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The Need for More Educational Leadership Pedagogical Knowledge in Early Elementary

Megan Hallissey

Abstract

This exploratory, qualitative multiple-site case study examined how principals' knowledge of early childhood learning, pedagogy, and practices (or lack of) influences their leadership decisions and assessment of teachers. Data collection included four different elementary school configurations and consisted of multiple data sources including the use of a video simulation. The twelve guidelines of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) and the Professional Standards of Educational Leaders (PSEL) provided a framework for thematic analysis. The results of this study show principals have a limited understanding of early childhood pedagogy which influences their hiring decisions when filling teacher vacancies. Additionally, results indicate principals' assessments of teachers do not reflect early childhood pedagogy and could be negatively affecting teacher evaluations. Finally, this study revealed principals' limited training and teaching background in early elementary grades may impact their ability to offer quality feedback for teachers needing instructional improvement.

Key Words: Principal preparation programs, teacher evaluations, developmentally appropriate practices, instructional leadership

Introduction

Thirty years ago, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published a position statement, which would later become widely known as developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), for educators serving children birth through age eight, also known as early childhood (Bredekamp, 1987). It was a condensed synopsis of what educators had learned over the last two centuries. The idea behind the DAP was to align teaching strategies with current research about children's development and learning capabilities while also accounting for children's ages, experiences, abilities, and interests (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Pre-service, early education teacher candidates often receive training about DAP, and are expected to be well versed in practices based on children's developmental readiness and interests. However, school administrators like principals and superintendents have no such requirements.

To date, most principal preparatory programs do not require classes in child development or early childhood curriculum and pedagogy (Clarke-Brown et al., 2014; Institute of Medicine [IOM] & National Research Council [NRC], 2015). The majority of elementary school administrators do not have experience teaching early childhood grade levels either (Ferratier, 1986; Hood, 2008; Mead, 2011; Szekely, 2013), including a limited understanding of how to design, implement, and evaluate programs for young children (Bornfreund, 2012; Göncü et al., 2012; Kostelnik & Grady, 2009). Despite this minimal training, elementary school principals are still responsible for supervising children ages three through eight, raising student achievement, supporting best teaching practices, and conducting objective teacher evaluations grounded in theory and foundations of best practice (Danielson, 2012). By increasing their knowledge of early childhood pedagogy and with a more thorough understanding, principals could increase

their effectiveness. They could assist teachers in reaching expected and appropriate outcomes, but also help students reach their learning objectives.

Research in educational administration often explores the role of principals within school systems, identifies specific leadership styles and then examines those corresponding attributes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Urick & Bowers, 2014). Other research often debates the hierarchy of content knowledge and managerial leadership skills (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2014; Craverns et al., 2012; National Association for Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2014). The current study does not contend with the debate to expand principals' content knowledge in the traditional sense (e.g. Science, Math, History, Reading, etc.), insisting they need to be all-knowing in every subject matter (Lochmiller, 2015; Stein & Nelson, 2003). Instead, this study asserts child development and early childhood practices are indispensable components for effective instructional leadership, not "content" areas, and understanding of each should be required. This study also considers how these deficiencies might affect leadership decisions. For example, how do principals construct their expectations of teaching and learning outcomes for early childhood grades given this minimal experience in early childhood practice and pedagogy? Are the means by which principals assess outcomes appropriate for this age group and do they align with research on child development practices?

Literature Review

A Change Educational Leadership Roles

In the past, principals were viewed as more school managers whose direct involvement with students revolved around disciplinary issues (Lewis, 1993). Now, principals are required to be instructional leaders with increased day-to-day interaction with students, spending more time in classrooms, evaluating quality instructional practice, aligning educational strategies and

resources across the grades, and creating a seamless alignment for PreK-third grade (Louis & Robinson, 2012; National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015; Urick & Bowers, 2014). This change in leadership role appears to impact students positively, with many students responding favorably to administrators' new job responsibility. Gentilucci and Muto (2007) analyzed middle school student perspectives as it relates to effective leadership and found "principals who exhibited administrative and teacher behaviors were perceived by students as more effective instructional leaders than principals who acted only as administrators" (p. 231). Principal-teachers were valued more because they "knew what we were studying," "understood our work," and "could help us with our assignments" (p. 231).

The revised National Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) put forth by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (formally the Council of Chief State School Officers) now confirm effective educational leaders should develop, align, implement, promote, and ensure appropriate instructional practices (NPBEA, 2015). The National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP) also reflects this shift in thinking and change in job responsibilities in many of their publications and position statements (NAESP, 2014). This change in perspective indicates the need for principals to be more directly involved in student learning, rather than merely perform the managerial role expected 20 years ago.

Emphasis of Early Childhood in Leadership Standards

The revised publication of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders in 2015 (formally referred to as the ISLLC standards) aligns with the new instructional role of educational leaders, requires a change in philosophy, and places more emphasis on early childhood pedagogy. For example, Standard 4, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, states effective educational leaders "*promote instructional practice that is consistent with knowledge of*

child learning and development, effective pedagogy, and the needs of each student" and employ valid assessments that are consistent with "*knowledge of child learning and development"* (NPBEA, 2015, p. 12). This standard not only requires educational leaders to be knowledgeable about child development, but also requires an understanding of effective instructional classroom practices that align with children's ages and abilities, rather than simply meeting a state curricular standard. Collectively, these national requirements for educational leaders indicate a shift in instructional practices. This shift now focuses on the needs of the individual child with personalized instruction based on the child's development, rather than the same instruction and curriculum for all students.

Other PSEL domains also seem to reflect early childhood pedagogy in additional ways. For example, Standard 3d requires student misconduct be addressed in a "*positive*, fair and unbiased manner" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11), rather than withholding or issuing punishments. Standard 4b states that alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment occurs "*within and across grade levels* to promote student academic success" and students' "*love of learning"* (p. 12), recognizing the need to create a seamless curriculum as he/she progresses through grade levels in school. These standards emphasize the importance of instructional leadership and highlights best practices for teaching and learning, including developmentally appropriate pedagogy for early elementary grade levels.

Informative Feedback for Teacher Evaluations

Part of a principal's role requires supporting student development by assessing and evaluating teacher effectiveness. Yet, given the minimal amount of training and understanding principals have regarding best practices for early elementary grades, can they effectively assess these teachers? In 2012, the State of Illinois changed their principal certification from a K-12, to

a PreK-12 certification. Some scholars expressed their concern of including pre-k in the new principal certification, explaining that leadership preparation faculty and their candidates often lack substantive training in early education (Göncü et al., 2012). They argued that now, it required principals to learn different developmental periods of childhood, instructional approaches, curricula, assessments, as well as work with teachers holding different types of certification (Göncü et al., 2012). However, if principals oversee early elementary grade levels in their building they were *already* supervising early childhood (defined by NAEYC as birth through age eight). Technically, principal preparation faculty and the principals themselves should already be well versed in each of these practices as early childhood education K-third as always been included in the licensure.

Knowledge about early childhood pedagogy becomes even more important, especially regarding teacher evaluations. The Danielson Framework, for example, requires principals to conduct teacher evaluations grounded in theory and foundations of best practices (Danielson, 2012). Pedagogical knowledge becomes increasingly important when evaluating teachers (i.e., quality, and type of instructional methodologies) as more emphasis and job security is placed on teacher evaluations. The PSEL requires educational leaders to deliver "actionable feedback about instruction and other professional practice through valid, research-anchored systems of supervision," and states evaluations should "support the development of teachers' and staff members' knowledge, skills, and practice" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 14). Additionally, teacher evaluations should be specific in assessing best teaching and learning practices for K-third, rather than general evaluative criteria such as improving practice, student learning, growth and achievement. Given this gap in principal knowledge, how are they effectively offering feedback for teaching growth and student learning? The need for pedagogical knowledge in early

childhood, especially for principals overseeing young children in PreK-third grade, becomes even more critical when evaluating teachers.

Principal Practices Hindering Student Learning

Given a principal's limited experience in early childhood practice and pedagogy, they may be unknowingly hindering student learning and success. For example, a Gallup poll in 2009 surveyed 1,951 principals about school recess (Johnson, 2010). Results indicated 97% believed recess positively impacted students' social well-being, but 77% took away recess as punishment. This type of practice contradicts what is developmentally appropriate for early childhood children. Additionally, teaching and learning practices emphasizing achievement and standardized test scores are also occurring, rather than teaching for developmental needs (Dee & Jacob, 2011). This can leave students feeling shameful when unsuccessful (Kearns, 2011) and increase student anxiety (Segool et al., 2013). With this increased emphasis on standardized testing and accountability now occurring in the early elementary grades, principals are shifting their highest performing teachers to grades three, four, and five believing this could raise test scores (Fuller & Ladd, 2012). Although pressures from high-stakes testing can impact principals' autonomy and effectiveness, these examples do not align with research about best teaching and learning practices for children in early elementary grades nor do they meet children's developmental needs.

Principals may also have inappropriate expectations of teaching methodologies for early elementary grades, ignoring the critical component of teaching holistically. Instead, they may insist on teaching practices that offer little engagement or do not account for children's developmental stages (Mead, 2011). For example, promoting strategies that require children to sit for extended periods of time can even impede a young student's learning and development

(Ehrenberg et al., 2012). The Alliance for Childhood showed that the relationship between play and learning was rarely articulated among principals, and instead, they favored a highly scripted, teacher-directed curriculum (Miller & Almon, 2009). The Hood (2008) indicated nearly one-third less instructional time is spent learning other disciplines due to the primary focus on Math and Literacy for state reporting measures. These types of practices do not align with research on early childhood and does not address nor account for the needs of the whole child. Mimicking strategies used for older students like eliminating recess, excluding learning activities based on play, and requiring children to be passive learners may actually be inhibiting students' learning and development (Johnson, 2010; Miller & Almon, 2009).

Theoretical Framework: The Influence of Educational Leaders

An increase in school administrators' experience and training in early childhood may be warranted given their influence on student learning. Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theoretical perspective, *the Ecology of Human Development,* illustrated how children exist in several environments nested within one another. He suggested a complex and an intertwining network, collectively, effects a child's development rather than separate entities. He categorized immediate, extended, and proximal relationships into specific contextual roles and indicates the daily interactions of leadership, teaching, and learning also shape the development of a child. Contextual labels identify different systems that directly influence a child's development. For example, teachers, parents, and peers encompass the *microsystem* and are thought to have the most influence. Lateral connections seen as extensions of these initial relationships (i.e., a peer's parent or parent-teacher interactions) are classified under the *mesosystem*. Bronfenbrenner argued principals lay in the *exosystem,* the next layer, but current research regarding principals'

influence indicated this may need to be reexamined as principals may be more influential in the development of a child than originally thought.

A consensus among researchers implied school principals have significant impact on student learning. For example, one consistent trend over the last 15 years shows an educational leader's indirect influence when examining areas of school culture and educational environments (Al-Safran et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2009; Silins & Mulford, 2002). Al-Safran et al. (2014) asserted one aspect of the school environment is reflected in the level of cooperation among teachers – how they share and discuss instructional ideas, experiences, and materials because "it reflects freedom, collectivism, comfort and trust in the school's environment" (p. 8). This study showed, as the others do, principals who spend more time in classrooms, who actively supervise and support teachers, and assist in coordinating instructional programing have higher student achievement. The different studies implied a correlation effect, indicating a principal's indirect influence on a child's development (i.e., exosystem) as Bronfenbrenner described.

Another trend over the last 15 years suggested school principals have more of a direct influence on a child's development. For example, in 2003, a meta-analysis by Waters et al. analyzed the results of 70 principal leadership studies and found certain direct leadership practices like classroom visitations, interactions with students, and visibility within the school, were "significantly correlated with improved student achievement with an average effect size of $r = .25$, increasing student achievement by as much as 10 percentile points" (p. 238). A landmark report in 2004 also showed more of a direct influence as "principals are second only to teachers in accounting for variance in student achievement" (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 69). When analyzing more recent research this trend appears to continue, indicating a more direct link to educational leadership and student success (Hallingera & Heck, 2010; Sun & Leithwood, 2015).

Studies also suggested a more direct and positive relationship between principal leadership and student learning (Osborne-Lampkin et al, 2015; Wise & Wright, 2012). As one study reported, “highly effective principals can impact student achievement "equivalent to two to seven months of additional learning each year” (Branch et al., 2013, p. 5). These various studies implied the school principal may be a component of the microsystem and have more of a direct influence on a child’s development than Bronfenbrenner once indicated.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine principals’ expectations of teaching practices while also accounting for children’s developmental needs and learning abilities in the early elementary grade levels (Kindergarten, first, second, and third grade). Because limited research studies exist about this discourse, the design and construction of the research questions expanded upon existing knowledge, and emphasized specific areas to cover gaps in the literature, narrowing the parameters of inquiry. These parameters were identified by aligning recommendations from national organizations for best practices of teaching and learning, new directives in principal competencies, and research in the science of child development. Therefore, this study primarily focuses on three distinct areas: the recognition and utilization of instructional practices to enhance and support early childhood learning (e.g., peer interaction and teacher-child interaction), the application of child development principles in the design of curriculum content (e.g., learning environments, activities, program structure), and the identification of early learning assessment strategies used to classify, address, and evaluate a child’s learning and development. This study also investigated how these constructs impact leadership decisions and two central questions aided in the exploration of the central phenomenon:

- How does principal knowledge of early childhood learning, pedagogy, and practices (or the lack of) influence leadership decisions?
- In what ways (if any) does this knowledge impact teacher evaluations?

Data Sample

Examination of case study inquiries suggest evidence from multiple cases is often more compelling, producing a more robust study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). To that end, this exploratory, qualitative multiple-site case study included four schools, each with different elementary school configurations - PreK-first grade, PreK-third grade, K-fifth grade, PreK-eighth grade (see Figure 1). All of the schools were located within a 45-mile rural area within one state. Existing literature did not support the need to account for varying geographical locations as this is nation-wide problem, not specific to one region or state (Clarke Brown et al., 2014; IOM & NRC, 2015; Szekely, 2013). Narrowing potential school sites included research of state report cards and school websites which accounted for school student populations, student demographics, and school configurations.

	School A	**School B**	**School C**	**School D**
Configuration:	PreK-8th	K-5th	PreK-1st	PreK-3rd
Student Population:	234 students	436 students	383 students	688 students
Administrations' Teaching Licensure:	Principal - Secondary	Principal - Special Ed	Principal - Special Ed	Principal - Elementary Assistant Principal - Elementary

Teachers' Grade Level and Teaching Licensure:	1st Grade - Elementary	1st Grade – Early Childhood	Kindergarten - Elementary	Kindergarten - Elementary 1st Grade - Early Childhood 2nd grade - Elementary 3rd Grade - Elementary

Figure 1. School Configurations.

The sample selection for the study included a nonrandom, purposeful, and small sample size, to allow for an inductive analysis and included twelve participants – five administrators, five elementary licensed teachers, and two early childhood licensed teachers. Selection criteria included (1) schools of varying student populations based on school report card data, (2) schools located within a rural context, (3) principals who oversaw early elementary grades, and (4) early childhood licensed teachers teaching in the early elementary grades within the school building.

Data Collection

The data collection techniques for the study involved multiple levels. The aim in the design of the data collection for this research study was to analyze and differentiate (if applicable) between participants' beliefs, knowledge, and practices. This not only built trustworthiness, confirmability, and credibility for the research study, but also highlighted any discrepancies between a participant's verbal understanding of concepts and a participant's practical application within a given context.

The study was conducted over a two-month period from mid-March through mid-May in four different schools. Data collection consisted of 70 hours total, approximately 13 hours in the field observing and interviews with participants at each of the four locations. The primary location of the study occurred within the natural environment of the school building, during the course of a school day as real-world settings allow for a more naturalistic inquiry rather than

having variables manipulated (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Data collection techniques included school and classroom observations, teacher and principal questionnaires and interviews, and a video clip simulating a teacher evaluation.

School and classroom observations occurred as an observer-participant at varied times within a given school day, over a three week period. Observations included school offices, hallways, classrooms, specials (e.g., library and music), recess, lunchrooms, school-wide and grade-level assemblies, faculty meetings, and classroom/school celebrations. Participant interviews occurred twice during the process and were asked several open-ended as well as semi-structured questions. Handwritten field notes accumulated during data collection were read within a 48-hour period and elaborated on with additional commentary. Personal thoughts, reflections, and margin notations citing specific examples of early childhood learning, pedagogy, and practices were recorded with a hand-held audio recorder.

To simulate a teacher evaluation, participants watched approximately four minutes of a video clip which did not exemplify best teaching and learning practices for a kindergarten classroom. The lesson is very teacher directed, giving minimal opportunities for children to ask questions or give their input. The teacher is at the front of the group in a teacher's chair, behind a student desk which holds a large model 'volcano' on top. The teacher frequently reprimands the children, telling them to "sit on their bottoms," and eventually one student has a penny taken away. The teacher selects only five children to stir and pour the "secret ingredients" to make the volcano erupt (a mixture of baking soda and vinegar which she never discloses to the children). During the eruption, several children stand up to see the "lava" more closely. However, they are told to sit down immediately. Participants viewed the video clip and then were asked how they would evaluate this teacher.

Credibility and validity of the study occurred in several ways. To test for face validity, a panel of eleven early childhood experts ensured the intent of all questions accurately achieved the intended objectives. Cognitive testing occurred with principals and teachers of similar background to ensure technical terms and jargon were clearly defined and understood. For example, one interview question read, "In designing content curriculum, in what ways (if any) would you expect to see the application of child development principles?" However, it was determined that "child development" was too vague and unclear. As a result, the new question read, "Please explain how curriculum is created within your school," with a more specific follow-up question, "Please explain in what ways, if any, child development is a factor in determining curriculum." These types of adjustments were made prior to the beginning of the research study.

My familiarity with school practices, both as a former teacher and administrator, allowed for a clearer interpretation of school practices, and this background served to build rapport with participants aiding in the extraction of more detailed information than I believe would have otherwise produced. However, my research biases were also accounted for through memos, reflective journaling, and by bracketing personal experiences with the topic. This identification, as well as the discovery of their influence on the emerging data and/or on conclusions was critical to establishing credibility. Additionally, data saturation and an external auditor helped maintain the credibility of the study as well.

Analysis

The analysis for this study included both within and across-case analysis of the four schools. Wolcott (1982) stressed the importance of explicitly looking for specific details when conducting research and analysis. As such, observations of well-delineated constructs occurred

(e.g., looking for specific evidence of early childhood pedagogy), but also an open-mind to undiscovered areas of research, aligning with the conventional strategies of qualitative field research. Systematic steps were taken during data analysis recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) – data reduction (recognition of reoccurring themes through a line by line analysis), data management (different matrixes, cognitive maps, and charts with a color-coded highlighting system) and conclusion drawing and verification (noting consistencies in patterns, explanations, and configuring data in diverse ways with clear operational definitions). If data could not be verified by multiple sources as to its accuracy, the data was not included. Data from different source types also helped to triangulate the data. Finally, the 12 guidelines of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) and the Professional Standards of Educational Leaders (PSEL) offered a framework for the final thematic analysis.

Results and Discussion

Results include both within-case and cross-case analysis. In order to understand the characteristics of a particular site, within-case analysis provided a way to capture essential school details, participant characteristics, and understandings of best practices of teaching and learning for early elementary grades unique to that specific site. In contrast, cross-case analysis provided data from the four schools collectively as a whole, and by grouping commonalities, the results became even more compelling. Two themes emerged from the data: 1) principals' limited understanding of early childhood may influence hiring practices, and 2) principal assessments of teachers may not reflect early childhood pedagogy.

Theme: *Principals' Limited Understanding of Early Childhood May Influence Hiring Practices*

Given participants' limited knowledge, training, and experience in early childhood, it was important to examine school leadership and contexts for their decisions. One area of investigation was principals' hiring practices. To that end, questions were posed to administrators regarding hiring criteria. Although several ideas transpired from the participants, three ideas reoccurred which included the need for grade level movability, differences in early childhood and elementary pre-service training, and perceived differences in abilities dependent on licensure.

All of the school administrators agreed that an early childhood licensure inhibits "movability" among grade levels, a necessity with varying student enrollment and district needs. This was one factor preventing principals from hiring the early childhood certified candidates. Instead, they hired elementary licensed teachers which offered the option to reallocate teachers to different grades should the need arise. As Principal B summarized, "It tied our hands terribly when I had an early childhood teacher. For mobility reasons, I couldn't afford to have a slew of early childhood. So yeah, I'll be honest with you, it did sort of effect who I hired." After examining four different schools and 73 classroom teachers' credentials working in K-third grades, only two teachers were identified as early childhood licensed. One of the two early childhood licensed teachers referred to herself as a "hybrid early childhood-elementary teacher." She explained she went back for her elementary license because "most administrators don't understand early childhood – they think Pre-K."

Given the comments from administrators, this may be an accurate assessment. Four of the five administrators felt training was also a consideration. Principals felt te difference in preservice training among early childhood and elementary teachers varied considerably. .

Principal D stated candidly, “I think there is a little bit of a transitional problem…coming into the real world if you will.” She elaborated further:

> We just don’t have the time to incorporate a lot of play and free choice. We have to make sure the kids get the instruction and are ready to move on to the next. If you’ve been in K-3 that has always been the expectation.

From an administrator’s perspective, early childhood teachers’ preservice training was distinctly different from their elementary counterparts and viewed as potential challenges. As Principal C stated, “They do all this good stuff, but then you have the actual school, and you have their ways.” The “school’s way” was later characterized by Principal C as mandated minutes per each subject area, and content driven curriculum. Principal D felt “we [elementary schools] are just not set-up the same.”

Principal C identified key characteristics of an early childhood teacher, using words such as “project-based,” “having the kids work together,” and creating “centers.” He described the difference in licensure as “an elementary teacher would have the kids sitting at a table. An early childhood teacher wouldn’t even have them sitting!” Principal B also appeared to recognize differences in preservice preparation designated by licensure distinctions, “I’m sure early childhood is a little more trained on those early years. It’s more developmental.” However, it was unclear if she understood the implications of this specified training noted by her hiring practices, “Teacher B was the last one I hired with early childhood [six years prior].”

As the only early childhood licensed teacher in her building, Teacher B corroborated, explaining she felt she was “living in an elementary world.” She further elaborated on how far removed she had become from early childhood philosophy and pedagogy, admitting:

> I hate to say it, but the last five years, I really haven't had that freedom because honestly, I haven't thought much about this since I got hired at School B.

Given the principals' comments and the corroboration from the teachers, it appears that principals did not recognize the critical instructional practices to enhance and support early childhood learning or how child development principles were applied in the design of curriculum.

The perception of teachers' abilities appeared to be dependent on licensure designation. Principal D felt early childhood licensed teachers had difficulty designing evaluations and strong lesson plans. They are used to "checklists and portfolios," she stated. She elaborated further stating, "They struggle with understanding this is the standard, this is what it's asking for, this is how I'm going to evaluate whether the students get there or not, and the data I'm going to collect. It's just a different mindset." Assistant Principal D also reiterated his principal's sentiment using similar verbiage when discussing the testing implications, "Early childhood teachers are behind. They haven't been a part of that world so to speak." Principal D also mentioned the importance of testing as it related to early childhood teachers and preservice training:

> The kids not only have to be able to answer the questions but they have to be able to answer it in the format that they're being asked. So our instruction is gearing them towards the format that they're going to be asked on the test. You have to prepare them. I think that's just the way it is, the way it's always been, we have to make sure they're prepared for that.

Principal C summarized the distinction of the preservice training denoted by teacher licensure, "It's just different philosophies. I don't know how long they can hold onto their early childhood training." Although the identification of early learning assessment strategies used to classify, address, and evaluate a child's learning and development were identified, they were not favored over standardized pencil and paper test.

The results of this study were similar to those from a ten-year old study which indicated few early childhood certified teachers work in the public school settings (Bredekamp & Goffin, 2012; Cook, 2016; Feeney, 2009). While movability within grade levels is certainly a consideration in rural settings, the more surprising finding was principals' strong perceptions and reactions to the different teaching licensure as well as the dismissal of more instructional appropriate techniques offered by early childhood licensed teachers.

Principals collectively felt early childhood teachers were unprepared to teach in the "real world" (i.e., elementary schools) and these teachers' ability to foster growth in all developmental domains appeared to be a negative factor preventing employment. Principals failed to recognize the early childhood characteristics (as expressed by principal participants) are more developmentally aligned with the needs of young children, than the current practices of instruction, curriculum, and assessment in their schools. This finding may indicate a need for stricter regulations for continued professional development, perhaps stipulating the requirement of hours towards specific early childhood areas. Given the results of this study, principals' hiring practices could potentially be impeding student learning as well.

Theme: ***Principal Assessments of Teachers May Not Reflect Early Childhood Pedagogy***

PSEL requires educational leaders to assess and promote instructional practices that are consistent with knowledge of child learning and development. To help deepen the understanding

of participants' knowledge regarding early childhood learning, pedagogy, and practices, each participant viewed a video clip and evaluated it (simulating a teacher evaluation). This particular contextual lens helped to examine what criteria principals use to assess teacher effectiveness.

Data from the interviews and questionnaires indicated all principals believed their own teachers effectively utilized guidance techniques and ranked them accordingly. However, none of the principals could give specific examples or positive guidance techniques that they had observed. Additionally, all of the principals and elementary certified teachers failed to recognize the absence of guidance techniques frequently used by the teacher in the video clip or mention the use her consistent negative consequences (i.e., taking the penny away), while the early childhood licensure participants recognized these issues immediately. Guidance techniques appeared to be an unfamiliar area, although it is regarded as a pivotal component of early childhood pedagogy. The non-early childhood licensure participants also failed to recognize the utilization of instructional practices to enhance and support early childhood learning (i.e., positive teacher and child interactions).

All participants (including teachers) noted the excessive movement of the children in the video clip. As Principal A stated, "they were very antsy the entire time. Seemed like they were having a little bit of trouble focusing and staying seated." None of the principals or elementary teachers connected this movement to the lack of student participation in the activity. However, the early childhood licensed Teacher B noted a potential reason, "I felt like the kids were getting in trouble and acting out because they weren't engaged in the lesson." The failure to equate the lack of student engagement with students' excessive movement was only noted by the early childhood licensed teachers. Other participants did not recognize how the application of child

development principles intertwined in the design of curriculum content either (e.g., learning environments, activities, program structure).

All participants seemed to agree the lesson in the video clip was not a hands-on activity. As Principal B stated, "I liked the hands-on that she did with them, but it wasn't *their* hands-on." Yet none of the principals offered suggestions on how to make it more *student* hands-on. When I asked the principals specifically what they would change about the lesson regarding this aspect, the most common suggestion was to have the teacher demonstrate in small groups or have the children gather around her in a circle to help others see better. Only after much probing did Principal C note the *children* should be participating in the hands-on activity, "Go outside – let them do it," he offered. Principal C also noted the lack of fun for children, "You say we're gonna do something fun, and then you make them sit down and not make any noise. It kinda sucked the fun out of it I think."

In the video clip, the teacher only allowed five of the twenty-five students to pour the "secret" ingredients. Yet none of the principals or elementary licensed participants noted this flaw in the instructional design. Only the early childhood certified teachers noted this unfair practice, recognized the teacher's consistent labeling of the "secret ingredients," and how the teacher never divulged what specifically those ingredients were so the children could learn. The rest of the participants failed to mention any of these three aspects. One early childhood licensed, Teacher D3, explained:

> She never told them what the ingredients were. What do you think we used? Showing them would have been more beneficial. 'Cause it's like I'm the all-knowing teacher. And you're getting information from me and you don't get to know what it is.

Limited understanding about children's developmental capabilities appeared to impact principal perceptions as well. For example, Principal C seemed to minimize children's capabilities, noting this as the reason for so much direct teacher instruction, "Teachers try to get it out of them, but I think it could just be their age [kindergarten]." Principal A felt it was hard to see "first grade students leading the direction of a conversation. I can see that more in the junior high."

The principals' comments made during the video clip and comments about children's developmental capabilities further indicate how early childhood learning, pedagogy, and practices, are still missing in principal preparation training and professional development. Yet, these principals are still responsible for conducting teacher evaluations and supervising early childhood certified teachers. This brings into question principal expertise and qualifications for conducting these evaluations as well as the quality of feedback offered for improvement during post-evaluation teacher conferences.

According to the PSEL, principals are required to "deliver actionable feedback about instruction," (NPBEA, 2015, p. 14) and promote "instructional practice that is consistent with knowledge of child learning and development" (p.12). During the simulated teacher evaluation video clip this did not occur. The teacher in the video clip illustrated several negative developmentally inappropriate strategies. The video clip helped indicate whether participants could *recognize* developmentally inappropriate instructional practices which helped corroborate their answers given during the interview. For example, during the formal interview a participant indicated he believed in guidance techniques, yet after watching the video clip made no mention of the lack of guidance techniques and the negative classroom management practices displayed by the student teacher.

A key element of early childhood pedagogy includes teachers guiding children to learn the appropriate behavior and expectations rather than inflicting a punishment or utilizing external rewards for compliance (i.e., the penny system in the video clip). Early childhood pre-service training includes teaching how to recognize children's individual needs and how to make the necessary instructional adjustments. The constant movement of the children in the video clip indicated a different teaching strategy was required to engage the children – an element other participants failed to recognize. Additionally, while building suspense is often promoted to generate children's interest, the teacher never explained what the specific ingredients were to create the chemical reaction that simulated the volcano eruption. Again, this strategy does not align with early childhood pedagogy, but yet was not recognized as an area of concern from most participants.

Implications and Future Research

In the current climate of high-stakes testing and federal mandates that require improved academic student outcomes, principals have an increased amount of pressure and tremendous responsibility when overseeing a school. The important role principals play in the life of a student's success and development is extremely influential and includes tasks such as creating a welcoming school cultural, a safe learning environment, evaluating effective teaching, and being an instructional leader, to name a few. Given this influence of a principal and the mandates required by state and national standards, it becomes increasingly important that he/she is informed and knowledgeable about the instructional strategies, curriculum choices, and assessment tools that best support the children they oversee.

Although the limitations for this study include a smaller participant pool with early childhood credentialed participants, the study's results warrant further investigation.

Administrators who have pre-service training in early childhood education may alter policies and procedures to align more with developmentally appropriate practices. Because a certified early childhood principal was not included in the participant pool (e.g., one could not be found within the surrounding area), it is unclear whether this limited the scope of the results. Similarly, the study only included two early childhood licensed teachers. It would be interesting to investigate changes in school climate and principal understanding regarding early childhood principles if early childhood licensed teachers were more prominent in the building. This study does highlight the need for more early childhood licensed educators at all levels.

This study also indicates principals have a limited understanding of early childhood pedagogy and are missing specific areas of knowledge regarding what is developmentally appropriate for early elementary students. Because most principals come from a teaching background in middle and high school, there is a gap in knowledge and training regarding early childhood. As a result, elementary school principals often replicate tactics that work in higher grade levels like eliminating play as a curricular role and recess, or requiring children to sit for longer periods of time. As a result, children this age face pressures to increase academic performance which often translates into an overemphasis on mastery of skills, and sometimes excessive practice of already mastered skills (Hyson, 2008). Children often become passive learners when an excessive repetition of material is required. This type of rote memorization does not develop concepts, promote problem-solving, support higher-order thinking skills, have applications to real-world settings, and does not align with best teaching and learning practices (Copple & Bredekamp 2009; IOM & NRC, 2015). More importantly, it is not what is best for children.

Perhaps with a better understanding of early childhood pedagogy, principals would advocate for more process-orientated projects (rather than the completion of products frequently found in schools today). These types of projects are more developmentally appropriate for this age group because they offer children opportunities to gain deeper knowledge about specific topics. When new concepts are introduced, children at this age must have something tangible to reference. For example, when something is real, familiar, and from their everyday lives (e.g., recycling trash in their home verses a land fill), children can make connections easier, and apply their classroom learning to real-life. When curriculum has no meaning, children cannot remember and concepts have to be retaught (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In contrast, authentic, real-world learning increases the chances for later recall (Calder, 2014). Learning experiences that require high student engagement, offer intellectually stimulating curriculum, include positive emotional connections, and are curtailed to students' interests becomes more meaningful and memorable (Hyson, 2008; Myers & Pianta, 2008).

This multiple-site case study has potential implications for both future policies and practices. Policy changes may need to occur at the Higher Education level. For example, it might be benficial for Higher Education Institutions offering educator preservice programs to include early childhood learning, pedagogy, and developmentally appropriate practices - regardless of teaching or administrative discipline. Due to changes in state regulations, the State of Illinois principal preparation programs now include early leaning curricula, internships in the early elementary grade levels, and content on the state exam (Szekely, 2013). These changes could occur in other states as well, as part of initial certification requirements prior to applying for licensure.

Early childhood pedagogy involves developing a child holistically utilizing a variety of different strategies. Learning environments, art integration, incorporation of movement, varying class instruction and materials frequently, utilizing field trips or outside resources, role-playing, community building within the classroom, collaborative ownership of ideas, and guidance techniques highlight a few of the early pedagogy topics. For current practicing educators, an in-depth understanding of these topics listed above could be required as part of their professional development to maintain current licensure status.

The results of this study also indicate that more accountability may be needed. Policy changes at the national and state level does not necessarily equate with changes in practitioner behavior. Given the current high-stakes of teacher evaluations, it becomes imperative evaluations are grounded in theory and current research in best teaching and learning practices for early childhood. This study also indicates that more leadership pedagogical knowledge in early childhood is required – to ensure that principals have an understanding of ways to meet children where they are and help teachers attain those goals. Given the influence of a principal on school climate, student learning and development, role as an instructional leader, and the success of teachers, it may be beneficial to address these deficiencies.

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