MULTIPLE CASE STUDY: DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE BELIEFS AND PRACTICE OF UNITED STATES AND JORDANIAN KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore how 10 kindergarten teachers reflected developmentally appropriate beliefs in practice at urban public schools in the north of Jordan and at kindergarten classrooms in central Alabama. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is a research-based framework for early childhood education that focuses on vital development of the child as a human being and the educative practice that promotes child development as described by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). DAP was first outlined in 1987, and expanded in 1997, to include cultural and contextual influences. DAP was revised again in 2009 (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

The participants in this multiple case study included 10 kindergarten teachers. Five kindergarten teachers from international sites volunteered after being identified as a purposeful group to participate in this study. This multiple case study sought to answer the research central question, how do 10 kindergarten teachers reflect developmentally appropriate beliefs through teaching practice at urban public schools in the north of Jordan and in central Alabama? The central research questions was followed by five research sub-questions.

Data were collected through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and documentary materials. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.
Interview transcripts, observations, and field notes were analyzed to provide a rich, thick description (Geertz, 1973). Data analysis followed the procedures outlined by Stake (2006) and was conducted on two levels, within-cases and across cases. Within-case analysis revealed that while sub-themes varied by case, the themes that were identified from the two cases regarding the explored DAP beliefs and practice by the kindergarten teacher included: (a) beliefs guide practice; (b) enhanced learning and development; (c) ensured success; (d) achieved challenges; and (e) reflected upon obstacles to DAP. These themes were composed into a narrative description that corresponded with the findings to the research questions. Lessons learned from this study may be transferable to other kindergarten teachers interested in improving DAP practice (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Keywords: DAP, beliefs and practice, Jordan, Alabama, multiple case study, kindergarten.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Mariam Rababah and Qassim Rababah, I know they would be proud of me. The only thing that would make this study process more rewarding would be if they could be here to see me finish. This work is also dedicated to my husband Shadi Altaha for believing in me.
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<td>AFU</td>
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<td>ACEI</td>
<td>Association of Childhood Education International</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>DAP</td>
<td>Developmentally Appropriate Practice</td>
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<td>DIP</td>
<td>Developmentally Inappropriate Practice</td>
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<td>Japan’s Bank for International Cooperation</td>
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<td>NANE</td>
<td>National Association Nursery Education</td>
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“Show me and I forget; teach me and I remember; involve me and I learn.”

Benjamin Franklin

Educational practices are most effective when attuned to the way children develop and learn (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2007). The root of interest and concern for young children and how they learn started with Plato. This Athenian philosopher’s notion was that younger children should be educated differently from older children (Spodek, Saracho & Pellegrini, 1998; Wolfe, 2002). Comenius (1592-1670), Locke (1632-1704), and Rousseau (1712-1778) advocated more child-centered and naturalistic approaches to education. Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and Owen (1771-1858) organized infant schools to begin education and care for the youngest children (Spodek et al., 1998; Wolfe, 2002). Additional historical advocates for the youngest of children included: Pestalozzi’s student, Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852), Father of Kindergartens, and then John Dewey and Ella Flagg Young, Caroline Pratt, Maria Montessori, and Patty Smith Hill, the key founder of the National Association Nursery Education (NANE) which now exists as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and many others (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000; Wolfe, 2002).

Currently, early childhood educators are becoming increasingly aware of what and how children learn and are concerned with promoting the physical, social, cognitive, emotional, and moral aspects of development and learning (Kostelnik, Soderman, &
Whiren, 2004). In order to achieve programs that enhance this kind of learning, educators in the National Association for Education Young Children (NAEYC) founded the concept of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In the 1997 revision of their Position Statement, Bredekamp and Copple added references to include diversity, making general statements about social and cultural contexts. In 2007, Bredekamp and Copple expounded more in-depth about the need for teachers to recognize the richness of diversity by being more inclusive of children representing varied cultures, special needs, and ethnicities that young children bring into educative settings.

DAP is related to best practice for Early Childhood Education (ECE). Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is a framework for education (Aldridge, Emfinger, Martin, 2006). A framework provides the big picture and serves as a general guideline proposed by a professional organization or group that describes the most basic way in which instruction should be delivered (Thomas, 2004). DAP focuses on the child as a developing human being and as a lifelong learner (child-centered). The framework helps early childhood educators recognize the child as an active participant in the learning process; a participant who constructs meaning and knowledge through interaction with others, including families, teachers, materials and the environment.

**Kindergarten in the United States**

The term “kindergarten” was first founded by Friedrich Froebel. Kindergarten means a child’s garden or garden of children. Froebel established the first kindergarten in 1837 in Blankenburg, in Thuringia in Germany (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000; Spodek et
al., 1998; Walfe, 2002). Froebel developed special kindergarten materials, activities and games, called “gifts”, and “mother plays”, and wrote books explaining his methods of working with children in detail (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000). The kindergarten idea spread to other European countries, North America, the Middle East, Asia, and Australia.

In the United States, German immigrants brought kindergartens in the 1850s. Specifically, the first kindergarten was established by Margarethe Schurz in 1856 in her home in Watertown, Wisconsin. Schurz was a student of Froebel (Beatty, 2000; Dombkowski, 2001; Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000; Osborn, 1991; Spodek et al., 1998), and hers was a private, German-speaking kindergarten. However, the first English-speaking kindergarten was established by Elizabeth Peabody in Boston in 1860. Peabody also founded a kindergarten association, the American Froebel Union (AFU) and promoted kindergarten teaching as a vocation for American women (Spodek, et al., 1998). The National Education Association began a kindergarten department in 1874, and the International Kindergarten Union (IKU) was founded in 1892. The IKU was the precursor to the Association of Childhood Education International (ACEI).

**Progressive kindergarten education.** In 1873, Susan Blow (mother of kindergarten) adapted the first American public kindergarten in the St. Louis public school system (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000; Spodek et al., 1998). Blow was a well-known kindergarten trainer and leader of the Froebelian faction that insisted on the original German kindergarten methods. In 1879, a public kindergarten for African American children was founded in St. Louis. Patty Smith Hill met with Mary Church Terrell in St. Louis to discuss Froebelian kindergartens, and thus began public kindergartens under the
National Association Colored Women (NACW) and the National Association Colored Women’s Clubs) NACWC (Beatty, 2000).

Between 1880s and 1890s most kindergartens in the major cities of the United States were private and served children from middle- and upper- class. In the same period, charity or free kindergartens were started to serve the children of the poor and immigrants (Spodek et al., 1998). These types of kindergartens were started in New York and Boston and then spread to Chicago and other parts of the Midwest and west. Many pioneering psychologists began modernizing Froebel’s German kindergarten methods to fit the needs of American children and the principles of the emerging science of developmental psychology. For example, John Dewey included a kindergarten class at his laboratory school at the University of Chicago in the 1890s in which Ella Flagg Young was a major contributor. Kindergarten was the first program at Hull House, Jane Adams’s famous settlement house in Chicago (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000; Spodek et al., 1998; Wolfe, 2002). Beginning in the late 1880s, free kindergartens were incorporated into the public schools in major American cities. By 1912, about 350,000 children, approximately 9% of those of kindergarten age were enrolled in public kindergartens, and the number of public kindergartens continued to grow slowly (U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, 1914).

Kindergarten in Alabama. The requirements for kindergarten are different from state to state. In Alabama, for example, kindergartens are part of the K-12 educational system, considered to be the first year of formal education, and of the duration of one academic year for 5 to 6 year old children. While kindergarten attendance is compulsory
in some states, it is not in Alabama. However, it is offered for free in elementary public schools in Alabama (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Furthermore, a child may begin kindergarten in Alabama in the fall term only if the child is age 5 before or by September, 1st.

**Kindergarten in Jordan**

Jordan is a country located in the heart of the Middle East. It gained its independence in 1946, after 25 years of British mandate. Before that, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was known as Transjordan. The total population is approximately 6 million with 35% of the population under the age of 14 (Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 2010). With very few natural resources, this high percentage of young citizens creates many challenges to the Jordanian government in achieving the fundamental demands of this part of the population. Education is one of the most important sectors of concern and attention for the Jordanian government. Jordan is considered a pioneer in its focus to promote preschool (kindergarten) in the Middle East. This focus is indicated by enrollment rates in preschool (Kindergarten 1 KG1 for 4 years children, Kindergarten 2 KG2 for five years children which increased from 28% to 51% between 1990-2008 (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 2009).

In 1994, a Department of Kindergartens was established in the Ministry of Education in Jordan. The Ministry of Education then established kindergartens in public schools in 1999-2000 as an implementation of the Education Act No. 3 of 1994. Specifically, 15 Kindergarten classes for KG2 students were established and integrated into the public school system in 1999-2000 (Four, Hajjar, Bibi, Chehab, & Zaazaa, 2006;
Ministry of Education (MoE), 2011; Roggemann, & Shukri, 2010). These 15 classes represented 375 boys and girls and 15 kindergarten teachers. On average, there are 25 students in each kindergarten class. The number of public kindergartens expanded in the academic year 2009-2010 to include 833 kindergarten classrooms which are attended by more than 16,000 young boys and girls. The Ministry established a phased plan and was expected to introduce about 40 new kindergarten classes for the next academic year 2010-2011 (MoE, 2011). Before this government initiative began in 1994, kindergartens in Jordan were operated by the private sector (MoE, 2011).

Early Childhood Education in Jordan was specifically addressed in 1999 when Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah commissioned a team of Jordanian professionals, representing different areas of expertise in dealing with young children, to develop a National Plan for Early Childhood Development (ECD) and the national strategy for children and families for the period of 2004–2013 (National Team for Early Childhood Development, 2000; UNICEF, 2009). The plan emphasized a commitment to promote the protection of the rights of each child and increase public awareness of childhood issues (Roggemann & Shukri, 2010). This plan took into account the basic principles of children’s rights and justice for those in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2009).

**Sponsorship.** According to Roggemann and Shukri (2010), the vast majority of kindergartens in Jordan are run by private, domestic, and religious organizations, rather than by the government. The private kindergartens have limited government regulations. Specifically, about 77% of all children attending kindergarten are enrolled in private
kindergartens, 5% are enrolled in public kindergartens, and 18% in the non-government organizations (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO, 2006). Private kindergartens and those sponsored by non-governmental organizations are controlled to a lesser extent than public kindergartens (UNICEF, 2009).

Educational reform in Jordan was funded by the Jordanian government and by international organizations (UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Bank). Other bilateral intergovernmental organizations assisted as well including: Japan’s Bank for International Cooperation [JBIC] and U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID]), and international nongovernmental organizations such as the Academy for Educational Development and the American Institutes for Research (Roggemann & Shukri, 2010). Thus, international organizations supported the Jordanian Ministry of Education initiatives to promote active-learning and teaching pedagogies in ECE. For example, the USAID and World Bank funded a “Support Project” for the Government’s “Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy” (ERfKE) which included ECE as one of the four major components of the program (Kaga, 2007).

The role of government and Ministry of Education (MoE). Currently, the educational system in Jordan is highly centralized, with the MoE being represented by regional directorates of education. These directorates are the intermediate authority between the Ministry and the schools. According to Four et al. (2006), the role of the Ministry of Education included the following:
- Sets the criteria for opening day care centers, which serve children (0-4) years old. However, nursery schools serving children ages 0-4 are under the Ministry of Social Development (Kaga, 2007).

- Maintains a special unit for early childhood education that provides licensing, teacher training, curriculum improvement, supervision of public and private kindergartens, and provision of kindergartens in rural and disadvantaged areas Four et al. (2006).

**Teacher training and qualification.** The current number of kindergarten teachers in Jordan is approximately 5,417 teachers. Of this total, 17.5% hold bachelor’s degrees; 80% have a two year college degree; and approximately 3% have a high school certificate (UNISCO, 2006). However, all teachers employed by Ministry of Education (MoE) in public kindergarten hold bachelor’s degree. Many of the kindergarten supervisors have master’s degrees. Moreover, the educational level of caregivers working in nursery schools and day-care centers varies: 44.7% of caregivers hold a university or college degree; 32.3% have a high school certificate; and 23% have lower qualifications (UNISCO, 2006). The Ministry of Education provides two types of training. These include the University of Wisconsin training program (160 hours) and the National Curriculum training program (160 hours) (UNISCO, 2006).

**Curriculum.** Public kindergartens have adopted the same curriculum used in Jordan’s public sector which is an integrated curriculum, “the National Interactive Curriculum.” The Interactive National Curriculum for kindergarten was developed by an
interactive national specialist team in early childhood under the supervision of National Committee for the Development of Pre-school Education in the MoE and the National Council for Family Affaire NAFA (Roggemann & Shukri, 2010). The National Curriculum for kindergarten consists of theoretical and practical activities written in Arabic for teaching Arabic language, activities written in English, Mathematics activities in Arabic, and in English, and miscellaneous activities in Arabic language (Ministry of Education, 2011). However, each private kindergarten has considered different subject oriented curricula, which in many cases are purchased from different commercial bookstores.

Cost. The Jordanian government spent approximately $7,058 in the year 2004 on day care centers. It also contributed $42,325 a year to ECE services. The government receives additional funding for its programs from UNICEF and USAID and other international organizations. The cost for the ECCE services is often paid for by parents’ income. Parents or families pay between $21 to more than $212 per month for private nursery school and private kindergartens. But the public kindergartens which serve children at age 5 are completely free.

Challenges. The following are some challenges that the kindergarten sector has in Jordan:

• Limited access to early childhood education: ECE in Jordan has not received the necessary attention and has been too urban-center focused (Roggemann & Shukri, 2010). Only 28% of Jordanian children benefit from kindergarten
services, but these services are provided mainly through the private or voluntary sectors. Children who attend private programs are usually from middle and upper income families (Four et al., 2006);

- The Education Law states that the caregivers in kindergartens should hold a university degree in an appropriate field, but a great number of caregivers do not have a university degree. This area is not monitored in a way that ensures the protection and education of young children;
- The licensing content and application mechanisms and criteria for kindergartens are weak;
- Many curricula presented by the private sector are weak;
- Jordan has few ECE experts. (Roggemann & Shukri, 2010);
- Childcare services for young children under age 4 continue to be limited;
- There is a shortage of the number of educational supervisors (MoE, 2011).

In conclusion, based on the UNICEF reports (2009), all countries have been developing a common vision of the priorities of the developing new world for young children; to make our world a world beneficial all for children through a global movement. With regards to a child's education, the report presents Jordan as one of eight Middle Eastern countries close to achieving the goal of universal primary education.

**Statement of the Problem**

Despite the attention, legislation, and concern of the Jordanian government for developing the most effective and developmentally appropriate curriculum for young Jordanian children (Roggemann & Shukri, 2010), research to inform best practice or
DAP for its young children is still limited. Most specifically, for Jordanian kindergarten children, the research on DAP is inadequate (Abu-Jaber, Al-Shawareb, & Gheith, 2010). According to researchers, there are just two research studies conducted in Jordan (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010; Haroun & Weshah, 2009). In general, there are debates about how to implement DAP effectively and apply its principles in the Jordanian kindergarten classroom (Hegd & Cassidy, 2009). Therefore, understanding how Jordanian kindergarten teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs are represented by their teaching practice will help inform the planning process and contribute to the most effective and optimal learning developmental environments for young Jordanian children.

Previous inquiry into kindergarten teachers’ perspectives on DAP conveyed that, in spite of kindergarten teachers tendencies to state that they believe in the principles of developmentally appropriate practice in general (Haroun & Weshah, 2009; Kim, Kim, & Maslak, 2005), many of kindergarten teachers still struggle between beliefs and enacting beliefs in practice in the classroom (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010; Haroun & Weshah, 2009; Hegd & Cassidy, 2009; Lee &Tseng, 2008; & Liu, 2007). Moreover, while teachers in Taiwan, for example, reported higher beliefs about DAP than U.S. teachers, U.S. teachers reported higher DAP implementation than Taiwanese teachers (Liu, 2007).

Further studies using observations of teachers’ practices of DAP in early childhood programs have been recommended to enrich the previous quantitative findings in Jordan and the U.S. (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010; Haroun & Weshah, 2009; Liu, 2007; Szente, Hoot, & Ernest, 2002). Thus, a need exists to compare how the kindergarten teachers in Jordan and in Alabama indicate and enact DAP beliefs in classroom teaching practice. Understanding how the beliefs and practices of kindergarten teachers coincide
may be transferable to kindergarten teachers interested in planning DAP principles to promote optimal child development and sound and effective learning activities. Moreover, the results may help policy and decision-makers, principals, and kindergarten teachers to plan effective and valuable pre-service and in-service teacher education programs and professional development opportunities.

**Statement of the Purpose**

The purpose of this multiple case study is to explore how 10 kindergarten teachers reflect and exhibit developmentally appropriate beliefs into practice in urban public schools in the north of Jordan and in kindergartens in central Alabama. DAP is defined as a framework for early childhood education that focuses on the child. The child is the central focus and is envisioned as a developing human being (child-centered). Developmentally appropriate practices are intended to maximize all domains of child development, emotional, social, cognitive, physical, and moral as defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

**Questions of the Study**

The following research central question guided the study:

How do 10 kindergarten teachers describe beliefs and reflect and implement developmentally appropriate teaching practices in urban public schools in the north of Jordan and central Alabama?

The following research sub-questions guided this study:
1. What are the kindergarten teachers’ beliefs that relate to DAP in urban areas in north of Jordan and central Alabama?

2. How do kindergarten teachers describe the ways in which they create a caring community of learning?

3. How do kindergarten teachers describe how they work to enhance development and learning?

4. What are the challenges that kindergarten teachers describe that they face in applying developmentally appropriate beliefs in practice?

5. What do kindergarten teachers describe as factors that encourage them to put developmentally appropriate beliefs into practice?

**Importance of the Study**

This study was important because there were no empirical qualitative studies found which directly addressed how kindergarten teachers described, implemented, and reflected beliefs into developmentally appropriate teaching practice in Jordan and Alabama. The results of the study provided useful data and implications that may help in planning kindergartens’ learning studies and activities, as well as designing appropriate professional development and preparation programs for kindergarten teachers. Moreover, the results may help kindergarten decision-makers and principals become more intentional when preparing pre- and in-service kindergarten teachers and developing teacher professional development to improve the implementation of DAP. Furthermore, this study may provide examples of effective DAP practices and implementation.
Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

In this qualitative study, the researcher assumed: (a) the participants were willing to participate in this research, (b) the translated interview questions from English to Arabic by the researcher were acceptable and equivalent to the questions as they were posed in English, (c) the researcher’s interviews and observations were accurate representations and reflections of the participants’ experiences and beliefs, (d) teachers were able to understand and honestly answer the interview questions, and (e) the participants had prior knowledge and professional experience about developmentally appropriate practice.

Since the value of qualitative research lies in the particular descriptions and themes developed in a context of specific sites, generalizations from these findings to other individuals, sites, or places outside of those under the study cannot be made. There is no generalizing in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, information derived from the findings in the study might be transferable to other similar thinking kindergarten teachers or in settings that have the same type of philosophical and ontological beliefs. Moreover, the videotaped observations gave the researcher the opportunity to repeatedly watch teachers’ implementation of practice, which offered rich opportunities to analyze teachers enacting practice in the classroom. An assumption was made that observation of teachers in their contexts, without the use of videotaping, might reveal different teaching practice. This study was limited to five public schools that have kindergarten classes in Jordan and to three schools with five kindergarten teachers in central Alabama.
Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provided an introduction of the study, discussed the history of kindergarten in the U.S. and in Jordan, stated the problem and the purpose of the study presented the research questions, outlined the significance of the study, and established assumptions and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of previous research and related studies in the area of Developmentally Appropriate practice (DAP). In Chapter 3, a discussion of the design of the study will be presented. This chapter describes the participants and the sites of the study in detail followed by a discussion of the data collection and process of analysis. Verification procedures, ethical considerations, and the role of the researcher conclude the chapter. Chapter 4 presents the findings about the participants and the sites, and the main identified themes and subthemes. In Chapter 5, an in-depth discussion of the main findings is presented and the questions of the study are resolved. The findings of this study mirror the research reviewed, gaps in the literature, and identified conflicts. Implications of the study and recommendations for further research as well as insights conclude the study.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore how kindergarten teachers describe, enact, and reflect DAP stated beliefs in teaching practice in north of Jordan and in central Alabama. The kindergarten movement in the U.S. and in Jordan was discussed. The statement of the problem, statement of the purpose, and central and sub-research questions were presented. The significance of the research, assumptions and limitations, and organization of the study were included.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, bodies of literature about four major areas evident in reviewing the literature on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) are summarized. The four areas include the following: (a) a discussion of the history of DAP and the theories related to Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), (b) the effectiveness of DAP, (c) DAP beliefs and practices, and (d) balance of DAP. This review of literature revealed a need for further study regarding DAP, particularly how kindergarten teachers in Alabama and Jordan reflect and exhibit DAP beliefs in kindergarten teaching practice.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). DAP is described as a framework for education that focuses on the child from birth to age 8 as a developing human being and life-long learner (child-centered) (Aldridge et al., 2006; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). According to Copple and Bredekamp (2009), the concept of developmentally appropriate practice was not new, having been used by developmental psychologists for more than a century. Furthermore, the historical roots of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) date back to the early 1900s when the International Kindergarten Union (IKU) appointed 19 experts to determine how children developmentally learn and how to teach young kindergarten children to meet their developmental needs. As a result, three reports were identified. One report advocated
highly structured, teacher-directed instruction. The second report advocated play-based, and child-initiated practice. The third report was a compromise of the other two reports (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007).

According to Aldridge and Goldman (2007) and Kostelnik et al. (2004), the DAP position statement was developed in 1986 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in response to the trend of pushing academic learning further and further down to preschool level. DAP guidelines were written “to provide guidance to program personnel seeking accreditation by NAEYC’s National Academy of Early Childhood Program; the accreditation criteria call for developmentally appropriate activities, materials, and expectations” (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. v). The original 1987 position statement included both age and individually appropriate dimensions (Bredekamp, 1987) and addressed the needs of young children from birth to age 8.

In 1997, the guidelines were revised to emphasize the education of children based on three types of knowledge (Branscombe, Castle, Dorsey, Surbeck, & Taylor, 2000; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997):

1. Knowledge of child development and learning. Knowledge of age-related human characteristics that allows a general prediction within an age range about what materials, activities, instruction and experience will be safe, healthy, achievable and also challenging to children. Additionally, teachers of young children have to take into consideration the changes that occur in all domains of development; physical, emotional, social, language, moral, and cognitive.

2. Knowledge of the strength and need of each individual child in the group;
Knowledge that is related to individual differences and the fact that each child is
unique thus ensuring that learning experiences and activities are built according to interest and ability of each child.

3. Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for all children and families.

Thus, the DAP statement position of 1997 was expanded to include age and individual appropriateness as well as ethnic and cultural appropriateness. Furthermore, in order to recognize the importance of the knowledge of all cultural and ethnic groups within social contexts in which children live, learn, and grow, the NAEYC continues to revise DAP position statements (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

In 2009, the NAEYC position statement on DAP was revisited. The NAEYC position statement focused on the most effective practices to promote children’s learning and development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). As a result, the NAEYC DAP statement position of 2009 was a response to build new knowledge to guide teaching practices for the youngest learners in rapidly changing contexts in which early childhood programs operate. These contexts included the growing role of public schools and the increasing focus on narrowing the achievement gap in lower socio-economic contexts, especially in ethnically diverse settings. Children living in poverty are more likely to become the elementary students who are negatively affected by the achievement gap, thus the focus on equity with pre-K and kindergarten children in lower socio-economic settings (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Furthermore, in 2005 NAEYC revised its Early Childhood Program Standards that identified the key components of quality programs and continued
the emphasis on educational practices that reflect knowledge of development in the revised documents (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

In the 2009 position statement, “excellent and equity” was placed at the center of the argument. DAP guidelines described the kinds of decisions that effective teachers make by enacting DAP with young children in their classrooms. Furthermore, the intention to expand by including the diverse social and cultural contexts was considered in this revision. In the current guidelines, instead of using the terms Developmentally Appropriate Practice /Developmentally Inappropriate Practice (DAP/DIP), NAEYC replaced it with DAP/ in contrast (Copple & Bredekamp, 1997; 2009). The belief behind the change was that it is harmful to label the opposite of DAP examples as incorrect or wrong because “as differences in culture can cause people to view the same practice differently” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. xi). Consequently, the current DAP guidelines (2009) are intended to draw attention to practices that require careful consideration. Teachers of young children who enact DAP respect each child’s social and cultural context. They know each child as an individual. DAP teachers respectfully utilize the richness of each child’s diversity to promote optimal development in each domain, consider the child’s interests and learn from each of them. Moreover, in the current NAEYC statement, practices for kindergarten are a separate statement for the first time. In the previous position, kindergarten was merely the last year of pre-school or the first year of elementary school (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

According to Copple and Bredekamp (2009), the DAP definition has four components that: (a) meet children where they are and enable them to reach goals that are both challenging and achievable; (b) reflect the practices that are age appropriate,
individually appropriate, and that are appropriate and respectful for the culture and context; (c) ensure that experiences and goals are challenging enough to promote children’s interest and progress, and (d) build on the knowledge and research of how children learn and develop. Moreover, DAP requires teachers to make intentional decisions in the classroom to promote children’s development and learning by enacting practices that: (a) create a caring community of learners; (b) teach to enhance development and learning; (c) plan curriculum to achieve important goals; (d) assess children’s development and learning; (e) and establish reciprocal relationships with families (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

The framework of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is derived from what early childhood educators knew from research and experience about how children learn and develop (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Specifically, principles of DAP are based on several theories that view intellectual development from the constructivist, interactive perspectives of Piaget and Vygotsky (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), and Bronfenbrenner (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Goldstein, 2008).

A caring community, one area of DAP, was addressed by Nowak-Fabrykowski (2010). Nowak-Fabrykowski investigated the techniques that kindergarten teachers utilized in order to create caring community. The purpose of this study was to describe how kindergarten teachers taught caring in their classroom. In order to collect the data, 200 questionnaires were sent to kindergarten teachers in Cleveland (Ohio) and Buffalo (New York). The questionnaires consisted of four open-ended questions. However, only nine questionnaires from the first city and eight questionnaires from the second city were returned to the researcher. Thus, qualitative analysis was conducted in order to achieve
the purpose of the research study. As a result, three themes were identified; “ways
teachers show that they care; ways children show that they care; and the programs and
books they use in teaching caring” (Nowak-Fabrykowski, 2010, p. 445). Moreover, each
theme was supported with some examples from teachers’ own experiences while they
developed caring dispositions.

The Effectiveness of DAP

The effectiveness of DAP has interested many researchers (Marcon, 1993;
Sherman & Mueller, 1996; Van Horn, Karlin, Ramey, Aldridge, & Snyder, 2005).
Previous researchers revealed positive effects of applying DAP for enhancing child
cognitive, social, and language, (Dunn, Beach, & Kontos, 1994) motor, and emotional
development and achievement levels (Marcon, 1993; Sherman & Mueller, 1996). Marcon
(1993) found that children who learn in DAP programs have higher GPAs in science and
social studies than children who learn in traditional academic programs. Further,
Sherman and Mueller (1996) found greater math achievement and increased creativity of
children who were educated in DAP classrooms. Sherman and Mueller also noted higher
achievement for children in DAP classrooms than for those who were educated in
classrooms with inappropriate practices. Moreover, Huffman and Speer (2000)
established that DAP in the classroom has a positive effect in enhancing children’s
reading skills and applied knowledge. In contrast, children in teacher-directed or
Developmentally Inappropriate Practice (DIP) classrooms exhibited more stress (Hart et
al., 1998; Ruckman, Burts, & Pierce, 1999), aggression, and nervousness (Hart et al.,
1998). According to Haroun and Weshah (2009), DAP programs are considered one of
the most effective programs for enhancing children’s learning and development, and these programs also have high accreditation levels. However, other researchers exhibited mixed results regarding the effect of DAP on children’s learning and development (Huffman & Speer, 2000; Van Horn et al., 2005).

Van Horn et al. (2005) conducted one of the studies that reported mixed results for DAP. For this study, the researchers investigated the effect of DAP on children’s development by reviewing 17 previous quantitative, empirical research studies that examined the effectiveness of DAP comparing with DIP. The authors discussed the findings and those effects in light of the methods and statistical analyses that were used in the reviewed research in order to answer the research question, “does DAP have the expected positive effects on children’s development?” (p. 328). Van Horn et al. evaluated and divided the previous studies into two groups. The first group investigated the effect of DAP on cognitive and academic outcomes, and the second group examined the effect of DAP on psychosocial outcomes. The focus of this assessment of the previous research was on the design implemented, outcomes measured, and effects reported. A mix of positive, neutral, and negative effects of DAPs on children’s academic and cognitive outcomes was revealed. However, regarding the psychosocial outcomes, a positive effect of DAP on children was noted. Van Horn et al. (2005) commented that the previous researchers’ measurement of the effect of DAP on children’s academic and cognitive outcomes was by using teacher-reported grades as outcomes and was considered as biased by the researcher. In order to evaluate the potential effect of DAP, Monte Carlo simulations were conducted for the studies that reported positive or negative results of DAP. The major finding of the simulation was that few of the reviewed studies “had
sufficient power to detect effect of the size that they reported” (Van Horn et al., 2005, p. 346).

**DAP Beliefs and Practices**

Numerous researchers have investigated teachers’ DAP beliefs and practices (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010; Haroun & Weshah, 2009; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Kim et al., 2005; Liu, 2007; McMullen, Elicker, Wang, Erdiller, Lee, Lin, & Sun, 2005; McMullen, Elicker, & Goetze, 2006; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Van Horn et al., 2005) and parents’ DAP beliefs (Ernest, 2001; Szente et al., 2002). However, three strands related to DAP beliefs and practices were revealed as a result of this current literature review: (a) factors that shape DAP beliefs and practice; (b) DAP beliefs of parents and teachers; and (c) DAP beliefs and practice in different cultures.

**Factors shaping beliefs and practice.** What teachers believe is not always consistent with what they practice in the classroom (Lee & Tseng, 2008; McMullen, 1999; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). According to Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006), external factors such as accountability, high stakes testing, parental pressure, parental involvement, financial resources and administrative policies shape teachers’ beliefs and practice in the classroom. Parker and Neuharth- Pritchett (2006) examined kindergarten teachers’ beliefs regarding instructional practice and the forces that shaped their practice and beliefs. Thirty-four kindergarten teachers from seven schools in a metropolitan area were interviewed in order to achieve the research study goal. The interviews were transcribed and prepared for analysis. Triangulation by using two
researchers was conducted in order to verify the credibility of the findings. The researchers discovered that teachers classified themselves in one of three groups according to their beliefs and instructional practice. Nine teachers considered themselves to be teacher-directed. Nine teachers considered themselves to be child-centered, and 16 teachers considered themselves to be both child-centered and teacher-directed. Four external factors were also identified that affected teachers’ beliefs and practices: (a) the shift to a more academic kindergarten, (b) the pressure from teacher’s peers and child’s parent, (c) the perceptions of teachers about the teacher-directed instructional approach, and (d) the perceptions of teachers about the child-centered instructional approach. Furthermore, teachers in the child-centered group indicated that they needed additional time in order to create activities, had more pressures, and had more control over the instructional decisions.

Beliefs about classroom practice and teachers’ educational level have also been investigated by various researchers (Han & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2010; Haroun & Weshah 2009). Haroun and Weshah (2009) examined Jordanian kindergarten teachers’ DAP beliefs. The researchers found that there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores of kindergarten teachers’ beliefs regarding DAP that could be attributed to higher educational qualifications.

In 2010, Han and Neuharth-Pritchett examined the relationship between teachers’ developmentally appropriate and developmentally inappropriate beliefs and teachers’ educational levels. The researchers investigated the beliefs and differences in belief between the lead teachers and assistant teachers in public pre-kindergarten classrooms. In order to achieve the research purpose, Han and Neuharth-Pritchett (2010) examined the
self-reported teachers’ beliefs of 35 lead teachers and 27 assistant teachers by using a Teacher Attitude Inventory measure (French & Blazina, 1992). Twenty-six items were extracted from a number of known early childhood education belief measures. The researchers analyzed the data using SPSS software to conduct an analysis of variance (ANOVA). The primary findings indicated statistically significant differences between the lead teachers and assistant teachers regarding their beliefs about developmentally appropriate and inappropriate practices. Specifically, the researchers determined that lead teachers had stronger beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices than assistant teachers. Conversely, teacher assistants had strong beliefs regarding developmentally inappropriate practices. Findings also revealed that lead teachers and teacher assistants had a general tendency to endorse developmentally appropriate practices. Thus, a link between teachers’ educational levels and their beliefs regarding DAP was revealed. Han and Neuharth-Pritchett (2010) suggested that teachers’ educational levels are not sufficient for understanding teachers’ beliefs and practices in the classroom. The authors recommended further research to investigate the difference in DAP beliefs among teachers from global ethnicities and cultures.

Zeng and Zeng (2005) examined the relationships between developmentally and culturally inappropriate beliefs and practices and two other variables. The variables included teacher and administrator qualifications that contain teacher and administrator background information “including teaching experiences, educational background, and their specialized training and certifications” (p. 710). Three thousand and forty-seven kindergarten teachers and 866 administrators were surveyed by the National Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) in United States. Data were analyzed using SPSS
software, and descriptive statistics were used to describe the characteristics of the participants. Correlation analysis and standard error of estimates were calculated in order to understand the relationship between beliefs and developmentally and culturally inappropriate practices and teachers’ and administrators’ educational backgrounds. Data analysis showed the following: (a) approximately 77% of kindergarten teachers believe that it is important for children to follow directions, sit and pay attention in the class; (b) approximately 34% of the kindergarten teachers agree that it is important for “preschool children to receive formal reading and math instruction” (p. 711); (c) more than half of the participants reported that children spent more than two hours doing teacher-directed activities; and (d) more than half of the kindergarten teachers believed in the importance of using standardized testing for admitting or placing children in school. Although Zeng and Zeng (2005) found no significant relationship between kindergarten teachers’ and administrators’ educational background and their inappropriate beliefs and practice, the authors advocated the importance of having a good educational certificate and teaching experience in early childhood in order to have a good quality program.

West (2001) investigated the role of principals in the practice of DAP for teaching young children. The purposes of this study were to explore the implementation of DAP in grade K-3 in four schools and discuss the influence of principals on the implementation of DAP. The participants in this study were four principals who attended an early childhood training program for four years. The researcher conducted a multiple case study in order to find out role the principal plays in teachers’ implementation of DAP. Classroom observations, structured interviews, and photographs were used in order to collect appropriate data. The major findings of this study were as follows: (a) four
schools applied DAP to a moderate extent; (b) kindergarten used DAP more than the other grade level classes; and (c) there were direct relationships between the principals’ behavior and DAP beliefs and teachers’ use of DAP in teaching young children. According to West (2001), principals play a vital role and influence the use and practice of DAP by teachers in the classroom.

According to Zambo (2007), it is important to childcare workers to understand information about the development of the brain in order to help them create enriched environments. Zambo (2007) investigated what childcare workers know about brain development and DAP and where they received their information. Fifty-nine childcare workers from three different centers in Arizona were surveyed in order to collect the appropriate data. The researcher ensured the validity and reliability of the survey. The researcher utilized descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA in order to analyze the data. The researcher documented that childcare workers prefer to get information about brain development and DAP from workshops. Forty-four percent of participants preferred coursework to learn important information about the brain and DAP. Childcare workers were found to have less information about the classroom environment and learning and more information about the importance of interacting with children. One additional finding was that childcare workers tend to get their information from each other and from lead teachers (Zambo, 2007).

To address the question of characteristics of teachers who believe and practice DAP, McMullen (1999) investigated DAP beliefs and practices and the factors that mediate beliefs and practices. The central research question for this investigation was: What are the beliefs and characteristics of teachers who engage in best practice in early
childhood education? Participants in this study included 20 early childhood teachers who worked with children from age 3 years to the 3rd grade. Nine were preschool teachers, and 11 were primary teachers. In order to collect appropriate data, the researcher utilized a questionnaire and observations as measurement instruments that had acceptable reliability and validity. Regression analyses, T-tests, and correlation analyses were conducted in order to analyze the data. The results of this study revealed the following: (a) teachers’ beliefs were the first predictor of practices; (b) significant differences were found between pre-school and primary teachers’ DAP beliefs, preschool teachers scored higher in beliefs and practice compared to primary teachers; (c) and (d) positive relationships between internal locus of control orientation and high personal teaching efficacy and high DAP scores existed (McMullen, 1999).

Parents’ and teachers’ DAP beliefs. Unequivocally, family and parents play a crucial role in promoting children’s learning and development. According to the experts, it is important for teachers and families to work together in order to support children’s learning and development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Ernest, 2001; Szente et al., 2002). Ernest (2001) investigated parents’ and teachers’ DAP and DIP subjective beliefs. The purposes of this study were to compare and contrast teachers’ and parents’ DAP and DIP beliefs, and to explore the relationship between teachers’ and families’ demographic information and their DAP and DIP beliefs. The researcher conducted Q methodology as a mixed methods measure in order to achieve the purpose of the study. The researcher asked 15 parents and 15 teachers from three Head Start centers in the northeast United States to complete the Q. Sort. Specifically, participants were asked to rank the Q. Sort of
60 DAP and DIP items that were developed by the researcher based on DAP categories of Bredekamp and Copple (1997). Descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted in order to analyze the collected data. Ernest found parents and teachers shared viewpoints concerning the 60 DAP and DIP items. In other words, there were more similarities between parents and teachers than there were differences. Ernest also identified three themes and highlighted items that were ranked by parents and teachers as most appropriate, most inappropriate, and neutral. The identified themes were: (a) independent learners, (b) communication, and (c) diversity. For example, parents and teachers agreed that it is appropriate for teachers to select activities based on individual differences and classroom diversity; and it is inappropriate for teachers to limit children’s play and for families to be excluded from participating in the design of activities.

Using the same procedures as Ernest, Szente et al. (2002) investigated parents’ and teachers’ views of DAP in Hungary. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to explore 14 parents’ and 14 teachers’ beliefs that related to the construction of DAP in pre-school and first grade. Thus, three research questions guided the study in order to find out: (a) differences between Hungarian teachers’ and parents’ DAP and DIP beliefs for pre-school and first grade and (b) viewpoints shared between parents and teachers regarding the most DAP and the most DIP. The researchers conducted Q methodology with 28 participants and follow-up interviews with six participants in order to collect, analyze, and interpret appropriate data. Szente et al. (2002) used the Q sample of Ernest (1999) that consisted of 60 DAP and DIP items based on 1997 NAEYC guidelines to ensure validity. The major findings of this study included three main beliefs sets: (a) focusing on the academic–oriented practice, (b) appreciating and respecting the diversity
in schools and families, (c) and focusing on children as individuals need in teaching. Moreover, parents and teachers shared a range of similarities and differences within each belief set. Hence, Szente et al., (2002) recommended the importance of discussing school and teacher expectations with families at the beginning of the year.

**DAP in different cultures.** While Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is a western term, specifically, an American term because the NAEYC is in the U.S., investigations of DAP beliefs and practices in other cultures have been a concern for multiple researchers (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010; Haroun & Weshah, 2009; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; McMullen et al., 2005). Hegde and Cassidy (2009) investigated kindergarten teachers’ perspectives of DAP in Mumbai (India). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and explain teachers’ interpretation of DAP and its applicability to the Indian culture. Interviews of 12 kindergarten teachers who worked in four zones of Mumbai were audio recorded and transcribed. The researchers used a constant comparative method to analyze the data. As a result, the following six themes were identified from the data: (a) play way vs. talk and chalk, (b) worksheets as important and essential, (c) group activity as socializing agent, (d) constraints on play, (e) need for change, and (f) struggle between belief and practice. The researchers noted that kindergarten teachers in Mumbai struggled with their beliefs and how DAP was enacted in the classroom (Hegde & Cassidy, 2009).

Beliefs about appropriate practice among early childhood educators across countries have interested many researchers (Kim et al., 2005; Liu, 2007; McMullen et al., 2005). McMullen and colleagues (2005) examined beliefs and practices regarding DAP
of 1,666 caregivers and teachers of 3-5 year-old children from the United States, China, Taiwan, Korea, and Turkey. The researchers analyzed teachers’ self-reported responses on the Teacher Belief Scale (TBS) and teachers’ self report on the Instructional Activities Scale (IAS). Researchers hypothesized that each country has its own and different viewpoint of the DAP statement, “DAP Policy statement reflects multiple viewpoints and perspectives...beliefs vary across nations and even within nations about what defines quality care and education and what is considered appropriate” (p.452). Descriptive analyses were used in order to analyze the data. Specifically, data were examined item-by-item using Pearson correlations, one-way ANOVA, and factor analysis within and across countries. Analyses revealed: (a) some similarities regarding DAP beliefs among teachers and caregivers within and across the above countries, specifically, those beliefs and practices related to integrating curriculum, promoting emotional/social development, providing concrete and hands-on materials, and allowing play in curriculum and (b) positive beliefs related to developmentally appropriate instructional activities in all five countries. Self-reported beliefs were the strongest in the U.S. and weakest in China. Multi-national and cross-cultural comparative studies were recommended by the researchers in order to define what is appropriate for young children and families in various cultures (McMullen et al., 2005).

Liu (2007) addressed developmentally appropriate beliefs and practice with kindergarten teachers in Taiwan and the United States. The purpose of this quantitative study was to describe kindergarten beliefs and practices related to developmentally appropriate practice in the two countries. The researcher examined the differences between both countries’ groups of teachers. A sample of 357 kindergarten teachers in the
U.S. and Taiwan were surveyed in order to collect appropriate data. The researcher found that teachers in Taiwan and the U.S. had strong beliefs about DAP. However, Developmentally Inappropriate Practice (DIP) activities took place in the classrooms of both groups of teachers. In spite of the fact that the Taiwanese teachers reported higher beliefs about DAP than U.S. teachers, the U.S. teachers implemented more DAP principles than the Taiwanese teachers. The researcher recommended further studies to refine teacher beliefs and to include classroom observations to verify and expand the findings.

Kim et al., (2005) investigated the understanding and implementation of kindergarten teachers and childcare center teachers in Korea. The participants in this research included 211 kindergarten teachers and 208 childcare center teachers who were randomly selected from Seoul. To collect appropriate data, the researchers used the Teacher Beliefs Scale (TBS) and Instructional Activities Scale (IAS) which were developed by Charlesworth, Hart, Burt, and Hernandez (1991) based on DAP guidelines of NAEYC in 1986. The researchers utilized descriptive statistics to identify DAP beliefs and activities and Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) in order to compare kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and activities with those of childcare center teachers. Researchers discovered the following: (a) early childhood teachers had positive levels of DAP beliefs and practice in general, (b) teachers’ differentiation of what is appropriate and what is not according to DAP was unclear, (c) a gap existed between teachers’ beliefs and practice, and (d) kindergarten teachers held stronger DAP beliefs and used DAP activities more frequently than childcare center teachers. Kim et al., argued these results. The reason for the apprehension returned to the fact that childcare centers teachers in this
study had lower educational level, less teaching experience, and fewer hours logged at in-service training sessions than kindergarten teachers.

Further, Lee and Tseng (2008) investigated the cultural conflict with implementation of DAP in Taiwan. The purpose of this study was to understand the differences and conflicts of implementing a Western, child-centered approach in early childhood education in Taiwan. The authors highlighted three main topics in this article: (a) description of the structure of ECE in Taiwan and implementation of DAP, (b) discussion of how child development theories and child-centered approaches shape teachers’ practice and their understanding of best practice, and (c) discussion of the cultural conflict for child-centered approaches as a socio-cultural invention. Three preschool teachers were interviewed in order to understand the cultural conflict and differences in the application of DAP guidelines in Taiwan. The authors determined that the differences and conflict of culture shaped the practice of teachers. In another words, despite the teachers’ beliefs in DAP guidelines and the child-centered approach, they struggled in their practice between child-centered and teacher-centered approaches. According to the authors, this struggle is a reflection of Chinese/Taiwanese cultural understanding of “Confucian construction of education child/ man” (Lee & Tseng, 2008, p. 194).

In Jordan, there were a limited number of researchers who investigated DAP in kindergarten programs (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010; Haroun & Weshah, 2009). Haroun and Weshah (2009) addressed the problem of beliefs of Jordanian kindergarten teachers related to DAP. The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers’ beliefs related to DAP according to educational levels, school types, and the number of years of
experience. In order to collect data, Kenneth Smith’s (1993) questionnaire, which was
developed according to the DAP 1997 position statement, was used. Results from the
survey of 181 female teachers indicated that kindergarten teachers tended to believe in
developmentally appropriate practice in general. Furthermore, there were statistically
significant differences in the mean scores of kindergarten teachers’ beliefs regarding
DAP that could be attributed to higher educational qualifications. Moreover, kindergarten
teachers who worked in basic public schools tended to believe in DAP more than
kindergarten teachers who worked in public secondary schools. However, these
qualitative researchers recommended further exploration with practicing kindergarten
teachers to tap into beliefs related to DAP.

Kindergarten teachers’ beliefs that relate to DAP in Jordan were also addressed by
Abu-Jaber et al. (2010). The purpose of this study was to investigate Jordanian
kindergarten teachers’ beliefs toward DAP and the differences between beliefs according
to educational level, years of experience, and ages of the teachers. The two central
questions were: “What are the general beliefs of Jordanian kindergarten teachers towards
developmentally appropriate practice?” , and “Do the beliefs of Jordanian kindergarten
teachers towards the developmentally appropriate practice differ according to their age,
years of experience, level of education, and specialization?” (p. 68). The sample for this
study was comprised of 285 teachers who were randomly selected from public and
private kindergartens. In order to collect the data, the researchers developed a
questionnaire. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were established by the
researchers. The major findings of the study revealed that teachers endorse DAP on all
five dimensions with the exception of establishing reciprocal relationships with families.
No significant differences were reported based on the means for teachers’ level of education, years of experience, or age. Further research studies were recommended to consider incorporating on-site observations of teachers’ instructional activities and interaction with children.

**Balance of DAP**

A new demand to focus increased efforts on the development of young children's academic skills has changed the goals and expectations for early childhood education (Goldstein, 2007, 2008; Hatch, 2005; Hogue 2008). As a result, the emphasis on children’s academic skill development in the earliest years of school has increased (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Goldstein, 2007; Parker & Neuharsh-Pritchett, 2006.).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was the point at which this new expectation took place in educating young children in the U.S. Hogue (2008) conducted a qualitative phenomenological study in order to investigate the experiences of early childhood teachers with this new expectation of accountability and standardized testing. Participants for this study included 11 female teachers who taught kindergarten through 3rd grade. Hogue collected appropriate data through individual interviews and participants’ journals in order to answer the central research question: “Do today’s teachers of young children use developmentally appropriate practice in their classrooms when faced with accountability issues and mandates as measured by standardized testing procedures?” (Hogue, 2008, p. 2). The analysis of data revealed several themes including: (a) DAP understandings, (b) de-professionalization of teachers, (c) beliefs about teaching
children, and (d) concerns for children. However, the researcher recommended further study using observations in order to provide contextual data.

Goldstein utilized a qualitative case study (2007) to investigate the change of expectations and mandate standards issue with focus on two kindergarten teachers’ efforts to establish practices that balanced the needs of students and the requirements of the state. Goldstein attempted to answer the following two questions: (a) How do kindergarten teachers satisfy both their commitment to developmentally appropriate teaching practices and the responsibility to teach the predetermined knowledge and skills mandated by the state?, and (b) What challenges do kindergarten teachers think they are facing, and how do they respond to those challenges? Two kindergarten teachers from the Burns Public Elementary School in Texas were interviewed and observed over a period of 12 weeks, for a total of 25 hours of observation for each kindergarten classroom. Each participant's data set was analyzed individually using the same processes by reading and rereading the data transcript to identify and code all statements. Subsequently, all data sources from both participants were engaged in cross-case analysis (Goldstein, 2007). The teachers' practices were portrayed in vivid narrative vignettes. Each revealed the value of pedagogical multiplicity in the creation of kindergarten classrooms in which mandated content was taught in developmentally appropriate ways. Three of the approaches, integration, demarcation, and acquiescence, were particularly intriguing because of their ability to enrich current understandings of kindergarten teachers' responses to the changing expectations they face (Goldstein, 2007).

When time to reflect was not taken by teachers, opportunities for developmentally appropriate practice were obstructed in ways teachers could not easily identify or act
upon (Wien, 1996). Through case studies, Wien (1996) explored the role of time, its organization, and how the organization of time intersected with the practical knowledge of individual teachers and with the discourse of developmentally appropriate practice.

Wien (1996) attempted to answer the question of how organizational time undermined the construction of developmentally appropriate practice and how the organization of time had become automatic practice for some teachers in childcare centers. Three teachers, each from a different childcare center, were presented in these case studies. Data collected included observations, interviews, videotaping, and review of program segments. By analyzing and comparing three cases, Wien determined that two teachers experienced positive consequences of adhering to a schedule and the third did not. The researcher described the following three consequences: (a) when time was organized as a production schedule, it dominated as the determinant of events; (b) time became a scarce resource; and (c) teachers suffered from a sense of lost program content and quality. As a result, opportunities for DAP were obstructed.

Ray and Smith (2010) researched what teachers and administrators needed to know in order to implement DAP, promote children’s learning and development, and provide a balanced model that served the whole child. The purpose of this article was to discuss important issues that kindergarten teachers need to know and practice in order to promote children’s learning and development and balance these practices with the mandated standards. The authors identified the following topics based on research of best practice: cognitive development, mathematics, language arts, science, social development, importance of play, teachers’ interaction with students, ways children develop a sense of community, emotional development, and children’s self-regulation.
Ray and Smith (2010) highlighted kindergarten transition and parent involvement and discussed the costs and benefits of implementing a balanced program through full-day kindergarten. According to review and analysis of current studies on these topics above, Ray and Smith (2010) suggested that teachers need to find a balance between the implementation of best practices and mandated standards.

Moreover, with respect to state curriculum and mandated standards, Goldstein (2008) explored how early childhood practitioners can balance between the mandated standards and their desire to offer developmentally appropriate opportunities in order to promote children’s learning and development. In an article on teaching standards and developmentally appropriate practice, Goldstein (2008) advocated for ideas from Dewey, Bronfenbrenner, and Vygotsky and offered examples from Texas kindergartens in order to support her critical thoughts for kindergarten teachers who desire to implement DAP with respect to mandated standards. According to Goldstein (2008), teachers have to consider sociopolitical factors in planning for teaching young children in addition to the age, individual, and sociocultural appropriateness. This article opened the door for more discussions and further research on the ways in which teachers can meet the new expectations of accountability and standardized testing while at the same time implement DAP in teaching young children.

**Summary.** Numerous researchers have investigated teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practice (Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Kim et al., 2005; Liu, 2007; McMullen et al., 2005, Van Horn et al., 2005). The major finding of this literature review was that empirical evidence supported positive effects of DAP. Previous researchers
tended to conduct quantitative studies related to developmentally appropriate practice. In reality, there are multiple and complex factors that may contribute to the effect of DAP in early childhood programs. These factors include teachers’ beliefs and application of their beliefs. Relating to DAP, investigations of kindergarten teachers’ perspective on DAP showed that in spite of kindergarten teachers’ tendency to believe in developmentally appropriate practice in general (Haroun & Weshah, 2009; Kim et al., 2005), they do not always implement those beliefs (Kim et al., 2005; Lee & Tseng, 2008; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). As stated by Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006), “Teachers often hold misconceptions about the actual attributes of developmentally appropriate” (p. 65). Further, many kindergarten teachers still struggle with their beliefs and practice in the classroom (Goldstein, 2008; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Kim et al., 2005; Lee & Tseng, 2008).

An additional major finding of this literature review was the paucity of research studies conducted in Jordan regarding DAP in early childhood programs (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010; Haroun & Weshah, 2009). I knew of only two previous studies conducted in Jordan that investigated kindergarten teachers and beliefs that related to DAP (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010; Haroun & Weshah, 2009). Both of these studies recommended further studies and conducting observations of teachers’ practices of DAP in early childhood programs in order to enrich the previous quantitative findings in Jordan and U.S. (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010; Haroun & Weshah, 2009; Liu, 2007; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Szente et al., 2002).

Thus, it is vital for researchers to conduct more qualitative studies to inquire into how kindergarten teachers in the U.S. and Jordan implement and reflect developmentally
appropriate beliefs into classroom practice. Table 1 provides a summary of the studies reviewed.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Study type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abu-Jaber, Al-Shawareb, &amp; Gheith</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Kindergarten teachers’ beliefs toward developmentally appropriate practice in Jordan</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernest</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Teachers' and family members' subjective beliefs about developmentally appropriate and developmentally inappropriate practices</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldstein</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Embracing pedagogical multiplicity: Examining two teachers' instructional responses to the changing expectations for kindergarten in U.S. public schools</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldstein</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Teaching the standards is developmentally appropriate practice: Strategies for incorporating the sociopolitical dimension of DAP in early childhood teaching</td>
<td>Article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han &amp; Neuharth-Pritchett</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Beliefs about classroom practices and teachers’ education level: An examination of developmentally appropriate and inappropriate beliefs in early childhood classrooms</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haroun &amp; Weshah</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>The beliefs of Jordanian kindergarten teachers of developmentally appropriate practices according to level of education, school type and years of experience</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hegde &amp; Cassidy</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Kindergarten teachers' perspectives on developmentally appropriate practices (DAP): A study conducted in Mumbai (India)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Years</td>
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<td>Study type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Huoge</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Developmentally appropriate practice and no child left behind: A phenomenological study of teachers’ experiences</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kim, Kim, &amp; Maslak</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Toward an integrative educare system: An investigation of teachers' understanding and uses of developmentally appropriate practices for young children in Korea</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lee &amp; Tseng</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Cultural conflicts of the child-centered approach to early childhood education in Taiwan.</td>
<td>Article</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liu</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices of public and private kindergarten teacher in the United States and Taiwan</td>
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<td>McMullen</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Characteristics of teachers who talk the DAP talk and walk the DAP walk.</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
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<td>McMullen, Elicker, Wang, Erdiller, Lee, Lin, &amp; Sun</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Comparing beliefs about appropriate practice among early childhood education and care professionals, from the U.S., China, Taiwan, Korea and Turkey.</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
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<td>Nowak-Fabrykowski</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Moving from ethical awareness to deeper understanding and practice: Kindergarten teachers’ experience with developing caring dispositions in children</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
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<td>Parker &amp; Neuharth-Pritchett</td>
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<td>Developmentally appropriate practice in kindergarten: Factors shaping teacher beliefs and practice.</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
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<td>Ray &amp; Smith</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>The kindergarten child: What teachers and administrators need to know to promote academic success in all children</td>
<td>Article</td>
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<td>West</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>The influence of principals on the institutionalization of developmentally appropriate practices: A multiple case study</td>
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<td>Wien</td>
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<td>Time, work, and developmentally appropriate practice</td>
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<td>Van Horn, Karlin,</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Effects of developmentally appropriate practices on children's</td>
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<td>Ramey, Aldridge, &amp;</td>
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<td>development: A review of research and discussion of</td>
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<td>Snyder</td>
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<td>methodological and analytic issues</td>
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<td>Zambo</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Childcare workers’ knowledge about the brain and developmentally</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
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<td>appropriate practice.</td>
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<td>Developmentally and culturally inappropriate practice in U.S.</td>
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<td>kindergarten programs: Prevalence, severity, and its relationship</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>with teacher and administrator qualifications</td>
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<td>Szente, Hoot, &amp; Ernest</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Parent/teacher views of developmentally appropriate practices: A</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Hungarian perspective</td>
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CHAPTER 3

Research Methods

Rationale for Qualitative Research

To explore the United States and Jordanian kindergarten teachers’ experiences of implementing and reflecting on developmentally appropriate beliefs in practice, I engaged in a qualitative instrumental multi-case study (Stake, 1995, 2006; Yin, 2009). The evolution of qualitative research began in the late 1800s to early 1900s in the field of social science and continued in this area until the 1930s and 1940s (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Spradley, 1980). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in the late 1960s philosophers of education began looking for an alternative to the traditional quantitative approach to research. These philosophers recommended the use of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This approach emphasized the importance of the participant’s view and was derived from the sociological domain.

Qualitative research was described as in-depth inquiry from the participants’ perspective. Researchers aim to build an interpretation of participant’s observations, discover how participants interpret the world around them and determine how this interpretation influences actions (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002). Qualitative researchers typically collect the data set in the natural setting where experiences of the participants occur. According to Hatch (2002), “Qualitative research seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it” (p. 7). Qualitative researchers include fewer participants compared to quantitative researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Hatch, 2002).
Qualitative research is exploratory and attempts to understanding a central occurrence. Researchers seek to understand experiences and examine social contexts as a whole rather than breaking them down into separate and disconnected variables, as most are too complex to unravel (Hatch, 2002). Furthermore, qualitative researchers collect subjective data in the contextual site where participants experience the problem. The researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998) who interacts and collaborates with the participants and gathers data as a “researcher-as-instrument” (Hatch, 2002, p. 7). Additionally, the researcher collects multiple forms of data such as interviews, observations, photos, work samples, and field notes (Hatch, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Furthermore, the researcher validates the accuracy of the data by using one or more of the validation procedures, such as member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Qualitative research is an inductive approach that allows the researcher to discover patterns, categories and themes from the “bottom-up” through organizing data into increasingly more abstract units of information (Yin, 2009). The qualitative researcher interprets meaning from the information by drawing upon personal reflections and past research to look for the larger meaning in the findings. Researchers write a final report that includes personal biases and quotes from the participants. This report is descriptive and flexible in structure; utilizes previous studies to mirror the study in progress; and is reflexive.

A qualitative approach is particularly well suited to research that seeks to explore and understand meaning in social behavior. In order to develop an understanding of how kindergarten teachers reflect their developmentally appropriate beliefs in their practice,
in-depth inquiry is needed. Qualitative research builds on data gathered from this particular context until patterns of behavior start to emerge for the researcher to identify (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009). Thus, qualitative research is an inquiry-based approach useful for exploring and understanding developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices, the central phenomena of this research, by exploring the intensive experiences of the participants.

**Case Study Approach**

I reviewed the five traditional approaches to qualitative research; case study, narrative, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology in order to determine the best approach for exploring the beliefs and practices of the United States and Jordanian kindergarten teachers related to DAP. I chose to use a qualitative, instrumental multiple case study approach (Stake, 1995, 2006; Yin, 2009). This type of research aims to create an in-depth interpretation of events through studying a relatively small number of people in different contexts or sites. Data are presented from the participants’ point of view and often in their words (Hatch, 2002).

Yin (2009) and Merriam (1988, 1998, 2002) argued that the case study is a special kind of qualitative work that investigates contextualized, contemporary events within specified boundaries. Hatch (2002) defined the boundaries or specified the unit of analysis as the boundary as the “key decision point in case study design” (p. 30). Accordingly, the researcher collects detailed data in the form of words and images by asking broad, general questions, collects various types of data in different contexts, and analyzes the information for descriptions and themes in order to develop an in-depth
description of the phenomena. The focus of a case study is to develop an “in-depth investigation, description and analysis of a case or multiple cases within a bounded system” (Merriam, 1988, 1998, 2002). Stake (2006) described case study as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case)…over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (p. 73). According to Merriam (1988, 1998), a case study is particular, descriptive, heuristic and inductive. Qualitative research conducted in a case study helps to bring a more clear understanding of a topic that will broaden and/or extend what is already known. Throughout a case study, the researcher has little control over the events since real people in real contexts are examined and studied in order to provide a foundation as the application of methods and new ideas are yielded (Yin, 1994).

As an instrumental multi case study, I focused on the issue of reflection and the application of teachers’ beliefs in practice. I selected cases specifically to illustrate this subject. A multiple case study is used to explore several cases, which are linked together and have numerous parts or members. Although each case has its own unique strengths, problems, people, and activities to be considered, the interest of a multiple case study rests in the collection of these above (Stake, 2006). Each case in this investigation involved unique experiences of teachers’ reflection of beliefs into practice, and each case provided opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009). This study was bound by place (five public school kindergarten classes in urban areas north of Irbid, Jordan, and three public elementary schools in central Alabama) and by time (approximately eight months).
Philosophical Assumptions

Qualitative research is described as in-depth inquiry into how, why, and what does or does not work from the participant’s perspective. Qualitative researchers approach studies with a phenomenological assumption that reality is socially constructed through an individual's definition of the situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In Hatch’s (2002) words, “the knower and the known are inseparable” (p. 10). The researcher’s purpose is to seek to understand the participant’s interpretations and viewpoints as the researcher and participant interact face to face. One of the unique aspects of qualitative research is that the process requires researchers to determine their beliefs about the generation of knowledge and philosophical viewpoints because “a basic set of beliefs or assumptions . . . guide action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). As Jones, Torres, and Armino (2006) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) described, these assumptions are important because they shape how researchers determine the question, conduct the data collection, and theoretically analyze data through their worldview. Understanding phenomena from many value points is of central importance in qualitative research.

This qualitative instrumental multi case study research was guided by six philosophical assumptions: (a) ontology; the nature of the reality, (b) epistemological; the relationship of the knower to the known, (c) axiology; role of values in inquiry, (d) methodological; use of inductive logic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), (e) generalizations, and (f) causal linkages; the possibility to distinguish causes from effects (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The methodological assumption is the use of inductive and logical reasoning within a given context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985),
naturalistic qualitative research methods are the data collection and analytic tools of the constructivist. Thus, the researcher spent extended periods of time interviewing participants and observing them in their natural settings in an effort to interpret the constructions participants use to make sense of their worlds (Hatch, 2002).

The possibility of generalization is the ability to generalize the research findings to other contexts. The purpose of this study was to conduct an in-depth investigation of kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and practice of DAP in order to better understand how kindergarten teachers implement DAP beliefs in teaching practice. Therefore, the intent was not to generalize to a larger population (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Generalization of the findings to sites or people who are outside the study is limited.

**Sites and Participants**

According to Hatch (2002), decisions about contexts are driven by many factors. The primary consideration ought to be the concern that the settings of the study will provide data that make it possible to answer research questions, in addition to accessibility, feasibility, and familiarity. Thus, the research was carried out at two different locations.

The first location was the public schools of Irbid, Jordan; specifically five urban public schools in the north of Jordan. Two secondary schools serve students who live in the area; one school included sixth to twelfth grade, and the kindergarten class was integrated within the school. The second school was for kindergarten to twelfth grade. The other three schools were basic primary schools that serve children who live in the area; one was for kindergarten to ninth grade, while the other two were for kindergarten
to sixth grade. I chose to work with the public schools because, according to my previous nine years of experiences as an educational supervisor in this area of Jordan in both the private and public schools, I found that teachers in the public kindergarten have better qualifications and sound educational training. This background made these schools credible participants to help achieve the research purpose.

The second location was central Alabama; specifically three suburban public schools in central Alabama. Two schools were elementary public schools for students who live in the area and serve children from the kindergarten to fifth grade. The third kindergarten was an early learning center for children from eight weeks of age to kindergarten. I chose to work with these sites according to recommendations of three faculty members who work in a southern university. I knew some of the kindergarten teachers in these sites as well as the faculty members. The teachers in these Alabama schools had equivalent qualifications and educational preparation to make them purposeful participants in the study.

Purposeful choice of participants is the procedure that was used in this qualitative research. “Purposeful choice” means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study who can best help us to understand occurrences for the topics to be investigated (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002). In purposeful selection of participants, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central occurrences in the contexts under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Stake, 2006). Furthermore, in contrast of sampling procedures in quantitative research, there is nothing random or statistically representative about the sample since the intent is not to generalize to any other population (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).
A participant population of convenience was sent a recruitment letter, and the first 10 teachers from both locations (Jordan and Alabama) who responded were selected as participants. As previously mentioned, central Alabama kindergarten teachers’ names were recommended by three University of Alabama at Birmingham faculty members who worked in School of Education. Jordanian teachers were recommended by the head of the Educational Supervision Department. For the principals of the schools in central Alabama and Jordan, I sent letters requesting access based on the plan and purpose of this study.

Specifically, in the first location (urban area in north of Jordan) I asked the head of Educational Supervision Department to recommend some of the kindergarten teachers who are known for their positive experiences with children and teaching, had at least three years of experience as teachers, and familiarity with the DAP term. Additionally, I sent a copy of the research proposal, which contained the research problem, purpose, and questions. Since, the number of public schools which have kindergarten classes was limited in the urban city in the north of Jordan, this made the selection of kindergarten teachers easier. Thus, the total number of participants in the first location was five kindergarten teachers, all of them were females, since all the kindergarten classes are integrated into schools for girls. Two of the kindergarten teachers were nominees for the Queen Rania Al Abdullah Award for Distinguished Teacher, and the other three teachers were distinguished for their work with children.

The total number of participants in the second location (central Alabama) was five kindergarten teachers (all females), who were also distinguished for their work with children. The 10 participants from both locations were volunteers for this research. After
they received the recruitment letter (see Appendix A) and consent letter which informed
them of the focus for the study, as well as the intent and participation requirements, all of
the individuals indicated their willingness to participate. The recruitment letter also
informed them that participation was voluntary and that there would not be any
compensation for participating.

Gatekeepers (principals) also received the recruitment letter in order to gain their
permission to interview and observe teachers in the schools (see Appendix B). In the first
location (north area in Jordan), the schools’ principals asked me to seek the Education
Department’s permission first in order to allow me collect data in their schools. I sent the
recruitment letter to the Education Department and asked for their permission. The
permission letter was sent via email to all recommended schools from the Education
Department.

Data Collection

In order to collect data, several arrangements were made via email and telephone
calls with principals and volunteer participants after I had received the principals’
permission. Only those individuals who consented to participate and contacted me were
considered for the study. Signatures of kindergarten teachers and witnesses were
obtained personally for each of the kindergarten teachers in central Alabama (see
Appendix C), while the signatures of kindergarten teachers and witnesses were waived
for Jordanian kindergarten teachers (see Appendix D). I conducted interviews (see
Appendix E), observations (see Appendix F), and collected appropriate documents and
artifacts in order to collect the data (see Table 2).
Table 2

Data collection procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Length of Time Required</th>
<th>Frequency of Repetition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews (both locations, central Alabama and urban area in north of Jordan)</td>
<td>One hour</td>
<td>Once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations (kindergarten classrooms in central Alabama only).</td>
<td>Four hours- Twice (8 hours total)</td>
<td>Twice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection of documentation (lesson plans, assessment tools) (both locations, central Alabama and urban area in north of Jordan)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Artifacts (videotapes) (public schools in urban area in north of Jordan)</td>
<td>8 lessons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the research method in Jordan, I recruited kindergarten teachers via email. After teachers indicated their willingness to participate in study, I arranged with the kindergarten teachers to conduct telephone interviews for one hour which were audio-taped. Following the audio-taped interviews, I asked the kindergarten teachers to send copies of videotapes documenting at least eight different lessons. The videotapes already existed and were held in each of the teachers’ school libraries. I collected data by filling in an observation sheet according to the artifacts (videotapes) that were collected from the kindergarten teachers. I did not record any identifiable information related to the children in the artifact; only teachers’ actions were recorded for the study. I also asked kindergarten teachers to scan and send specific documentation (lessons plan and assessment tools) via email.
For the research method in central Alabama, I sent recruitment letters to the kindergarten teachers via email. After I gained permission and the participants’ agreement, I arranged face to face interviews with the kindergarten teachers for one hour interviews that were audio-taped. Afterward the interviews, arrangements were made to observe each kindergarten teacher. Observations took place twice on two different days for four hours each day for a total of eight hours for each participant. I did not observe children or record any identifiable information related to children in the classroom. The teacher explained the presence of the researcher to the children. I collected specific documentation (lessons plans and assessment tools) by asking kindergarten teachers to have copies of their lesson plans and assessment tools that they used in their teaching practice.

The interview protocol had two icebreakers questions, which helped to transition the participant into the actual questions. There were 18 questions that also included follow-up probing questions. Probing questions were necessary as they allowed me to pull out rich and thick information from the participants, descriptions that they may not have considered to be relevant (Geertz, 1973, 1983; Merriam, 1998, 2002; Yin, 2009). The interview questions were built according to DAP guidelines (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Moreover, two faculty members in one university who were experienced in the field of early childhood education reviewed the interview questions and gave recommendations to improve the internal validity of the questions as related to the research questions. Interviews took place at locations and times that were feasible for both me and the participants. Moreover, participants were asked to check their responses after I transcribed their interviews and observation field notes.
Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data. Hatch (2002) stated that data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes. Finally, data are presented in figures, tables, and/or discussion.

Since data collection and data analysis in qualitative research are simultaneous processes (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1988, 1998, 2002), for this multiple case study I started collecting and taking the first steps in analyzing the data. At the same time, I started initially reading and taking notes from the data. At the completion of the interview process, I carefully transcribed the (a) interviews using the audio recordings, (b) observations using the videotapes and field notes, and (c) reflections of the various sources of documentation.

Since all of the data collected from the public schools in Jordan were in Arabic, all written transcripts were translated from Arabic to English. Each transcript was read several times to obtain an overall feeling of the content. From each transcript, I searched the statements to determine how individuals experienced the event being studied. I made a list of significant statements and assigned them a “code”. The coding process is an inductive process that reduces data into broad themes (Yin, 2009). According to Merriam (1998), coding involves labeling passages of text according to content. For this study, each transcript was reviewed to identify the participants’ beliefs regarding developmentally appropriate practice and how they enacted beliefs into teaching practice. Initial themes were reduced. Repeating statements, overlapping statements, and statements were grouped into “meaning units.” Thus, initially I worked with the data,
organized all of the pieces, broke them into manageable units, synthesized them, and searched for patterns to discover what was important and what was to be learned (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Furthermore, I developed codes to identify pre-emergent or initial themes by bracketing the data (Denzin, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Finally, I used NVivo 9 in order to arrange and organize the codes and themes to determine whether any other themes were identified via electronic means.

For this multi case study, analysis was conducted at two levels: within-case and across the two cases. Themes common to all cases were evaluated for a cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009) to understand the overall implementation of DAP. Specifically, I searched for common themes that were shared across cases and similarities and differences unique to each case.

**Establishing Credibility**

In qualitative research, one or more types of validation procedures are used to ensure the accuracy of the data. The process of validation may be accomplished through the use of member checking and triangulating sources of data in the qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). To ensure the credibility of this study, I utilized five verification procedures including: (a) triangulation, (b) member checking, (c) peer review, (d) external auditor, and (e) thick rich description.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation is one of the most popular and cost-effective procedures for establishing validation. Triangulation is taking three or more varied sources of data within the qualitative research and verifying each against the other
(Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2009). Triangulation is a source of credibility for methods, investigators and theorists (Denzin, 1978). To keep information more credible, triangulation is applied by investigators using at least three sources of data to verify the same piece of information. Furthermore, triangulation can occur among bodies of literature, theorists, and investigators.

Triangulation is both feasible and a desirable method to establish credibility. The need for triangulation arises from the ethical need to confirm the validity of the processes. In this case study, triangulation could be done by using multiple sources of data (Yin, 1984, 2009). Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2009). For this study, I used multiple and different sources of data to provide corroborating evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Yin (2009), the process of triangulation can add to the validity of the study if themes emerge based on a review of several sources of data. Researchers sort through data sources to find common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998). Triangulation was a technique that facilitated validation of data through cross verification from three sources of data including: interviews, videotaped observations, and documentation provided by the teachers.

**Member checking.** The second method used to ensure credibility in the study was member checking. In member checking, participants are given the opportunity to participate in the credibility of the findings and interpretation given by the researcher. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is the most critical technique
for establishing credibility. Member checking is a process whereby the researcher goes back to the participant with a transcribed document to make certain that what is written is correct. Oftentimes, the participant will offer additional information based on this review. Member checking involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account (Merriam, 1998). For this study, I sent the transcript via email to the 10 participants. I heard back from all of the participants except three. The seven participants who responded agreed on the content of the transcript and expressed their interest in reading the final interpretation.

**Peer review.** Peer review or peer debriefing was described as someone who provides an outside check of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Merriam (2009), peer debriefing is defined as “discussions with colleagues regarding the process of the study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretation” (p. 229). A peer debriefer for this research was an early childhood doctoral student and educator. The debriefer and I kept a written record of each encounter, partly for the sake of the audit trail and partly for reference so that I could establish why the inquiry identified as it did (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**External auditor.** The fourth method used to ensure credibility in the study was the use of an external auditor. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested enlisting an outsider to “audit” fieldwork notes and subsequent analysis and interpretations. Including an external auditor helped me continue to develop plans for the study as it was being
Thick, rich description. A fifth and final method used in the study to ensure credibility was thick, rich description. Use of thick, rich description was an asset to the study and used to provide captivating passages for the reader (Geertz, 1973, 1983). According to the experts, thick, rich descriptions can transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). Thick, rich description in qualitative studies helps the researcher and the reader to understand the account. The use of vivid details about the participants, the setting, and about themes also make the study more credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). Additionally, the utilization of “rich, thick description” of participants aids the reader in concluding the transferability of results to other settings. Hatch (2002) identified thick description as a part of the constructivist paradigm, which is fitting for this study since I employed a constructivist paradigm. Rich, thick description is an interesting strategy because it allows readers to make decisions regarding the transferability of the findings based on my descriptions of the details of the participants or setting under study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988, Yin, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

The American Psychological Association (APA) provides professional guidelines for researchers to insure respect and the protection of the civil and human rights of participants in a study. In ethic codes provided by APA, principles and standards are set
that will produce informed judgments by both the researcher and the human subjects researched. In conducting this research, these ethical principles and standards were observed as part of my responsibility to maintain the highest standards in the collection and analysis of data, as well as uphold my obligation to society, the participants, research colleagues, and other stakeholders in the study.

Jones et al. (2006) indicated that the important first step in developing ethical sensitivity is anticipating where and when ethical issues may emerge in the research processes. The second principle is that informants have a right to remain anonymous (Jones et al., 2006). This principle means that participants have the right to reject the use of cameras, video or audio recorders. According to Jones et al. (2006), maintaining confidentiality refers “to the treatment of information that an individual has knowingly disclosed in a research relationship with an expectation that this information will not be disclosed to unauthorized parties without consent” (p. 155). The last principle is privacy (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). My ultimate consideration was how to protect the participants. Jones et al. (2006) noted that the researcher’s greatest ethical commitment must be to the participants in the study. Thus, to ensure that the privacy of the participants and confidentiality of the data collected were protected, I first asked for and used pseudonyms that were provided by the participants in order to protect their anonymity by masking names and assigning pseudonyms to all individuals (Hatch, 2002). Moreover, participants were given an informed consent stating the method of data collection, specific procedure to collect the data, obligations of the study, the limit of their participation, and any potential risks they may incur. Education Department and gatekeepers’ permissions were also asked for prior to contacting participants.
Furthermore, audio-taped interviews and the documentation were stored in a secure place and were accessible only to the researcher. Audio-tapes were stored in a locked cabinet. Data were only viewed by me and my dissertation committee. All audio-taped interviews, artifacts (videotapes), and documentation will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study. All documents were password protected as was the computer on which the data were stored. These were the precautionary measures that I developed in order to maintain and secure anonymity and confidentiality. However, for this research, the university’s Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was the most important tool to review all ethical considerations (see Appendix G). The IRB requested that I ask Yarmouk University/ School of Education in Jordan to review the procedures that concerned Jordan since there was no IRB in Jordan. Yarmouk University convened a committee to review the protocol for this research proposal, and the committee deemed it acceptable (see Appendix H). I also received a letter of permission from the Educational Department of Jordan (see Appendix I). All the procedures were performed according to local customs, local context, and local community attitudes.

**Role of the Researcher**

Qualitative research assumes that the researcher is an integral part of the research process. At the beginning of a study, qualitative researchers provide an overview of personal and professional perspectives and assumptions (Hatch, 2002; Yin, 2009).

The qualitative researcher uses the natural setting as the source of data. The researcher attempts to observe, describe, and interpret settings as they are, while maintaining an empathic understanding. In qualitative inquiries, the researchers’
interpretations cannot be separated from their own background, history, context, and prior understandings (Hatch, 2002). Moreover, in qualitative research the researcher is an instrument (Hatch, 2002) as he or she interacts and collaborates with the participants while simultaneously gathering data. The qualitative researcher considers himself or herself to be the “researcher-as-instrument” (Hatch, 2002, p. 7).

I am a full time student from Jordan. I came to the United States to earn a Ph.D. degree in early childhood education. I have nine years of teaching experience at Yarmouk University in Jordan as an instructor for undergraduate students and as an educational supervisor working in preparing and training pre-service teachers. Learning with and teaching young children are my passions. Moreover, in the entirety of this research I kept the focus on learning how the beliefs participants held about DAP were enacted into teaching practices (Yin, 2009).
CHAPTER 4

Research Findings

Introduction

In this study, I sought to explore and understand the participants’ experiences and reflection of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and how beliefs are put into teaching practice. Data sources included: (a) classroom observations, (b) videotaped observations, (c) teachers’ interviews, and (d) documentary materials. An initial concern was to select interview sites and times that were convenient for the participants. Collecting quality audio recordings was also an important consideration. Interviews took place at locations and times that were convenient for the participants. All five kindergarten teachers from the first case (north Jordan) were interviewed via telephone because I was out of the country (Jordan). One participant was interviewed at the basic school during the day. The other four participants were interviewed at home in the evening when it was convenient for them. Documentary materials, such as lesson plans, assessment tools, and artifacts, including eight videotaped lessons for each kindergarten teacher, were collected from participants. Specifically, I sent each teacher envelopes for the requested materials. My husband, who was in Jordan, collected the materials and sent them to me by express mail.

The five kindergarten teachers from the second case (central Alabama) were interviewed face to face at the time and place that was convenient for them. Two participants were interviewed at a nearby public library. Two teachers were interviewed
in the school setting during the children’s’ naptime. The fifth teacher was interviewed once in the classroom and once at the nearby university. Classroom observations were conducted after the appropriate arrangements were made with the kindergarten teachers. Documentary materials, such as lesson plans and assessment tools, were collected from each participant.

All data were collected between September 4 and December 4, 2011. During this time, I prepared all data for analysis. The analysis for each case was conducted to identify themes and subthemes. Furthermore, cross case analysis was conducted in order to find overall themes and subthemes common to both cases. In this chapter, I present each case first by discussing the settings, participants, and themes and subthemes for each case. Subsequently, the cross cases analyses, themes, and subthemes are discussed. The summary of main findings concludes this chapter.

**Case Study 1/ North Jordan**

**Research site.** The setting for the first case included kindergarten classrooms in five public schools that integrated content areas throughout the curriculum. The five public schools were chosen for this study based on their exceptional commitment and work to develop children’s’ learning and development. The kindergarten teachers who worked in these schools were distinguished in their work with children and were recommended by the chair of the Supervision Department.

School 1A was a public secondary school serving girls from sixth through twelfth grades who lived in the area. The kindergarten class was integrated with the school in 2007. School 1A consisted of 16 sections with 365 students. There were 30 teachers and
four administrators who worked in this school. This school had one section for kindergarten children, which was not enough to accommodate children in the neighborhoods that the school served.

School 1B was a public secondary school in an urban area in the north of Jordan. The school served girls from first through twelfth grade who lived in the area. The kindergarten class was integrated into the school in 2008. School 1B consisted of 26 sections with 607 students. There were 54 teachers and nine administrators who worked in this school. The school had one section for kindergarten children, which was not enough to accommodate children in the neighborhoods that the school served.

School 1C was a public basic school in an urban area in the north of Jordan. School 1C served girls from first through sixth grade who lived in the area. The kindergarten class was integrated into the school in 2008. School 1C consisted of 16 sections with 310 students. There were 35 teachers and eight administrators who served in this school. The school had two sections of kindergarten children.

School 1D was a public school in an urban area in the north of Jordan. School 1D was a school for girls from first through sixth grade who lived close by the area. It was founded in 1996. The kindergarten class was integrated into the school in 2006. School 1D consisted of 15 sections with 387 students. There were 27 teachers and three administrators who worked in this school. This school had one section for kindergarten children.

School 1E was a public, mixed gender school in an urban area in north of Jordan, founded in 1989. School 1E was a school for students of lower income who lived in the area. The children who attended were from kindergarten through ninth grade. Both
genders were served from kindergarten through third grades. The remaining grades were single gender. The kindergarten class was integrated into the school in 2008. The school 1E consisted of 10 sections with 144 students. There were 20 teachers and two administrators who worked in this school.

Participants. Five kindergarten teachers participated in this case. To maintain confidentiality, participants were asked to select pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Table 3 outlines the demographics of the participants in this case.

Table 3
Participants’ demographic of first case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Student number in the kindergarten</th>
<th>Kindergarten Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A</td>
<td>Ms. Noor</td>
<td>BA/ECE</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B</td>
<td>Ms. Fatimah</td>
<td>BA/ECE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Develop all domains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1C</td>
<td>Ms. Rasha</td>
<td>BA/EE</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Place to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1D</td>
<td>Ms. Lyan</td>
<td>BA/ECE</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Learning/play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1E</td>
<td>Ms. Reem</td>
<td>BA/ECE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Prepare to school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Ms. Noor” was a 35–year-old, female who was married and the mother of two children. She had a bachelor’s (BA) degree in early childhood education. She had worked in public and private kindergartens for nine years and started working in School 1A three years prior to the study. Ms. Noor said that she loves working with children because she feels as if her students are her children. Because of her warm parental relationship with the children, she called the children “mama”, and all of them call her “mama.” She
moved to live in the same school community area after her marriage to a man who lived in that community. She was trying to develop a sound relationship with her students’ families. She was a nominee for the Queen Rania Al Abdullah Award for Distinguished Teacher in 2011. The fullness of love for her school children and passion to work with them in active and interactive strategies made her successful in engaging all students and drawing all of them to her in a caring relationship.

“Ms. Fatimah” was a 30-year-old, married and mother of three children. She had been a kindergarten teacher for five years in public schools. She graduated from the Al-Balqa Applied University and held a bachelor’s degree (BA) in early childhood education. She said that working with children was her passion. She considered herself to be patient. She tried to provide equal opportunities for every student to learn. She had three years’ experiences working in School 1B. She lived in the same school community, so she knew all of her students’ families well. She was distinguished by the chairman of the Educational Supervision Department for her excellent work with children. With the large number of students (26 students) in her classroom and no assistant, she worked hard to achieve her goals and beliefs regarding the education of young children.

“Ms. Rasha” was 29 years old, a kindergarten teacher who taught for four years, two years in first grade and the third and fourth year in kindergarten at school 1C. She was married and had two children. She graduated from Mutah University, holding a bachelor’s degree (BA) as a class teacher. This degree prepared her to work with children in the first three grades (first – third grade). In spite of all the in-service training sessions required of kindergarten teachers, she had only had two in-service training sessions. This
was because she had only one year of experience in teaching kindergarten children. She also was a nominee for the Queen Rania Al Abdullah Award for Distinguished Teacher.

“Ms. Lyan” was a 27-year-old female, married and mother of one child. She had four years’ experience in teaching. Her first year was in second grade, and she had been a kindergarten teacher for three years in public school 1D. She graduated from Yarmouk University in 2006, and held a bachelor’s degree (BA) in early childhood education. Ms. Lyan said that working with young children was her passion. She was born and lived in the same school community until she was married. She moved to another area, which was 15 miles away from the school, but she knew all of her students’ families well. She was distinguished by the Chairman of the Educational Supervision Department for her excellent work with children.

“Ms. Reem” was an unmarried female and 27 years old. She earned her bachelor’s degree in early childhood education from Yarmouk University in 2006. She had three years’ experience in teaching kindergarten in School 1E. She was recommended by the Chairman of the Educational Supervision Department for her excellent work with children.

**Themes and subthemes.** Based on the analysis of all data sources including interviews, videotaped observations, and the documentary materials of the first case in north Jordan, I identified five major themes regarding DAP beliefs and practice of kindergarten teachers: (a) beliefs guide practice; (b) enhanced learning and development; (c) caring community; (d) ensured success; and (e) reflected upon obstacles to DAP. The
identified major themes and associated subthemes that emerged from the first case are listed below (see Table 4).

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes / Subthemes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs guide practice</td>
<td>Enhanced learning and development</td>
<td>Caring community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on play</td>
<td>Checklist not testing</td>
<td>Set up a good relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on whole child</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-centered</td>
<td>Teaching strategies</td>
<td>Commitment to kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of DAP and kindergarten purpose</td>
<td>Understanding children’s needs</td>
<td>Boys-girls relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping children to maximize learning</td>
<td>Role of religion</td>
<td>No assistant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beliefs guide practice. According to analysis of the kindergarten teachers’ interviews, videotaped observations, and documental materials, several beliefs toward DAP were identified as a guide for a teacher’s practices in the kindergarten classroom. A focus on play, focus on whole child, child-centered orientation (constructive approach), and importance of DAP and the purpose of the kindergarten were the beliefs that guided kindergarten teachers’ work with the children in north of Jordan.
Focus on play. Play was the most important belief that guided the practice of all of the kindergarten teachers in north of Jordan. While the practice was varied among Jordanian kindergarten teachers, all of them believed in the important role of play in teaching young children. Ms. Noor stated, “I do believe the best practice is that the practices that depend on play and work with children as active learners who can learn if they have the opportunity to do so.” For her, DAP meant the practices that focus on play. She stated, “play…play…play, this is my focus. Play is the life of the children. I cannot ask the children to stay at their seat.” Ms. Fatimah also believed that the role of kindergarten was to help children grow and develop in every way. She focused on play by using learning centers and considered these centers to be a way she could achieve DAP practice in her class. She thought she could improve and nurture all developmental domains within each of her children. So noted the following:

I think there are different practices that developmentally appropriate practices, such as the playing in the centers. For example when children play with the blocks in the blocks centers they develop and improve their cognitive thinking and abilities. Also, when they play in the dramatic play center (we call it in Arabic to translate kitchen center) they develop their language and social relationships. The music center develops the art sense, and the computers develop the physical domain. So I think the centers system in the classroom helps in improving the children’s development in all domains.

The application of this belief regarding play varied from teacher to teacher. For example, Ms. Fatimah allowed children to play different cognitive games during the day in the kindergarten classroom in order to develop her children’s cognitive domain. Also, she used outdoor activities in the “playground” in order to help children develop healthy bodies.
Ms. Noor played with children for the entire day, not just in the breakfast time. She utilized different types of play in her curricula such as free play, constructive play, intentional play, and pretend play. One example was when she got the children to pretend to be the king and the queen. They wore crowns and carried pictures of the king and queen. She wanted them to learn about the king and the queen of Jordan through an interesting way, and she succeeded in that. Before the morning circle, she allowed the children to participate in self-selection play. Some of children were singing, some played cognitive games, while others played games on the computer, and some participated in pretend play.

Ms. Noor’s classroom was full of the children’s movement. In the interview, she said the following, “I do believe that the play is the most important in developmentally appropriate practices, so I think the kindergarten children learn through play.” Also, she used free play to develop the children’s physical domain and to help her transition the children from one educational activity to another. She used five minutes after each activity to transition children from one activity to another in free play. As stated by Ms. Noor:

I believe in the important role of play in teaching for children at this stage. Also I think when I use play in my class all children engage and do not get bored. Actually I use play at all day…they learn much by this way. I usually teach everything for children through play. I found that using play as way in teaching young children is very effective. Also the children understand and learn more.

Moreover, Ms. Noor used play to develop the whole child in every developmental domain stating “they move and run while they are playing. Also, I use pretend play so children can learn and develop different kinds of emotional feelings.” She said that she knows that children like to play so she used play for everything in her classroom.
“Wow...Sure I encourage play in my class; I think that we spend all the day playing at the class. We really enjoy our time in the kindergarten class in this way.”

Ms. Lyan said that she believes the role of the kindergarten is to help children grow and develop so children grow healthy in body, mind, and heart. For Ms. Lyan, this development was necessary to prepare them for the upper grades in school. She had some educational games so children could develop cognitively, emotionally, physically, and socially. For example, in teaching the Arabic language, they played the game that put two chairs and two children who catch the string so the teacher hangs several cards which have written words or letters on the string. The children start play together by blindfolding a child’s eyes so that he or she cannot see and has to ask the rest of the children to tell him or her the way. The children gave directions and said “go straight, left, right, up, down”, and then the child took the card and tried to read, and so on with the rest of children. Thus, children learned directions. They were motivated, read the letters or the words and enjoyed learning. According to Ms. Lyan, the children never thought that they were forced to learn.

The strong value of play was not universal among the teachers from north of Jordan. For Ms. Rasha, there was no role for play in her classroom. She just had 20 minutes for children to play in the playground, and that time was required in her daily schedule as recess time. Also, Ms. Reem only allowed children to play in the learning centers for 20 minutes once she finished all of the planned objectives. Children saw the centers for free play but seldom were able to play in them.
Focus on the whole child. Kindergarten teachers in the first case believed in DAP as an approach that focused on the whole child. This belief also guided their practice in the kindergarten classroom. Ms. Fatimah considered her children to be the center of the teaching and learning process. This consideration was reflected in her work with children. She utilized many activities and different types of playing to engage children in the classroom. According to Ms. Fatimah:

I teach, interact, and engage children in activities for learning, but at the same time, I consider to improve and develop the child’s entire development in every domain. And then between each activity, children can play different games or can play at these centers.

She said that as a kindergarten teacher, she had to consider all developmental domains of the child. But she recognized that social development was the most important area, “I do believe it is more important than the cognitive development area for this age and stage.” She further noted, “I think developmentally appropriate practice meant that the practice that focuses on the whole child and developing the all domains such as the cognitive, physical, emotional, social, and language development.”

For Ms. Reem, DAP also meant a focus on the whole child. She stated, “Also, I do believe I have to take care of all developmental domains, emotional, psychological, cognitive, and social developmental domain.” Similarly, Ms. Rasha considered DAP as the practice that develops the whole child. She said:

I think developmentally appropriate practice meant that the practice that focuses on the developing the all domains such as the cognitive, physical, emotional, social, and language development nurtures and enhances children’s abilities to prepare them for the next level of school.

Child-centered practice. Kindergarten teachers in the first case varied in their beliefs concerning the role of the students in the classroom. For example, Ms. Noor
considered her children to be the center of the teaching and learning process. This view was reflected and noticeable in her work with children. She utilized many activities and different types of play that engaged children in learning in the classroom. Based on the videotaped observations, the activities and playing strategies were all child-centered approaches in Ms. Noor’s classroom. Children were very active in the classroom. She said:

I do believe that the children have to be the center. What children find of interest and choose to focus on in the classroom is what I want for them. I am here for them. Children like to move and play, so all of my activities are child centered; my role in the class is as facilitator and helper for children and to be sure they are safe and feel secure. So all of my activities and strategies are focused on children and their active roles in the class.

According to Ms. Fatimah, both teacher and students play an active role in the classroom. There were interactive activities in her classroom. While Ms. Rasha’s children were her focus, the purpose was for them to learn. She did not mention any focus on overall development, nor did evidence appear in the videotaped observations that she held this focus. However, all of her instructional implementation and application was on how children learn. She said:

I do believe that the child is the central focus of the teaching process. Also, I believe that the book and the curriculum are very appropriate for children. So all of my strategies and activities focus on the active role of children.

*Importance of DAP and the Purpose of kindergarten.* The purpose of kindergarten was another subtheme that I identified. This subtheme reflected kindergarten teachers’ beliefs about Developmentally Appropriate Practice and, as a result, directed their practice in the classroom. For Ms. Fatimah, the purpose of kindergarten was not to fill the child’s brain with information. She believed that the role of kindergarten was emotional
and social preparation for them to be ready for the next level of schooling, rather than forcing them to learn to read and write.

Ms. Fatimah also identified the importance of DAP and her belief was reflected and implemented in her work with the children. She said that believed DAP was very important for the kindergarten teacher in order to help children develop to their full potential cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically. She indicated that once the teacher implemented DAP in the classroom, children were helped to understand their feelings. She used different strategies with children in order to accomplish this goal. She and her children sang songs, played and danced in order to help them develop in each developmental domain. Ms. Noor also provided opportunities for children to play because for her play was the purpose of kindergarten. She did not believe that kindergarten was the place for children to learn in a traditional way or to learn to read and write. She suggested that if there was no time for play in kindergarten, it was not real kindergarten. In the words of Ms. Noor, “What is the importance of the kindergarten if the children do not play? If the kindergarten teachers focus on teaching children to memorize, this is not kindergarten.”

Ms. Lyan reflected the importance of DAP in her work with the children and indicated that DAP was very important for teachers in order to help children develop cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically. She noted:

I think the most important things to follow are the developmentally appropriate practices in teaching kindergarten children. These practices are beneficial for developing each domain such as the cognitive, physical, emotional, social, and language development. Also, I think it is effective in teaching and learning young children because it is fit for their developmental level.
In contrast, Ms. Rasha, suggested that the purpose of kindergarten was to help children learn and to prepare them to attend first through third grade in school. She stated, “I think DAP is effective in teaching and learning young children because it helps them to improve their learning.”

Despite the above findings from the interviews, triangulation with the data sources revealed that Ms. Rasha and Ms. Reem had no clear theory or belief regarding DAP. The other data collected revealed weak beliefs and weak DAP practice by these two teachers.

In conclusion, several beliefs about DAP were identified as a guide for teachers’ practice in the kindergarten classroom. Focus on play, focus on the whole child, child-centeredness, and importance of DAP and the purpose of kindergarten were beliefs that guided teachers’ work with kindergarten children. Each teacher had her own beliefs that guided her practice. At the same time, each teacher reflected and implemented these beliefs in different ways in classroom practice. For example, Ms. Noor indicated that DAP meant that teachers have to focus on intentional and free play, so she implemented play in her class at all times. She suggested that children need to play and move because of their age level, so she reflected and implemented play and activity in her teaching practice in the classroom. For Ms. Fatimah, DAP meant focusing on the whole child, so she addressed all areas of development in her teaching practices in the classroom. She implemented learning centers to improve the children’s’ growth in developmental domains. She focused on both learning and development of children in her practice. While DAP meant focus on the whole child for Ms. Rasha, she just implemented teaching practice to enhance the learning process. This practice was based on her belief that the
role of kindergarten was to help children to learn foundational skills for first grade. Moreover, all of the teachers expressed a belief that they have to follow child-centered approaches in teaching kindergarten children, but the implementation of this focus differed among them.

Enhanced learning and development. Enhanced learning and development was another theme that I identified during the analysis of the inter-data sources. Several subthemes were identified during data analysis that I considered an essential part of enhancing children’s’ learning and development, including: (a) checklists not testing, (b) flexibility, (c) teaching strategies, (d) understanding and reaching all children’s varied needs, (e) grouping children to maximize learning, and (f) planning were the most successful procedures used to enhance and improve children’s development and learning. These factors were identified from raw data sources. Interviews, videotaped observations, and documents revealed that the focus varied among kindergarten teachers to enhance and improve learning and development of children.

Checklists not testing. In order to assess the children’s learning and development, all of the participants in the first case used their observations rather than any type of test for school readiness. They collected data regarding the development of children by using checklists that were developed to assess all developmental domains in addition to children learning. According to Ms. Reem, “I use observations and fill the specific checklists. I do not use testing or informal assessment to evaluate my children.” Based on collected assessment tools, there were several checklists. Each checklist had been
developed in order to assess skills or characteristics, depending on the type of checklist and its purpose. For example, if the checklist was built to assess learning letters, the checklist contained different skills to be observed by the teacher such as writing, reading, painting, and tracing the letter.

Furthermore, Ms. Noor used observations to assess children’s social development. She stated:

Also, in social development I focus on engaging children with the guests or visitors and with each other in the class. And then observe how they deal in several situations to assess their social development. So if I have shy, aggressive children, or ‘normal’ children, I observe how they have socially and emotionally developed.

Ms. Fatimah identified how she collected data regarding development and learning of her children. She said:

I filled out this checklist during the week. Actually, I evaluated five students each week, so by the end of month I finished evaluating all the students. Also, I want to add that I depend on my observation of children in order to assess their learning. That is because if the children feel that I am assessing them maybe they will feel nervous and the observation will have a negative result. So because I have large number of students in my class, I just follow or observe five students at a time and write that on the special checklist without letting the children know I am assessing them.

Ms. Rasha also used observations rather than testing. She said,

Since we have checklists in order to evaluate students’ learning, I use my observation to fill out that checklist. Also, I observe the improvement of children in achieving lesson plans. I focus so much on the low achieving children… I know that the low achieving children need more help.

*Flexibility*. Ms. Noor, Ms., Lyan, and Ms. Fatimah were flexible in their classroom practice. They suggested that working with children required more focus on the children and how to improve learning for each child’s total development. In order to follow the recommended schedule, they said that they would have to teach a subject-
oriented curriculum, and in this way they would not be able to improve all children’s development in every area at the same time.

Ms. Fatimah indicated that working with children required more focus on each child’s development and learning and how to improve and enhance the capacity for growth and development individually. She stated:

I do have flexibility in dealing with my planning so even if I plan for short term and the next day I maybe decide to change some activity to fit with children’s situations so I go back and fix that in my short and long term planning. For example, sometimes I write in my long term plan that the first unit will take me three weeks. Then in the real world it may take me four weeks so I go back to my plans and change and modify it.

Ms. Noor was also flexible in following the recommended kindergarten schedule. She expressed the belief that if she teaches in a subject-oriented way, she would not be able to help all of her students improve and develop in the necessary and varied areas at the same time. She explained it this way:

I do have a schedule that is provided from the Education Department… mmm… all the kindergarten teachers have the same schedule which we should have to follow. But actually I am flexible. I just follow it during the times when we have breakfast and outdoor play. Sometimes we cannot go outside for weather reasons, so I switch the schedule and add another type of learning activity.

*Teaching strategies.* Ms. Noor and Ms. Fatimah both shared that they did not like to teach young children by particular subjects. They both held the belief that children learn new information holistically. Because of their holistic view of learning they depend on integrating all of content areas together when teaching young children. Both teachers chose certain activities and games so that the children would have the opportunity to learn varied disciplines simultaneously while progressing developmentally as well.
Ms. Fatimah revealed:

I use the integrated curriculum when teaching the children. I think the integrated curriculum is very important in order to enhance learning and physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and emotional development of young children. I focus on a number of outcomes at the same time. Thus, I am focusing on the whole child when I choose learning activities.

In her classroom, Ms. Fatimah was teaching children one letter of the alphabet. She engaged them in many types of activities in order to help them with the specific letter. First, they read a story that had the specific letter repeated in it. She had real items that began with the sound of the specific letter. She brought them different kind of seeds and beans for the children to create the shape of the letter using the seeds and beans on paper. They also talked about the types of seeds they used, and then they glued the seeds to the paper in the shape of the letter that they were talking about. Ms. Fatimah also asked children to trace the letter made from the seeds, paint the seeds using their favorite color, count and find how many seeds or beans they used in order to frame the letter that they were studying. In order to provide experiences for one letter of the alphabet, the children played, painted, talked, sang, and listened to and told stories. She engaged children in math, science, art, and literacy. It was enjoyable for the children and at the same time they were learning and building small muscle development, socialization skills, gross motor skills, and oral language development.

Ms. Noor focused on making teaching and learning more enjoyable. She chose activities to ensure that the children did not get bored and were active all day. She stated:

I have free play time. My goal in using this type of approach is to get children moving to help improve physical development. Making the class activities more enjoyable so children like to come to school is important because they like learning and playing in my class.
Ms. Noor said that when children enjoy learning while in school, they build a positive attitude toward school. Ms. Noor and her students enjoyed learning together. “We really enjoy our time in kindergarten in this way.” One example from her classroom was when she was teaching the theme of “My Country.” Together, they sang Jordanian national songs, wore traditional clothes, and danced traditional dances. She taught them some words in English and Arabic such as ‘flag, king, and queen.’

Ms. Rasha’s, Ms. Lyan’s and Ms. Ream’s approaches to teaching kindergarten were different. These three teachers relied on subject-oriented teaching using traditional strategies on many occasions. Ms. Fatimah employed varied resources in the classroom in order to enrich children’s learning and development. She utilized the resources that were appropriate for her children’s age and abilities. She tried her best to provide and access the best resources for children, no matter the cost of these resources. In her words:

Also, I have numerous types of cards for numbers and letters. We made masks, paper bags, and cards for birthdays and other celebrations and events. We do many things in the classroom which require types of materials which I bought with my own money. I usually prepare my materials by myself. My passion is to make my teaching very attractive for children.

Ms. Lyan indicated that using different resources helped her in meeting the individual differences between children. She shared this statement, “I think by using different resources children engage in the teaching and learning process. At the same time, I can meet individual differences and the age appropriateness of children.”

Ms. Noor also recognized the value of varied resources when she said the following:

I do believe that the most effective resources that I can utilize for instruction are authentic, hand on materials. If I don’t have access to concrete resources, then I use semi-concrete resources. Children learn more when I use authentic items. I do
my best to find the suitable resources for the themes that we study and that fit with children’s interests and are age appropriate.

In one of Ms. Noor’s lessons, the teaching theme was “My animals.” She brought a real rabbit to the classroom so that the kindergarten children were able to see and touch the rabbit, and name and feed him. She brought different kinds of rabbit food, such as small pieces of carrots, grass, and apple. The children were so interested in the themed study of rabbits. They learned about rabbits, shapes, colors, food they eat, and care of the rabbits.

*Understanding and reaching all children’s varied needs.* It was very important for teachers to understand children’s needs and interests. Four out of the five participants in the first case knew that children need to have freedom in movement. Children need tenderness, and a feeling of safety and caring, however, Ms. Rasha did not seem to fully comprehend the needs of her students. She thought that children needed to be polite and disciplined at this age.

It was obvious that Ms. Fatimah understood her children’s needs. She knew that children need to feel safe and comfortable in the classroom. She added that she needs to understand her students’ problems in order to help them. She shared with me her story with a special student’s needs:

The teacher has to understand the problems that they have. If a child has an emotional, or cognitive problem, and maybe even if a special need, the teacher has to be understanding. Actually, I have girl with special needs who has difficulty in speaking. She could not speak well because she was born with problems in her speech system. In addition to this, this girl suffers from the offense and ridicule of the other children in the class. I actually deal with these issues in a sensitive way. I encourage her to share in discussion. I give her tasks that are suitable for her abilities and, at the same time, I speak with the other children about how to be friends with everyone.
Ms. Fatimah understood that all of her children have varied characteristics and needs. She stated it this way:

I have some children who have no preschool experiences, so they are behind when they come to kindergarten from the children who have attended preschool. I have some children who can read. Some are able to recognize all letters and numbers in both languages (English and Arabic), other children cannot. Moreover, I have some children who can understand me while I am talking and they do not need concrete materials to help them understand. Some children need different types of strategies. I engage them in a different sense in order to understand me or understand my questions.

Ms. Fatimah mentioned that individual differences exist in many classes, and her job is to meet the children where they are. Ms. Fatimah worked very hard to reach her children’s needs. Since she espoused the belief that children learn and develop holistically, she used different strategies that depended on the integrated approach in teaching them while enhancing their overall development. She said:

I think the individual’s differences in each child in my classroom play an important role when I plan the activities for all of the children. I do believe some activities may be appropriate for some of the children’s cognitive or emotional development levels. But, at the same time, those same learning activities are not appropriate for other students.

Moreover, she said that she believed that children need concrete materials and use their senses in order to learn, so she tried to use learning activities and materials that children can use more than one sense in order to help them learn. She said:

I think the best way is to use varied, multi-sensory strategies. I try to utilize more than one of the five senses in each planned activity. I think some children understand from the spoken word, but other children need to use their eyes and ears in order to understand. Still others have to be active in order to learn in class.

Ms. Noor also understood the diverse needs of children and worked diligently to reach all of the children’s needs. She indicated:

Children at this age have to feel free to move in the classroom. They really need to play. So I do not force them to stay in seats all day. Instead we spend time
moving, playing, singing, dancing, and even some time I allow the children to choose do what they want in the classroom. Many times we engage in free play such as pulling the string, the rabbits’ jump, and more…

Since the children and Ms. Noor played together so much, they rarely sat down for seat work. She had three tables that children could sit and work at some activities such as painting, cutting, and writing. She had several centers, and children could choose where they wanted to work. She organized and prepared everything for them at the centers. In her words, “We have different centers, in addition to one computer, and a small library. There are three tables so children can work at painting and on other activities such as writing and cutting.”

Ms. Noor indicated that children need tenderness, hugs, and love. She said the following:

I found that if a child makes a mistake or chooses to be aggressive, when I talk them through a positive manner, they calm down and feel better. I hug the children to feel more secure. I know children at this age need tenderness so much.

Ms. Noor used tenderness often with her students. To help them feel cared for, she hugged and kissed the children.

*Grouping to maximize the learning.* Grouping the children was another strategy that participants utilized to enhance learning and development of children. The participants, in the first case in Jordan, used different strategies to group kindergarten children. Mixed ability group was one strategy that all of them used in grouping the children. Ms Fatimah said this, “I group the students so each group has different levels….children at advanced levels, low levels and typical levels.” She used this strategy because she believed that children who are advanced could help the lower level
students. Also, Ms. Noor advocated the same strategy in grouping the children, “I use mixed ability strategies to group the children. At the same table there are children at advanced levels and lower levels. Children at advanced levels help lower level children.” She considered the children’s achievement in her grouping strategy, “I group the children according to individual differences.”

Giving children the opportunity to choose kindergarten friends and the activity they wanted to do was another strategy that Ms. Noor and Ms. Fatimah employed in order to group children. Ms. Fatimah said:

Also, I want to add that sometime I allow the children to choose where they want to sit and with whom they want to work. Especially in the morning centers, the children choose to play where they want. We have free play and center time and during those times the children choose to play and work with whom they want. Gender, as a Jordanian cultural perspective, was also considered as a part of the grouping strategy.

Ms. Noor said the following, “As I told you before, I consider the children’s gender at the beginning of the year, until I change their attitudes regarding working with each other.” It was obvious that she had some problems regarding this issue. The boys in her class ‘hate’ the girls, so she grouped the boys together and the girls together when they worked at the tables. Similarly, Ms. Fatimah, Ms. Rasha, and Ms. Lyan raised this same issue and strategy of grouping children by gender. Ms. Fatimah said, “I have three groups; one group for girls, one group for boys, and one group for both genders. The last group depends on the kids’ relationships.”

Ms. Rasha and Ms. Reem did not allow choices for the children. Instead they instituted the criteria for grouping the children. Ms. Rasha commented:

I group the students so each group has different levels....advanced children, children at lower levels, and typical children. Also I group them according to gender so the same group has girls and boys. I do not put aggressive children
together in the same group. If I have two noisy children, I do not put them together at the same group. If children who are very close to each other work together or sit at the same table they may make noise so I try to put them in different groups.

Planning. All three teachers Ms. Noor, Ms. Fatima and Ms. Lyan planned for short and long term experiences. They usually started by setting long-term goals that have to be achieved at the end of the year. Then they planned for the short term, for one unit, and then for one week. They considered the assessment data, children’s abilities, children’s ages, and the resources that they had in the planning for teaching kindergarten children. However Ms. Noor’s, Ms. Fatima’s and Ms. Lyan’s plans were built on an integrated approach, while Ms. Rasha’s and Ms. Reem’s plans were built on a subject-oriented approach.

Ms. Noor identified that “in my planning, I plan to have many activities that are appropriate for children’s ages and appropriate for the characteristics of holistic development.” Ms. Fatimah stated, “I am actually taking into consideration while planning for young children, their age and individual differences. I consider the goals and outcomes as well as the required content, the classroom environment, and the materials that I have in the classroom.” Since kindergarten is built on thematic units, she took themes and built plans on them. According to Ms. Fatimah, “In my planning, the activities and strategies that I use serve the theme. I believe planning for kindergarten is different than planning for first or second grade. That is because in these classes the planning is subject directed.” In contrast, Ms. Reem’s and Ms. Rasha’s plans were more focused on learning new content and the cognitive development of children.
Caring communities. Setting up good relationships, classroom discipline, physical environment, and the role of religion were the subthemes that were identified within the larger theme of creating caring community. The following descriptions explain how the five teachers characterized these subthemes.

Setting up good relationships. Setting up good relationships with students and with students’ families while building a good relationship between students, were concerns of all five of the public school teacher participants in the first case (north Jordan). Additionally, they worked to change any negative relationships that they perceived between the girls and boys. In order to build good relationships with students’ families, they invited all families to the classroom at the beginning of the year to discuss their teaching strategies and beliefs. All of the teachers observed in north Jordan set-up means for ongoing communication. All public kindergarten programs have Parent Participation programs. Mothers are welcome to visit and spend time with children at the school, help in various ways, and share in the educational process. Ms. Noor noted that she had a good working relationship with her students’ families. She stated:

Usually I set the program with the date and the parent’s name at the beginning of the year when we meet them. The participation in the classroom is just for mothers not fathers, (this is our tradition as you know). Fathers can come and ask about their children in the school, but as a girls’ school which is operated by females and within our culture it is unacceptable to have men as helpers in the classroom.

Thus, all of the teachers had a good working relationship with the children’s families that began to develop at the beginning of the school year. In spite of the good relationships, teachers and parents had some conflicts regarding beliefs as to what and how children need to be educated in school.
Being familiar with the community’s culture and traditions helped the teachers to build a sound relationship with parents and families. Ms. Fatimah mentioned that being born, growing-up, and living in the same community helped her to build an effective relationship with students’ parents and families. She reflected:

Actually, I contact all my students’ family at the beginning of the year, and take their phone numbers. So there is continued contact... Also since I was born, grew-up, was educated at the same school, and live in the same community in the same area, makes my mission to build a good relationship with the families very easy. Personally, I know all the families and I have a good social relationship with them, and usually visit them. So I think I can build a reciprocal relationship built on respect for each other.

The participants were all familiar with the communities except Ms. Noor. She moved into the community following her marriage to a man from the community near the school. She considered it a challenge to build a strong relationship with families and to appreciate the culture and customs of the community.

Regarding the teacher-student relationship, Ms. Noor and Ms. Fatimah mentioned that loving the children and working with them were factors that helped them succeed in teaching. Ms. Noor stated, “we are like one family.” She said that she felt that she was like a mother for all of her students. They called her “mama” meaning mother in English. She hugged them and built a very good relationship with her students. The children loved her so much, and she considered that special relationship as one reason that she was successful in her teaching career. According to Ms. Noor:

I feel I am like their mom and they are all my children. I love them all and call them mama. At the beginning of the year, this is the relationship that I set-up and keep working at it to strengthen it.

Regarding the student-student relationship, Ms. Fatimah noted that she did not have this type of relationship with her students. She had children who hurt other children,
cooperative children, and children who were aggressive to other children in the classroom. Ms. Fatimah said, “I want to tell you the truth; I have all kinds of relationships among children. There are friendly relationships, relationships that are built on the cooperation among children, and I have aggressive relationships.” She worked at the beginning of the year to build good relationships among the children by developing the idea that they all are one family and they have to love, care, respect, and cooperate with each other in the classroom.

Classroom discipline. At the beginning of the school year, Ms. Fatimah and Ms. Noor engaged all of the children in a discussion to set the classroom rules. Following the discussion of the rules, they collaboratively made the rules as pictures in order to get the children to be able to understand and read the statement. Since most of the children at this stage cannot read the words, they can comprehend pictures that were placed in the classroom. Ms. Fatimah described this approach to setting the rules as follows:

At the beginning of the year, I use drawing pictures as a strategy along with discussion with children to set the rules. For example, to set the rule that ‘the block playing center is not to hurt or hit each other,’ we discussed and drew pictures for children who hurt and hit others by throwing the blocks, and drawing other pictures to illustrate children playing with blocks. We put (x) on the first picture that shows the wrong behaviors for them what not to do and put that in the block center. Another rule for example, is for the kitchen center. It is for everyone (boys and girls). I draw a picture of the kitchen with both boys and girls playing in it and then we discuss this picture. So by the end of first semester these pictures become familiar for children.

Ms. Rasha, Ms. Reem, and Ms. Lyan informed the children of the rules directly, and they expected them to obey the rules without any discussion. Ms. Rasha communicated this way, “I think children need to know how to follow rules and be polite in the classroom. They have to be able to work together.” This expectation was replicated
in her teaching practice. For instance, in a lesson during morning circle time while she was talking about some pictures that expressed some feelings, she showed pictures of an angry person. She stated, “if you do not follow the rules, I will be angry”. Consequently, the children were just afraid of her. If they chose not to follow the rules, they knew that they would be in trouble.

Regarding the role of rewards and punishments in classroom discipline, all five teachers in north Jordan used tangible rewards for children in the classroom. They suggested that children needed rewards to keep them active and working. Some rewards that they utilized were stars, candy, presents, and many more types of rewards. Regarding punishment of children, all of them stated that they did not like to use punishment for children. Ms. Rasha used many rewards for children. She thought that children required rewards to keep them working. She noted, “I reinforce children by giving them a variety of rewards. I try to get them to like the school by accepting them and preparing enjoyable activities at the beginning of the year to make an easier transition into first grade.” Ms. Fatimah used rewards to keep children engaged in the activities. She mentioned, “I think using a reinforcement system by distributing rewards and the treats to the children keep children engaged in lessons and feel comfortable.” She disliked using punishment with children. This is what she said about it, “I do not use punishment in my classroom…But I do use reinforcement and a reward system with the children. I found this strategy to be very helpful in the classroom management.”

Ms. Lyan implemented rewards with her students frequently. She indicated that children needed rewards to keep them engaged in activities. She noted, “children like rewards so much. They exert their best effort to have earned them.” She also did not
punish children. In her words, “Believe me… I cannot punish children, so I do not use it as discipline. I just say to the misbehaving child that I will not give you a reward instead.”

*Physical environment.* All of the classes in the first case had child-friendly furniture. The tables, chairs, and shelves were all at the children’s level. All materials in the classrooms were labeled by the teacher participants in two ways, both by pictures and written words. There were different learning centers that the Education Department recommended and supplied. Kitchen center equipment included ovens, tables, pots, and other materials. In the science, music, reading, and block centers, the materials were provided. The kindergarten furniture was modeled after the United States’ pre-school system. All kindergarten classrooms in Jordanian schools were set up by the educational department staff. All kindergarten furniture was funded from USAID foundation, and the education department staff arranged the classrooms and the centers. Kindergarten teachers were not allowed to move or change the design of the classroom. They were not allowed to change the center arrangement, whatsoever. They could only move the tables in the classroom. Ms. Fatimah was not satisfied with the specified arrangement of the classroom. She stated:

I do not have any water resources in the classroom but do have running water in the classroom. Also, I do not like the room arrangement. It is not appropriate. For example, the kitchen and the discovery or science centers are far from where running water is. Also the utility is far from the class, so I cannot teach the children to wash their hands before and after dining or eating!

*Role of religion.* All of the kindergarten teachers engaged in the first case implemented religious instruction frequently in the curriculum. Because all of the students were Muslim, they focused on discussions that developed sound relationships
between the students and families. The teachers also applied the tenets of Islam to help children develop and clarify morality. Ms. Fatimah said, “I invest time implementing lessons about religious commitments. I give them some stories from the Qur’an and tell them that we have to cooperate with each other and love each other so our God will love us.” Furthermore, she said:

I speak with the children through using religious words. For example, I said it is not good to offend other people. She was born like that and our God will be angry with us if we offend others. We have to respect all other people.

Ms. Reem also used the religious principles and the Qur’an to improve relationships among children and families. In her class, she read a phrase from the Qur’an, which included “if the people want to have faith in God they have to be of good heart and soul with their parents.” Then she discussed this phrase with the children, and asked them many questions to ensure that they understood. Her goal was children-will choose to behave from what comes from the discussion of the religious belief.

Furthermore, Ms. Lyan expressed the same sentiments as Ms. Reem. Ms. Lyan said that she believes in heaven and the fire as eternal reward and punishment for good and evil people, so she wants children to choose positive behaviors. She talked also about the manner of Muslim people. She said in one of her classes, “Is this a good way to talk with your friends? Is this the manner of the Muslims?”

Morning center time was another area in which all participants illustrated that the Qur’an was employed in teaching young children. In the videotaped observations, the participants encouraged the children to memorize some “Ayat” (the Words of Allah) from the Qur’an. To help children memorize the “Ayat,” the children repeated the “Ayat” over and over.
Ensured success. According to the data analysis, I identified three factors that helped kindergarten teachers in north Jordan to succeed in reflecting and implementing DAP beliefs in practice. Professional development, commitment to kindergarten children, and support were the subthemes of the ensured success theme.

Professional development. All of the kindergarten teachers working in the public schools were expected to have the same training sessions. The training sessions included: (a) basic level of teacher training for new kindergarten teachers to introduce many parts of the curriculum; (b) Training Sessions of the National Interactive Curriculum; (c) Wisconsin training sessions “work with little children.” In this session, the historical development of early childhood education; children’s age appropriate characteristics, developmental needs, learning strategies, learning difficulties, behavioral issues, and environmental characteristics of a kindergarten classroom were presented. Different programs for young children such as Head Start, Montessori, and the Bank Street approaches were discussed during this session; (d) training sections about Sesame Street were for two days. In this session, they discussed the safety issues on the road. The team gave the kindergarten teachers’ an agenda that had Sesame street characters that they could use to get children to express their feelings; (e) International Organization for Standardization (IOS) training was another section for kindergarten teachers about international accreditation.

Moreover, there was annual supervision of the kindergarten classes and observations to review how kindergarten teachers work with kindergarten children.
Administrators checked to determine if teachers provided a secure, healthy, and safe classroom environment. Ms. Noor noted that having all of the professional development sessions helped her to build positive beliefs and attitudes about being a kindergarten teacher. According to Ms. Noor:

I really feel that the training workshops were very beneficial for me. It helps me to see where the children are, their needs, and developmental levels so I can build on what I know. Also we saw and discussed different or several a good models with which to work. Some of models are from the USA.

Ms. Fatimah also had all the same training sessions. According to her, the training sessions helped her to find what was appropriate for children and ensure success in teaching young children. She said the following:

These training sessions were very helpful and beneficial for me. It is helpful for me to see how I have to deal with children; how I have to teach and help children holistically develop. Since the kindergarten furniture is very different from other upper classes, I did need some experience to know how to use the materials that I have in my classroom. Connecting it all to child development characteristics with good strategies that are appropriate to the characteristics of children in this stage or this age were all so helpful. So all of these sessions were supportive. I think the most beneficial one was the Wisconsin training session because it helped me so much to see where the children are and what the characteristics of the children are. To know what their developmental needs are at this age and how I can better ensure teaching this age of children was useful.

Ms. Rasha and Ms. Reem just finished the first two training sessions because they only had two years of experience in teaching kindergarten, but they commented on the value of training they had received.

*Commitment to kindergarten children.* Ms. Fatimah mentioned that it was her love to work with children. Ms. Fatimah identified another factor that helped her to succeed as a kindergarten teacher and communicated it this way, “I think my desire and
passion to work with children… children that I love; I love children so much and also the feelings that I have to be a good and successful kindergarten teacher encourages me to be perfect.” Patience was another issue that helped Ms. Fatimah to be successful while functioning in the kindergarten setting, “I was known as a patient person. I know that I am very patient with children.” Videotaped observations of Ms. Fatimah supported this finding.

Ms. Noor demonstrated self-confidence in working with children. She said that a good teacher who has a strong belief in herself and her ability is able to work very hard in order to achieve and meet any necessary challenges. She stated the following:

Actually, for me I do believe that a good teacher who has a strong belief in her ability to change and can meet any challenges. I am always trying to apply any kind of innovative strategy. I think it is good for children to learn. I feel as if the children are my own children. I have to do my best to get them develop and learn.

In the videotaped lessons, it was obvious that she had a strong relationship with children, and the children loved her as well. She noted that children desire to do their best and that was why she thought that she had to work with each one of them. She indicated:

I think the most important thing which made me successful in working with children is loving the children and my commitment to their education. I feel that this is the best work I can do. I love the children so much and I do believe that they deserve a good teacher to help them learn and develop. Also I feel lucky because my students love me as well.

Support. All of the participants in the first case considered support from students’ parents, the principal, and from the educational supervisor as factors that encouraged them to implement and reflect beliefs into practice. Ms. Fatimah had a support system from her students, parents, the principal, and from her educational supervisor. She said that this support helped her…
I think my principal and supervisor support me emotionally, specifically the educational supervisor. Wherever he goes he talks about my class and the good experiences that we encounter. I heard that from various teachers in our training sessions. All of the kindergarten teachers in the same city attend the same types of training. I feel the encouragement of the educational supervisor. It is one of the supports that I have received.

Ms. Noor spoke of the support from the educational supervisor. She said that, “educational supervisors encourage me by saying good things about my work with children.” Also, she noted that the educational supervisor liked the ways in which she worked with children. That encouragement helped her to implement and reflect her beliefs into teaching practice with kindergarten children. She mentioned:

I think that the educational supervisor likes my way in working with children because he always invites other kindergarten teachers into my classroom to see how I work with children. Even on some occasions the Department of Education invites me as an exceptional teacher to attend an event or workshop. For example, last month we had several kindergarten teachers who came from China as volunteers to present their teaching experiences. The Educational Department invited me to go and discuss teaching strategies with the visitors.

Ms. Noor further stated that her students’ parents trusted her and the ways that she works with children. That was another aspect that encouraged her to continue working with young children and have the ability to apply her beliefs into practice.

**Reflecting upon obstacles to DAP.** Another theme identified was the obstacles and barriers to implementing DAP beliefs. The kindergarten teachers explained obstacles to implementing beliefs included lack of parental awareness, relationships between boys and girls, physical size of the classroom, not having assistants, challenges of providing a safe and secure environment, and lack of funding for resources. These were the most frequent barriers that three of the kindergarten teachers expressed.
Parent awareness. Lack of parental awareness was one challenge for the participants in the first case. Ms. Fatimah stated that at the beginning of every year she had problems with the parental beliefs regarding how she works with the kindergarten children. She said:

Some parents push me to start teaching their children to read and write very early. They expect me to focus on the academic issues. They want me to give their children homework. They want me to keep children working or studying all evening at home until they go to sleep.

She also added that “many parents believed that the kindergarten is just the place for children to learn to read and write.”

Ms. Lyan, Ms. Reem, and Ms. Rasha raised another important point, which was the parents’ belief about the role of public school in educating young children. Ms. Lyan said:

I just have 15 students in my classroom, and we have just one section at the school. That is because many parents do not trust public schools. Parents do not send their children to public school because they trust private school more!

Ms. Rasha also stated that teachers and schools’ administrations still need to work more with parents to enhance and improve awareness so parents can participate in the classroom and help in educating their children in general. She said:

Even though we have two sections of kindergarten and each section can hold 25 students, but because families are not aware about the important of kindergarten for their children, we have just 18 students in the two sections. There are three sections for the first grade class so it was presumed that we would have at least two sections of kindergarten!

Boys-girls relationship. Teacher participants in north Jordan discussed a negative relationship between the girls and boys in all of the kindergarten classrooms. This negative relationship between the students made for some challenges for the kindergarten
teachers to establish and build a good relationship in the classroom. Ms. Rasha said, “to be honest with you, the boys dislike the girls so much that they hit them and steal their pencils. Actually this is makes many challenges for me.” Also, she stated that she was still working to change this kind of relationship between her students. Ms. Lyan also stated, “the boys do not like to sit at the same table with girls. They do not want to play with them.”

Despite these issues, the participants worked very hard to change the relationships. They made some improvements. “I tried my best during the day to change this by engaging both genders in activities,” Ms. Fatimah said. Moreover, Ms. Noor noted that she too had negative issues between the boys and the girls, “Actually I do have a negative relationship between the boys and the girls.” In spite of that, she tried her best to engage the children together in several activities so that they would accept each other. She said, “I try my best during the day to change this association by engaging both of genders in activities. Since we spend almost all day playing to learn, I encourage them to play together.”

Ms. Noor referred to the negative association between boys and girls as an aspect of the culture of the children. “I think the reason may be our tradition and culture. Many parents tell the boys not to play with girls. Just stay with boys, otherwise you will be like girls.”

*No assistants.* Not having an assistant was expressed as a challenge by Ms. Noor, Ms. Lyan and Ms. Fatimah but not by Ms. Rasha, since she had another kindergarten teacher in her classroom. Ms. Reem had just 10 students in her classroom. So for Ms.
Rasha, having an assistant was one factor that helped her succeed in her educational career of teaching kindergarten children. However, all of the kindergarten teachers in Jordan had no aides to help them in the classroom. Ms. Rasha’s situation was an exception.

With 26 students in the kindergarten class and no one to assist, Ms. Fatimah had another challenge. She stated:

I do not have anyone to help me in the classroom. We do not have teacher assistants in the schools in Jordan… I do not have any time for rest. I do not have time for eating or drinking. I keep working with children from 7:30 until 12:30.

Moreover, she added that there was not anybody to help her in cleaning the classroom. She said that she cleaned it three times every day, and that was extra work for her.

Ms. Noor indicated that she would like to have someone to help her in the classroom. She said, “I do not have someone to help me in the classroom. I would like to have someone, an aide…I have 24 students in the class, and they are so active.”

Ms. Rasha said that she was fortunate to have another kindergarten teacher in her classroom. The explanation for this exceptional situation was that School C offered two sections for the kindergarten, but they did not have enough numbers for two sections. The two teachers agreed to combine the two classes into one and to work together in teaching this class. The result was one classroom with a total number of 16 students with two teachers. Ms. Rasha said:

Actually I have just eight students in my class. We have two kindergarten sections or classes in the school, so I and the other teacher in the second class combined the students to be taught together. We have 16 students and I teach them with the other kindergarten teacher. We divide the mission between us. One teacher teaches the children, and the other one is working in preparing for the activities. We switch the roles from time to time.
**Size of the classroom.** The physical size of the classroom was one barrier that Ms. Rasha reflected upon in her beliefs and in practice. She stated, “actually my classroom is very small. I cannot recognize the centers. My class size is very small and I cannot change the organization of classroom. I have three tables so I divided the students to three groups.” That classroom size was a challenge affecting Ms. Noor’s and Ms. Rasha’s beliefs and practice. Ms. Noor focused on intentional and free play in the classroom. She needed more space to be able to implement this belief effectively. In her words, “The centers are very close so I do not have enough space to apply my beliefs in accordance to play. I would like it if the class is bigger.” She also compared her class with the other classes in other public schools. She said, “if I want to compare the size of my classroom with the others kindergarten classes in other schools it is really small.”

**Interruptions during the day.** Ms. Noor, Ms. Fatimah, and Ms. Lyan mentioned most professional development sessions that were mandatory and offered by the Education Department were during the school day time. When teachers had to leave the students for professional development or for other reasons, teachers who are not qualified worked with the kindergarten children. Ms. Noor said, “also, when I go to visit another teacher in another school, I leave my children with somebody who may be not qualified to work with children.” She indicated that she would like professional development sessions held during the summer. She suggested another alternative was pre-service training instead of during the school day. Both alternatives would work better for the children. She said, “I think that we have to have some pre-service training or have professional development opportunities during the summer holiday.” She actually could
not stand to leave her children because it disrupted everything with the children, and was not good for children themselves.

Find and fund the resources. Ms. Rasha, Ms. Reem and Ms. Lyan stated that there was a shortage of necessary resources. Teachers have to purchase many resources with their own money. Ms. Rasha said, “I have to buy some resources from my own money. But I cannot do this all of the time as this will cost me so much money.” Ms. Noor pointed out that teachers need help to find appropriate educational resources for kindergarten children. She suggested the Education Department provide some examples or Internet access in the schools so teachers can look for the good resources. Ms. Lyan said, “I would like if there was a professional development session that discusses different resources that we can use in specific subjects, not just talking about resources in general.”

Safe and secure environment. Ms. Fatimah mentioned that she had problems with the playground. It was not secure and safe for children to play. For example, they had a sand area or sandbox which was still in process of being set up. If the children fell, they would be hurt; so the playground was not safe. She stated:

Thus, my students are not able to play outside, and since we do not have a gymnasium that is also an obstacle for me to develop the physical domain for the children. The students have to stay in the classroom all the time.

Ms. Reem stated the same thing. She said, “We have no place for the young children to play. We have all the tools that have to be set-up on the children’s playground, but they still working on it! It is not safe for children to play outside.”
Case Study 2/ Central Alabama

**Research Site.** The second case consisted of three school settings in central Alabama. Two settings had kindergarten integrated with first through fifth grade classrooms. The third setting was an early learning center serving infants, toddler, preschool aged children and kindergarten-aged children. Schools were chosen for this study because of the exceptional commitment and work by the teachers in helping children develop in all domains. The kindergarten teachers who worked in these schools were recommended by three faculty members at a nearby university for their exceptional work with young children.

School 2A was an early learning center in central Alabama for children from eight weeks of age to kindergarten. School 2A was a private, church-sponsored setting. The kindergarten in this setting was a transition kindergarten mostly serving families and their children who were not ready to go to public school. Several of the children were not yet five years old, and some of the children were not considered by their parents or teachers as developmentally ready for public school kindergarten. The K5 program in this setting was called a Success Through Academic Readiness Skills (STARS). Moreover, the care and educating of young children was guided by Christian beliefs in this setting. Teachers and administrators viewed each child as a unique individual.

School 2B was a public elementary school located in central Alabama and built in 1920. School 2B was a school for children who lived in the area and for both genders. It had five kindergarten classrooms. There were approximately 612 kindergarten through fifth grade children. Thirty percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced priced lunch. The student population was diverse. There were approximately 44 full time
teachers, 12 special education teachers and an instructional aide, one nurse, one

counselor, two administrators, two clerical staff, two physical education teachers, and six

staff who worked in the child nutrition program.

School 2C was a public elementary school for children from pre-kindergarten to

fourth grade located in central Alabama. School 2C was a school for children who lived

in the area and for both genders. It had six kindergarten classrooms. School 2C consisted

of approximately 56 sections or classrooms with 662 students. There were 48 full time

teachers. The ratio of teachers to students was 1:14. Furthermore, there were 12

instructional support teachers, two in the reading room and three staff in the office,

including one nurse, and two administrators. This school had an art program, computer

sciences program, physical education program, and five special education programs.

Participants. Five kindergarten teachers participated in this case. One teacher

worked in School 2A, two teachers worked in School 2B, and two teachers worked in

School 2C. Teachers were purposefully selected based on recommendations by three

faculty members at a nearby university. The teachers were known for their commitment
to working with children. To maintain confidentiality, the participants were asked to

select pseudonyms to protect their identities. Table 5 outlines the demographics of the

participants in this case.

“Ms. Anne,” a female, was married and the mother of three boys. She had an

undergraduate degree in elementary education, and Master’s degree in Elementary

Education. She was working on a Ph.D. in early childhood education. She had 18 years of

teaching experience in grades Pre-K to 4th grade. Her first year of teaching was 4th grade
for one year. She taught first grade for six years. After her oldest son was born, she took a break from teaching for about five years. When her middle son was three, she started teaching in the preschool where her children went to school. This arrangement allowed her to get back into teaching but still have some flexibility in her hours to be with her children. She taught kindergarten in a preschool setting, a transitional classroom for parents who are not ready for their children to go to public school even though they were five years old. This was her fifth year to teach kindergarten in the learning center which was School 2A.

“Ms. Tonya” was a 33-year-old female who was married and had three boys, ages 14, 13 and seven. She had a bachelor’s degree in early childhood/elementary education from University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). She was in the process of getting her master’s degree in early childhood education/elementary education from UAB. She had been a kindergarten teacher for 10 years in School 2B. Ms. Tonya indicated that her principal would love to see her in administration, but she did not want to sit in an office and talk to parents all day. Working with young children was her passion. Before teaching kindergarten, she taught in summer school for fourth and fifth graders, and interned in third grade. She had an instructional aide in her classroom.

“Ms. White,” a female, was married with no children. She had her undergraduate degree in elementary education from an urban university and was working on her graduate degree in elementary education. She also was working on a special certification in reading which was an additional 30 hours. She had been a kindergarten teacher for five years. She taught fifth grade for one semester, and then started teaching kindergarten in School 2B, which was four miles from her house. She never planned to leave early
childhood. So, even if she changed grade levels, she wanted to continue teaching in kindergarten to second grade. Her favorite subject to teach was reading. She indicated that one day she would like to be a reading coach for the school and work with children who are having difficulty reading.

“Ms. Hope,” a female, was married with no children. She earned her undergraduate degree in early childhood education from a small Catholic college. She earned a master’s degree in elementary education from a state university. She had been teaching for eight years. She taught two years in Mobile with four-year-olds, and this was her sixth year teaching kindergarten in School 2C.

“Ms. Spring,” a female, had received an undergraduate degree in Child Development from a state university. She was fascinated with the child development part of her degree. She also earned a master’s degree in elementary education from the same university. She started student teaching at School 2C. After she graduated, she was able to get a job in School 2C. She had four years of kindergarten teaching experience.

Table 5

Participants’ demographics of second case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Student number</th>
<th>Kindergarten purpose</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2A</td>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>PhD/ ECE</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Learning through play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B</td>
<td>Tonya White</td>
<td>MA/ ECEE</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Learning and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MA/EE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Learning and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2C</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>MA/EE</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Learning and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>MA/EE</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Building foundation in math and reading</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Themes and subthemes. Based on the analysis of the entire data set including interviews, classroom observations, and the documentary materials of kindergarten teachers in the second case “central Alabama,” I identified five themes regarding DAP beliefs and practices of the kindergarten teachers. The themes were: (a) beliefs guide practice; (b) enhanced learning and development; (c) caring community; (d) ensured success; and (e) reflecting upon obstacles to DAP. Table 6 outlines the identified themes and subthemes of the second case: central Alabama.

Table 6
Themes and Subthemes of the second case: central Alabama

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes / Subthemes</th>
<th>Beliefs Guide Practice</th>
<th>Enhanced Learning and Development</th>
<th>Caring Community</th>
<th>Ensured Success</th>
<th>Reflected upon obstacles to DAP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on play</td>
<td>Implementing effective teaching</td>
<td>Set up a good relationship</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Parent awareness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on whole child</td>
<td>Understanding and reaching children’s varied needs</td>
<td>Classroom discipline</td>
<td>Commitment to kindergarten</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of DAP</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>State curricula and mandated standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grouping children to maximize learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluating learning and development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Beliefs Guide Practice. According to analyses of the interviews, observations, field notes, and the documentary materials, several beliefs about DAP were identified as a guide for teacher’s practice in the kindergarten classroom: (a) focus on play, (b) focus on the whole child, and (c) importance of DAP. These were the beliefs that guided the five kindergarten teachers’ work with children in the kindergarten classrooms in central Alabama. Each teacher had her own beliefs that guided her practice. Even when two or more teachers shared the same beliefs, each one had a particular way to practice that belief in the classroom.

Focus on play. Play was the most important belief that guided practice of the kindergarten teachers in central Alabama. While the practice was varied among the kindergarten teachers, all of them believed in the important role of play in teaching children. Ms. Anne, for example, said that play was the work of children. She stated:

I feel very strongly about the role of play in kindergarten because play is the job of a kindergartener…it gives them a chance to understand the world…it gives them a chance to interact with others…it gives them a chance to express and control their emotions…it gives them a chance to use their imaginations…I think especially socio-dramatic play can be a tool for learning about a concept…about the writing props and space for the kids. I think that play needs to be child-initiated and teacher supported.

In Ms. Anne’s classroom, it was obvious that she applied this belief. She had a pretend area set up in her classroom that provided a space for children to engage in pretend play. She provided tools such as dress-up clothes, stove, refrigerator, play food, paper, pencils, and other props that varied depending on what children were learning. There were little plastic animals, blocks, Legos, and trains allowing children to build and play based on their own choices. There were many different centers available in the
classroom. These centers included dramatic play areas. Many manipulatives were provided to enhance the children’s imagination. Ms. Anne also had a construction center where children were allowed to build things through play.

Furthermore, Ms. Anne believed that children learn through play. In her classroom, children played different games. One game was a card game, “War.” In this game, children played cards and learned the concepts of “less” and “more.” Children each drew a playing card. The child with the higher number had “more” and won the two cards. Children were very active in the classroom. Another example was Ms. Anne’s use of pretend play to improve children’s language and literacy skills. She had a restaurant set up in her classroom with paper and pens for children so they could practice writing when they made menus or took orders from the children eating at the restaurant. This insight about children’s development gave the teacher an opportunity to support each child’s social and cognitive development.

Ms. White also focused on intentional play in teaching kindergarten children. She said, “I think you have to convince some people that play-based learning is – when I say ‘play,’ I mean educational play, ‘intentional play,’ is good and appropriate for them (children).” She expressed that she was upset because they did not have free play because there was no time. She stated, “I would like to say yes but, unfortunately, we don’t have much time for free play. I think we have so many standards to cover that free play is really not encouraged like it used to be.” Furthermore, she added:

I wish we had more time to play. I think that’s great for kids. But, I’ve got to make sure anytime it looks like the kids are just playing, that there’s really an educational purpose behind it, because I’ve got to be able to back myself up, if my principal walks in and it looks like my kids are just playing. I’ve got to be able to justify that and say, ‘Well, they’re playing with blocks, because of this…”

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However, her students played in the classroom often in centers. The teacher was reinforcing the academics, but with a context that children think of as play. They are both learning and playing. Also, children used the blocks to make letters. They used playing in play-dough and shaving cream to make sight words.

*Focus on the whole child.* Ms. Anne pointed out the importance of educating the whole child was because development in one area affects development in each of the other areas. She said:

They are all very closely related…development in one of those areas affects development in the other areas…I think they are all equally important. I think you have to think about each one…how is this lesson going to benefit their cognitive development, their social development…I think you have to be very mindful how it influences the whole child…every part of him.

Ms. Tonya said that she also believes that DAP’s purpose is to educate the whole child. She stated:

The biggest thing is you have to educate is the whole child. It’s hard for a child to concentrate if they’re hungry or if they’re worried or if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. So, you have to make sure that you are touching on their physical, their emotional, as well as the cognitive needs.

*Importance of DAP.* The five teachers in central Alabama indicated that DAP was effective because it allowed each child to develop at his or her own rate. DAP also ensured that children were not forced to do anything that they were not developmentally ready to do. It gave children an opportunity to feel secure with their abilities. Moreover, DAP activities enabled teachers to maximize students’ strengths and use strengths to support whatever weaknesses they may have. DAP allowed for individualizing curricular needs of individual children. Ms. Anne stated:
I think that children are very curious to learn about the world and a developmentally appropriate classroom allows them the opportunity to explore their curiosity. I think it allows for children to develop their own autonomy; It also allows children to develop into a community…to develop a sense of community with each other which I think is really important.

For Ms. White, DAP was important because it focused on children playing an active role and learning through doing. She noted:

One key point is less teacher talking and more student DOING. The hands-on activities I plan are fun and engaging. The students like what they are doing and are eager to complete the activities which make them understand the skills and concepts better.

Similarly, Ms. Tonya added:

I think it’s very effective [DAP], for the simple fact that you take into account child development theory. When you think about kindergarten children, there’s no way that you can sit them down for an hour and listen to a teacher lecture. So, if you think about what they need, then you take into account we may be able to read a story for 10 minutes, but then we’ve got to get up and go do something else. And then we have to come back to the floor, and then we may have to get up and do something else. So, I think that when you’re using developmentally appropriate practice, that it benefits the kids. I think it also benefits the teacher, because if you don’t use developmentally appropriate practices, I think it leads to behavior issues, and you probably are working harder than what you need to. And, our goal at our school is to give every child a year’s progress. Developmentally appropriate practice allows you to, since you’re listening and watching for all of their individual needs. Take every child from where they are and give them a year’s progress.

Enhanced Learning and Development. Four subthemes were identified as teachers’ beliefs and teaching practices implemented in kindergarten settings that enhanced learning and development. In order to enhance and improve children’s learning and development, the five teachers’ raw data revealed these subthemes: (a) implementing effective teaching, (b) understanding and reaching all children’s varied needs, (c) grouping children to maximize learning, and (d) evaluating learning and development.
Implementing effective teaching. Teachers took into consideration the age of children, individual differences, materials for implementation, and learning and development outcomes, when they chose the learning strategies and different resources and activities. Small group teaching, whole group teaching, songs, integrated curriculum, number talks, and telling stories were some of the strategies that the participants in central Alabama implemented in order to improve children’s learning and development.

Ms. Tonya said:

Well, when you’re looking at activities, you have to think about, ‘Will this benefit everyone? Will this offend anyone? Will this go over their heads? Is this too high? Is this too low?’ You have some people who try to teach to the middle. But, I’m a firm believer of trying to find activities – and planning activities – to meet everybody’s needs. And I think that small groups probably help the most, because, in whole group, there’s no way that you can find one activity that is going to take into account all of those differences.

Ms. Tonya also took the different cultures into consideration in teaching kindergarten. She stated this advice:

I would say race would probably be at the top. And I put that into cultural as well. You have your Caucasian children, you have your African American children, you have your Hispanic children, and you have individual differences where they’re coming from different backgrounds. You have children who get read to every night and then you have children who’ve never seen a book before in their lives.

Thus, participants had to implement different strategies in order to enhance the learning and development to reach every one of the children in the classroom. Ms. Tonya was positive and enthusiastic with children. She used songs as one strategy to teach children. She said:

I am a big believer in using strategies that work best for me and my students. You have some people who have – we all have our differences. So, I’m always on the lookout for good strategies to use. I think one of my biggest ones is probably singing. I have a song for everything. I’m a firm believer in that – because songs are something that you take with you and you remember it forever.
She also used “think-pair-share,” a strategy in which the teacher asked the children a question. The children thought for a second. Then, they paired up with a partner, and told their partner the answer. The teacher called on two or three pairs to share. So, everybody had an opportunity to talk and share answers and opinions.

Ms. Anne used an integrated curriculum as much as possible. She did not separate language, science, reading and writing in teaching. She thought of the curricula as thematic. She said, “We usually go by themes, like seasons…and I will do…if they want to learn about fall…it might have ideas for fall activities, winter activities and spring activities.” However, Ms. Hope pointed out that each subject was different so she tried to teach these subjects separately without integration. She said, “Each subject area is a little bit different in how it’s planned and set up.” She also stated:

Sometimes I can incorporate, but if I’m trying to focus specifically on science and I look at the standards and see the concepts that they need to know – and I like to go beyond it as well, because kindergarten has sort of limited standards. So we want to find experiences that are going to mean something to the kids, like cleaning up the pumpkin mess last week. Knowing what’s inside a pumpkin, and it is not a standard, but giving them that opportunity to do it is a fun way to learn what’s inside, and to remember that there are seeds and pulp. And we’re going to remember, because it was in their hands. They got to feel it.

Ms. Hope, Ms. Spring, and Ms. White integrated the kindergarten curriculum. Ms. Hope was teaching about “fall,” so the fall theme appeared in everything in her classroom. She set up the shelf with numerous books about the theme. “Fall, Leaf, Red Leaf Yellow Leaf, Pumpkin, Apples, and Halloween” were just some of the books titles that she had in the reading shelf. She also read a story about Halloween, measured pumpkins in math, compared pumpkins with apples in science, and used many spelling words that related to the “fall” theme in the literacy centers.
For Ms. Spring, it was easier to teach an integrated curriculum rather than teaching separate subjects. According to Ms. Spring,

It makes it easier, if we can incorporate the subjects within each other, because the children are learning, I think are learning, more than if you were to strictly say, I’m only doing math here. I’m only going to do reading here, and I’m only going to talk about vocabulary when I’m reading this book.

In her classroom, she was teaching math through collecting and graphing data. She combined many subjects in that class. She started by talking about the apples from the day before in science. She brought hands-on objects to the classroom including “real apples” in different colors, red, yellow, and green. Then, they talked about the colors of the apples. She asked many questions for brainstorming. Then, she cut the apples into small pieces, and put all of the pieces that had the same color on one plate. She had three plates for each color of apple. She had small cards in the shape of an apple, and the colors, red, yellow, and green. She asked children at each table to test the three kinds of apples and decide which one they liked more. Children were directed to pick the card that was the apple shape and color that represented their choices. The children tasted the apples and picked the apple card. After that, Ms. Spring had a big board with a table to put all the data under the question, “Which is the apple kind the children like more?” Each child put the card he or she had selected in that table. When all the children had added their cards to the table, the children had to count the number of cards for each apple type and then answer the question.

Ms. Anne, Ms. White, and Ms. Tonya used number talks as strategy to work with children in order to develop higher-order thinking and build mental math skills. Ms. White stated:
We have 10 minutes short math lesson, I call them number talks - helps build their number sense. We work understanding numbers 1-5 until the end of this year, December). The different combinations that are used to make five (0&5, 1&4, 2&3 etc.).

In her classroom observation, she used “rekenreks” as a tool to build number sense, and combinations of five. She combined two numbers to make five and then asked the children, “Can you guess my way?” Each child had his or her own rekenreks to make five. Each child had his way to make the number five. She gave the students time for thinking and then asked them to start talking about the problem and the solutions. She was not interested in the correct answers but was more interested in different strategies children used to solve the same problem. Moreover, every time a student came up with an answer, she asked the rest of students if they agreed or disagreed and if they had a different solution. “The rekenrek is composed of two rows of stringed beads with five beads of one color and five beads of another color on each row.” (Parrish, 2010, p. 41)

All of the participants in central Alabama used different kinds of educational resources. Ms. Hope and Ms. Spring used technology often. They especially liked to use the document camera with the LCD projector, which allowed the children to see a big example of what they were working on. Also, Ms. White and Ms. Tonya had a Smart Board where they could show children examples. Children could touch the screen and the problems the teacher presented. All of the participants had Internet service in their classrooms. They also had more than four computers which enabled them to use different educational programs. However, Ms. Spring used the teaching guide as a framework in teaching kindergarten. According to Ms. Spring:

I have teaching guides. I have teachers’ guides that I look at. And I use them as a framework. You know, sometimes I don’t necessarily go step, by step, by step,
by step, of what’s in the book. I also use my own materials that I might find on the Internet, in conjunction with the framework that we have for the district.

**Understanding and reaching all children’s varied needs.** It was important for kindergarten teachers to understand all the varied needs of children in ages five to six years in order to meet these needs in teaching kindergarten. The participants in central Alabama were varied in the knowledge, beliefs, and practices they used to meet children where they were developmentally. They met the needs of all the children in different ways because everyone learns in different ways. They used small groups, whole group, and a variety of resources to make learning enjoyable. These multi-sensory and hands-on activities engaged the kindergarten children in learning.

Ms. Spring suggested that if children had all of their basic needs met, then they would learn. She said the following:

I truly believe that if a child is hungry they’re [sic] not going to be able to focus and they’re [sic] not going to learn. If they have not had enough sleep, they’re not going to be able to focus and they’re not going to be able to learn. So, I feel strongly that, until all of the needs of that child are met, emotionally, physically, socially, then they [sic] will be able to progress further in their learning.

She added:

It’s very tricky to make sure that each child’s needs are being met, in every subject. Whether their weakness is in math or their strength is in reading, you have to make sure that you’re challenging the kids that come into kindergarten already knowing, and you’re also working with the children that don’t know most of their letters.

Ms. Anne had seven children in her classroom. She indicated that not everything works with every child. She said, “I have some children that listen and you don’t need to engage them any other way…they’re always going to listen to you…but I know that I have some that have shorter attention spans.” She said that children need to be met on all
levels; socially, emotionally, cognitively, physically, and to have many opportunities for play. She stated this very eloquently:

They need lots of opportunities for literacy development...and I said play...playing in the classroom and playing outside...chances to use their imagination and to interact with each other, to build relationships with each other...lots of activities to explore...hands-on learning, active learning. I always say to my class...you know, you’re five years old and I don’t expect you to do things that a seven or eight year old...because you’re five...you know, just chances to do things that five year olds should be able to do.

Ms. Tonya added:

So, if you’re teaching the letter M, you may have puppets one day, talking about the M sound. You may have a song that teaches the M sound. You may have pictures for those children who see – those visual learners. You may have M, the little buckets that have the M objects for those kids who need to touch things. Ms. White also indicated that movement was very important for young children.

She stated the following:

I think it’s really important to have lots of time for movement. I underlined movement, like, four times. Kindergarten kids, they cannot sit for long periods of time or they’re going to ‘zone out’ and start moving around and have no idea what you’re saying.

In her classroom, about every 10 minutes of instruction she tried to get up and have a quick sing break or a dance break that kept them interested and engaged. She said that if the children are not moving they are bored.

Ms. Tonya had one child who was at a higher level than the rest of the children in reading. She discussed this issue with the principal and decided to send her to the first grade just for small reading group. As stated by Ms. Tonya:

I have a student who came in already reading on a level G. There’s nobody else in the room that’s on her level. So, I went to my administration and I said, ‘I need her to go to a first-grade class for small reading group.’ She’s still five. She still needs the social and the math and the social studies, but as far as reading, she needs to be pushed. So, she’s going to be in first grade, just for the small reading group and then coming back to me.
Ms. Hope tried to incorporate developmentally appropriate principles into her scheduled daily routine so she stated the following:

Our daily routine is made up of, basically, chunks of curriculum that we need to study. So, I try to lift developmentally appropriate into those chunks by having a difference between whole group activities and then being able to move and go to our desks for independent work. That helps the kids from a movement to having to sit still, to being able to move again. In a way that’s appropriate in the classroom, instead of just acting crazy during work time.

**Planning.** The planning subtheme was observed in the ways the participants planned for the whole year including weekly units and daily lessons. Based on collected and analyzed data, four aspects of planning were considered for teaching: (a) age appropriateness, (b) individually appropriateness, (c) meaningful and relevant activity, and (d) integration of different subjects. Ms. Anne tried to have plans that were appropriate for five year old children. She said:

I try to be mindful of my schedule of what five year olds can do...like how long can they sit...they need to be up...they need to be moving. Like I know I can’t schedule a 30 minute languages art time...it’s just too long for children that age to sit still and listen.

She also focused on the relevancy of the plans and activities to the children’s backgrounds and families. She stated:

Whatever I am planning for the children is meaningful, relevant and respectful of the children and their families. For example, this year I have two children who live in homes without fathers...one because they’re divorced and one because he died...you see, you have to be sensitive to things like that...I’ve had children before that lived with grandparents and how do you be sensitive to the needs of the children.

Ms. Tonya also planned activities to meet the needs of children on different levels. She said:

I have to plan for the higher level children that finish early-what else can they do that is fun but also challenging? This year I really have to modify my curriculum
for my special needs child. I have to think about what his personal goals are and plan activities that are developmentally appropriate for him.

Ms. Spring also stated:

The biggest part of the planning process is there are various different levels of ability. So, when you are planning, you have to plan for the child that knows two letters, and you’re also planning for the child that knows all of the letters and is also reading on, maybe, a first-grade level.

However, Ms. Hope argued that teachers have to consider more than just the academics. They also have to consider in the planning ways that make the instruction fun for children and more engaging. She said:

The planning, that typically has more to do with the academic differences because, in planning in general, I try to keep it fun, engaging, about as much as I can, while still covering the topic. So, in planning, it would just have accommodations, whether they need numbering or, for some of the kids today, finding letters, I would underline the words that they needed to find the letters in, because the page, itself, was too overwhelming for them.

Furthermore, being organized and planning ahead were other things that Ms. Tonya focused on when she prepared for teaching kindergarten. She indicated:

The biggest thing in planning is staying organized, staying ahead. I do not like going home on Friday and not knowing what my week is going to look like. You have to have all of your things in place because, if you have your kids in front of you and you say, ‘Oh, hold on one second, I need to go over here and get this,’ you’re going to lose them. Their attention is going to be gone. So, whatever you need, it needs to be right where you need for it to be, so you can always have your kids’ attention.

In addition to the above, Ms. Anne highlighted good questions that she considered in order to have appropriate plans for teaching kindergarten children. She said:

I think about, ‘Are the things I’m doing helping to create a caring community? Does it enhance developmental learning? Is it intellectually engaging? Is my environment that way? Am I including all curriculum areas in my planning’…I try to do an integrated curriculum where everything includes language, social studies, science, math…I try to do…you know, integrated like that. We also…we don’t really have a curriculum that we have to follow.
Grouping children to maximize learning. In order to group children to maximize learning, the participants considered children’s abilities. So, they had two types of groups, mixed ability groups and ability-based grouping. They used mixed ability grouping when children worked in the learning centers, so that higher level children could help the lower level children. Also, the participants used ability-based grouping when they pulled a group of children to work on particular skills. Ms. White said:

The center groups are mixed-ability. I have a child in them that’s usually a little bit higher, one that’s in the middle, and one that’s a little bit lower, because they can help each other. The higher level kids can help the lower level kids.

She added, “I feel like mixed-ability works well, when they are working together. In other words, but when I pull them back, it is ability based.” On the contrary, Ms. Tonya stated:

When I pull my small groups, those are kids who need the same thing. So, you may have your strugglers in a group. You may have your average children in a group. You may have your higher kids in a group. And those are the ones that I pull for small groups, because they all need the same thing.

Ms. Anne and Ms. Hope considered the children’s interests and personalities, as well as their abilities, when they grouped children. Ms. Anne stated:

... not all kids get along...they have different interests and different personalities. I sometimes struggle with that having only seven in the room because I have four very dominate personalities so trying to find a balance between those four dominate personalities and three kind of passive personalities... but trying to find who works well together or groups that work together because I know that if I combine some together they’re just going to spend all their time trying to be the boss or be in charge... I have to think about things like that when I combining students...especially on project work.

In Ms. Anne’s classroom, children could choose the other children with whom to work. Ms. Anne said:

I let them choose a lot...who do you want to work with? Then if it doesn’t work out... if they can’t show me that they can work together...Sometimes they pick
someone that socially they can’t work with, and then it has to be changed. Or sometimes I say choose a partner and then five or ten minutes later I say choose another partner …because it’s such a small class they all work pretty well together.

Also, Ms. Hope said:

Sometimes I let the kids pick themselves if they’re, like, in a math center and playing a game. And sometimes I can let them have the freedom to pick a partner. But again, that’s something that we’re still learning how to do, like how to pick somebody and still be able to do the task, and not just pick somebody that you’re going to play with and talk with all the time.

However, Ms. White did not allow children to choose other partners until January, she said:

At the beginning of the year, I decide, because I don’t think they’re mature enough to work with their best friends and get it done. In January, the groups changed, the mixed ability groups, and I let everybody request one friend. And I try to give everybody at least one friend in their group. And then, of course, I say ‘I’m going to put you with your friend you requested, but if you can’t get the work done, then I’m going to move you out.’ So, I do it at first and then I try to let them have a choice, because I do want them to choose and have an opportunity to work with whoever they want to work with, but, within parameters.

Evaluating learning and developing “kid watching.” Five different assessment methods were used by the participants in central Alabama to evaluate learning and development:

(a) observing children and anecdotal notes, (b) mid and end year checklists, (c) journals, (d) portfolios for each child, (e) self portfolios, and (f) questioning.

Ms. Anne used all of the above strategies in order to evaluate children’s learning and development. She expressed how she evaluated progress:

Observing children and taking anecdotal notes… If you become an active part of their play…if they invite you to their table or something…you can pick up on a lot of special things that we need to address in our classroom and when they bring over their pad of paper and they want to write things down you can see their language development and I can work with them on that. I take notes on things that happen in play. The teacher has to take a very active role in it.
She also used journals to assess children’s handwriting. She kept portfolios for each child and work samples from each month. At the end of the year, she put it all together in order to assess the development of children. As stated by Ms. Anne:

We keep portfolios for each child and I keep work samples from each month and then at the end of the year I put it all together…so right there in front of you I also do a self-portrait every month…where they draw a picture of themselves and these show so much development throughout the year. So at the beginning of the year their body might just be a circle with the arms coming out of their head and then it progresses to a body with arms coming off the body and then even adding details like fingers and things like that show a lot of development.

Ms. White used observation and questioning in order to evaluate children’s learning and development. She said, “Using a lot of observation, like I mentioned, the checklists. Taking notes about the students. I do use a lot of questioning. I try to use higher-order questions, not just basic recall questions.” Also Ms. Spring used observations and she added:

Observations, questioning, and for report cards, we use certain assessment tools. We use ‘Mary [sic] Clay’ which is a letter I-D, dictation, writing, and dictation. We use the Marie Clay program. For their numbers and letters, we just use a page that has the letters and numbers in random order…I usually do one-on-one to check that. For reports cards and documentation, I’ll do one-on-one questioning, me and one student.

Importantly, the data that the teachers collected from different assessment tools were used to nurture teachers’ teaching practice, to share with parents and families, and to show how far the children had developed in all domains. Additionally, assessment data of all types were used by teachers to help children to improve learning, work to their potential, and develop increasingly higher zones of proximal development. Ms. Anne said, “I save all data. I share it with parents and families. I use it for myself…how can I improve my teaching? How can help this child? It needs to be ongoing and purposeful to help children.” Ms. Hope added virtually the same type of comment:
Evaluation strategies are more than knowing where that child is and how the accommodations are helping them. You have to know when they need you to back off some. … because they’re starting to be able to do it on their own, or when you are making something too difficult for them. I think in terms of looking at the differences. I think that evaluation time is the way to say, ‘Okay, you need something a little harder. I can push you this way, or this is a little too difficult.’ What if I do this? Can you find the activity then? Can you find the letters or can you find the skill that we’re working on?

The participants highlighted that the evaluation of children’s learning and development has to be continuous, ongoing, and comprehensive in all developmental domains. Furthermore, Ms. Anne added that the evaluative means have to consider the individual differences and the teacher has to be flexible in evaluating young children. Ms. Anne said:

I think … evaluating the learning and development of children has to be pretty much a continuous interaction and at the same time, it’s always ongoing. Also, I don’t expect every child to be able to do the same thing, so that definitely has to be individual.

She responded with this reflection:

I think you always have to be evaluating how you approach what you’re doing in the classroom…does it work? Does it need to be tweaked a little bit? And I’m bad…it requires a bit of flexibility on my part….like, I usually have way more planned than I can get to in a day and it used to bother me. I used to rush, rush, rush through and you need to sense that the children get stressed. Or it wasn’t good for them…so I’d think that I have just learned that I need to be more flexible and, you know, if we don’t get to it today…we’ll get to it tomorrow.

Ms. Spring stated, “reading, for example, when I have an individual conference with them, I’ll assess them and figure out what reading level they’re on, and then I will guide them. They will choose the books that are appropriate for their level.” For evaluation, the children develop in different developmental domains. Four participants utilized observation without writing it on a checklist. Ms. White said:

I would say emotional is pretty much the same thing. We don’t really test how their emotions are, but we can tell. I have a child that cries every day. Something
is wrong. So, I talked to the counselor about this child. I go get support from either the nurse or our school counselor.

**Caring communities.** I identified three subthemes within the larger category of “caring communities” using the data collected from the participants in central Alabama. The teacher participants tried to create caring communities in the following ways: (a) set up good relationships, (b) use effective classroom discipline, and (c) provide an appropriate physical environment.

*Set up a good relationship.* The participants in the second case (central Alabama) worked to set up three kinds of relationships: (a) teacher-parents/families relationships, (b) teacher-children/student relationships, and (c) child-child relationships.

First, to build a sound relationship with parents/families, the participants noted the importance of starting very early at the beginning of the year to build this relationship through open communication. Having parent meetings at the beginning of the year during which children can come and meet the teacher and the parents/families can come to an informational meeting is important. Ms. Anne said, “I think it’s so important to start at the very beginning to build these relationships by open communication… so establishing these relationships early helps.” She had a daily folder in which she sent home notes. She also sent a newsletter every week. She gave her email and telephone number to every family in case they wanted to contact her. She said:

I try to start from the very beginning to have an open, honest relationship with them too. I give them my email. I give them my telephone number. I make myself accessible to them. I tell them they can call me if they need me. I ask them to be respectful of the fact that I have a life outside of school. I have a family and kids and usually they’re pretty respectful of that. You know, the parents and families of my kids go on to be my friends after their kids are in my
classroom...we stay in touch. Some years are harder that other years...some
families give you problems or are hard to deal with but I just try to find positive
ways to deal with them and usually it works out okay. I try to be very open with
them; I try to be honest. I mean I send home newsletters every week. I try to call
them if someone is sick or you know that someone has a problem at school. Or I
send them an email if they had a really great day at school. I send emails a lot.

In addition to emails and daily reports, Ms. White stated that she sent pictures to
the families. “I send pictures home. Sometimes the photos are about what we’re doing in
class. I’ll just send a quick email picture to the parents and let them see their kid playing
with the blocks or doing literacy centers.” Ms. Anne indicated that parents and families
and teachers have to work together. Furthermore, she reflected, “I think that parents and
teachers have to be partners together and you have to work really hard at that. And I
need them to support me.” Another way to build a good working relationship with
families that the teachers mentioned was to have the families come in to conference from
time to time. This opportunity was to discuss the important points in educating their
children. Ms. Hope said:

We’ve just had our conferences, and I think that having that time to sit down and
talk with a parent and show them that you really do know their child and really do
care about him or her goes a really long way with the parent in terms of trust. You
are building that trust that you need.

The participants in this case all noted that they had a good working relationship
with the families of the students. Ms. Anne explained:

It’s easy for me to get parents to come as volunteers if I ask them. This year I
have a lot of working parents and so I don’t have them in here on a regular basis
but they come if I need them for something.

Moreover, Ms. Hope said:

I have good relationships with all of the parents of my students. Even parents
whose children don’t always make the best choices at school, I think were able to
still communicate about choices without it seeming like an accusatory way or
have them get defensive or feel like I’m picking on their kid.” She added that, “I
think the way that we’re able to talk about the child, that they see how much I care about them, to where my concerns are just for their child and not for labeling them as a misbehaving kid.

Moreover, Ms. White commented that teachers have to have a good way to communicate with a parent in order to build a good relationship with them. She remarked:

I try to say what I have to say as nicely as I can. Instead of saying, ‘Your child was disrespectful,’ I’ll say, ‘Your child had trouble following the rules.’ I try to, even when I’m saying what they made a poor choice; I try to make it as positive as I can. Sometimes that’s hard to do.

Also, Ms. Spring added that being open and available encouraged parents to communicate with teachers. She explained:

I think that just having an open door policy and being as available as possible is very comforting for parents, especially at this age, with their ‘babies.’ I mean, a lot of these children are ‘their babies.’ They’re either their last children or their first children. So, just helping them feel more comfortable that their child is here at school and I that I care about their child, and that their child is safe. I think that’s a huge strength of mine.

Second, in order to have a good relationship with children (students), Ms. Tonya indicated that teachers have to be enthusiastic, and she suggested that a teachers’ attitude affects the classroom. She remarked:

No matter what’s going on in my life at home, I have to leave that at the door and I’m always outside my door, every morning, greeting children and families with a smile. No matter how bad your day was yesterday, today is a new slate. I’m always happy to see the children, and I think that carries over to them to where they’re positive with the other classmates, and they’re positive – you know, just in general.

In her classroom every morning, she greets every child with a smile and a positive note for example, she said, “you have a pretty hair,” “good morning,” or “I like your shirt.”

Ms. White followed each child’s interest in order to build a good relationship with each child. She noted, “I try to know every child’s interests. The ones that are the most
quiet are the ones you really have to kind of figure out. What do they like? What can I ask them questions about?” She added:

I finally learned that one of my Hispanic children loved to play soccer. He won’t talk to me about much, but he will talk to me about soccer. So, I ask him, how was soccer practice? How was your soccer game? And his face just lights up. I try to go to his—go out and play soccer—so, I try to go to soccer games. A lot of them play baseball, so I try to make it to at least one game. I don’t go to all of the games. But I try to show up at least one outside function.

Ms. White and Ms. Anne also tried to build a feeling and sense of family in the classroom. Ms. White said to the children, “You have your family at home that you live with, and we are a family at school. . . You’re supposed to be kind to your siblings, just like you are with other classmates.” She also thought that she was like the mom for her students. Ms. White pointed out:

I think your relationship with your students has to be good in order for your classroom to function. So, I respect them, and I expect them to be respectful to me. I don’t interrupt them when they’re talking, so they’re not to interrupt me.

Instead hearing her say, “Sit down, and be quiet,” during the classroom observation she said, “Please, sit down. Please, stop talking.”

Ms. Hope indicated other ways to form an effective relationship with children so that they feel that the teacher cares for and loves them. She explained, “there are some kids who just need a hug, who just need to know that you care about them and that you love them.” However, Ms. Spring gave directions to the children and had them repeat them. She thought that this would encourage children to be self guided! She said:

I do a lot of coaching with the kids. For example, this is how you would ask somebody, if you need something. Turn to your friend and say: Please, may I use that pencil? And I have them repeat after me, so they know how to ask nicely. I think that, over time, it helps them interact better with each other.
In her classroom, she did not call parents when one child made a bad choice. If it was a choice that needed to be addressed with the parent, she had the child call the parent, because she thought children have to have accountability for their own actions.

Finally, relating to child-to-child relationships, Ms. Tonya indicated, “Developing those relationships, giving them the opportunities to play together, and to work together, is good, so that they can start learning how to interact with each other.” Ms. White read many books aloud to the class about being a good friend. She asked the counselor to come every two weeks and talk about being a good friend. She reflected:

We read a lot of books about how to be a good friend. We have some puppets that we use to model, kind of, good friendships. And we’ll do some role playing about how not to act if you want friends. Then, I say, okay, what should we really do, when we want to be a good friend?

She added this, “Our school counselor helps out with that a lot. She comes to talk to the children about once every two weeks about being a good friend.”

Ms. Hope encouraged children to play together and be nice to one another. In the researcher’s observation of recess time, there were two students who had difficulties playing together. Ms. Hope talked with them nicely and said the following, “If somebody asks you to play with them, you say yes. We’re a family. You help your friends out if they need help.” She said to the child, “How would you feel if your friend did not want to play with you?” “What could we have done that would have been better? How could we choose not to hurt that person’s feelings?”

Classroom discipline. Establishing and respecting classroom rules and using the system of rewards and punishments were issues identified in the raw data related to classroom discipline. However, the participants in the second case varied the methods
they used to deal with these issues. In the issue of using rewards and punishments, almost all the participants used reward systems in their classrooms. Ms. Anne did not utilize any type of rewards or punishments, whatsoever. Ms Tonya and Ms. Spring used apple trees as a means for a management system. Ms. White and Ms. Hope used treasure boxes and stickers in order to reward children. Ms. Spring, Ms. Tonya, and Ms. Hope reduced the children’s recess time in order to punish the children when they made poor choices.

Ms. Tonya had an apple tree system. In her classroom a big apple tree had an apple with each child’s name on it. Each apple had three pieces that were able to be removed. The three parts were the leaves, stems, and the apple. Whenever a child chose to break a rule, she gave them a verbal warning. Sometimes she gave them several warnings. If they continued to break rules, then they lost a leaf. When they lost a leaf, additionally they had to ‘walk the wall’ at recess for three minutes. If they continue to break rules, and already lost a leaf, then they would lose a stem. Once they lost a stem, they have to ‘walk the wall’ for six minutes at recess. If they continued to break the rules and had lost a leaf and a stem, next, they lost the whole apple. Ms. Tonya then called mom or dad, and let the parents-know what behaviors their child had chosen to do in the classroom.

As far as rewards, four participants had rewards systems that were implemented daily. Ms Anne was the only participant who did not utilize a reward system. In Ms. Hope’s classroom, when children were able to keep the entire apple on the tree all day on Monday, they received a sticker. On Tuesday, they were able to choose something from the treasure box. The treasure box is just full of goodies, like Happy Meal toys, pencils, erasers, stickers, and other little knick-knacks. On Wednesday, they get to read their
library book during naptime. On Thursday, they are able to go to the treasure box again.

And on Friday, they get to watch a G-rated movie instead of taking a nap.

Conversely, as mentioned previously, Ms. Anne did not use a treasure box or any other reward. Her aim was to build children’s autonomy while in her classroom. This is how she stated her intent for the children’s development:

I don’t do a treasure box because, number one, I really just don’t like to keep up with it. I want them to just choose to do the right thing. I talk to them about this a lot…I say just to them, do the right thing because you know it’s the right thing to do, not because someone told you it was the right thing to do. What if someone told you it was the wrong thing to do? I just want you to do the right thing because it’s the right thing to do. We say this in our class a lot…that way they have to make those choices.

Ms. Anne also did not like to use the time out system. Instead, she gave the children choices, so if a child chooses time out that is because the child chose it. She explained it this way:

I don’t like it [time out] but I still sometimes use time out. And what I do is I just put them over by themselves…and I usually set my timer for five minutes…because they are five years old…and then I say when you’re ready to come back…and when you’re ready to come back, then you may come back and join us. That kind of leaves it up to them. Now after five minutes if they’re still not ready to come back, I’m like your time is up…you need to come back.

Ms. Anne came up with a suitable strategy to set up classroom rules. She made the children part of the rule setting. They read many children’s books together. They discuss the behaviors that the characters in the books choose. The children come up with some rules. Then they write a promise. She described the details of the process:

We…at the beginning of the year, we sit together as a group, and I read lots of books, children’s literature, to them about being a community of learners. We talk about how to be a community of learners. We come up with our own class rules. We don’t call them class rules…it’s a pledge. Together, we talk about what a pledge is…it is a promise. So these are our promises that we’ve made to each other. The children have a stake in it…they’ve been a part of it…they’ve made up the rules, so they’re stake holders and it’s valuable to them. Then what they do is
we have these little paper doll figures and they each get to decorate each one to look like each one of them. They write their names on the one that they make. We put our pledge up on the wall and they put the paper cut outs that they have made in their likeness on the wall. They sign their names. We have a discussion about how signing your name means that you’re making a promise…this is your pledge. So in the entire process, I try to keep them involved in and making them a part of the rules and pledge process in this way.

In Ms. Anne’s classroom, when the children chose not to follow one of the rules on the pledge, or they were doing something unacceptable, Ms. Anne said to them, “remember…you promised that you were going to…” They did have rules like “we don’t run in the halls” and “we don’t hit one another.” Furthermore, Ms. Hope highlighted a very good point when she said:

The kids don’t know how to use words when they’re upset; they just react. Learning how to say, ‘Could you please sit down so I can see?’ so that their friend will quit doing what is bothering them, they simply get upset and choose to react. Then the other friend gets upset and retaliates.

In Ms. Hope’s classroom, she tried to model positive behavior. For example, she said to the children, this is how you can respond, “Could you please stop doing that?” or “Would you please go to that table?” This modeling of language is how she communicated with the children to help them begin to comprehend a better way to choose to behave.

Ms. White also modeled for her children. She told me:

I think that I have to model how it looks like to choose good behavior. I have to be kind to the students. They have to see and hear me being kind to my peers, my fellow teachers, because they see and hear everything. I tell them my expectations. I don’t expect you to be ‘ugly.’ If you’re going to be ‘ugly,’ you know, you’re going to have to leave.
She added that, “We spend a lot of time – we call it “being a peacemaker.” Instead of me saying, “Don’t be a bully,” I say, “Try to be a peacemaker. Try to help your friends out. We’re a friend to everybody.”

**Physical environment.** All participants in the second case (central Alabama) had kid-sized chairs and tables, many books, and small shelves with books about the themes that were being studied. At least five computers were in every classroom, and many organizing files were visible as well. Also, in the five classrooms everything was at children’s level. They could go to it easily. They could pull materials off the shelves they wanted to get. All materials placed out of the children’s reach were typically teacher materials. Everything in the classrooms was labeled with written words as well as pictures.

Ms. Anne was a well-organized teacher. There were plenty of open spaces in her classroom. She had some tables to work on but she kept them out of the way. The tables did not impede children’s movement in the classroom. Moreover, she tried to maximize the space in the classroom to best meet the needs of the children. For example, she used one table for many purposes. Three children sat at it for snack time. This table also served as her writing table.

Regarding the organization of her classroom in order to be developmentally appropriate, Ms. White said:

Everything is low, at their level. I have a fairly large classroom that allows me to be flexible…there are centers set up around my room…and shelving with different games and materials that they can take to the different centers. I have an art station where they can go to get paper, pencils, and crayons, whatever they need to be artists. They are not required to keep it in the art center. They can take
it wherever they want to have it. I have a stage in my classroom that they like to get up on and pretend to do little plays.

**Ensured success.** Four subthemes related to “ensured success” emerged from the data in the central Alabama case. These four factors helped to ensure success in the implementation and reflection on their DAP beliefs in teaching practice. The factors that were identified were (a) professional development, (b) commitment to kindergarten, (c) support, and (d) collaboration.

**Professional development.** Attending conferences and workshops, kindergarten meetings, and continuing graduate study were some professional development opportunities to which participants attributed their success as teachers. However, these professional development opportunities varied among the participants. Ms. Anne explained:

I am in school, so I have a lot of continuing education. But at our school, our director is really good at offering us opportunities to go to conferences or kindergarten meetings within the system. The public school system offers many opportunities for professional development and we take advantage of these. She usually gives us two or three professional development opportunities throughout the year. They might be workshops…they’re usually workshops or participating in functions that the local school system is doing.

Since Ms. Anne was a doctoral student in an early childhood program, she read many professional books and articles. She stated:

I’m always reading because I’m in a doctoral program…we’re reading so many professional development books. We’re reading so many good research-based articles and about matters that are effective for young children. I think that I read so much, especially because of being in the doctoral program. It has influenced me a lot.
Ms. White and Ms. Tonya had five days of professional development every year. They both worked for the same school district. Ms. White stated:

Our district, we have – let’s see – every year we have five days of professional development in our school system. So we have one in October, one in February, and then three in November. Those days we usually have a choice in which one we want to attend.

Additionally, Ms. Tonya was involved in the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) and Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) professional development opportunities.

According to the participants in central Alabama, the professional development opportunities contributed in shaping their philosophies about how to teach young children and how they learn most effectively. Ms. Anne explained, “It helps me to be more aware. It’s helped me to define my philosophy about how children learn most effectively. Being more mindful…to really reflect about teaching and learning.” Opportunities that help teachers to have innovative ideas about teaching children is what professional development is about. Ms. Hope emphasized, “there’s a kindergarten conference that occurs once a year. That’s really great to attend if we have the money to do so. That’s a great way to get ideas.” She added:

Sometimes you get stuck doing something the same way. It seems that you can’t figure out why it’s not working. If you go to that really great professional development event that offers you that moment of clarity, like, ‘Oh, I could do this!’ It’s just so exciting to find another way that you might be able to reach a student that you haven’t been able to reach yet.

For Ms. White, having an effective professional development session offered her the opportunity to interact with other kindergarten teachers. She expressed it this way:

I think professional development is great, because during those days we have time to listen and talk to one another, other kindergarten teachers. We can kind of take what we learn from there and bring it back to our classrooms...
development is great. I think that’s what helps me to not get burned out because I’m constantly learning something new to take back and try with my kids.

Commitment to kindergarten children. Strong love for kindergarten children, being patient, and teacher tenderness for kindergarten children caused the participants to be more committed and successful in teaching young children. Ms. Anne said it this way:

I just think the kids….the love of learning, their natural curiosity…and then at the end of every year, when I put together those portfolios together and I see…I mean being a kindergarten teacher is hard…because the children have so many needs…but at the end of the year, you put that portfolio together and you think of where they were at the beginning of the year and how far they’ve come in the academic year…it’s so satisfying. I think that’s what keeps me doing it.

She added that, “I love working with kindergarten children…it’s my favorite age.” Ms. White shared:

I love the kids. I love the curriculum, the kindergarten curricula. I think it’s fun and I think that you can make it fun. I think that every year I teach, I become more confident which makes me want to be better. I can reflect from last year, ‘Okay, I didn’t teach this unit so great. What can I do better?’ Or, ‘I didn’t really – I need to work on this skill, and read, to teach my kids this or that.’ As my confidence grows – I want to be the best teacher that I can be, because I want them to grow and develop into the best kids that they can be.

Ms. Tonya preferred to work with kindergarten children instead of having an administrative position. She said, “My principal would love to see me in administration. But I just wouldn’t want to sit in an office. I want to feel like I have really accomplished something with children.” Ms. Hope also stated:

I love the age group of the children. They are sweet, excited, and funny! My day is never boring and I can really see the progress they make throughout the year. But, for the most part, I really love it. It’s a very sweet age. They’re excited about school. You can keep them excited about school. They want to come to school. They want to learn things. They want to please you for the most part. Negative attitudes haven’t developed. As they get older, some kids, if they don’t feel that love and don’t feel like they are able to do the work, their self confidence suffers. They feel like this isn’t a place they want to be – you don’t have that in here, which is great, because it’s still the beginning and everybody feels loved and believed in. They still believe that, ‘We can do it.’ So, I personally really like this
age. I like how you can make the curricula fun for them. I know how to make it fun at this age level.

Ms. Spring also explained that making progress with kindergarten children makes her love working with this age of children. She mentioned, “To me, there is a huge, huge, amount of progress between the beginning of the year to the end of the year. That’s probably my favorite reason why I love this age, because you can see so much progress.”

Support. The support that the participants had from the students’ families, the principals, and coaches were other factors that made them feel successful working with kindergarten children. Having family support for Ms. Anne meant, “I really feel my parents support me…I think that they think that I’m doing a good job and what is best for their child.” Ms. White commented that, “I think parents are supportive once you let them know how you operate the classroom and what your goals are.” Moreover, there were many parents and family members who were willing to help in the classroom settings. Ms. White mentioned:

I have two room parents and they pretty much do whatever I need them to do. I’m constantly sending things home to be cut out, so they do that for me. Now, they don’t come into the classroom as much. They come in, I would say, three or four times a year. School principals, reading coaches, and assistant principals also were very supportive. Ms. Spring said the following, “We have a principal that’s very encouraging of professional development.” Ms. Hope affirmed:

Our reading coach, principal and our assistant principal are big believers in developmentally appropriate practice. They help us find ways to assist what we’re doing to be more developmentally appropriate. They encourage us and bring things into our classrooms. As long as we’re still meeting the curriculum standards and expectations, which can feel very not developmentally appropriate, at times. Trying to find those ways that, ‘Okay, how in the world is a five-year-old going to get this?’ And they’re very supportive in the ways that we come up
with, as opposed to just being like, ‘No, it has to look like this. You have to do it this way.’ They’re very encouraging with us to help find our own ways to do that.

Ms. Anne acknowledged, “Our child development center is very supportive, and it’s our philosophy that children learn through play. It’s important to our director that we implement developmentally appropriate activities in our room.” Her director allows her to do everything that is appropriate for teaching young children. Ms. Anne added:

This kindergarten, in this school…this is only its third year, and I started it so pretty much they’ve been able to let me do what I want to do and nobody has really said to me, you need to be doing this or that.

Ms. White pointed that the principal’s prior kindergarten teaching experience made her more supportive. She specified:

Our principal is good because she used to be a kindergarten teacher. So, she understands the needs of kindergarten students. She knows that the kindergarten classroom is not going to be a quiet place. It’s not going to be excessive with noise but they’re going to be talking. There’s going to be playing with each other and communication.

In addition to principals’ encouragement, teachers are provided with a variety of suitable resources that are very important for incorporating DAP in teaching young children. Ms. Anne explained:

Our school provides a lot of resources for us…if I wanted it and I went to ask for it, they’d probably say okay if it was reasonable. They give me lots of books. If I need something to make activities with my kids, that is always okay, that’s fine. We like to cook a lot in school, and our school has a cooking cart. And there’s an oven and electric skillet, things like that they provide for us. We have a big resource room in our school with just about anything you’d need for art projects or a sensory table. Anything you’d need for something you’d want to make, you could probably find it in that room.

Collaboration. Collaboration with other teachers on the same grade level was another factor that helped the participants succeed in teaching kindergarten. Ms. Anne
stated, “I have peers from whom I get ideas and help. Other teachers that I work with help me. The Internet is also very helpful.”

In School 2B, Ms. White and Ms. Tonya usually have several meetings with the other kindergarten teachers in the school and talk about strategies that are working for the kindergarten classrooms. Ms. Tonya stated:

We have technology meetings. On Wednesdays, we have an instructional planning meeting. On Thursdays, there is a grade level meeting. So working with colleagues helps a lot too. Sometimes we sit down and we plan together. So, that’s helpful too.

Ms. White shared:

We all kind of try to share ideas which I think is very important, especially for new teachers to have a teacher to go to, to ask questions. Like Ms. Tonya, we’re next-door neighbors. We talk all the time and ask what are you doing about this or that? What worked for you?

Ms. Hope also stated that she collaborated with the other kindergarten teachers. She used to meet and work as team in order to come up with the best ideas to teach kindergarten children. “We’ll take the ideas and come back as a team and brainstorm together. “Okay, how can we make this work, for us? What will this look like with our five-year-olds?”

**Reflecting upon obstacles to DAP.** While there were successes in the implementation of DAP beliefs and teaching practices in the kindergarten classroom, there were also challenges. Three challenges to implementation of DAP were identified through the data analyses: (a) parent and family awareness, (b) time, and (c) state’s curriculum standards.
Parent awareness. Parental and familial beliefs about the best way to educate young children sometimes pushes teachers and becomes an obstacle. Some parents want their children to be good readers and writers and ignore the children’s individual differences. Ms. Anne stated it this way:

Parents who push you to teach their children certain things … I think parents, with the best interest of the child in mind, might not always know what’s best. Parents want their kids to be smart, to have an edge. Especially when this is a pre-K program and parents want their kids to be readers, writers when they leave. You know some of them will be, but they’re not all going to be. Some parents would ask me to send homework for them, send sight words…a lot of things that I don’t necessarily do or believe in but there was a lot of pressure from them (parents).

Some parents also think that kindergarten kids are too old to play in order to learn. They want them to learn through just sitting and listening. Ms. White stated:

Some parents think that the play time should be – that’s what you do in preschool; when you get to kindergarten it’s learn-learn-learn. I think, as I said before, you have a challenge or a barrier. ‘Intentional play’ has educational value. Some people view them as frivolous, but that’s not the case at all.

Moreover, Ms. White pointed out that she had to explain to parents or families what “developmentally appropriate” means. She said:

I tell them (parents), do not expect a big stack of worksheets to come home every day because we don’t do worksheets all the time. That does not mean your child’s not learning. It means they’re learning in an enjoyable way, that’s appropriate for a five-year-old. We are intentionally playing. We are having fun but we are learning. I promise that they will learn everything they’re supposed to learn.

Ms. Anne expressed the same idea:

Parents…in what they think is in the best interest of their children…they don’t understand why we don’t do worksheets. They don’t understand why we don’t do homework in kindergarten. Educating parents about why that might not be good for children, sometimes that can be challenging.
Time. Ms. Anne, Ms. White, Ms. Tonya, and Ms. Hope indicated that time was a big challenge for them when trying to implement DAP while teaching kindergarten. Ms. White said, “I think a big challenge is time. If you’re going to play through developmentally appropriate practices, it does take more time to plan, because you are differentiating instruction, and you are trying to make it fun for the kids.” Ms. Hope expressed it this way:

It would be so easy for me to teach the whole class without any modifications. But, that’s not what the kids need. I think a challenge is time. I think you have to be committed to it. I think you have to know, remind yourself as the teacher, I’m doing this because it is best for the kids. Yes, it does take more time. Yes, I do have to plan more lessons. I can’t just lecture all day to the whole class. But, it’s worth it.

However, Ms. Ann reflected time as a challenge in a different way. In her case, being a half day program was a time barrier in applying DAP. She stated:

Really, when I’m at school I don’t feel like there are any major barriers. I think in my case, being a half day program is a barrier…it’s not much time and then all the little interruptions that happen during a day.

Ms. White also stated, “unfortunately we do not have enough time for free play. I feel that we have many standards to cover. The free play is not really encouraged like is supposed to be.”

State curricula and mandated standards. Ms. White, Ms. Hope, and Ms. Tonya highlighted the state curricula and standards as one barrier to applying DAP in teaching kindergarten. Ms. Tonya explained:

Our state curricula and standards are so rigid, that it allows little time for children to investigate and explore. So basically, we have so much that we’re given to cover, that there’s not a lot of time for children to have to investigate and explore.

Ms. White confirmed:
I think that how we teach now is in a test-driven kind of society. Everything is about testing. ‘Is this going to be on the test? Can I know what’s on the test?’ Because, standardized testing is how everybody gets evaluated. She also added, “I think that that’s one issue, the focus on testing scores is a barrier. That I even feel the pressure in kindergarten to go-go-go-go. We’ve to get them prepared for first grade.

Ms. Hope shared the same view about the conflict between DAP and having to meet the standards. She said:

Sometimes the curricula standards make it difficult to teach in a developmentally appropriate way. Next year the kids will have to master place value to 19. That means they will have to understand that 19 is made up of a group of 10’s and 9 ones. I am very nervous about them understanding this concept.

In spite of pressure to address curriculum standards, Ms. White and Ms. Tonya indicated that they personally have to find a good way to balance the standards with what they believe is the best way for young children to learn. Ms. White stated:

With all of the curricula and with as difficult as everything is getting, the pushed down curriculum, it’s still my job to make sure that they can do those things, but I try to find the ways in which that I will create a more hands-on way, like using manipulatives. It’s a good way, right now, to help children to learn new concepts that are difficult, because they cannot handle things that are abstract. If they can’t see and can’t touch it, it does not make sense.

**Cross Case Analysis**

Based on the analyses of the entire data set and comparison of themes across the two cases, the same five themes were identified in order to understand how the kindergarten teachers implemented and reflected their DAP beliefs into teaching practice: (a) beliefs guide practice; (b) enhanced learning and development; (c) a caring community; (d) ensured success; and (e) reflection upon the obstacles to DAP. However, the subthemes varied in the two cases. The two cross cases themes and subthemes that were identified by the researcher are listed below (see Table 7).
### Table 7

**Themes and subthemes of DAP beliefs and practice cross the two cases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes / Subthemes</th>
<th>Beliefs Guide Practice</th>
<th>Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus on play</strong></td>
<td>Checklist not testing (A)</td>
<td>Set up good relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus on whole child</strong></td>
<td>Effective teaching</td>
<td>Classroom discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child-centered</strong></td>
<td>Understanding and reaching children’s varied needs</td>
<td>Physical environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Importance of DAP</strong></td>
<td>Role of religion (A)</td>
<td>Role of religion (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning</strong></td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluating learning and development</strong></td>
<td>Evaluating learning and development</td>
<td>Evaluating learning and development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Note. A = Case 1 “north Jordan”; B = Case 2 “central Alabama”; Subthemes that identified at only one case is noted in parentheses by the case’s letter name.

#### Theme 1: Beliefs guide practice

According to analyses of the interviews, observations, field notes, and the documentary materials, several beliefs toward DAP were identified as guides for the teachers’ practice in the kindergarten classroom. These included: (a) focus on play, (b) focus on the whole child, (c) child centeredness and (d)
importance of DAP. DAP beliefs guided all participants’ work with the children in the kindergarten classrooms in the both cities in central Alabama and north Jordan. However, each teacher had her own beliefs that guided practice. Even when two or more of the teachers shared the same beliefs, each teacher had her own particular way to practice that belief in the classroom.

Play was the most important belief that guided the teaching practice of all of the kindergarten teachers. Three types of play were illustrated in teaching kindergarten children: (a) intentional play, (b) free play, and (c) pretend play. In the first site, Ms. Noor and Ms. Fatimah strongly believed in the role of play in teaching young children. They believed and practiced the three types of play in the classroom. Ms. Noor, especially, was a big believer in the role of play in teaching young children. She offered three types of play for children daily and taught through the use of play. Ms. Lyan used intentional play on different occasions, but sometimes she used traditional strategies in teaching the children instead of play. However, Ms. Rasha and Ms. Reem just offered 20 minutes of recess time as an opportunity to play.

In the second site in central Alabama, the participants believed in play in general. However, implementing teaching practices using their beliefs varied among school districts, and even among teachers in the same school district. Ms. Anne, who was working in a school that had the same philosophy that she did about “learning through play,” was strongly supported to implement her belief that “play is the job of children” as she taught young children. She offered three types of play in her classroom, and the classroom was full of organized movement for the children. Ms. White and Ms. Tonya offered intentional play in their classrooms when they taught the whole group and when
children were working in the learning centers. Each center was well-prepared with intentional games for learning through play. However, Ms. White had to defend her use of play as a method for learning. Parents and school administrators challenged her belief.

She said:

Eight years ago, free play was still very prominent in kindergarten, and they had housekeeping centers in which children could play. But now, in the district where I teach, kindergarten is a lot more serious. The parents take it pretty seriously. The administration takes it seriously.

She also added, “Free play had to be stopped. We can’t call it ‘free play.’ But, we can do ‘intentional play.’ They’re playing but they’re learning something.”

Ms. Hope focused on the intentional play in the teaching practice when she offered this explanation:

I can use the blocks, because I have an activity that shows them how to make letters with the blocks. We can use kitchen because there’s an opportunity for them to make shopping lists and to read words that are in there. Plus, it develops oral language. But, that’s sort of how I can justify having centers at this time. I have justify them to where I just might see it as playtime, but the oral language that they develop and the social skills that they develop is all very important for kindergarten.

Ms. Spring also mentioned that she believed in the importance of free play. She said:

Free play is very important, and I highly encourage playtime. I do feel like play is very important, especially for social growth. They learn how to interact with each other nicely, using kind words, So, I’m a huge fan of play, free play.

However, that value did not appear in her teaching practice. Free play is not sending the children to play and then the teacher ignoring them. Developmentally appropriate use of free play involves the teacher looking for opportunities to teach while children are playing.
In both cases, the participants believed that the role of children in the classroom was important. However, the enactment of this belief in their teaching practices varied among teachers in both sites. Two teachers in the first site used teacher-directed traditional approaches in teaching young children. In the second site, one teacher firmly believed and implemented Developmentally Appropriate Practice as a child-centered approach. Ms. Anne indicated that children were able to construct their own understanding of concepts, but at the same time they also benefited from instruction. In her classroom, the students worked together and had some instruction from the teacher. She provided them different opportunities to construct knowledge and understanding. She shared:

I think that developmentally appropriate activities allow children to explore their own inquiries. They are allowed to make meaningful choices, and they can benefit from self-initiated play, as well as some teacher-initiated play, or spontaneous play. They also benefitted from teacher directed activities, as well, especially, those that are designed to be developmentally appropriate for them.

Additionally, the participants in both cases and sites believed that DAP was very effective in improving children’s learning and development for many reasons. However, each participant at each site had her own specific beliefs. According to the participants in the second case, DAP was effective because of the following:

- DAP allows children to develop at their own rate and they’re not forced to do anything that they are not developmentally ready to do;
- DAP offers children an opportunity to feel secure with their own abilities;
- DAP activities enables teachers to maximize student’s strengths in order to overcome weaknesses;
• DAP allows for individualizing the curricula to meet the needs of individual children;
• DAP focuses on an active role for children to learn by doing and thinking;
• DAP keeps children interested and engaged in the teaching and learning process.

According to the participants in the first case in north Jordan, DAP was effective and very important for teaching young children because of the following:
• DAP helped children develop cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically;
• DAP helped children grow and develop at their own pace;
• DAP focused on play as the job of children;
• DAP offered several suitable opportunities for children to learn and develop;
• DAP focused on an active role for children in the learning process;
• DAP engaged children and made the learning process more enjoyable.

However, two teachers from north Jordan and one teacher from central Alabama had no clear idea about what DAP really entailed and the importance of this framework. They believed that DAP was a foundation for learning to read and write. These three teachers viewed DAP as a way to help children to learn and prepare them for grade school.

Theme 2: Enhanced learning and development. Within the major theme of “enhanced learning and development,” four subthemes emerged from the data. These
subthemes were practices teachers believed in and used to enhance and improve children’s learning and development: (a) implementing effective teaching, (b) understanding and reaching all children’s varied needs, (c) planning, (d) grouping children to maximize learning, and (e) evaluating learning and development. While both sites shared the same theme and subthemes, teaching practices differed across kindergarten teachers in both sites and within kindergarten teachers in each site.

Kindergarten teachers must understand that all children have varied needs at ages five to six years. In order to meet children’s needs while teaching in kindergarten, the participants in both centers varied according to their knowledge, beliefs, and practices to meet children where they were developmentally. They implemented different methods to meet the needs of all the kids because not everyone learns the same way. The participants in both sites utilized whole groups, sang songs, read stories, used different resources, and had enjoyable, hands-on activities that engaged kindergarten children in learning. In addition to these strategies, the participants in central Alabama implemented small group teaching, more hands-on activities, number talks, and the used technology in teaching young children.

The participants from both sites constructed both long and short term curriculum plans. The participants planned for the whole year by organizing the curriculum into units of study, weekly plans, and daily lessons. According to the collected data set, four criteria were considered in planning for teaching: (a) age appropriateness, (b) individual appropriateness, (c) meaningfulness and relevancy, and (d) integration of different subjects. While all participants voiced belief in the importance of the four criteria above, not all practiced and implemented the beliefs they said they held.
In order to group children to maximize learning, the participants pointed out that they considered children’s abilities in grouping children in the classroom. They described two types of groups; mixed ability groups and ability-based grouping:

- They used mixed-ability grouping when they grouped children to work in learning centers. The children at higher levels helped the children at lower levels. Participants in both sites used this type of grouping;

- The participants in the second site used ability-based grouping when they pulled a group of children with which to work in building specific skills. This type of grouping was used to meet children who were in need of remediation to improve in particular areas of learning and development. However, no participant used this type of grouping in north Jordan;

- Grouping by gender. This type of grouping was only used by the participants in the first case (north Jordan). Most especially at the beginning of the year the Jordanian teachers used gender-based grouping until they strengthened positive social relationships between girls and boys.

Furthermore, in all of the grouping types above, the participants from both sites considered children’s interests and personalities. Additionally, two participants from the first site in north Jordan and one participant from central Alabama offered opportunities for children to choose the classmates and learning activities in which they wanted to work.

Kindergarten teachers in both sites were varied in how they reflected the subtheme of evaluating, learning and developing. In the first case (north Jordan), teachers just used two types of evaluation in order to assess learning and development of children.
Checklists were filled out based on observations and questioning of children. Two teachers in Jordan illustrated these strategies for assessing the cognitive development and learning of children. Two teachers did not describe or use tools to assess the children’s development in other domains such as emotional, physical, and social development.

In the second site (central Alabama), a variety of assessment procedures were implemented to evaluate learning and development of kindergarten children: (a) child observations and anecdotal notes, (b) mid and end of the year checklists, (c) journals, (d) portfolios for each child, (e) self portfolios, and (f) questioning. However, one teacher out of the five focused on the assessment of academic skills and cognitive development. All teachers from both sites used their evaluations of kindergarten children to inform and develop their own teaching practices. Teachers at both sites used evaluations to share with parents and to document where the children are in relation to the differing developmental domains. Teachers at both sites used assessment results to show parents how they could help enhance their children’s capacity for learning and development at home. Moreover, all participants from both sites shared the conviction that evaluation of children’s learning and development has to be continuous, ongoing, individually appropriate, age appropriate and inclusive of all developmental domains.

**Theme 3: Caring community.** Four subthemes were identified within the larger theme of “caring community.” The participants in both sites tried to create caring communities, set up good relationships, address effective classroom discipline, and use physical environments effectively. In addition to these subthemes, employing religion
was unique subtheme participants in north Jordan utilized to develop positive relationships.

The participants in the both sites worked to establish and strengthen three kinds of relationships: (a) teacher-parents/families relationships, (b) teacher-children/students relationships, and (c) child-child relationships. First, in building a good relationship with parents/ families, the participants noted the importance of starting very early at the beginning of the year. One way to build this relationship was through open communication. The participants in the second case sent daily folders with notes to each child’s home, created weekly newsletters, and shared their email addresses and telephone numbers with the parents or families so families could contact teachers. These teachers also sent pictures of children engaged in activities to the families and met with families for conferences. The participants in the second case indicated they were available for the families and have open relationships with them. Ms. White said:

I do a lot of email. That’s my primary form of communication. I do phone calls, as well. And, when I email and call home, it’s not necessarily a bad thing. I might say, ‘Your child has had a great day together,’ with a smiley face.

In the first case, the participants communicated to the parents through notes that went home with children and phone calls.

Moreover, families/ or parents were welcomed to visit the classroom and were invited to be volunteers in the classrooms at both sites. Ms. White expressed, “Our school wants the parents to be involved, but we find that sometimes, when the parents are always coming in, it kind of disrupts the classroom. The kids get really excited, and they act up when their parents are there.” However, in the second case, Ms. White indicated that, “the volunteers that come into my room are not children’s parents. They’re like
other people’s parents that come in. But, the parents, I do want them to be as involved as possible, so they do come on field trips with us.” In north Jordan, parents or families were welcomed to visit the classroom; however, just the mother was welcomed to volunteer. For cultural reasons, dads were not welcomed as classroom volunteers in Jordan.

All the participants from both sites indicated they had good relationships with children. The participants from the first case used tenderness and love. They also built a sense of family and respect with the children in order to help children trust and love one another. In addition to the procedures that participants in the first case used, the participants in the second case used other procedures, as well. Being open and positive, following the interests of children, and showing enthusiasm in order to build and strengthen the relationships with children were cited as important by the central Alabama teachers.

Classroom rules and the use of rewards and punishments were issues that were identified in the classroom discipline sub-theme. Nine participants out of ten from both sites used a reward system in the classroom. Ms. Anne from the second case was the only teacher who did not believe in using rewards. Instead, she believed that children had to choose to do the right thing not because of a reward. In the second case, Ms. Tonya and Ms. Spring used an apple tree for classroom management. Ms. White and Ms. Hope used treasure boxes and stamps to reward children. Ms. Spring, Ms. Tonya, and Ms. Hope reduced the child’s recess time in order to punish children for making poor choices. Four participants in the second case reduced recess time to punish children when they broke the rules. Ms. Tonya and Ms. White asked the kids to ‘walk the wall’ during recess time
for five minutes instead of playing on the playground. Ms. Hope and Ms. Spring asked the children to stand behind the wall under the sun and not play with the other kids for five minutes.

In the first case, all the participants used a reward system in the classroom. All of them believed that using the rewards would motivate children to learn and engage in the classroom learning activities. However, all the participants in Jordan preferred not to use any type of punishment. The researcher had no opportunity to verify teachers’ stories about the punishment, as she just observed videotaped lessons.

In order to set the classrooms rules, two participants from the first case and all five participants from the second case engaged the children in establishing classroom rules. They read books, discussed children’s literature, and encouraged the children through questioning to help them construct classroom rules. However, three teachers from the first case set the rules themselves. They informed the children of the rules and expected the children to obey all the classroom rules.

Although School 2A in the second case was church-based program, the role of religion was a unique subtheme for the first case in creating caring communities. All participants in the first case used religion in all areas of the curricula; religion was implemented in building good relationships with peers, being a caring community, and helping children obey the rules. In the second case, there was little role of religion in the classroom. In Ms. Anne’s classroom in the second case religion did play a limited role in building the classroom environment. The children went to chapel for prayer before eating. Ms. Anne said, “Because it’s a church program, we start our day…we have a chapel time, with the whole school, we do that together.”
Theme 4: Ensured success. Cross-case analyses of data from both sites revealed four factors that helped the participants in central Alabama to succeed in the implementation and reflection of DAP beliefs into teaching practice. Professional development, commitment to kindergarten, support, and collaboration all were contributions that ensured success for all of the kindergarten teachers in Alabama. However, in north Jordan, only the first three factors emerged as important for the teacher’s success. The collaboration sub-theme was not pointed out by the participants at first site. Four of the five schools in Jordan had only one kindergarten classroom with one kindergarten teacher. There were no other kindergarten teachers who worked at the same school with whom to collaborate. In central Alabama School 2A, there were three kindergarten sections. In School 2B, there were five kindergarten sections, and in School 2C, there were six kindergarten sections. Multiple kindergarten sections in the central Alabama schools allowed many opportunities for the kindergarten teachers in the second case to collaborate in order to find the most effective and successful support systems.

The professional development opportunities that were offered differed across the two cases. All the professional development opportunities in the first site were mandatory. All were offered and presented in the educational department for all the kindergarten teachers around the country. However, the mandated professional development opportunities were varied by school district in central Alabama. Moreover, the central Alabama schools offered extra opportunities for teachers. Teachers could attend professional development opportunities sponsored by the school, participate and attend conferences, workshops or any other type of professional program. Thus, the professional development opportunities for kindergarten teachers in the second case were
richer and more varied than the first case. The participants in the second case attended conferences, workshops, continued graduate school, and read professional books and articles about teaching and learning issues, in addition to the mandated opportunities. Meanwhile, the participants in the first case only had the mandated professional development sessions. Two of the participants in the first case had only two opportunities from those that were previously mentioned.

Evidence of the support theme was clear in data from both cases. The participants at both sites indicated that they had the support of principals, students, parents or families. In the first case, the participants added the encouragement and support of the educational supervisor as another factor that encouraged them to implement their beliefs in teaching kindergarten. Having a commitment to kindergarten children also was sub-theme that both sites shared, in spite of the differences of the commitments among participants within each case and across the two cases.

**Theme 5: Reflected upon obstacles to DAP.** Kindergarten-teachers in both cases had several challenges implementing and practicing DAP beliefs in their teaching. Parent awareness was the common subtheme in both sites. Kindergarten teachers in both sites reflected that many parents just push them to teach children reading and writing very early in the school year. Ms. White stated the following:

> The parents are the ones that are really kind of pushing their kids. And sometimes they’re pushing their kids too much. They want them to read instantly, and to be able to write perfectly. I tell them that, ‘That’s my job, to teach them, and the kids aren’t ready.’ Most of them don’t come to school writing sentences and reading, because that’s not developmentally appropriate for a five-year-old. So, we have a lot of conversations about, ‘Yes, my expectations,’ I tell them – ‘I expect your child to read at the end of the year, but now I don’t, because if you try to push them too hard, the kids just give up and get frustrated.’ We talk about, ‘Trust me
‘... ‘I’ll get them there by the end of the year, and if I’m seeing a problem, where they’re not going to be there, they’re not reading by the end of the year, if they’re not writing sentences, I will definitely let you know.’

State curricula, mandated standards, and time were unique subthemes in central Alabama. Ms. White, Ms. Hope, and Ms. Tonya indicated that the state curricula and standards were obstacles to implementing DAP in kindergarten. Ms. Hope said, “Sometimes the curricula standards make it difficult to teach in a developmentally appropriate way. Next year the kids will have to master place value to 19.” However, state standards were not a barrier for Ms. Anne, because she worked in a church-sponsored Early Learning Center. Her private program adopted the idea and philosophy that was developmentally appropriate and advocated “learning through play.”

For Ms. Spring, the situation was different. She considered the state standards as a guide for her in planning for young children. She said:

We have a framework. It’s called our ‘Pacing Guide.’ That also is from the district and it just gives us, month by month, generally, what we should be teaching in math and what we should be – we also have Alabama State Standards, for the State of Alabama. And those standards have to be taught in the classroom. Then we have anything that our district wants us to teach.

Observation of the kindergartens in north Jordan revealed no mandated standards or high expectations for teaching young children. However, the teachers in north Jordan had other barriers which included not having assistants, interruptions during the day, size of the classroom space, relationships between the girls and boys, lack of funds, difficulties finding educational resources, and difficulties providing secure and safe environments. These challenges were unique subthemes identified for kindergarten teachers in north Jordan.
Having no assistants was one unique subtheme at the first site. However, one teacher from central Alabama indicated that she had 19 students without a full time aide. She had a part-time aide. She complained:

Having 19 students in my classroom which for this school system is considered high. We usually like to stay around 15 to 17. But there’s one teacher and no aides, with the exception if there’s a ‘special needs’ child, then they have an instructional support person. That person will come. There’s no full time aide, just one teacher and the students.

All the participants in the first case stated that the professional development sessions were during the day school, and they had to leave the children for several days. They considered that as an obstacle to fully implement and reflect their beliefs in practice. However, in the second case, just one participant reflected this subtheme during the interview. Ms. Anne said:

Going to music class, going to PE…transition time, walking from place to place, they’re five years old, so it takes them a long time to do things sometimes. I think sometimes there are just too many structured things for them to do. They don’t have enough time to just be kids and enjoy playing and doing the work they’re supposed to do…which is play.

**Summary of the Findings**

Ten participants from two different sites and countries were involved in this study. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand how kindergarten teachers reflected and implemented developmentally appropriate beliefs into their teaching practice in urban public schools in the north of Jordan and in kindergartens in central Alabama. The interview transcripts, videotaped observations, field notes, and documents were analyzed to provide a rich, thick description. The data analyses followed the procedures outlined by Stake (2006) and Yin (2009). The study was conducted on two levels, within-cases and across cases. Within-case analysis revealed that while
subthemes varied by case, the major themes that were identified from the two cases regarding DAP beliefs and practices by the kindergarten teachers included: (a) beliefs guided practice; (b) enhanced learning and development; (c) established caring community; (d) ensured success; and (e) reflected upon obstacles to DAP.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Overview of the Study

This multiple case study explored how ten kindergarten teachers reflected and exhibited developmentally appropriate beliefs in urban public school kindergartens in the north of Jordan and in kindergartens in central Alabama. DAP is defined as a framework for educating early childhood learners that focuses on the child. The child is the central focus and is envisioned as a developing human being (child-centered). Developmentally appropriate practice maximizes all domains of child development, emotional, social, cognitive, physical, and moral.

The participants in this multiple case study were 10 kindergarten teachers in two countries. Five kindergarten teachers from each international site volunteered after being identified as a purposeful group to participate in this study. This multiple case study sought to answer the research central question: How do ten kindergarten teachers describe beliefs and reflect and implement developmentally appropriate teaching practice in urban public schools in the north of Jordan and central Alabama? The study was further guided by five sub-questions:

1. What are the kindergarten teachers’ beliefs that relate to DAP in urban area in the north of Jordan and central Alabama?

2. How do kindergarten teachers describe the ways in which they create a caring community of learning?
3. How do the kindergarten teachers describe how they work to enhance development and learning?

4. What are the challenges that kindergarten teachers describe that they face in applying developmentally appropriate beliefs in practice?

5. What do kindergarten teachers describe as factors that encourage them to put developmentally appropriate beliefs into practice?

The data were collected through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and documentary materials. The interviews were audio-taped, and transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts, observations, and field notes were analyzed to provide a rich, thick description (Geertz, 1983). The data analysis followed the procedures outlined by Stake (2006) and Yin (2009). The data analysis was conducted on two levels, within-cases and across cases. Within-case analysis revealed that while subthemes varied by case, the themes that were common in both cases regarding DAP beliefs and practices by the included: (a) beliefs guide practice; (b) enhanced learning and development; (c) established caring community; (d) ensured success; and (e) reflected upon obstacles to DAP.

Chapter Five reports major findings of this study and answers the research questions. This chapter also discusses implications for teachers and administrators, issues for transferability, and recommendations for further research.

**Major Findings**

My data analysis across the two cases revealed five emergent themes related to exploring the DAP beliefs and practices of the kindergarten teachers in north Jordan and
central Alabama: (a) beliefs guide practice; (b) enhanced learning and development; (c) established caring community; (d) ensured success; and (e) reflected upon obstacles to DAP. These themes helped me to answer the central research question, “How do kindergarten teachers describe beliefs and reflect and implement developmentally appropriate teaching practice in urban public schools in the north of Jordan and central Alabama?” The following discussion reports the major findings related to each research sub-question and mirrors the reviewed literature in Chapter Two.

What are the kindergarten teachers’ beliefs that relate to DAP in an urban area in north Jordan and central Alabama? Data analysis revealed teachers’ beliefs predict their practice (Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak, & Johnson, 2001; West, 2001). Analysis of the data collected in this study revealed that kindergarten teachers believed in DAP in general in both north Jordan and central Alabama (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010; Haroun & Weshah, 2009; Kim et al., 2005). Moreover, according to analysis of the interviews, observations, videotaped observations, and the documentary materials, several key tenets of DAP were identified as guides for teacher’s practice in the kindergarten classroom. These beliefs that guided kindergarten teachers’ practice in north Jordan and central Alabama included focus on play, focus on the whole child, child-centeredness, and the importance of DAP in educating young children.

Each teacher had her own specific beliefs that guided her practice. Even when two or more teachers shared the same belief, each one had her own way to practice that belief in the classroom. However, one participant from central Alabama and two participants from north Jordan still struggled between their DAP beliefs and their implementation of
these beliefs (Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Lee & Tseng, 2008). Specifically, their theoretical underpinning for practice was not clear within their thinking, and they had no clear theory regarding working with children and “hold misconceptions about the actual attributes of developmentally appropriate practice” (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006, p. 65). Their lack of a theory and misunderstandings were reflected in their inconsistent beliefs and in their developmentally inappropriate practices evident in their work with the children. For example, one kindergarten teacher from second site used both appropriate and inappropriate practices (Lee & Tseng, 2008).

While the rest of participants; (four kindergarten teachers from the second case, and three kindergarten teachers from first case) strongly believed and clearly demonstrated their theory regarding DAP. All of the teachers in the second case, with the exception of one, had a signs of developmentally appropriate practice in their classrooms (Lee & Tseng, 2008). Developmentally inappropriate strategies observed in the second case included using the reward and punishment strategies, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The inclusion of these inappropriate strategies may be attributed to external factors that affect teacher beliefs and practices. Possible external factors were the state curriculum, mandated standards, available educational materials and resources and parents’ and administrators’ levels of awareness. This finding supported Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett’s (2006) contention external factors such as accountability, high stakes testing, parental pressure, parental involvement, financial resources and administrative policies shape teachers’ beliefs and practice in the classroom. Another reason for lack of consistency in DAP may be the kinds of the professional development that kindergarten teachers had. (Kim et al., 2005; McMullen, 1999).
Play was the most important belief that guided practice of kindergarten teachers in both sites. While the practice was varied among kindergarten teachers in both sites, all of them believed in the important role of play in teaching children. According to Copple and Bredekamp (2009), play is an important DAP principle because “play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognitive, and social competence” (p.14). Additionally, Curwood (2007) explained, “Play is the necessary work of children” (p. 31). According to Segal (2004), “The children who thrive enter school with strong communication skills. They are confident and self-assured, adept at making friends, persistent, creative, and exited about learning. These are the qualities that children acquire through play” (p. 33). Three types of play were illustrated in teaching kindergarten children at these two sites; (a) intentional play, (b) free play, and (c) pretend play. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) indicated several kinds of play that teachers can engage the children with in order to promote their learning and development in all domains; dramatic play, constructive play, game with rules, object play, and physical play.

In the first site, Ms. Noor and Ms. Fatimah strongly believed in the role of play in teaching young children. They believed and practiced the three types of play in the classroom. Ms. Noor, especially, was a big believer in the role of play in teaching young children. She offered three types of play to children for the entire day. Ms. Lyan used intentional play in different occasions, but sometimes used more traditional strategies in teaching children, instead of play. However, Ms. Rasha and Ms. Reem just offered 20 minutes of recess time as opportunity to play. Occasionally, Ms. Rasha and Ms. Reem
allowed the children to play in learning centers. They limited center play time because “they wanted to keep these centers neat and new!”

In the second site, all participants believed in play in general. However, the enactment of that belief varied among the participants, even among those who work in the same school district. Ms. Anne, worked in a school that had the philosophy of “learning through play.” This circumstance supported her belief that “play is the children’s job.” She offered the three types of play in her classroom, and her class was full of children’s organized movement. Ms. White and Ms. Tonya offered intentional play in their classroom when they taught the whole group and when children worked in the learning centers. However, Ms. White had to defend using play as way for learning. Both parents and school administrators challenged her belief. Gronlund (2010) also pointed out:

Academic pressures, call for accountability, and misunderstanding about how young children learn best have taken their roll, casing play to be questioned and minimized in classrooms, and many teachers are frustrated with the continual need to justify any time for play. Let alone the long periods that children need to develop rich, imaginative and complex play. (pp. 4-5)

Ms. Spring also stated that she believed in the importance of free play, but that did not appear in her teaching practice. Ms. Spring interpreted free play to mean sending the children to play and then the teacher ignoring them. She did not reflect the understanding that free play involves the teacher looking for opportunities to teach while children are playing. Also in the first case, all kindergarten teachers believed in the role of play in children’s development and learning. However, just two out five participants at this site consistently reflected their belief in their practice (Kim et al., 2005; McMullen, 1999).
These findings supported previous research that found inconsistencies between teachers’ beliefs and actual implementation in teaching practice (Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Kim et al., 2005; Kowalski et al., 2001; Lee & Tseng, 2008; West, 2001). These inconsistencies may be related to fewer teaching experiences with children and to shortage in on-going professional development (McMullen, 1999; Kim et al., 2005). According to McMullen (1999), the inconsistencies between practice and belief can be related to environmental or “work related stress” (p. 217). He stated, “Certain personality traits, tendencies, and or level of preparation or professional experiences may act together with environmental/work factors to make it difficult or even impossible for these teachers to engage in the “best practice” in which they say they believed” (McMullen, 1999, p. 217).

Lee and Tseng (2008) stated, “High quality programs should be child-centered” (p. 183). The group of participants indicated they believed the role of children in the classroom was important and believed in a children-centered approach, thus supporting Lee and Tseng’s idea. Lee and Tseng (2008) also stated, “Placing the child at the center of education is deemed to be appropriate and desirable…globally in multiple cultural contexts” (p. 183). However, practice of this belief varied among teachers in both sites. Two teachers in first site practiced a more teacher-directed approach and used traditional approaches in teaching young children in spite of their expressed beliefs in the importance of child-centered approach. This finding is in concert with Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett’s research study. They found, “Many teachers regardless of the type of instructional practices used in their classrooms, felt that, all students are benefit from child-centered practices. Unfortunately, it is clear this belief did not necessarily translate
into child-centered classroom” (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006, p. 76). In the second site, there was one teacher who believed and practiced DAP as a child-centered approach. Ms. Anne believed that children are able to construct their own understanding of concepts but at the same time they also benefit from instruction. In her classroom the students worked together and received instruction from teacher. She provided them different opportunities to construct their knowledge and understanding.

All participants in both sites expressed the belief that DAP was very effective in improving children’s learning and development for many reasons. This finding supported many previous research studies that revealed positive effects of applying DAP to children’s learning and development (Burts, Hart, Fleege, Mosly, & Thomasson, 1992; Burts et al., 1993; Dunn, Beach, & Kontos, 1994; Marcon, 1993; Sherman & Mueller, 1996; Van Horn et al., 2005). However, two teachers from north Jordan and one teacher from central Alabama have no clear idea about DAP and the importance of this framework. They believed that DAP is a foundation for learning to read and write and to help prepare children for grade school. Teachers appeared to “hold misconceptions about the actual attributes of developmentally appropriate practice” (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006, p. 65).

How do kindergarten teachers describe the ways in which they create a caring community of learning? A “caring community of learning” is one of the key areas of DAP that needs teacher’s intentional decisions in order to support children’s learning and development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Copple and Bredekamp (2009) proposed five components necessary to create positive caring community and build
positive relationships between children and adults, teachers and families, and among children: (a) each member of the community is valued by others so children learn to respect and acknowledge the differences; (b) children construct their own meaning of the world through the opportunities of communication and interaction with other children and adults; (c) each member in the community respects and is accountable to the other members; (d) the physical environment is maintained to protect the health and safety of learning community members; and (e) the teacher ensures the overall social and emotional climate is positive (pp. 16-17).

Nowak-Fabrykowski (2010) proposed six caring stages which are: (a) caring for self, (b) caring for family and relative, (c) caring for friend, (d) caring for strangers who are in need and ask for help, (e) caring for strangers who are in need and do not ask for help, and (f) planning and initiated caring for strangers in need. Three subthemes emerged from the broader theme of “caring communities.” The participants in both sites tried to create caring communities using the following common factors: setting up a good relationship, attending to classroom discipline, and addressing the role of the physical environment. Additionally, in the second site, the role of religion emerged. The 10 kindergarten teachers in this study worked very hard to establish and strengthen good and positive relationships of three types: (a) teacher-parents/families relationship, (b) teacher-children/students relationship, and (c) child-child relationship.

First, to build a good relationship with parents/families, the participants noted the importance of starting very early in the beginning of the year to build this relationship by open communication. The participants in the second case sent daily folders to the children’s home with notes, included newsletters every week, and provided their email
address and telephone number so families could contact teachers. They also sent pictures of children doing activities to the families and met with the families for conferences.

Families/ or parents were welcomed to visit the classroom and to be volunteers in the classroom in the both sites. Grant and Ray (2010) pointed out that “It is important to move beyond family involvement practices that best serve teachers’ interests and look for ways to form true partnerships with families” (p. 9). Ms. White said:

Our school wants the parents to be involved, but we find that sometimes, when the parents are always coming in, it kind of disrupts the classroom, because the kids get really excited and they act up when their parents are there.

However, Ms. White also indicated, “The volunteers that come into my room are not children’s parents. They’re, like, other people’s parents, that come in. But, the parents, I do want them to be as involved as possible, so they do come on field trips with us.” In north Jordan, parents or families were welcomed to visit the classroom; however, just the mothers or women were welcomed to be volunteers. Based on cultural norms men and fathers are not appropriate volunteers in the classroom.

Murray, Murray and Waas (2008) pointed that a positive kindergarten teacher’s relationship with children will promote emotional and social health in children. All the participants from both sites indicated that they had a good relationship with children. They all used tenderness and love, promoted a sense of family, respected the children, had an open and positive attitude, focused on the interests of children, and were enthusiastic in order to build and strengthen their relationship with children. The teachers in this study reflected the thoughts of Ray and Smith (2010) who asserted, “Teacher–child relationships in kindergarten should focus on fostering warmth and trust to support all children’s early school adjustment and subsequent long-term academic success” (p. 9).
Teachers focused on strengthening relationships among children when they offered opportunities for children to work and play together, thereby establishing the classroom’s culture. Ray and Smith (2010) stated, “As children work and play together…This culture is a result of sharing materials and routines, as well as forming values and attitudes about their environment” (p. 9). According to Nowak-Fabrykowski (2010), teachers also need to teach caring by teaching specific lessons in order to form a caring community “There is a need for teaching children to care as part of moral development. There is also a need for the teachers to model and practice caring, and be able to develop it in children” (p. 442).

Ms. Anne planned for a caring community lesson during the Thanksgiving time. She discussed with the children how they could help other people in the community who had no homes or food. Then, they decided to cook and share foods with people who were homeless. The teacher brought several cans of beans, chopped tomatoes, tomato sauce, and corn. Also, she brought cooked ground beef and chopped onion. Then, they started the discussion about how to cook and prepare the food. Everyone had a role and shared in the process. In this transferable lesson, Ms. Anne’s students learned about being a classroom community that was able to share with another less fortunate community. The lessons learned were many and long lasting. They learned about sharing, helping others, taking turns, making decisions, and facts about vegetables. They also learned math by counting the cans of food, colors of the vegetables they used, and the importance of the food for health.

Classroom rules and using rewards and punishments were the two issues that were identified within the classroom discipline subtheme. Nine of 10 participants from both
sites used rewards in the classroom. Ms. Anne, from the second case, was the teacher who did not believe in using the rewards. Instead of rewards, she believed that children had to do the right things without rewards. In her classroom, she encouraged problem-solving strategies and tried to establish autonomy in children by offering many choices (Kamii, Clark, & Dominick, 1994; Waite-Stupiansky, 1997). Also in the second case, Ms. Tonya and Ms. Spring used an apple tree for behavior management. Ms. White and Ms. Hope used the treasure box and stamps in order to reward children. Ms. Spring, Ms. Tonya, and Ms. Hope reduced the child’s recess time in order to punish the child. Also, the four participants in the second case reduced the recess time in order to punish the children when they broke the rules. Ms. Tonya and Ms. White asked the kids to walk the wall during recess time for five minutes instead of playing on the playground. Ms. Hope and Ms. Spring asked the children to stand behind the wall under the sun and not to play with the kids for five minutes.

In the first case, all the participants used the reward system in the classroom. All of them believed that using the rewards would motivate children to learn and engage in the classroom. However, all the participants hated to use punishment, and the researcher had no opportunity to verify their stories, as she just observed the videotaped lessons (no direct observations) were available for this case.

In order to establish the classroom rules, two participants from first case and the five participants from the second case engaged the children in establishing the classroom rules. They read books, discussed some stories, and encouraged children through questioning to construct the classroom rules. However, three participants from the first case set the rules, themselves, and simply informed the children. They explained the
rules and expected the children to obey all the classroom rules. Kamii and Kysh (2006) argued that in too many schools, children are not encouraged to think. Students are given the rules instead of being asked to think and invent their own procedures. They added that “children often struggle when they are asked to invent solutions, but this struggle constitutes the process of construction, and they are proud and often elated when they invent a method of solution” (p. 114).

Although School 2A in the second case was a church based program, the role of religion was a unique to the first case as a related to creating care communities. All participants in the first case used religion in many ways including building good relationships with peers, being a good community, and also in helping children obey the rules. In the second case there was no role for religion in the classroom teaching. Only Ms. Anne’s classroom addressed religion in any way. In her classroom this role was limited to chapel time and to the prayers that the children say before eating. This finding may relate to the fact that about 92% of the Jordanian population is Muslim. Also all the five schools, teachers, and students in the first case in this study were Muslims (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2010). In U.S. schools, many religions are represented and the culture relegates religious practice to the home, rather than the school.

How do the kindergarten teachers describe how they work to enhance development and learning? In order to enhance and improve children’s learning and development, the kindergarten teachers in both sites used different procedures. The most successful procedures used to enhance and improve children’s development and learning were: (a) implementing effective teaching, (b) understanding and reaching all children’s
varied needs, (c) planning, (d) grouping children to maximize learning, and (e) evaluating learning and development. While both sites used the same procedures, there were
differences in practices of kindergarten teachers across both sites and even among kindergarten teachers in each site. The participants in central Alabama were more professional, intentional, and organized in their implementation of DAP in teaching young children. This finding may be related to: (a) higher educational levels in early childhood education field that the participants had in central Alabama (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010; Han & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2010; Haroun & Weshah 2009; Kim et al., 2005). All the participants in central Alabama had at least a master’s degree in early childhood or elementary education and (b) the amount of professional development available to teachers may also be a factor in the more consistent implementation of DAP practice in central Alabama. The participants in central Alabama had more professional development opportunities than the Jordanian participants. McMullen (1999) and Ray and Smith (2010), both suggested strong professional development can be a factor in DAP implementation. Finally, DAP was founded as an American term and framework for educating young children and has been part of early childhood practice in the U.S. since 1986 (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Since that time, DAP beliefs, practices, and effects have interested many researchers, educators, and policy makers in the U.S. On the other hand, the interest in DAP is very new in Jordan. DAP was introduced into Jordan in 2008, about one decade after the beginning of the public kindergarten movement in Jordan. “Teachers are still relatively new to working with DAP and are concerned that parents might exert too much influence over program content, thereby causing
practitioners to do what families prefer even if they disagree with it as early childhood professionals” (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010, p. 71).

It was found that the participants in each site who had good and ongoing professional development and had more years of experience with teaching early childhood were more able to implement DAP in teaching young children. These findings supported previous research that suggested teachers with more years of experience are much strongly entrenched in developmentally appropriate practice. Often the strength of practice is related to the influence of ongoing professional development in early childhood, not because of the number of years in the field (McMullen, 1999).

An important tenet of DAP for kindergarten teachers is to understand all children’s various needs in age five to six years in order to meet these needs in teaching kindergarten. The participants in both locations varied in their knowledge, beliefs, and practice of meeting children where they are developmentally. Teachers used different ways to meet the needs of all the kids because not everyone learns the same way. The participants in both sites utilized whole group activities such as singing songs and reading stories, used a number of different teaching resources, and conducted fun, hands-on activities in order to engage the kindergarten children in learning (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In addition to these strategies, participants in central Alabama used small group teaching; more hand-on activities, number talks, and technology in teaching young children.

The participants from both sites planned for both the long and short term. The participants planned for the whole year, unit plans, weekly lesson plans, and daily lesson plans. According to collected data four criteria were considered in planning for teaching:
(a) age appropriateness, (b) individual appropriateness, (c) meaningfulness and relevancy, (d) available resources, and (e) integration of different subjects (Copple & Bredekamp, 1997, 2009). Meaningfulness, relevancy, and cultural context were reflected in different ways. For example planning and preparing activities for Thanksgiving Day, Halloween, and Valentine’s Day are relevant and appropriate for American culture, but are not appropriate for Jordanian culture. Also while all the kindergarten teachers’ plans in central Alabama were built on the integrated approach, in north Jordan, just two participants plan and teach using the integrated approach. The three other kindergarten teachers in Jordan implement subject-oriented lesson plans. The reasons for the differences may be their beliefs regarding the work with children (Kowalski et al., 2001; West, 2001), and may be related to fewer professional development opportunities provided to Jordanian teachers (McMullen, 1999; Ray & Smith, 2010).

In order to group children to maximize learning, the participants pointed out that they considered children’s abilities in grouping children in the classroom. The teachers described two types of groups; mixed ability groups and ability-based grouping. Ability-based grouping was used in order to meet children were they were developmentally and to enhance and improve their learning and development (Copple & Bredekamp, 1997, 2009). However, no participant used this grouping type in north Jordan. Grouping by gender was used by the participants in the first case (north Jordan), especially at the beginning of the year until teachers strengthened the relationships between girls and boys. Moreover, in all the grouping types above, the participants from both sites considered children’s interests and personality. Two participants from the first site and
one participant from central Alabama offered chances for children to choose the people and the activity with which to engage.

Evaluating learning and development was revealed as an important factor for all teachers in the study. Kindergarten teachers in both sites varied in how they evaluated learning and development of children. In the first case (north Jordan), teachers used only two types of evaluation to assess the learning and development of children. They used checklists based on their observations of children and by questioning children. In the second site (central Alabama), a variety of assessment procedures were employed to evaluate learning and development of children: (a) child observation and anecdotal notes, (b) mid and end year checklists, (c) journals, (d) portfolios for each child, (e) self portfolios, and (f) questioning.

Observation is a good tool to evaluate children’s development in all domains, as well to evaluate children’s learning of specific skills (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Szente et al., 2002). All participants from both sites shared their belief that evaluation of children’s learning and development has to be continuous, ongoing, inclusive of all development domains, and individually and age appropriate (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). However, two teachers in first the case and one teacher in the second case focused on assessment of academic skills and children’s cognitive development. These teachers did not describe assessment tools they used to evaluate the children’s development in the other domains such as, emotional, physical, and social development. The emphases these teachers place on cognitive development and academic skills may be related to the pressures kindergarten teachers felt from children’s families or the mandated standards. Weak implementation of DAP is consistent with Curwood’s (2007) report, which stated,
“while young students’ reading and math scores are soaring, there is little assessment of the effect of the intensified academic focus of kids’ motivation to learn, creativity, motor skills, social skills, or self-esteem” (p. 30).

What are the challenges that kindergarten teachers describe that they face in applying developmentally appropriate beliefs in practice? According to cross-case analysis of data from both sites, there were several common challenges to implementing DAP beliefs. Also, while both sites shared some challenges or obstacles, data analysis revealed that each site also had its own particular challenges. State curricula, mandated standards, and time were specific challenges that kindergarten teachers had in the second site (central Alabama). Having no assistants, interruptions during the day, size of the classroom, the girls-boys’ relationship, lack of funds, difficulty finding educational resources, and making the environment secure and safe, were unique subthemes identified as challenges for kindergarten teachers in north Jordan. Lack of parent awareness of DAP was a challenge common to both sites. Kindergarten teachers in both sites reported that many parents push teachers to teach the children reading and writing very early in the school years. This finding supported previous research study findings about the pressures teachers had from parents (McMullen, 1999; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Szente et al., Zeng & Zeng, 2005). Szente et al., (2002) found that teachers and parents had a range of differences, as well as some similarities on DAP beliefs.

Three out five kindergarten teachers in central Alabama stated the state curricula, mandated standards, and time were challenges in providing a developmentally
appropriate learning environment. This finding also is supported by the previous research findings about the impact of mandated standards on teacher belief and practice of DAP (Curwood, 2007; McMullen, 1999; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). In Curwood’s article (2007) entitled “What happened to kindergarten: Are academic pressures stealing childhood?” she mentioned, “The pressures on schools to prepare children for testing in third grade has helped to eradicate the block area and dress-up center from the kindergarten” (p. 30). However, state standards were not a barrier for Ms. Anne, because she worked in a private Early Learning Center that was connected to a church. Ms. Anne’s center had adopted the idea and philosophy of “learning through play.” But for Ms. Spring, the situation was different. She considered the state standards as the guide for her in planning for young children. Also, she followed the district guidelines in planning and teaching young children. As was previously stated, Ms. Spring had a teacher-directed approach in her classroom and had mixed beliefs about appropriate and inappropriate practices in teaching young children. This finding is consistent with Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) findings. Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) stated that the teachers who believe and follow district policies and procedures are teacher-directed.

Review of data collected in the first case suggests the kindergarten teachers in north Jordan have no high expectations or mandated standards in teaching kindergarten children. However, they have other constraints including no assistants, interruptions during the day, size of the classrooms, girls-boys’ relationship, lack of funds, difficulty finding educational resources, and difficulty providing a secure and safe environment. These unique subthemes that identified as challenges for kindergarten teachers in north Jordan also affected the teachers’ implementation of DAP.
No assistant was one subtheme unique to the first site. Ms. Fatimah, for example, had 26 students with no assistant. She indicted also she was required to teach English as a second language to her kindergarten children, yet she had no qualification to do that. She pointed out, “All kindergarten teachers had to teach even English language for children.” However, one teacher from central Alabama indicated that she had 19 students without a full-time aide. She had a part-time aide.

Girls-boys negative relationship was another barrier to DAP that kindergarten teachers had in Jordan but not in central Alabama. The kindergarten teachers in north Jordan indicated that this negative relationship impacted opportunities to create caring learning communities because they had to spend so much time working with children in to facilitate the building of good male-female relationships. However, there was no previous research related to this issue. The researcher agreed with the participants’ comments about this issue. Both teachers and I attributed this kind of relationship issue to culture. A Jordanian teacher indicated, “This is how many parents educated their children…they always telling them to do not play with the girls because they want them to be men not women!”

The kindergarten teachers from central Alabama proposed time as a challenge for them. They indicated that teaching and preparing DAP activities needs additional time. This finding is consistent with Huoge (2008) and Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006). Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) indicated, “Teachers in the child-centered group noted the additional time it takes to create child centered- activities” (p. 75). Wien (1996) indicated that when time to reflect was not taken by teachers, opportunities for developmentally appropriate practice were obstructed in ways teachers could not easily
identify or act upon. However, Ms. Anne reflected time as a challenge in different way. She noted that working in a half day program is a challenge. She needed more time to work with children. However, no one from the first case indicated time as barrier, even though public kindergarten in Jordan is also a half day program (8:00-12:30). The difference in perception of time as a barrier may be related to the fact that in Jordan, there are no mandated standards with artificially high expectations.

All the participants in first case stated that the professional development sessions were during the day school, and that they had to leave the children for several days to attend professional development sessions. They considered that as an obstacle to reflecting their belief in practice. However, in the second case, just one participant reflected this sub theme during the interview. Ms. Anne said:

Going to music class, going to PE…transition time, walking from place to place. They’re five so it takes them a long time to do things sometimes. I think sometimes there are just too many structured things for them to do and they don’t have enough time to just be kids and enjoy their play and do the work they’re supposed to do…which is play.

**What do kindergarten teachers describe as factors that encourage them to put developmentally appropriate beliefs into practice?** Analysis of the data revealed four factors helped the participants in central Alabama to succeed in reflecting DAP beliefs in teaching practice. The four factors were: professional development, commitment to kindergarten, support, and collaboration. However, north Jordan only the first three factors emerged. The collaboration subtheme was not pointed out by the participants in first site (north Jordan), because there was just one kindergarten classroom with one kindergarten teacher in each of the schools. Thus, there were no other kindergarten teachers who worked at the same school with whom to collaborate. For the
second case (central Alabama), in School 2A there were three kindergarten sections. In
School 2B there were five kindergarten sections, and in School 2C were six kindergarten
sections. There were a good opportunities for the kindergarten teachers in the second
case to work together and collaborate in order to find the best practices for children
(Zambo, 2007).

The kinds of professional development offered at the two sites were different, but
professional development emerged as an important factor at both sites. All the
professional development in the first site was mandatory and was offered and presented
in the educational department for all the kindergarten teachers around the country. The
Alabama teachers also had mandatory professional development, but these mandated
opportunities were varied by school district. Moreover, the schools offered extra
opportunities for teachers in Alabama. Thus, the professional development opportunities
for kindergarten teachers in the second case were richer than the first case. The
participants in the second case attended conferences, workshops, continued their graduate
studies, and read several books and articles about teaching and learning issues in addition
to the mandated opportunities. The participants in the first case just had the mandated
professional development sessions and two of those participants had only received two
opportunities for professional development. The differences in the amount and richness
of professional development opportunities available to teachers may explain the finding
that the kindergarten teachers in central Alabama reflected DAP more professionally than
kindergarten teachers in Jordan (McMullen, 1999; Ray & Smith, 2010; Zeng & Zeng,
2005).
All participants in both sites indicated that they had the support of the principal and the students’ parents or families and that this support encouraged them to use DAP in teaching children. This finding supports previous research studies (Ray & Smith, 2010; West, 2001; Zeng & Zeng, 2005). In the first case, the participants added that the encouragement and support of their educational supervisor as another factor that encouraged them to implement their beliefs in teaching kindergarten. The commitment to kindergarten children was another factor that both sites shared, in spite of the differences in the extent of the commitment between participants within each case and across the two cases.

**Implications for Practice**

Many researchers investigated teacher’s implementation of DAP, the effect of DAP, and how DAP practice improves children’s learning and development (Burts, Hart, Fleege, Mosly, & Thomasson, 1992; Burts et al., 1993; Dunn, Beach, & Kontos, 1994; Marcon, 1993; Sherman & Mueller, 1996; Van Horn et al., 2005). Therefore, understanding these kindergarten teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practice helps advocates, administrators, and teachers plan best practices for young children. The following are some suggested implications that were derived from this study:

- School administrators should consider the multiple forces and external factors that influence teachers’ implementation of DAP;
- Teachers need professional development regarding the balance of DAP and state curriculum standards;
• Pre-service teachers need to be exposed to the benefits of DAP as best practice to educate young children. They should learn how to use DAP in teaching and have opportunities to observe teachers using DAP effectively in the classroom;

• Professional workshops regarding DAP are needed for teachers and parents;

• Professional workshops offering DAP procedures for evaluating children’s development in social, emotional, and physical domains are needed;

• Child developmental theory courses at the university level are needed to focus on the implementation of theory in teaching practice;

• The last recommendation is directed toward the Educational Department and to the principals in Jordan. Administrators need to discuss with the teachers the challenges of implementing DAP and allow them to change the kindergarten classroom organization. Also, administrators need to help teachers to find and fund the important resources that help them in their work with children.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The following are some recommendations for future research that were derived from this study:

• Research that explores the professional development opportunities offered to teachers and how professional development helps teachers realize the suitability and application of DAP in teaching young children;

• Studies of parent(s)/families and teachers’ beliefs about best practice and whether it is linked to the particular aspects of DAP;
• Further case studies to explore the reasons behind the negative relationships between the boys and girls in Jordanian kindergartens;

• Research exploring pre-service teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and practices;

• Examine DAP in primary elementary schools (1st-3rd grade) in Jordan;

• Case studies to explore in-depth how child-initiated learning activities develops social responsibility;

• Case studies to explore in more depth how kindergarten teachers create caring communities of learning;

• Further case studies to explore the classrooms of teachers who successfully offer intentional and free play opportunities to promote learning and development young children;

**Conclusion**

In this study, two countries, two cultures, and two skies were on the paper. Each sky had its own stars. Some stars were more brilliant; some were less brilliant. Some stars were blurry. No matter whether stars were brilliant or not, each one had its input and insights in this world. In this real world, the two skies connected together in points of their desire, eagerness, and commitment to change and make a difference. Thus, more consideration must go to these stars in order to have brighter sky and better world. This is the value of the qualitative multi case study approach; it brings two or more worlds together. While each world had its own people, problems, successes, rich, thick description (Geertz, 1983), allows the collection of all of these factors and indicators to
contribute to better understanding the experiences explained by the participant teachers (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009).

In this study, I sought to provide insights into the good examples of Jordanian and American kindergarten teachers’ experience about their use of DAP in order to facilitate develop children’s learning and development. Lessons learned from this study may be transferable between the two countries, within each country, and to other kindergarten teachers who are interested in improving their own developmentally appropriate practices. They must however, interpret the data by respecting and taking into consideration the context of each geographical place and specific culture studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
References


APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER
July, 2011

Dear Kindergarten Teacher:

I am writing this letter to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Early Childhood Education, I will be conducting a study titled “Multiple Case Study: Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs and Practice of United States and Jordanian Kindergarten Teachers,” and the IRB Protocol number is X110718002. The purpose of this study is to explore how kindergarten teachers apply developmentally appropriate beliefs in practice at urban public schools in north Jordan and in public kindergartens in central Alabama. You have been purposefully selected because as a kindergarten teacher you will be able to provide valuable information and insight that will aid in the success of my research study.

The time frame for this project is August 2011 through December 2011. Your experiences will be the focus of this study, therefore; your involvement will require a one hour audio recorded interview. I will ask to observe in your kindergarten classroom twice for four hours each time. Also, some documentation such as lessons plan and assessment tools will be collected.

Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Your name or any other identifying information will not be used in this study; I will take all precautions to ensure your anonymity. In doing so, you will be issued a coded name. All collected data and materials related to this study will be kept in locked storage containers and the audiotapes will be destroyed in one year.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You will not receive any compensation for your participation. However, your participation may provide valuable information to school administrators, teachers, and department of education leaders. We would appreciate your completion of this study in its entirety. However, you will have the option to withdraw from the study at any time should you choose to do so. The data collected for this study will be used solely for the completion of the study. Again your anonymity will be secured using a coded name.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate in this study, contact me at [ obscured] or via email (ebtesam@uab.edu) or you may contact Dr. Lois Christensen at [ obscured]. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Ebtesam Rababah
University of Alabama at Birmingham
APPENDIX  B

PRINCIPAL LETTER FOR ACCESS
Dear _______.

During the fall semester of 2011, I will be conducting a qualitative research project to complete my dissertation for doctoral studies in Early Childhood Education at the University of Alabama, Birmingham. The title of my project is “Multiple Case Study: Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs and Practice of United States and Jordanian Kindergarten Teachers,” and the IRB Protocol number is X110718002. The purpose of this study is to explore how kindergarten teachers apply developmentally appropriate beliefs in practice at urban public schools in north Jordan and in public kindergartens in central Alabama. This research study will involve twenty kindergarten teachers who have three or more years experience in teaching and who are familiar with the use of developmentally appropriate practices in the early childhood classroom. These teachers will be asked to discuss their experiences and feelings as early childhood teachers, and they will complete a one-hour audio-recorded interview. Some lessons will be observed after arrangements are made with teachers, and some documentation such as lesson plans and assessment tools will be collected.

There will be no cost for participation other than the time volunteered. The data collection process will occur over a three month period beginning in September 2011 and ending in December 2011. Participants will be free to withdraw at any time during this study without consequences. Participants’ identities will be kept confidential and all research documents will be kept in a secure location. All participants will be asked to sign a consent form that outlines their rights as research participants, and a copy of the consent form and will be provided to each participant.

As principal of ----------- Elementary School, it is important for me to have your permission for access to your school and faculty. If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints regarding this research, please contact me at email address: ebtesam@uab.edu or _______. You may also contact my Dissertation Chair, Lois Christensen, Ph.D. at lmchrist@uab.edu or _______. We will be glad to answer any of your questions.

If you have questions about the rights of a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll-free number, press the option for “all other calls” or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the OIRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

Thank you for your support in my educational endeavor. Please send a letter of permission and support on your school’s letterhead for the purpose of gaining access to your school.

Sincerely,
Ebtesam Q. Rababah
653 Idlewild Circle. Apt # C
Birmingham, Al 35205
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
Informed Consent Document

TITLE OF RESEARCH: Multiple Case Study: Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs and Practice of United States and Jordanian Kindergarten Teachers

IRB PROTOCOL: X110718002

INVESTIGATOR: Ebtesam Rebabah

SPONSOR: University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Education

Explanation of Procedures

You are being asked to participate in a multiple case research study to explore how kindergarten teachers apply their developmentally appropriate beliefs in practice at public kindergartens in Central Alabama and in urban areas in north of Jordan. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is defined as an approach in early childhood education that focuses on the child as a developing human being and lifelong learner (child-centered) founded by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 1987 and then expanded in 2009. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a kindergarten teacher in central Alabama or urban areas in north of Jordan.

As kindergarten teacher you will be able to provide valuable information and insight that will us better understand how kindergarten teachers apply their beliefs in practice.

As a participant in this study from central Alabama, you will be asked to complete a one-hour audio-taped interview which I will transcribe. You will also be asked to provide any lesson plans and assessment tools that you are willing to share. You will be asked to arrange for the Principal Investigator to observe your kindergarten classroom twice four hours each time.

As a participant in this study from Irbid, Jordan, you will be asked to be interviewed and audio-taped via telephone for one hour, which I will transcribe. You will also be asked to provide any lesson plans, assessment tools, and artifacts (video tapes for 8 lessons) that you are willing to share.

The time frame for this project is August 2011 through December 2011. The total number of the participants for this study will be 20 participants.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no physical, social, economic, or legal risks that will be encountered as a result of this study. Confidentiality is very important to the investigator and any information obtained from this study will be kept confidential and secure. Pseudonyms will be utilized for all participants to keep the data confidential.
Benefits

You will not benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, your participation may provide valuable information to school administrators, teachers, and department of education leaders.

Alternatives

The alternative is not to participate in this study.

Confidentiality

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. However, research information that identifies you may be shared with the UAB Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including people on behalf of the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The results of the research may be published for scientific purposes. Your identity will not be given out.

The data will be stored in a secure place accessible only to the investigator and will be viewed only by the investigator and her dissertation chair Dr. Christensen. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study through the use of pseudonyms for participants. In addition, all data collected and materials related to the research will be kept by the researcher in a locked metal file cabinet. The audio-tape will be transcribed by the researcher. The transcription, observation notes, and the audio-tape will be destroyed after one year from the completed study.

Refusal or Withdrawal without Penalty

Whether or not you take part in this study is your choice. There will be no penalty if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide not to be in the study, you will not lose any benefits you are otherwise owed. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with this institution.

You may be removed from the study without your consent if the sponsor ends the study, or if you are not following the study rules.

Cost of Participation

There will be no cost to you from participation in the research.

Payment for Participation in Research

You will not receive any compensation for participation.
Questions

If you have any questions about the research, Ebtesam Rababah, the principal investigator, will be glad to answer them. Ms. Rababah’s phone number is 205-354-1961 (cell).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (OIRB) at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll-free number, press the option for “all other calls” or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the OIRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

As Jordanian kindergarten teacher you may also contact Dr. Mohammad Tawalbeh as a local contact. Dr. Tawalbeh is the Dean of the School of Education at Yarmouk University. Dr. Tawalbeh may be reached at (02) 7211111/ extension 3728 or via email education.fac@yu.edu.jo. Regular hours for the Office of Deanship of School of Education are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Sunday through Thursday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

Legal Rights

You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this informed consent document.

Signatures

Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed informed consent

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Signature of Witness

Date
APPENDIX  D

WAIVER OF INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENTATION FOR

JORDANIAN KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS
Waiver of Informed Consent Documentation

- **Use this form** to request a waiver of the requirement
  - o to obtain a signed consent document (cannot be used for FDA-regulated research) or
  - o to give participants a signed copy of the document.

- **Do not use this form** to request a waiver of part or all of the informed consent process. Instead, use the Waiver of Consent or Waiver of Authorization and Informed Consent.

1. IRB Protocol Title: *Multiple Case Study: Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs and Practice of United States and Jordanian Kindergarten Teachers*

2. Principal Investigator: **Ebtesam Qassim Rababah**

3. Choose one of the checkboxes below, indicating why the waiver of documentation is being requested for this research, and provide protocol-specific details as requested.

☐ Confidentiality Risk—Respond to Items a-c, below.
  a. Would the only record linking the subject and the research be the consent document? ☐Yes ☐No
  b. Would the principal risk be the potential harm resulting from a breach in confidentiality? ☐Yes ☐No
  c. Describe your plans to ask each subject whether he/she wants documentation linking his/her name with the research, and how each subject's wishes will govern (e.g., a document could be used for the informed consent process, subjects would be asked if they wanted a signed copy to document their consent, and those who did not would receive an unsigned copy).

☐ The research involves no greater than minimal risk and no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside the research context. Respond to Item a, below.
  a. Describe plans, if any, that you have for providing subjects with a written statement regarding the research. *(Note: The IRB may require that a written statement be given to the subject.)*

  I will be asking for consent from the participants from Jordan, but I will not be able to document their consent. It is impossible to obtain consent.

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documentation because the participants are in Jordan and I will be conducting the interview by telephone from Alabama.

By signing this request for waiver of informed consent documentation, I certify the information included in it.

Ebtesam Q Rababah

08/04/2011

Principal Investigator's Signature

Date
Interview Protocol: Multiple Case Study: Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs and Practice of United States and Jordanian Kindergarten Teachers.

Time of interview:

Date: 

Place: 

Interviewer: 

Interviewee: 

Position of interviewee: 

**Introduction:**

(Participant name), I want to thank you for taking time to speak with me about how you implement your beliefs that relate to developmentally appropriate practice in your instructional setting. Everything we say is being recorded unless you request otherwise during the interview. The purpose of my study is to explore the kindergarten teachers’ developmentally appropriate beliefs and practice. Remember, I am audi-taping as well as taking notes during our conversation. Audiotapes will be transcribed in their entirety for review by the researcher. Afterwards, you will be able to review all scripted notes and listen to the recordings if you so choose. At the conclusion of this interview, I will ask you for a pseudonym that you would like me to use in order to
protect your anonymity when referencing you in the study. In addition, all data collected and materials related to this study will be kept by the researcher in a locked, metal filing cabinet and will only be viewed by the investigator during the study.

Questions:

Icebreaker Questions:

Icebreaker #1: Tell me about yourself, your education, your work, and any other personal information you would like to share.

- Teacher specialization:

- Material status, if married/ how many children.

Icebreaker #2: Discuss where you received your:

- undergraduate:
- Graduate training:
- how long you have been a teacher:
- the grade levels you have taught:

1. Describe the daily schedule or routine of your classroom. How many students in your classroom? What is the number of adults in your classroom? (Teacher assistants, volunteers, student teacher)

2. How do you define developmentally appropriate practice?
3. Discuss the key beliefs that you think are most important about developmentally appropriate practice in teaching kindergarten children.

- How effective has developmentally appropriate practice been in improving student abilities at your class?

4. What do you think the major needs are of children between ages 5-6 years are?

- Describe how you think about working with kindergarten children?

5. How do you work in the classroom to reach these needs?

  - In planning:
  - teaching strategies:
  - Educational materials:
  - Interaction and communication with children:
  - Evaluation strategies:
  - grouping the children:
  - Classroom management strategies, discipline (punishment and rewards)
6. Describe the role of individual differences in your classroom?

- How do you meet these individual differences in your classroom?
  
  - In planning:
  
  - teaching strategies:
  
  - Educational materials:
  
  - Interaction and communication with children:
  
  - Evaluation strategies:
  
  - grouping the children:

7. Which of the following do you believe you have to consider in your planning, cognitive, social, emotional, physical development, or focus on child-centre approach?

- Describe how you take care of your choices in your planning, and in your teaching methods?

- What resources do you use for planning?

- How do you sequence different subjects’ objectives?

- How do you plan for long and short term goals?

8. Describe the role of play in the kindergarten classroom? (intentional play and free play)

- Do you encourage/discourage the play…

  - If encourage, how do you implement the play in your own classroom?

  Can you clarify more, Give me examples.

  - If discourage, why?
9. How do you organize your classroom to be developmentally appropriate?

- How do you set up classroom work stations?
- How do you schedule for instruction?
- How do you group students to maximize learning?

10. How are resources utilized in instruction?

What type of resources do you use?
Describe the effectiveness of each resource.
How do you find these resources?
Who funds these resources?

11. How do you assess students’ learning?

- How do you assess students’ development?
  - Cognitive:
  - Social:
  - Emotional:
  - Physical development:
- How do you use the data?
- How do you address student needs?
12. Describe the relationship you have with:

- your student:

- and with the parents:

- and child–child relationship:

- How do you set these relationships at the beginning of the years?

- How do you work to strengthen these relationships, give me examples, tell me more about your relationship with your students’ family?

13. What kind of professional development you experienced as kindergarten teachers?

- In what ways has professional development changed the way you instruct your students’ different subjects?

14. What support have you received toward integrating developmentally appropriate practice in your classroom?

15. Describe the factors that you think that have contributed to your commitment to kindergarten?
16. Describe any challenges do you face in practicing your developmentally appropriate beliefs in your classroom? Give me examples.

17. Describe any barriers that you face in practicing your developmentally appropriate beliefs in your classroom practice. Give me examples

18. Are there any additional comments you would like to make?

Thank you for your time and assistance. May I meet you again in the next couple of weeks if I need to clarify anything? Please be assured that confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and the reporting process? At this time, what name would you like for me to use when I reference you in the study?

The researcher

Ebtesam Rababah
Setting: __________________________________________________________

Observer: ________________________________________________________

Role of observer: ___________________________________________________

Date: _______________________________ Time: _______________________

Length of observation: _____________________________________________

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<tr>
<th>DAP</th>
<th>Descriptive Notes</th>
<th>Reflective Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>1-Creating a caring community of learners:</td>
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<td>- fostering positive relationships</td>
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<td>- building classroom community</td>
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<td>2- Teaching to enhance development and learning:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- environment and schedule</td>
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<td>- teaching methods.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- communication and language.</td>
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<td>- motivation and positive</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
approaches for learning.
  - Guidance.

3- **planning curriculum**

to achieve important goals:
  - curriculum essential.
  - physical development.
  - language and literacy.
  - Mathematics.
  - Science.
  - Technology.
  - social competence;

Social Studies.
  - Creative arts.

4- **Assessing children’s development and learning:**
  - Strategic and purposeful.
    - Systematic and ongoing.
    - integrated with teaching and curriculum
APPENDIX G

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
Form 4: IRB Approval Form:
Identification and Certification of Research
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The Assurance number is FWA00005960 and it expires on September 29, 2015. The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56.

Principal Investigator: RABABAH, EBTESAM Q
Co-Investigator(s):
Protocol Number: X110718002
Protocol Title: Multiple Case Study: Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs and Practice of United States and Jordanian Kindergarten Teachers

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 8-5-11. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.

IRB Approval Date: 8-5-11

Date IRB Approval Issued: 8-5-11

Marilyn Doss, M.A.
Vice Chair of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.
APPENDIX H

YARMOUK UNIVERSITY REVIEW
Research Process Approval
Identification and Certification of Research
Project Involving Human Subject

This is to inform that, Yarmouk University has no Institution Review Board (IRB). Thus, I am the dean of School of Education at Yarmouk University has reviewed the following research project process.

Principal Investigator: Ebtesam Rababah
Protocol Title: Multiple Case Study: Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs and Practice of United States and Jordanian Kindergarten Teachers.

The dean of school of Education at Yarmouk University has reviewed and approved the above named proposed project. The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks.

It is the researcher’s responsibility to submit annual progress reports to the School of Education for this project.

Approval Date: 10 July, 2011

Mohammad Tawalbeh, PhD.

Professor of Educational Technology
Dean, Faculty of Education
Yarmouk University-Irbid-Jordan
Phone:7211111/3728
Fax:7211136
Email address: education.fac@yu.edu.jo
APPENDIX I

EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT PERMISSION
Principals of Public Schools

Subject: Educational Research

Refer to the letter of Minister of Education No 101/4/3347 dated in 24/1/2011.

Ebtesam Qassim Rababah will be conducting a multiple case study entitled, “A Multiple Case Study: Developmentally Appropriate beliefs and practice of United States and Jordanian kindergarten teachers” as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of philosophy in the Early Childhood Education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham in USA.

Ebtesam has the permission of the Educational Department of second Irbid to collect the appropriate data from public schools; we would appreciate your help and support of her to do so.

Director of Education

Copy/ Director of educational and technical affairs
Copy/ Director of rehabilitation and educational supervision
Copy/ file

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