobson & Koetting, 1985, p. 2). The suggestion is that there is one proper scheme of things, translated into grade level expectations, and that children who do not fit cannot move forward until remediated through an extra-year placement.

Another approach to thinking about Sarah's knowledge is in the context of what Sanders & McCutcheon (1986) speak of as professional knowledge. Here, professional knowledge refers to teaching practices, and is broadly defined as "...actions taken that are intentional, purposive, enacted with some end-in-view...They are (or should be) meaningful and justifiable because they lead to educationally desirable outcomes..." (pp. 52-53). They include "organizational policies and operating practices" among other educational practices, with the placement of children in particular classes being given as an example of this type of educational procedure (p. 52).

A teacher's experiences of what works, not in general, but in particular situations, is a primary source of teacher knowledge, according to Sanders and McCutcheon (1986). Through feedback teachers receive, staff and committee meetings, peers, journal articles, graduate studies and so forth, they continue to develop practical theories. Teachers engage in comparison of their practices with what they believe is best practice, experimentation with particular practices, and consideration of the consequences.

Sarah seems to understand the importance of this process of thoughtful consideration of practices and their consequences as evidenced in her knowledge of extra-year placement practices.

> ...I'm a classroom teacher and I value teacher observations...but it depends on how the teacher is biased...if she's bought into the Gesell approach hook, line and sinker, then she's looking through a different lens...There are some teachers, that got the bachelor's and they've never done anything outside of the required staff development...Granted, I believe the classroom teachers are experts, but they better base what they're doing on research, and things need to be congruent. If what they're doing is totally out of sync with the research, then something's not right. (4-29-93 interview)

It appears that Sarah values the importance of teachers' continued growth and development, and recognizes that practices must be evaluated in terms of whether they "make sense" in terms of what else is known. This is consistent with what Sanders and McCutcheon (1986) suggest that teachers do in developing practical educational theories. Ideas are encountered, reflected upon, and if

judged to be reasonable, implemented. Teachers then reflect on results of a given action, and, "...until evidence disconfirming its effectiveness comes to their attention," (p. 64), the action or practice will probably remain a part of a teacher's personally constructed knowledge.

A teacher's professional knowledge reflects particular values held, and is constructed through a variety of experiences which go beyond practical teaching experience. Professional knowledge is, in part, derived from experiences in all of life's roles; as teachers are children, parents, students, friends, and relatives (Sanders & McCutcheon, 1986). This is apparent in Sarah's knowledge of extra-year practice, both expressed and in action, as will be presented in a discussion of influences on her knowledge construction.

In addition to teachers' practical theories being individual, personal constructions, they are particularistic; that is, teachers are not so much concerned with whether or not any given practice is generalizable, as they are with whether it seems to result in desirable effects in the individual situations with which they are involved (Sanders & McCutcheon, 1986).

Sarah's professional knowledge in regard to extra-year practice appears to have been constructed in a manner consistent with personal invention of theory, as Sanders & McCutcheon have discussed. The idea of extra-year practice was a familiar one to Sarah, even before she began her career as a teacher, and her existing knowledge gave her

reason to doubt the efficacy of kindergarten retention. Still, as she encountered the practice being implemented by her peers, she considered the practice in terms of whether it might be reasonable and helpful for children. She did attend a workshop on developmental placement, and, as stated previously in this writing, she attempted to understand the viewpoint of the proponents of extra-year practice, saying, "...I thought, 'Well, maybe I'm missing something. Maybe things have changed since I was in school'" (4-15-93 interview).

Sarah practiced extra-year placement for two years, recommending only two to three children a year out of approximately forty-five students per year. Sarah has not practiced the recommendation of extra-year placement in two years, however, because she believes, through thoughtful reflection on all of the evidence she has encountered and as presented in this chapter, that the validity of extra-year placement as a viable intervention has been disconfirmed for each young child she has taught. She says, "I feel like I kind of have to make an argument for what would be best for that individual child, and so far, I just can't come up with a good enough reason to hold a child back" (4-15-93 interview).

In summary, Sarah's knowledge about extra-year practice is that the risks associated with it are great, and the benefits, if any, are few. She knows extra-year practice to be incongruent with the variable rates of children's growth

and development and thus, she cannot support extra-year programs. In her own words, she explains that "...retention must be dealt with using extreme caution, individually, and always asking if this is in the child's best interest" (4-17-93 journal entry). She has concern that first grade teachers may replace children in an extra-year program, or may convey expectations to children which could negatively affect their school success; this accounts for her reservation in terms of rejecting extra-year practice altogether. Her own practice, however, indicates that she does reject kindergarten retention, and that she has yet to find, in recent years, sufficient reason to warrant the risks of extra-year placement for any child.

Experiences Leading to Construction of Knowledge

As Sarah shared with me her experiences and understanding related to the issue of extra-year practice, several areas of influence seemed to emerge. Those areas include family experiences, college preparation, mentors, professional reading/associations, teaching experiences unrelated to early childhood, and school culture, as will be presented in this section. To the extent possible, these areas of influence will be presented in chronological order, though there is naturally a great deal of overlap.

Family Experiences. Sarah's earliest recollection of the idea of retention was as a young child in elementary school. She was the tallest girl in her class, and with the exception of a child who had been retained, Sarah was the oldest in the class as well. As previously discussed, Sarah remembers feeling embarrassed that "...the other kids assumed I must've been retained" (4-17-93 journal entry).

Frequently during our conversations, Sarah made reference to her own son, explaining that he had some characteristics that might lead certain teachers to recommend "the gift of time" for him; she admits that she had concerns when he was in third grade and still exhibited some characteristics of youngness, such as letter reversals and reading reversals. He was promoted, however, and things "...really pulled together for him in fourth grade. Now, he's in fifth grade and he's doing just great!" (4-27-93 interview). Sarah believes that this personal experience coincides with research findings, which suggest that early retention disavows individual, developmental pace, and creates problems that really do not exist.

A third personal experience, which has been previously discussed, was the occasion of Sarah's niece being retained in kindergarten. Sarah speaks with emotion of this event, and believes that her niece was labeled, moving directly from a second year of kindergarten to remedial classes in first and second grade. Though she's currently experiencing more school success, Sarah believes the retention in

kindergarten was neither helpful nor necessary, and may have even been harmful. "With family, you hear the feelings of the child," she laments (4-27-93).

Sarah values parental input, and has learned about the issue of extra-year placement from conversations with parents. Reflecting on the years when she did recommend a few children for retention or D-1 placement, Sarah says, "I should've listened more, because the parents were saying, 'Yes, but she's so strong in this'..." (4-15-93 interview). She continues,

> I wanted to hear what the parents had to say because sometimes, you know, it can happen unintentionally...the guy at the grocery store might say, "How old are you? What grade are you in?" And then..."Oh, why aren't you in second grade?" Or, kids say those things themselves. (4-15-93 interview)

These kinds of comments, Sarah believes, must be considered in terms of how children may be negatively affected by extra-year placement. As to her ability to remain true to what she believes is best for children, Sarah shares another personal influence.

> My mother was a special education teacher, too, in a state school, and I think that (doing what's in the best interests of children) just came naturally. She was always going to battle for her kids, so I'm sure I learned some of that from her. (4-15-93 interview)

College Preparation. Sarah's early childhood coursework was taken at the graduate level, as she had obtained an undergraduate degree in another field. Of her knowledge related to extra-year practice, Sarah explained,

> Well, I think my knowledge about kindergarten retention and D-1 started with my coursework at UT. The professors were - I worked with Joe Frost and other really respected professors. I remember them talking, even back then, that retention was not good for kids. (4-1-93 interview)

> I do recall my professors saying that it was not a good thing to do for children, and that was around 1975. And then when other teachers were excited about this Gesell placement (laughs), you know how you hear their (professors') voices. (4-15-93 interview)

Sarah continues,

> I have a certificate in special education in Texas...professors talked about doing what was best for the child, and that there was a real need for special education teachers to knock the system a little bit to get what was best for the child, so I heard a lot of that. (4-15-93 interview)

It was apparent to me, throughout the course of our visits, that Sarah's professors made a significant impression on her, not only in terms of how the educational process should serve children, but in terms of what it means to be a professional as well. Sarah appears to view herself as a learner, a growing teacher; in the area of extra-year placement, this may account, in part, for her references to studies and research.

> Statements that professors made through the years that, you know, your education doesn't stop the minute you land a job. And that teachers are researchers...I think we have to know what we believe and why. I don't see that attitude...in fact, it's funny to me, you can be talking philosophy with lots of different people, and it seems as though there are some who really haven't sat down to think about what they believe. (4-20-93 interview)

As to how her professional reading habits began, Sarah replied,

> Oh, gosh! Just from going to UT, practically the first day, because they brought the forms and they enrolled us in NAEYC (laughs). Professional reading was encouraged, strongly encouraged...the attitude that if we want to be considered professionals, then this is just part of it. I got really hooked on (professional) reading there. (4-20-93 interview)

Sarah pointed out that some teachers are easily led by other teachers as far as their beliefs and practices. She is troubled by that, and believes that she is less likely to make changes solely because other teachers are moving in a particular direction as far as extra-year practice. When asked why, Sarah elaborated:

> Well, I just...I really think back about the things I learned at UT, and the statements that were made...I recall one professor questioning some of Gesell's work. Gesell had been working with special needs children at Yale before he developed an interest in normal growth and development. My professors shared that some of Gesell's work contradicted Piaget. You didn't have to agree with the professors, but you know where they stood. They might share other viewpoints, but they weren't afraid to say what they thought. And they backed it up with research - the study, the why. (4-17-93 journal entry)

Mentors. In many of our conversations, Sarah spoke of working closely with teachers from whom she learned a great deal. This close association, or mentoring, seems to have had a significant effect on her philosophy and her teaching practices, as well as her understanding of extra-year placement. Sarah first mentioned this influence during one of our initial conversations. "I have a good friend, and she taught me more about early retention. She shared some articles with me, and even then, in the early 80s, it (D-1)

was being found more harmful than helpful" (3-30-93 interview).

About this friend, Sarah commented,

> It wasn't until I met and worked with Nita, my friend who taught reading...that I finally had some real comraderie and mutual agreement on early childhood and developmentally appropriate practice...(4-17-93 journal entry). I thought it was a golden opportunity, well it was, to learn from her (4-20-93 interview).

Sarah felt that it was extremely beneficial for her to have had a team teaching experience with this particular friend, who she considered to be extremely knowledgeable. The two of them shared a classroom, with Sarah teaching the morning kindergarten session and Nita teaching the afternoon session.

> And to share a classroom...that was really unique, and it was, you know, my initial teaching experience was in a team situation where I was kind of an underling of really good lead teachers. And then, in learning whole language I was there again, in physical contact with this person who knew what to do (4-20-93 interview).

Of that initial teaching assignment, which was in special education, Sarah says,

> Well, my first experience was with just a real early childhood natural, although her training was in music education, and she just really had it...she was our lead teacher, and she really developed in all of us an attitude of doing what was best for the children (4-15-93 interview).

It seemed that Sarah believed close association with more experienced teachers had been valuable in her development as a teacher, and recommended this approach as a possibility for teacher preparation.

> I really think we're headed in the right direction with teacher education, because there is the supervisory

> teacher, year long program. But they're not in the same classroom...seems like in California they do something like that...what they call a mentor. And they actually have time where they leave their classroom and go in and work with the mentor and vice-versa. (4-20-93)

Sarah explains further that a mentoring approach would be ideal, with teachers actually sharing classrooms, but that it would be important to have similar philosophies.

Professional Reading and Associations. Sarah made many references to her own professional involvement, and to studies and research findings as we considered the issue of extra-year placement. In particular, the recent whole language movement has given Sarah opportunity for continued growth and development. When speaking about the source of recent readings to which she referred, related to kindergarten retention, Sarah commented, "It came out of my whole language readings...out of that I decided to subscribe to the High Scope newsletter. It's amazing to see how congruent whole language is with early childhood" (4-6-93 interview).

Sarah has held offices in various reading associations, has attended national conferences, and has presented at the state and local levels. She feels fortunate to have had contact with some of the experts in the area of whole language, including Ken and Yetta Goodman, as well as Don Holdaway. In terms of the connection between whole language and her understanding of the knowledge base in early childhood, Sarah makes an interesting point:

> When Don Holdaway was here, I provided transportation for him and he talked, and read with my kids...just listening to him...there just seems to be a common thread in early childhood and whole language, as far as looking at what's best for kids...if we'd just let kids be kids... (4-6-93 interview)

This common thread that Sarah speaks of was evident in many of our conversations. Sarah attended a national whole language conference in 1987, when, she says, "...the Gesell push for retaining children was at its peak" (4-15-93 interview), and remembers hearing Yetta Goodman and others speaking out against retention in the early grades.

Of the role these people have played in Sarah's current pedagogical practices, including extra-year placement practice, Sarah says,

> Now my philosophy is no longer clouded by what other teachers may be doing, but is very clearly in pursuit of what is in the best interests of the children. Conversations with these experts gave validation to what I believed all along. (4-5-93 journal entry)

As she had referred to studies and research findings on several occasions, I asked Sarah to elaborate on the specific readings which had contributed to her understanding in regard to extra-year practice. Sarah mentioned the Developmentally Appropriate Practice guidelines (Bredekamp, 1987), expressing that the guidelines mentioned retention and made statements that were "...pretty strong" (4-15-93 interview). Further, about the guidelines, Sarah said,

> In fact, a lot of what I do in here is because of reading that because it really just solidified what I learned in college. To see an organization like that (NAEYC), that I really respect...since I've been in college still stand true to those beliefs, then I felt like it was time to forget what everyone else is doing

> in the building, in the district, or even in the state and hold true to what I know to be right for children. (4-15-93 interview)

Sarah also mentioned that she remembered a statement about readiness and retention from OACUS, and one from the Texas AEYC. She made copies of some of the readings to which she referred, and others which she considered to be significant, and shared them with me. In addition to the DAP guidelines, Sarah shared articles which address the lack of efficacy of grade retention, and suggest the possible ill-effects of extra-year placement (Shepard & Smith, 1990; May & Kundert, 1992; Meisels, 1991).

In addition, Sarah volunteered two readings which are consistent with her beliefs about children, learning, and the role of the teacher. One of those (Koepke, 1991) focuses on Vivian Paley, a well-known author, researcher and teacher of young children. A recent recipient of the MacArthur "genius" award, Paley is revered in the field of early childhood for her insightful writing as to the nature of children's thinking, and her genuine respect for children.

The second reading (Kenneth S. Goodman, source unknown) proclaims the teacher as a professional, competent decision-maker, responsible to trust and support children, always keeping them first in the educational process. It is a declaration to which Sarah ascribes.

Teaching Experiences Unrelated to Early Childhood. Another experience which Sarah shared as having impacted her understanding was the year she spent teaching junior and senior high students in special education. In that position, Sarah believes she had a first-hand encounter with the negative effects which can be a result of retention. "I saw children in those classes that were seventeen, eighteen, nineteen - and one that was twenty. These kids were held back and held back and held back...what a disservice!" (4-15-93 interview).

Sarah recognized the loss of self-esteem these students suffered, saying, "...self-esteem was just as low as it could be...there were a whole bunch of them there that really had been held back two years...it didn't serve them well at all" (4-15-93 interview).

Speaking of this same teaching experience, Sarah recalls that when she passed all the students forward, she had to argue that point with the other teachers in her building. The teachers were not pleased, Sarah remembers, that she gave her students As and Bs. "I was thinking...even back then, that we should evaluate children according to their progress, individually as opposed to...see, they all wanted me to give them Cs and Ds" (4-15-93 interview).

School Culture. In the course of our conversations, Sarah spoke of various teaching experiences in many school

buildings with a host of different teachers. There was evidence that Sarah had been influenced by other teachers with whom she worked, as is consistent with other findings (Sanders & McCutcheon, 1986; Smith & Shepard, 1988). However, though Sarah has encountered both peer support and negative peer pressure, her practices do not appear to have been dictated by external forces; instead, Sarah seems to have the ability to remain open-minded, to consider the perspectives of fellow teachers, and yet, to make decisions thoughtfully, remaining true to her personal beliefs and knowledge, and always, to the children.

I asked Sarah to expand on some comments that she had made earlier, as to her philosophy having been "...clouded by what other teachers may be doing..." (4-5-93 journal entry), and the need to "...forget what everyone else is doing..." (4-15-93 interview). Sarah shared about her experiences working with other teachers in one particular setting:

> ...I was one of four first grade teachers and I was requiring less (seatwork) than the other three teachers by half. I can remember them running off about thirty papers a day for their children to do...actually, I was doing about a third...I cringe now to think I made those kids do that much paperwork. (4-15-93 interview)

Sarah found this to be quite distressing, and took action to make changes. She gathered articles in an effort to inform the building principal as to what kinds of things would be more appropriate for the children in kindergarten and first grade, and she was successful; the principal

allowed the teachers, specifically Sarah, to make curriculum changes which reflected a better understanding of how children learn. "I fought to get outdated first grade basals out of kindergarten. I stood firmly in my belief that children deserved activities that were appropriate for them, rather than reams of seatwork papers" (4-5-93 journal entry).

Not only has Sarah taken a stand in terms of inappropriate curriculum, she has also learned to withstand pressure specifically related to the issue of developmental placement. She states that it was "...somewhat painful as my fellow teachers jumped on the Gesell bandwagon. I bit my tongue on several occasions" (4-17-93 journal entry). She did attend a Gesell workshop with peer teachers at one point, and, as previously discussed, attempted to consider the point of view of those who advocated extra-year placement. Though always skeptical, she did recommend extra-year placements for a few children over the course of two school years.

Speaking about a team teaching situation with a high retention teacher, Sarah said, "I really struggled with who I would recommend...I did retain that year. But not near the number and she was real unhappy, because of the number that I sent on" (4-15-93 interview).

However, Sarah doesn't believe that school culture makes a difference in her retention practice at present, explaining that she stopped retaining, even though the

expectation in her building was to hold back those who were "unready."

> I just couldn't resolve the conflict within myself. So I quit, and suffered the consequences of the first grade teachers coming in at the first of the school year...why didn't I recommend this one and this one for an extra year...I never took the children back, but usually they would make the recommendation that the child be sent back to D-1, which I think is worse for the child. (4-15-93 interview)

There are two other kindergarten teachers in Sarah's building. One, she says, shares her beliefs about extra-year practice, and recommends very few children for an extra year; the other, however, does support and recommend extra-year placement as a viable intervention for children.

Sarah made mention of peer relationships which were positive in many of our conversations. She has a positive rapport with other teachers in the building where she currently teaches, and is comfortable with the classroom practices of the first grade teachers. She perceives informal meetings with other teachers in her building as well as in professional associations to be very helpful to continued teacher development.

> ...I think that's probably one of the most beneficial things for me. It's just a real informal, not even necessarily a faculty meeting, but where people can be invited to just sit down and talk with peers and hand out things to read. (4-20-93 interview)

In one conversation, Sarah expressed that she had seen teachers change their pedagogical practice as faculty composition changed. Again, we talked about whether she, like those she made mention of, might be influenced,

specifically in the area of extra-year practice, by the practices of teachers within her building.

> No, I've taught since 1974, almost eighteen years, and well, that's a long time. There have been times I've kind of swayed in the wind, and it's just always backfired if I don't stay with what I believe in. (4-20-93 interview)

Results of Wholistic Analysis

Two thematic statements have been formulated by this researcher to express the essence of what has been revealed by the data. These statements are verified, in the judgment of this researcher, throughout the data previously presented, and require little further comment; therefore, a very brief discussion will follow.

Theme 1: Sarah's Autonomy Enables Her to be a Low-Retaining Teacher. As has been depicted in this chapter, it has been somewhat of a struggle at times, for Sarah to stand firm in her practice of recommending no or few children for extra-year placements prior to first grade. Sarah has remained open to the ideas and understandings of others, as evidenced by her attendance at a workshop on the subject of developmental placement, and her own past experience making some kindergarten retention recommendations. Still, she remains true to what she knows to be best for children in regard to extra-year placement, based on her life experiences and personal study, which results in what she considers to be evidence which disconfirms the efficacy of

extra-year practice. This leads her to make decisions regarding children's placement with extreme caution, and with consideration given to each child as an individual, always attempting to determine what is best for the child. Questioning what is in a child's best interests is of primary concern to Sarah, regardless of the opinions of others. This is consistent with what van Manen terms "pedagogical interest," which, he says, grows out of "...interest in the child's growth for the sake of the child" (1991).

Kamii speaks of autonomy as the "...right and responsibility to make professional decisions" (1981, p. 5). Further, she states, "An intellectually autonomous person takes all the relevant factors into account and comes to his own conclusion about what is true or untrue" (p. 2). Clearly, Sarah exercises her right to make professional decisions in an intellectually autonomous manner. While she is open to the ideas of others, she is self-directed in regard to her extra-year practice. Sarah places great value on her continued growth and change as a learner, and while she continues to study this issue, her present understanding prevents her from supporting extra-year practice, regardless of the opinions of others.

Shulman (1986) speaks of professional knowledge, and emphasizes the importance of being able to justify, through explanation, professional action. Sarah has evidenced her capability to be self-reflective and to provide rationale

for her position on extra-year practice, as is necessary in order for her to act autonomously in this regard.

Finally, Sarah's focus on advocacy is a shining example of her autonomy in relation to extra-year practice. Sarah spoke about the need to be strong on behalf of children, and to resist the pressure to retain children as a way of pleasing teachers, administrators or parents (4-29-93 interview). She expressed a belief that it's important to fight for practices which best serve children, and against harmful trends in early education, like extra-year practice. Sarah's stance might be described in the words of van Manen (1991, p. 166), when he says, "Many teachers find themselves fighting silent battles and personal crusades against the blind forces of bureaucratic, administrative and political structures in order to preserve a wholesome quality to their students' educational experiences." As stated previously, Sarah appears to be building cases against extra-year practice for individual children, even if it means "going to battle" with those who would advocate extra-year placements for them.

The second thematic statement is also evident throughout the data previously presented and gives further insight to Sarah's position with regard to extra-year practice.

Theme 2: Sarah has a deep, genuine respect for children, which guides her in the issue of extra-year

practice. Sarah's respect for children is apparent in the planning of the physical environment, the flexibility of scheduling and the child directed structure of the classroom as well as in her interactions with children, and her knowledge expressed to me through out conversations. According to Katz (1977), teachers' interactions with children should convey not only warmth, friendliness and acceptance, but also "...genuine connectedness and respect for the intellect" (p. 19). Sarah embodies this kind of respect as she talks with children, makes eye contact with them, listens to them and acknowledges them. Like others who convey real respect for children, she treats them not just as "cute," but as "profound" (Koepke, 1991, p. 48).

As previously stated, Sarah trusts children to think for themselves, views them as competent and capable, and supports and encourages their efforts in the classroom. She clearly demonstrates a belief in their abilities to grow and to be successful in school. In the judgment of this researcher, knowledge and practice reflect a valuing of children for who they are at a given moment, and for what they can become.

Sarah has expressed a belief in children, and is concerned that extra-year placement may discourage their belief in themselves. She understands that supporting children can lead to success, which leads to more success. According to van Manen (1991), "An educator needs to believe in children...belief in a child strengthens that child."

Sarah's respect for children, indeed her belief in them, results in practices which serve to strengthen them; extra-year placement is not a practice which strengthens children, in Sarah's view.

Summary

The first section of this chapter included the presentation of the data which is, essentially, the story of Sarah, a low retaining kindergarten teacher. This researcher has attempted to portray Sarah honestly and fully, through the use of thick description. The second section focused on the results of the study in regard to the following research questions:

1. What is the knowledge expressed by one low retaining teacher regarding extra-year placements?
2. What factors have influenced this construction of knowledge?

Finally, the results of wholistic analysis were presented, revealing the emergence of two essential themes:

1. Sarah's autonomy enables her to be a low-retaining teacher.
2. Sarah has a deep, genuine respect for children which guides her in the issue of extra-year practice.

Chapter V

Summary, Results, Interpretation, and Recommendations

In this chapter, a summary of the research process and a review of the results will be discussed. The interpretation of this researcher will be offered, and recommendations will be suggested.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate one low retaining kindergarten teacher's construction of knowledge about extra-year placement. As previously discussed, extra-year placement prior to first grade is currently a prevalent practice in public schools. This particular study is significant in that it provides us in the field of education with an opportunity to gain insight about the teacher who resists this questionable practice.

At best, extra-year placement is most often a benign intervention, though it can result in negative effects on children in areas of social and emotional development, and academic achievement (Holmes & Mathews, 1984; May & Kundert, 1992; May & Welch, 1984; Niklason, 1987; Shepard & Smith, 1986, 1989b). Extra-year practice also serves to promote

inappropriate curricular expectations in the early grades, which is cited by extra-year advocates as one of the ills in early schooling that necessitates extra-year programs (Brewer, 1990; Uphoff, 1990a & 1990b).

A study involving a low retaining teacher was designed to illuminate her understanding of extra-year practice, and how that knowledge, which guides her in her low, almost nonexistent rate of kindergarten retention has been constructed. The research participant, Sarah, is a voice from the classroom, and has provided insight which can serve to stimulate others toward a more informed construction of knowledge in relation to extra-year practice.

This study was a qualitative, phenomenological case study design, involving a question of meaning, rather than a problem to be solved. The research participant, Sarah, was viewed as a collaborator rather than a subject, and maintained ownership in the research process through the sharing of field notes and the ongoing dialogue. The result of the study is a "holistic, intensive description and interpretation" (Merriam, 1988, p. 9) of the phenomenon being investigated, in this case, one low retaining teacher's construction of knowledge regarding extra-year placement.

The researcher was the primary instrument in the present study, as is the nature of qualitative research. This research is interpretive; that is, the result of this inquiry represents the researcher's construction as to

Sarah's knowledge of extra-year practice and how it was constructed. This researcher has made every effort to portray Sarah honestly, relying heavily on Sarah's own narrative as well as the sharing of field notes. Methods of data collection were conversational interviewing, close observation and journaling. Out of these processes, thick description was generated in an effort to convey Sarah's knowledge construction related to extra-year practice more fully to the reader. Data collection, analysis and interpretation were initially concurrent events, allowing the researcher to be guided in data collection through the ongoing analysis and interpretation. After data collection ceased, intensive analysis was conducted as described in Chapter IV.

Results

The Teacher's Knowledge About Extra-Year Placement

As evidenced through our conversations and during classroom observations, Sarah understands that children progress at individual rates, and believes that schools and teachers should accomodate those varying rates by supporting and encouraging children's individual development. In addition, Sarah knows that interaction with children at various levels of cognition enhances development. These understandings are consistent with the accepted

understanding in the field of early childhood education (Bredekamp, 1987). Sarah's expressed knowledge specific to extra-year placement is congruent with her practice. She states that she does not support extra-year placement because she believes there are great risks involved for children, and indeed, she has recommended no children for extra-year placement programs for two consecutive years.

Sarah's belief about extra-year practice, both stated and in action, suggest an interactionist view of development and early learning. Among other things, then, Sarah believes that she can influence children's development through providing appropriate experiences; that children's progress is unpredictable; that children's assessments should be based on teacher observation and knowledge of the child in context; that there is a wide range of normal variability in a group of five-year olds; and that she can provide for each child's individual growth and success.

Consistent with other findings (Smith & Shepard, 1988), Sarah, a non-nativist, interactionist teacher, is a low retaining teacher. Smith (1989), however, found that a majority of low retaining teachers still endorse extra-year placement as beneficial and necessary for some children. While Sarah does not completely rule out the option of extra-year placement for some children, she does not view extra-year placement as a beneficial intervention. She knows extra-year practice to have the potential for negatively affecting children, as she has clearly articulated.

Sarah is concerned that retention is strongly correlated with dropping out of school, and is also extremely concerned about the damage to self-esteem which children may suffer. Sarah has been witness to the negative self-fulfilling prophecy which occurs for many retained children. She also understands and expresses that by third or fourth grade, many of the developmental differences between the younger and older children in the class decrease greatly, so that these differences should not be viewed as problems which require intervention (i.e., extra-year placement) in the earlier grades. Additionally, she believes that positive effects for retained children virtually disappear by about third grade.

Sarah's understanding of the effects of extra-year practice as it relates to kindergarten curriculum emphasizes the problems related to the trend toward a more academic kindergarten. Sarah is aware that because of extra-year programs, kindergarten classes are comprised of children varying in age by as much as one and one-half to two years, and thus, younger children, of legal entry age, may be unfairly judged as less than capable. She also understands that many kindergarten teachers are conducting their classes as though they were teaching first, or even second grade, and she believes this causes many children to experience failure. Sarah's knowledge in this regard is congruent with the suggestion of others (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1988a, 1988b).

The two children discussed in Chapter IV, Kathy and Bryan, serve as examples to illustrate Sarah's knowledge in practice, that extra-year placement must be considered with extreme caution and with respect being given to all the relevant factors affecting each child. In Kathy's case rather than classifying her as immature and unready, Sarah observed her over time, gently encouraged her and charted her growth during the school year. Had Sarah decided that she was unready at an earlier point in the school year, this child would have been unnecessarily placed in an extra-year program; thus, Sarah's belief in ongoing assessment is an important factor in her knowedge of extra-year placement and refelects the position of several early childhood professional associations (NAEYC, 1988; Perrone, 1991; SACUS, 1990).

In Bryan's case, Sarah considered this child in the context of his home, and noted that there was very little support for this child's development. She understood that it made little sense to assume that an extra-year placement would make any positive difference for him, and that the risks associated with extra-year placement might only worsen his situation.

These two examples illuminate an interesting point concerning Sarah's knowledge in practice: because she recognizes the possible ill-effects of extra-year placement, Sarah seems to build cases against kindergarten retention for children who might be considered at-risk for school

failure, instead of building cases against children's continuous progress; extra-year placement, she understands, may actually increase the possibility of failure. Certainly, Sarah has reservations about how best to help children who may be placed in first grade classes and then replaced in extra-year programs, or who may be viewed as "unready" by a first grade teacher and then be subject to a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. Due to these uncertainties, Sarah has, in the past, recommended extra-year placement for a very small number of children. Still she does not endorse extra-year practice as helpful and supportive of children's development, as the majority of teachers in the Smith and Shepard (1988) study did.

While Smith and Shepard (1988) found that a majority of teachers underestimated the degree of conflict experienced by parents and the negative feelings of children as a result of extra-year placement, Sarah expresses an awareness and an understanding of those feelings. Sarah is also unlike the majority of teachers discussed by Smith and Shepard (1988) in that her beliefs do not diverge from, but are congruent with what the authors call available evidence that is, evidence which reflects the current research findings generated in the field of early childhood education.

Smith and Shepard (1988) found that training and experience didn't account for teachers beliefs about extra-year practice; Sarah's training and experience, however, appear to have been extremely influential in her

construction of knowledge regarding extra-year practice. Finally, while Sarah's extra-year practices have, in the past, been challenged and slightly affected by school culture, her beliefs, her personally constructed knowledge did not change to reflect the school culture, even when she was teaching in a high retaining school. Smith and Shepard (1988) suggested a more direct relationship between school culture and teacher beliefs and practices.

Results from an additional study suggest that Sarah's beliefs about retention do not reflect those held by many kindergarten through third grade teachers (Tomchin & Impara, 1992). While a majority of teachers at those grade levels expressed a belief that retention to remediate either a lack of academic or maturational readiness, is necessary to school success for some children, and that retaining children in the early grades can encourage the development of positive self-esteem. Sarah's beliefs reflect available evidence (Ferguson, 1991; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Mantzicopoulos & Morrison, 1992; May & Kundert, 1992; Shepard & Smith, 1986, 1989b), which suggests no benefits for retained children and possible negative effects in terms of self-esteem.

The epistemological base to which Sarah ascribes, and which guides her extra-year practice is constructivism. This view suggests, among other things, an understanding that children are capable, competent learners who grow and develop at individual rates, and whose development can be

influenced through interaction with others and the environment. This view of knowledge supports children's continuous progress, as opposed to placement of children in extra-year programs, and is congruent with appropriate practice concerning placement of children as defined by professionals in the field of early childhood education (Bredekamp, 1987).

Sarah's knowledge regarding extra-year practice is a personal invention of theory, resultant of a combination of her lived experiences related to extra-year practice, and thoughtful reflection on all relevant evidence available to her. Sarah understands the evidence regarding extra-year placement derived from her experiences and including the findings of relevant research, to disconfirm the efficacy of extra-year programs; therefore, her professional knowledge leads her to support children's continuous progress and to disavow kindergarten retention as a justifiable or beneficial practice. Her personal theory-building in this regard is consistent with what Sanders and McCutcheon (1986) have termed "professional knowledge."

Experiences Leading to Construction of Knowledge

Sarah's lived experiences related to extra-year practce were shared through reflective journal writing as well as through our conversations. Many events and experiences have contributed to Sarah's understanding in relation to the

phenomenon being investigated, and those were organized based on six areas of influence which emerged. The areas of influence, in chronological order, are as follows:

1. Family experiences

Sarah's earliest memories of the retention issue stem from her own experience as a child. She has also lived the extra-year placement issue as a parent, an aunt, and a consultant to parents of her students. In each of these roles, Sarah has seen evidence of the negative effects of extra-year placement. This area of influence supports the notion that since teaching is a "human enterprise," knowledge is constructed about teaching practices "...at home, as a student oneself, with peers, and so forth" (Sanders & McCutcheon, 1986, p. 59). In other words, all of Sarah's experiences related to extra-year practice, rather than those explicitly lived in her role as a teacher, have necessarily been taken into account as Sarah has made sense of the issue of kindergarten retention.

2. College preparation

Sarah's preservice teacher preparation appears to have been a major influence in her construction of knowledge related to extra-year placement practice. She speaks of her college professors as having cautioned against retention in the early grades, and of having supported those cautions through the sharing of research. Though studies have suggested that college preparation doesn't account for beliefs about retention (Smith, 1989) or teaching policies

and practices such as placement of children in classes (Sanders & McCutcheon, 1986), Sarah's college coursework is a significant factor in her construction of knowledge related to the issue of extra-yar placement.

3. Mentors

Sarah attributes her understanding about extra-year practice and teaching young children in general, in part, to the influence of certain people with whom she has felt privileged to work. Sarah's teacher preparation program allowed her to work with experienced teachers, as did some her teaching positions. Of these mentors, Sarah expresses their instrumental role in encouraging her development as a professional and her desire to do what is best for each child individually.

4. Professional reading associations

For Sarah, professional membership and reading began during her preservice preparation. Professional reading material was expressed as one important source of information, providing Sarah with guidance and support in her teaching practices as well as her extra-year placement practice.

5. Teaching experiences unrelated to early childhood

Before teaching at the early childhood levels, Sarah was a teacher of junior and senior high students, where she was witness to students' loss of self-esteem resulting from extra-year placement. Sarah observed that retention "...didn't serve them well at all (4-15-93 interview), and

this experience contributed to Sarah's understanding of the effects of extra-year placement.

6. School Culture

School culture has been found to influence teachers' beliefs in general (Sanders, 1981), and specifically in regard to kindergarten retention (Smith, 1989). In the present case, Sarah has maintained an open mind to other teachers' understandings related to extra-year practice, and she has been challenged and even pressured to retain children in some situations by peer teachers. However, even in high retaining schools, Sarah's beliefs, her personally constructed knowledge, has not been dictated by the school culture; rather, she has remained consistent in her understanding of extra-year practice.

Essential Themes

Wholistic analysis was conducted, resulting in the emergence of two themes considered by this researcher to be essential to the phenomenon being investigated. Thematic statements were formulated to convey the essence of what the data revealed, as follows:

1. Autonomy enables Sarah to be a low retaining teacher.
2. Sarah's extra-year practice is guided by a genuine respect for children.

Interpretation

As is the nature of the case study approach, interpretive findings are not intended to be generalized

beyond the present study but may serve to stimulate thinking, and to deepen our ability to understand a particular phenomenon. The results of the study having been presented, this section will focus on the researcher's creation of meaning as to Sarah's construction of knowledge related to extra-year practice.

1. Awareness of one's beliefs leads to congruence in practice. According to Arthur Combs,

> Whatever we do in teaching depends upon what we think people are like. The goals we seek, the things we do, the judgements we make, even the experiments we are willing to try, are determined by our beliefs about the nature of man and his capacities... (quoted in Dobson, Dobson & Koetting, 1985, p. 69)

Sarah's practices in regard to extra-year placement reflect her stated beliefs about children, development and schooling, and her teaching interactions are consistent with those stated beliefs as well. Sarah describes herself as a life-long learner, and is a very reflective person, putting a great deal of thought into her actions as a teacher. She is surprised that some teachers don't seem to know what they believe about children and learning. While the findings of others (Freeman & Hatch, 1988; Davis, 1993) have suggested a lack of teachers' beliefs/practice congruency, Sarah's ongoing examination of her beliefs related to her practice results in congruence with regard to her extra-year placement practice.

2. Teacher preparation programs can play a significant role and have far-reaching effects on the knowledge about extra-year placement which teachers hold as valid.

Others have suggested that college preparation doesn't account for teachers' beliefs about retention (Smith, 1989), or for teachers' knowledge and practice in general (Sanders & McCutcheon, 1986). In Sarah's case, however, her teacher preparation program continues to be an instrumental influence in her expressed knowledge as well as her classroom practices. My speculation is that the nature of the program Sarah was involved in may account for its lasting influence. As a preservice teacher, Sarah encountered professors who were well-known in the field, and in her mind, respectable and knowledgable. She explains that they supported their assertions with research, and encouraged students to be involved in research as well. Sarah's coursework required many "hands-on," authentic teaching projects, field experiences, and close associations with expert teachers, or mentors.

Her teacher preparation program was quite meaningful to Sarah, as she saw professionalism demonstrated, and was encouraged to view herself as a professional. As a result of her experience in that particular program, Sarah felt empowered to do what she believed was best for children in regard to extra-year placement. For this reason, I believe, the cautions she heard in college about extra-year programs

were seriously considered, and have been an important influence in her continuing knowledge construction.

3. Meaningful assessments of teachers' practices necessarily go beyond "the practitioner's fallacy" (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987).

Kohlberg & DeVries speak of this fallacy, the assumption that teachers be concerned with "what works" as defined by one's own experience or that of others, and focusing on short-term assessments of children's progress.

Findings of Smith (1989) suggest that in the case of kindergarten retention, teacher's practical, experiential evidence is incomplete and misleading. For Sarah, however, consideration of long-term effects of extra-year placement is critical, and goes beyond immediate assessments to include research evidence and personal experience regarding the lack of efficacy and the possible negative effects of kindergarten retention in the long-term. This approach to evaluating personal practice leads Sarah to a more informed knowledge in relation to extra-year practice.

4. Personal and practical knowledge, in conjunction with attention to relevant research in the field, result in more sophisticated, professional understanding.

Yonemura (1986a) found that teachers' personal knowledge was as important to professional practice as was technical knowledge of teaching. Connelly and Clandinin (1984) and Elbaz (1983) reported that relatively few of the teachers they studied held implicit theories which were based on

reliable knowledge of child development and learning; instead, teacher decisions were grounded in personal or practical knowledge. Additionally, Kamii (1981, p. 5) says that "teachers today generally base their practice on common sense and intuition about what feels right rather than scientific knowledge of how children develop." Sarah, on the other hand, considers professional reading material which focuses on theory and research to be reliable, informative and necessary to her continuing knowledge construction and growth as a professional. Professional reading, in conjunction with Sarah's personal and practical experience, which are, of course, viewed as valid and important, contribute to her understanding of the issue of extra-year placement.

5. Autonomous teachers, those who consider all relevant factors in making decisions, stand firm in supporting practices that best serve children as individuals in the educational process.

This interpretive statement speaks perhaps most strongly to this researcher, and addresses the two essential themes which the data revealed. Again, Sarah's respect for children, that is, her belief that best serving children's needs in the educational process is of primary importance, is emphasized; additionally, her autonomous disposition, which enables her to remain true to her convictions, is recognized. Autonomy, as discussed by Piaget, suggests that one would consider all relevant factors and make decisions

based on what results in the common good. An autonomous teacher, then, is a capable, thinking professional who acts on his or her convictions after thoughtful consideration of a particular educational practice or issue. This is an accurate description of Sarah, whose decision-making in regard to extra-year practice reflects her attention to the evidence available to her, including research findings as well as personal and professional experience. Sarah's comments regarding her own childhood recollections and in regard to her experience teaching older students suggest that she is concerned with the longitudinal effects of extra-year practice, rather than short term effects, which do not present the most informed picture of the issue presently being investigated. Thus, Sarah does take into account all relevant factors with regard to the issue at hand.

Speaking on the importance of empowering children as it relates to teacher empowerment, Yonemura (1986b) states that "When we come to see children as knowledgeable, hard at work making meanings, and fully human, we see ourselves in a new and revealing light" (p. 478). It is the opinion of this researcher that Sarah clearly sees children in the manner described by Yonemura. Further, it appears that Sarah sees herself in this manner as well: knowledgeable, hard-working, capable of making professional decisions of great importance in the lives of children..."fully human". In other words, Sarah trusts her own thinking. This, one might

say, is the essence of autonomy, and, in the view of this researcher, accounts for Sarah's willingness to stand firm in her position concerning extra-year practice; Sarah can do no other than to support continuous progress for children, as she believes, in view of all available evidence, that this best meets their needs.

One of three ways in which Shulman (1986, p. 11) characterizes knowledge is as moral or ethical reasoning. This knowledge, he says, "...reflects the norms, values, ideological or philosophical commitments of justice, fairness, equity and the like..." Shulman suggests that these "...occupy the very heart of teacher knowledge..." and goes on to say that, though not robust to practical or scientific scrutiny, this kind of propositional knowledge guides teachers because it is morally and ethically right. According to Dobson, Dobson and Koetting (1985), "Teaching is, first and foremost, a moral enterprise because educators intervene in people's lives" (p. 11). Autonomous decision-making is consistent with the understanding that teaching is a moral endeavor; the autonomous teacher is by definition concerned with fairness...with doing what is ethically right for children, regardless of the pressure to do otherwise. Extra-year practice is certainly a significant intervention in the lives of children for whom it is recommended; the autonomous teacher, in this case, Sarah, views this issue with a commitment to providing for children in the schooling process that which is best for them.

Recommendations

As previously discussed, a case study, by design, does not result in a solution to a problem. It does, however, bring to light numerous possibilities to be further explored. Following is a discussion of the recommendations which come resultant of this researcher's participation in the present research project.

This study suggests to school administrators the need for support of teachers' ongoing personal constructions of knowledge. Sarah has experienced both school settings which support her beliefs and understanding, and those which either mandated practice related to extra-year placement, or in which extreme pressure toward extra-year placement existed as a part of the school culture. While in both kinds of settings Sarah has remained true to her understanding with regard to this issue; still, she sought her current position in a building where her knowledge is respected, and where she feels supported as a professional. Here, Sarah is thriving in terms of professional growth, and finds it much more comfortable to place children's needs first, which is her ultimate purpose in teaching.

One vehicle for supporting teachers' knowledge would be the provision of meaningful staff development opportunities (Jones, 1993). These experiences might include peer presentations, site-based research projects, self-selected classroom observations, attendance at professional

conferences, and self-selected professional readings, each of which could be followed by opportunities for dialogue with peers. Through these experiences, teachers would be encouraged to examine their practices and the effects of those practices, and relevant options could be explored. This kind of meaningful exchange would result in teachers feeling empowered to make decisions and take action professionally, based on their own informed understandings, rather than on district or building policy. The development of autonomy would most certainly be fostered through these kinds of professional activities.

A second recommendation to school administrators is simply a matter of logistics. Records should be kept of those children in extra-year programs, and of those recommended but not placed. These records would allow for longitudinal assessments of the effectiveness of extra-year placement within specific districts. An ongoing look at local results of extra-year practice would strengthen teachers' knowledge in regard to this issue. A particular district encountered by this researcher had no records as to which children had been placed in extra-year programs with the exception of the current school year; thus, there was no way of gathering reliable data as to what difference, if any, extra-year placement made.

For institutions of teacher education, it is recommended that programs be structured in such a manner that preservice teachers find relevance in their educational

experiences. One can only speculate as to why Sarah's teacher education coursework had a significant, positive, long-term impact on her as a professional; however, the implications of her experience are worthy of consideration for any teacher preparation program. Preservice teacher education professionals should explore an emphasis on fieldwork in conjunction with coursework, mentoring approaches whereby students experience an apprenticeship of sorts, and opportunities for student involvement in research on relevant issues. Preservice teachers should also be given encouragement toward professional membership, and should have ample opportunity to read and dialogue regarding research findings on relevant topics, such as extra-year practice.

In Sarah's case, reflecting on her own childhood experiences in school proved to significantly effect her construction of knowledge; thus, a focus on preservice teachers' personal histories as learners is suggested. These kinds of experiences in teacher education programs may serve to promote the development of confident, autonomous teachers who view themselves as lifelong learners, and whose practices are consistent with the needs of the children they teach.

In addition, it is recommended that teacher preparation programs provide opportunity for preservice teachers to examine their beliefs related to education, and to encourage ongoing awareness of personal belief systems. In the

present study, Sarah's espoused beliefs were indeed congruent with her practice; perhaps it is a result of her understanding of her own beliefs that she is able to remain consistent in regard to extra-year practice. Many purport the need for congruence between beliefs and practice (Combs, 1982, 1988; Dobson, Dobson & Koetting, 1985; Yonemura, 1986a), and have suggested a common disparity among teachers' stated beliefs and actions (Davis, 1993; Dobson, Dobson & Koetting, 1985; Freeman & Hatch, 1988). It would seem significant, in light of the present case, to encourage beliefs/practice consistency.

Finally, it is suggested that teacher educators initiate collaborative research projects with classroom teachers. This type of field research, as was utilized in the present study, acknowledges the classroom teacher as expert, and provides a necessary perspective to inform and enhance the research base in teacher preparation.

A recommendation for classroom teachers is related to the previous suggestion, that being the role of teachers as researchers. According to Vivian Paley, "If teachers are to continue to grow, they must at some point begin to study themselves" (Ayers, 1989, p. vii-viii). Practitioners in the field are clearly in the best position to examine their own practices, curricular or otherwise, and determine whether and how they will make changes. Sanders and McCutcheon (1986), suggest that we might ask how practitioners can begin to investigate the problems they

face in teaching, rather than how research findings can be made available to them. Others have eloquently articulated the value of research from the view of the practitioners themselves as perhaps the most significant kind of research in the field of education (Kincheloe, 1991; Patterson, Santa, Short & Smith, 1993; Schubert & Ayers, 1992). In the present case, Sarah welcomed the opportunity to participate in this research endeavor, and her contribution, it is believed by this researcher is noteworthy. There is a wealth of opportunity toward broadening the knowledge base in education through "teacher lore," that is, the telling of teachers' own stories (Schubert & Ayers, 1992).

The present study suggests at least two other research possibilities which logically follow, and which would provide for continued dialogue related to the topic. In terms of extra-year placement, widespread support of this practice continues to exist. In particular, many classroom teachers hold fast to the notion that extra-year placement is a necessary and beneficial intervention for many children. Perhaps this is because, as Smith (1989) suggests, teachers' practical knowledge regarding this issue is incomplete and misleading; teachers do not have ready access to children's progress beyond the time spent with them. Thus, they don't see what occurs beyond the year of placement in an extra-year program.

As established in the present study, Sarah considers evidence other than the short term assessment based solely

on the year spent in an extra-year program. Other classroom teachers would be encouraged to consider greater depth of evidence as well through meaningful studies which are personally conducted. Longitudinal studies involving classroom teachers in research of the progress made by children from their own classrooms, both promoted and nonpromoted, would result in relevant, personal findings related to the issue of extra-year practice. These kinds of studies would speak strongly to practitioners in the field, and would further clarify the issue presently investigated.

In the present study, Sarah's decision-making was based on her personally constructed knowledge as to what is best for children, after taking all relevant factors into account. The profession would benefit from other studies which focus on teachers' understandings, and their processes of decision-making. Collectively, these kinds of studies could have a significant impact in terms of our understanding of the classroom teacher's perspective. In addition, findings from these research endeavors would hold potential toward our ability to affect change in educational settings through greater understanding of a key player, the classroom teacher.

Beyond the Smith and Shepard (1988) study of teachers' beliefs related to extra-year practice, this study presents the complexity of one individual teacher in the context of her world - her lived experience. An honest attempt has been made to portray the thinking of one teacher, Sarah, in

regard to extra-year practice. Results are significant in the depth and richness of the one perspective offered, and of the process through which it was (and continues to be) conceived. According to Yonemura (1986),

> Immersion in the work of one teacher holds...promise for deepening understanding of other teachers, opening up new perspectives and sharpening existing ones, perhaps raising new questions, and refocusing on questions that have been with us in teaching for a long time. (p. 8)

Collectively, phenomenological studies such as the present one provide opportunity for just such immersion, and consequently, just such deep understanding.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ames, L. B. (1986). Ready or not: How birthdays leave some children behind. American Educator, 10(2), 30-33.

Angus, D. L., Mirel, J. E., & Vinovski, M. A. (1988). Historical development of age stratification in schooling. Teachers College Record, 90(2), 211-234.

Ayers, W. (1989). The good preschool teacher. New York: Teachers College Press.

Bickel, D. D. Zigmond, N., & Strayhorn, J. (1991). Chronological age at entrance to first grade: Effects on elementary school success. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 6(2), 105-117.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1982). Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Boyer, E. L. (1993). Ready to learn: A mandate for the nation. Young Children, 48(3), 54-57.

Bradley, R. (1985). Review of Gesell School Readiness Test. In J. V. Michael, Jr. (Ed.), Ninth mental measurements yearbook (Vol. 1, pp. 609-610). Lincoln, NE: Buros Institute of Mental Measurements.

Bredekamp, S. (1990). Extra-year programs: A response to Brewer and Uphoff. Young Children, 45(6), 20-21.

Bredekamp, S. (Ed.). (1987). Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8, expanded edition. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Bredekamp, S., & Rosegrant, T. (Eds.). (1992). Reaching potentials: Appropriate curriculum and assessment for young children. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Bredekamp, S., & Shepard, L. (1989). How best to protect children from inappropriate school expectations, practices, and policies. Young Children, 44(3), 14-24.

Brewer, J. A. (1990). Transitional programs: Boon or bane? Young Children, 45(6), 15-18.

Breznitz, A., & Teltsch, T. (1989). The effect of school entrance age on academic achievement and social-emotional adjustment of children: Follow-up study of fourth graders. Psychology in the Schools, 26(1), 62-68.

Bryant, D. M., & Clifford, R. M. (1992). 150 years of kindergarten: How far have we come? Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 7(2), 147-154.

Burkart, J. (1989). Developmental kindrgarten - In the child's best interest? Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 10:2(31), 9-10.

Byrnes, D., & Yamamoto, K. (1986). Views on grade repetition. Journal of Research and Development in Education, 20(1), 14-20.

Castle, K. (1989). Child-centered teaching: Through children's eyes. Childhood Education, 65(4), 209-212.

Charlesworth, R. (1989). "Behind" before they start? Deciding how to deal with the risk of kindergarten "failure". Young Children, 44(3), 5-13.

Coburn, J. (1991). Extra-year programs: The pendulum keeps swinging. Early Childhood News, 3(4), 1, 8-9.

Combs, A. W. (1982). A personal approach to teaching: Beliefs that make a difference. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Combs, A. W. (1988). New assumptions for educational reform. Educational Leadership, 45(5), 38-40.

Curry, M. (1982, December). Held back in kindergarten. Early Years, pp. 3, 27.

Davis, L. S. (1993). Developmentally appropriate practice and implications for knowledge construction (Doctoral Dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 1993).

Denzin, N. K. (1989). Interpretive interactionism. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

DeVries, R., & Kohlberg, L. (1990). Education for development. In R. DeVries & L. Kohlbert, Constructivist early education: Overview and comparison with other programs (Chapter 1, pp. 3-16). Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Dietz, C. & Wilson, B. J. (1985). Beginning school age and academic achievement. Psychology in the Schools, 22(1), 93-94.

Dobson, R. L., Dobson, J. E., & Koetting, J. R. (1985). Looking at, talking about and living with children. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc.

Duckworth, E. (1987). The having of wonderful ideas and other essays on teaching and learning. New York: Teachers College Press.

Durkin, D. (1987). A classroom-observation study of reading instruction in kindergarten. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 2, 275-300.

Educational Research Service. (1986, May). Kindergarten programs and practices in public schools. Principal.

Eisner, E. W. (1981). On the difference between scientific and artistic approaches to qualitative research. Educational Researcher, 10(4), 5-9.

Elam, S. M. (1990). The 22nd annual Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. Phi Delta Kappan, 72(1), 41-55.

Elbaz, F. (1983). Teacher thinking: A study of practical knowledge. New York: Nichols Publishing Company.

Elkind, D. (1986). In defense of early childhood education. Principal. 65(5), 6-9.

Elkind, D. (1987). Miseducationa: Preschoolers at risk. New York: Knopf.

Engel, P. (1991). Tracking programs toward the school readiness goal. Educational Leadership, 48(5), 39-42.

Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. Whittrock (Ed.), Handbook of research on teaching (3rd ed.), pp. 119-161). New York: Macmillan.

Fair Test. (1990). Standardized tests and our children: A guide to testing reform. Cambridge, MA: Fair Test.

Fedoruk, G. M. (1989). Kindergarten screening for 1st grade learning problems: The conceptual inadequacy of a child-deficit model. Childhood Education, 66(1), 40-42.

Ferguson, P. C. (1991). Longitudinal outcome differences among promoted and transitional at-risk kindergarten students. Psychology in the Schools, 28(2), 139-146.

Ferree, S. (1988). School readiness workshop. Bethany, Oklahoma

Fleege, P. O., Charlesworth, R., Burts, D. C., & Hart, C. H. (1990). Stress begins in kindergarten: A look at behavior during standardized testing (Doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1990).

Fosnot, C. T. (1989). Enquiring teachers, enquiring learners: A constructivist approach for teaching. New York: Teachers College Press.

Foster, J. E. (1993). Retaining children in grade. Childhood Education, 70(1), 38-43.

Freberg, L. (1991). Relationships between chronological age, developmental age, and standardized achievement tests in kindergarten. Psychology in the Schools, 28(1), 77-81.

Freisen, D. (1984). Too much, too soon? Principal, 63(4), 14-18.

Galloway, J. E., & George, J. (1986). Junior kindergarten. Educational Leadership, 44(3), 68-69.

Gentry, R. J. (1984). Developmental aspects of learning to spell. Academic Therapy, 20(1), 11-19.

Gesell Institute of Human Development. (1982). A gift of time...A developmental point of view. New Haven, CT: Author.

Gesell Institute of Human Development. (1987). The Gesell institute reponds. Young Children, 42(2), 7-8.

Gesell Institute of Human Development. (1989). Respecting growth and development of children: Policies and practices. New Haven, CT: Author.

Gitlin, A., Bringhurst, K., Burns, M., Cooley, V., Myers, B., Price, K., Russell, R., & Tiess, P. (1992). Teachers' voices for school change: An introduction to educative research. New York: Teachers College Press.

Glickman, C. D., & Pellegrini, A. D. (1988). The case against kindergarten testing for promotion. Principal, 68(2), 34-35.

Goodlad, J. I. (1954). Some effects of promotion and nonpromotion upon the social and personal adjustment of children. Journal of Experimental Education, 22(4), 301-328.

Goodlad, J. I. & Oakes, J. (1988). We must offer equal access to knowledge. Educational Leadership, 45(5), 16-22.

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

Grace, C. Shores, E. F., Brown, M. H., Arnold, F. D., Graves, S. B., Jambor, T., & Neill, M. (1992). The portfolio and its use: Developmentally appropriate assessment of young children. Little Rock, AR: SACUS.

Graue, M. E. (1993). Ready for what? Constructing meanings of readiness for kindergarten. New York: State University of New York Press.

Graue, M. E., & Shepard, L. A. (1989). Predictive validity of the Gesell School Readiness Tests. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 4(3), 303-315.

Gredler, G. R. (1980). The birthdate effect: Fact or artifact? Journal of Learning Disabilities, 13(5), 9-12.

Gredler, G. R. (1984). Transition classes: A viable alternative for the at-risk child? Psychology in the Schools, 21(4), 463-470.

Grissom, J. B., & Shepard, L. A. (1989). Repeating and dropping out of school. In L. A. Shepard & M. L. Smith (Eds.), Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention (Chapter 3, pp. 34-63). Philadelphia, PA: The Falmer Press.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1989). Fourth generation evaluation. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Gullo, D. F. & Burton, C. B. (1992). Age of entry, preschool experience, and sex as antecedents of academic readiness in kindergarten. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 7(2), 175-186.

Hall, N. (1987). The emergence of literacy. Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton.

Hammond, C. H. (1986). Not ready! Don't rush me! Childhood Education, 62(4), 276-280.

Hatch, J. A., & Freeman, E. B. (1988). Kindergarten philosophies and practices: Perspectives of teachers, principals, and supervisors. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 3(2), 151-166.

Holmes, C. T., & Matthews, K. M. (1984). The effects of nonpromotion on elementary and junior high school pupils: A meta-analysis. Review of Educational Research, 54(2), 225-236.

Hymes, J. L., Jr. (1991). Early childhood education, twenty years in review: A look at 1971-1990. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Ilg, F. L. (1965). Scoring notes: The developmental examination. New Haven, CN: The Gesell Institute.

Ilg, F. L., Ames, L. B., Haines, J., & Gillespie, C. (1978). School readiness. New York: Harper and Row.

Jones, E. (Ed.). (1993). Growing teachers: Partnerships in staff development. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Kagan, S. L. (1990). Readiness 2000: Rethinking rhetoric and responsibility. Phi Delta Kappan, 72(4), 272-279.

Kagan, S. L. (1992). Readiness past, present and future. Young Children, 48(1), 48-53.

Kagan, S. L. (1994). Reading schools for young children: Polemics and priorities. Phi Delta Kappan, 76(3), 226-233.

Kamii, C. (1981). Teachers' autonomy and scientific training. Young Children, 36(4), 5-14.

Kamii, C. (1982). Autonomy as the aim of education: Implications of Piaget's theory. In C. Kamii, Number in preschool and kindergarten (appendix, pp. 73-86). Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Kamii, C. (1985). Leading primary education toward excellence: Beyond worksheets and drill. Young Children, 40(6), 3-9.

Kamii, C. (Ed.). (1990). Achievement testing in the early grades: The games grown-ups play. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Karweit, N. (1992). The kindergarten experience. Educational Leadership, 49(6), 82-86.

Katz, L. (1977). Talks with teachers: Reflections on early childhood education. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Katz, L. (1988). What should young children be doing? American Educator, 12(2), 14-19.

Katz, L., Roth, F., & Torres, R. (1987). A place called kindergarten. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

Katz, M. B. (1975). Class bureaucracy, and schools. New York: Praeger.

Kaufman, N. (1985). Review of Gesell School Readiness Test. In J. V. Michael, Jr. (Ed.), Ninth mental measurements yearbook (Vol. 1, pp. 607-608). Lincoln, NE: Buros Institute of Mental Measurements.

Kincheloe, J. L. (1991). Teachers as researchers: Qualitative inquiry as a path to knowledge. Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press.

Koepke, M. (1991, September). Listen to the children. Teacher Magazine, 47-52.

Lamb, B. (1987, May 10). Learning readiness debate. The Oklahoma Observer, pp. 12, 19.

Leavitt, R. L., & Eheart, B. K. (1991). Assessment in early childhood programs. Young Children, 46(5), 4-9.

Lichtenstein, R. (1990). Psychometric characteristics and appropriate use of the Gesell School Readiness Screening Test. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 5(3), 359-378.

Malinowski. (1922). Argonauts of the western Pacific: An account of native enterprise and adventure in the archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.

Mantzicopoulos, P., & Morrison, D. (1992). Kindergarten retention: Academic and behavioral outcomes through the end of second grade. American Educational Research Journal, 29(1), 182-198.

Marzollo, J. (1990, February). Why kids flunk kindergarten. Parents, pp. 89-94.

May, D. C. & Kundert, D. K. (1992). Do extra-year classes pay off? The Executive Educator, 14(3), 25-27.

May, D. C., & Welch, E. L. (1984). The effects of developmental placement and early retention on children's later scores on standardized tests. Psycholoty in the Schools, 21(3), 381-385.

McLaughlin, P. J. (1981). Readiness measures. Diagnostique, 6(2), 42-47.

Medina, M., & Neill, D. M. (1988). Fallout from the testing explosion. Cambridge, MA: Fair Test.

Meisels, S. J. (1985). Developmental screening in early childhood: A guide. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Meisels, S. J. (1987a). But Dr. Meisels is not convienced. Young Children, 42(2), 8-9.

Meisels, S. J. (1987b). Uses and abuses of developmental screening and school readiness testing. Young Children, 42(2), 4-6, 68-73.

Meisels, S. (1989). High stakes testing in kindergarten. Educational Leadership, 46(7), 16-22.

Meisels, S. J. (1991). Four myths about America's kindergartens. Education Week, 10(33), 32.

Meisels, S. J. (1992a). Doing harm by doing good: Iatrogenic effects of early childhood enrollment and promotion policies. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 7(2), 155-174.

Meisels, S. J. (1992b). The lake wobegone effect reversed: Commentary on "The Gesell assessment: Psychometric properties". Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 7(1), 45-46.

Merriam, S. B. (1988). Case study research in education. San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Moyer, J., Egertson, H., & Isenberg, J. (1987). The child-centered kindergarten. Childhood Education, 4(63), 235-242.

Naglieri, J. J. (1985). Review of Gesell School Readiness Test. In J. V. Michael, Jr. (Ed.), Ninth mental measurements yearbook (Vol. 1, pp. 608-609). Lincoln, NE: Buros Institute of Mental Measurements.

Nason, R. B. (1991). Retaining children: Is it the right decision? Childhood Education, 67(5), 300-304.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1990). NAEYC position statement on school readiness. Young Children, 46(1), 21-23.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1988). NAEYC position statement on standardized testing of young children 3 through 8 years of age. Young Children, 43(3), 42-47.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1989). Testing, tracking, and timing: Challenge policies that deny equity and access to young children. The Early Childhood Advocate, 1(1), 1, 4.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1992). Goal 1: Problem or promise? Young Children, 47(2), 38-40.

National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE). (1987). Unacceptable trends in kindergarten entry and placement: A position statement of the NAECS/SDE.

National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). (1988). Right from the start. Alexandria, MD: Author.

National Governors' Association. (1990, February 25). National education goals. A statement adopted in Charlottesville, VA.

Niklason, L. B. (1987). Do certain groups of children profit from a grade retention? Psychology in the Schools, 24(4), 339-345.

Oakes, P. B., & Caruso, D. A. (1990). Kindergarten techers' use of developmentally appropriate practices and attitudes about authority. Early Education and Development, 1(6), 445-457.

Patterson, L., Santa, C. M., Short, K. G., & Smith, K. (Eds.). (1993). Teachers are researchers: Reflection and action. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, Inc.

Patton, M. A. (1980). Qualitative evaluation methods. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Peck, J. T., McCaig, G., & Sapp, M. E. (1988). Kindergarten policies: What is best for children? Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Perrone, V. (1981). Testing, testing and more testing. Childhood Education, 51, 76-80.

Perrone, V. (1991). A position paper of the Association for Childhood Education International: On standardized testing. Childhood Education, 67(3), 131-142.

Peterson, S. E., DeGracie, J. S., & Ayabe, C. R. (1987). A longitudinal study of the effects of retention/promotion on academic achievement. American Educational Research Journal, 24(1), 107-118.

Pitcher, E. G. (1963, October). Learning academic sugjects in the kindergarten: Is the school ready for the young child? The Journal of Nursery Education, 18(4), 250-252.

Porwancher, D., & DeLisi, R. (1993). Developmental placement of kindergarten children based on the Gesell School Readiness Test. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 8(2), 149-166.

Pratt, D. (1983). Age segregation in schools. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 231 038).

Price, N. (1984, September/October). Are little kinds ready for academics? Family Learning, pp. 59-61.

Rhoten, L. S. G. (1991). An examination of transition first grade curriculum (Doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 1991).

Ross, E. D. (1976). The kindergarten crusade. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.

Rubin, L. J. (1985). Artistry in teaching. New York: Random House.

Salholz, E. Wingert, P. Burgower, B., Michael, R., & Joseph, N. (1987, February 2). Kids need time to be kids. Newsweek, pp. 56-58.

Sanders, D. P. (1981). Educational inquiry s developmental research. Educational Researcher, 10(3), 8-13.

Sanders, D. P., & McCutcheon, G. (19). The development of practical theories of teaching. Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, 2(1), 50-67.

Schickendanz, J. (1986). More than the ABCs: The early stages of reading and writing. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Schubert, W. H. (1990). Acknowledging teachers' experiential knowledge: Reports from the Teacher Lore Project. Kappa Delta Pi Recored, 26(4), 99-100.

Schubert, W. H., & Ayers, W. C. (Eds.). (1992). Teacher lore. White Plains, NY: Longman Publishing Group.

Schultz, T. (1989). Testing and retention of children: Moving from controversy to reform. Phi Delta Kappan, 71(2), 125-129.

Schultz, T. (1990). Testing and retention of young children. The State Board Connection: Issues in Brief, 10(3), 1-2, 6-7.

Schultz, T., & Lombardi, J. (1989). Right from the start: A report on the NASBE task force on early childhood education. Young Children, 44(2), 6-10.

Seefeldt, C. (1985). Tomorrow's kindergarten: Pleasure or pressure? Principal, 64(5), 12-15.

Senior, E. M. (1986). Learning disabled or merely mislabeled? The plight of the developmentally young child. Childhood Education, 62(3), 161-165.

Shapiro, J., & Kilbey, D. (1990). Closing the gap between theory and practice: Teacher beliefs, instructional decisions and critical thinking. Reading Horizons, 31(1), 59-73.

Shepard, L. (1994). The challenges of assessing young children appropriately. Phi Delta Kappan, 76(3), 206-212.

Shepard, L. A. (1989). A review of research on kindergarten retention. In L. A. Shepard and M. L. Smith (Eds.), Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention (Chap. 4, pp. 64-78). Philadelphia, PA: The Falmer Press.

Shepard, L. A. (1992). Psychometric properties of the Gesell developmental assessment: A critique. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 7(1), 47-52.

Shepard, L., & Smith, M. L. (1986). Synthesis of research on school readiness and kindergarten retention. Educational Leadership, 44(3), 78-86.

Shepard, L. A., & Smith, M. L. (1987a). Effects of kindergarten retention at the end of first grade. Psychology in the Schools, 24(4), 346-357.

Shepard, L. A., & Smith, M. L. (1987b). What doesn't work: Explaining policies of retention in the early grades. Phi Delta Kappan, 69(2), 129-134.

Shepard, L. A., & Smith, M. (1988a). Escalating academic demand in kindergarten: Counterproductive policies. The Elementary School Journal, 89(2), 135-145.

Shepard, L. A., & Smith, M. L. (1988b). Flunking kindergarten: Escalating curriculum leaves many behind. American Educator, 12(2), 34-38.

Shepard, L. A., & Smith, M. L. (1989a). Academic and emotional effects of kindergarten retention in one school district. In L. A. Shepard and M. L. Smith (Eds.), Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention (Chap. 5, pp. 79-107). Philadelphia, PA: The Falmer Press.

Shepard, L. A., & Smith, M. L. (Eds.). (1989b). Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention. Philadelphia, PA: The Falmer Press.

Shepard, L. A., & Smith, M. L. (1990). Synthesis of research on grade retention. Educational Leadership, 84-88.

Shulman, L. S. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. Educational Researcher, 15(2), 4-14.

Smith, F. (1979). Reading without nonsense. New York: Teachers College Press.

Smith, J. K. (1983). Quantitative versus qualitative researcher: An attempt to clarify the issue. Educational Researcher, 12(3), 6-13.

Smith, M. L. (1987). Publishing qualitative research. American Educational Research Journal, 24(2), 173-183.

Smith, M. L. (1989). Teachers' beliefs about retention. In L. A. Shepard & M. L. Smith (Eds.), Flunking grades: Research and policies on retention (Chapter 7, pp. 132-150). Philadelphia, PA: The Falmer Press.

Smith, M. L., & Shepard, L. A. (1987). What doesn't work: Explaining policies of retention in the early grades. Phi Delta Kappan, 129-134.

Smith, M. L., & Shepard, L. A. (1988). Kindergarten readiness and retention: A qualitative study of teachers' beliefs and practices. American Educational Research Journal, 25(3), 307-333.

Southern Association on Children Under Six (SACUS). (1990). Position statement on developmentally appropriate assessment. Little Rock, AR: Author.

Spodek, B. (1982). The kindergarten: A retrospective and contemporary view. In L. Katz (Ed.), Current topics in early childhood education (Ch. 8, pp. 173-191). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Co.

Spodek, B. (1988). Implicit theories of early childhood teachers: Foundations for professional behavior. In B. Spodek, Professionalism and the early childhood practitioner (pp. 161-173), New York: Teachers College Press.

Spodek, B. (1985). Early childhood education's past as a prologue: Roots of contemporary concern. Young Children, 40(5), 3-7.

Steinberg, A. (1990). Kindergarten: Producing early failure? Principal, 69(5), 6-9.

Sweetland, J. D., & DeSimone, P. A. (1987). Age of entry, sex, and academic achievement in elementary school children. Psychology in the Schools, 24(4), 406-412.

Tonehin, E. M., & Impara, J. C. (1992). Unraveling teachers' beliefs about grade retention. American Educational Research Journal, 29(1), 199-223.

Uphoff, J. K. (1990). Extra-year programs: An argument for transitional programs during transitional times. Young Children, 45(6), 19-20.

Uphoff, J. K. (1990a). Real facts from real schools. Rosemont, NJ: Modern Learning Press.

Uphoff, J. K. (1990b). School readiness and transition programs: Real facts from real schools. Rosemont, NJ: Modern Learning Press.

Uphoff, J. K., & Gilmore, J. (1985). Pupil age at school entrance - How many are ready for success? Educational Leadership, 43(1), 86-90.

van Manen, M. (1990). Researching lived experience. New York: State University of New York Press.

van Manen, M. (1991). The tact of teaching: The meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Walker, R. N. (1992). The Gesell development assessment: Psychometric Properties. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 7(1), 21-43.

Walsh, D. J. (1989). Changes in kindergarten: Why here? Why now? Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 4(3), 377-391.

Walsh, D. J., Ellwein, M. C., Eads, G. M., & Miller, A. K. (1991). Knocking on kindergarten's door: Who gest in? Who's kep out? Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 6(1), 89-100.

Waters, E. (1985). Review of Gesell School Readiness Test. In J. V. Michael, Jr. (Ed.), Ninth mental measurements yearbook (Vol. 1, pp. 610-611). Lincoln, NE: Buros Institute of Mental Measurements.

Whipple, G. M. (Ed.). (1929). Preschool and parental education. 28th yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Bloomington, IL: Public School Publishing Co.

Wood, C., Powell, S., & Knight, R. C. (1984). Predicting school readiness: The validity of developmental age. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 17, 8-11.

Yonemura, M. V. (1986a). A teacher at work. New York: Teachers College Press.

Yonemura, M. V. (1986b). Reflections on teacher empowerment and teacher education. Harvard Educational Review, 56(4), 473-480.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORM

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

Proposal Title: Kindergarten Teachers' Constructions of Knowledge About Extra-Year Placements

Principal Investigator: Kathryn Castle/Kelly A. Rahhal

Date: May 26, 1991 IRB # ED-91-037

This application has been reviewed by the IRB and

Processed as: Exempt [X] Expedite [ ] Full Board Review [ ]

Renewal or Continuation [ ]

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s):

Approved [X] Deferred for Revision [ ]

Approved with Provision [ ] Disapproved [ ]

Approval status subject to review by full Institutional Review Board at next meeting, 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month.

Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reason for Deferral or Disapproval:

Signature: Steven W. Edwards Date: May 31, 1991
Chair of Institutional Review Board

VITA

Kelly Anne Rahhal Baker

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION OF ONE LOW RETAINING KINDERGARTEN TEACHER: A CASE STUDY

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Personal: Born in Okemah, Oklahoma, the daughter of Franklin D. Rahhal and Sue E. Rahhal.

Education: Received Bachelor of Science degree in 1984 from the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, with a major in Elementary Education; completed a Master of Education program in 1988 at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma, with a major in Early Childhood Education; the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction completed in May, 1995.

Professional Experience: Kindergarten Teacher, Putnam City Public Schools, 1984-1989; Graduate Teaching Assistant, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 1989-1991; Instructor, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma, 1991-1995.