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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF KINDERGARTEN RETENTION:

ARE STANDARDS TO BE BLAMED?

by

GINGER DELAIGLE

(Under the Direction of Yasar Bodur)

ABSTRACT

Currently there are a number of Kindergarten students who are being retained for not mastering Common Core State Standards. One of the methods that teachers can use to support Kindergarten students in achieving these standards are Developmentally Appropriate Practices. The exploration of the perceptions of teachers who have experienced the phenomenon of retaining Kindergarten students served as the goal for this qualitative, phenomenological study. The results provided data for examination of the perceptions the teachers had with retaining Kindergarten students and their perceptions of the developmental appropriateness of the Common Core State Standards. Four Kindergarten teachers participated in three interviews which determined their Focused Life History, Details of the Experience, and Reflection of the Meaning. Data from each interview were analyzed, coded, and indicated identifiable patterns. The findings provide information that could be used to help teachers learn from other teachers' experiences of retention and lead to possible interventions that may help prevent retention. Recommendations for future research are also provided.

INDEX WORDS: Common Core State Standards, Developmentally Appropriate Practices, Kindergarten, Retention

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BS.Ed., Georgia Southern University, 1999

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GA

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF KINDERGARTEN RETENTION:

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Major Professor: Yasar Bodur
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Electronic Version Approved:
July 2016

DEDICATION

I devote this dissertation to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This dissertation has proven your Word "I can do ALL things through Christ which strengtheneth ME" – *Philippians 4:13*.

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Roy, and to my son, Hunter. You both have supported me and have selflessly shared me as I have worked countless hours to complete my work. You have both managed to entertain each other and have even managed to stay out of trouble (well, most times).

Roy, I could not have made it without your continuous support of informing me that I was "too smart to not complete this dissertation". Your patience has helped provide me with something that I genuinely desired to earn. You knew how badly I wanted it, even when I was willing to let it all go. I would not want to walk this journey called *Life* with anyone but you.

Hunter, our deals of "Do you want it - then go get it" and "If you give up, I can give up on making Honor Roll" held me to completion more than you will ever know. Thanks for holding me accountable to being an example of how our family strives for nothing less than the best. May you always find the strength and motivation to always do your best in everything that you tackle in life! Never forget that I will always be your #1 fan!

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This achievement must feel comparable to winning an *Oscar* and only having seconds to acknowledge the many people who have contributed to my success. It may very well be the most difficult segment of my work. The words "*Thank You*" will never feel adequate enough to express my appreciation for each and every precious individual.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Mastery of grade-level standards is primarily the criteria for grade-level promotion. Students are expected to learn the mandated standards along the same pace of other students and demonstrate mastery by the end of the school year. With a growing emphasis on test scores and accountability, grade retention at all levels has become increasingly controversial in the United States (Whitmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004). Concerns about kindergarten retention are on the rise within the current climate of high-stakes testing and escalating kindergarten expectations (Curwood, 2007). Certain groups of students are more likely to be retained than others. Gender, race, socioeconomic status, and parental involvement all play a role in the retention of students (Thomas, & Stockton, 2003).

According to research revealed by Winsler, et al., (2012), children in poverty are 3 times more likely (16%) to be retained in kindergarten or first grade than those with family incomes above the poverty line (5%), and the same degree of increased risk for early retention is found for children of parents without college education (16%), compared with those with higher education (6%), (Alexander et al., 2003; Hauser, 2001). Boys have also been found more likely to be retained in kindergarten, compared with girls (Dauber, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1993; Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997; Mantzicopoulos & Fulk, 1994; Meisels & Liaw, 1993), likely due to both lower academic performance and greater behavior problems seen among boys relative to girls. However, not all studies have found gender differences in early retention (Blair, 2001; Mantzicopoulos, 2003; Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 1998). Finally, other child and family predictors of early retention include children being young for their grade (Mantzicopoulos, 2003), low parental involvement in school (Jimerson et al., 1997;

Mantzicopoulos, 2003; McCoy & Reynolds, 1999), and child behavior problems and/or conflicts with teachers (Blair, 2002; Jimerson et al., 1997; Mantzicopoulos, 2003; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995).

School readiness, or how a student is prepared for entering school, has also been a contributing factor of retention in Kindergarten. In a study using Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten (ECLS-K) cohort data, Wertheimer, Croan, Moore, and Hair (2003) described even more risk factors of children entering kindergarten in 1998. The researchers conducting the study analyzed data gathered from a nationally representative sample of children. In this study, significant numbers of children entered kindergarten with risks in health, cognition, social and emotional development and many of these areas of need overlapped. Wertheimer et al. (2003) found that 31% of all children in the study entered kindergarten with at least one significant health challenge. Health challenges included being overweight, having delays in fine or gross motor development, having poor health or having a disability. Using tests and teacher ratings of cognition, early literacy, and mathematics, researchers analyzed the types and levels of differences in children entering kindergarten. Wertheimer and colleagues found that 20 % of all entering kindergarten children lagged significantly in one or more of the assessed areas. As part of this study, teachers and parents rated the behaviors and qualities of relationships for the children in the sample. Overall, 31 % of the children were rated as entering with social or emotional challenges. Wertheimer and colleagues also found that about 5% of kindergarten children in the study showed challenges in all three areas. Of the children demonstrating challenges in three areas: 66% were boys, 27% were identified as Non-Hispanic black, 63% were identified as children whose parents had a high school diploma or less, 55% lived in households with incomes less than $25,000 per year, 33% were children from homes with a single parent.

A current topic conversed among educators contributing to retention in Kindergarten are the high-stake standards (Frey, 2005) or Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards express the knowledge and skills that students need in order to meet the end goal of college and career readiness for all students (Common Core State Standards Initiative [CCSSI], 2014). Issued by the Alliance for Childhood (2010), the *Joint Statement of Early Childhood Health and Education Professionals on the Common Core Standards Initiative,* proposed four arguments concerning CCSS. These four arguments include: such standards will lead to long hours of instruction in literacy and math, standards will lead to standardized testing for Kindergarten students, didactic instruction and testing will crowd out other important areas of learning, and there is little evidence that standards for young children will lead to later success. These arguments are not new amongst educators. For several years, surveys of elementary teachers and experts in early childhood education indicate that the academic expectations for students in Kindergarten are much higher, making Kindergarten more like first grade was in years past (Curwood, 2007; Elkind, 1993). According to Bodrova and Leong (2005), the pressures of accountability have dramatically increased in recent years and resulted in more direct instruction, which can be developmentally inappropriate for young children. Standards are in place to guide schools in developing an appropriate curriculum. The curriculum framework is the starting place, and then teachers can use their expertise in making changes that meet the needs of individual learners. Russell (2012) stated that fearing the standards, as the dominant conversation surrounding them appears to, can only result in treatment of the standards as “a list to be learned,” which will “ignore the need to weave coherent course of instruction into its framework, and put in place strategies designed only to get students through the next test rather than to build reliable concepts and skills” (p. 56).

There are many historical influences which guide the need for standards within a reformed curriculum. The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), with its focus on accountability, heightened concerns over child "readiness," and the factors that might contribute to school success (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). NCLB aimed to raise achievement and close the achievement gap by setting annual test-score targets for subgroups of students, based on a goal of 100 percent proficiency by 2014 (Darling-Hammond, 2007). These expectations and others are fueling the academic pushdown seen in early childhood classrooms across the nation (Elkind,2007; Hatch, 2002; Miller & Almon, 2009). Retention levels increased due to NCLB because schools faced higher consequences or penalties for low test scores. School systems are under intense scrutiny to produce learners that show academic proficiency on benchmark assessments as early as grade three (Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004). This measure of accountability causes pressure to commence as soon as students enter school.

An earlier call for reform which occurred due to student achievement, or lack thereof, took place in 1983 when the National Commission on Excellence in Education published, *A Nation at Risk,* a report stating that our schools were inadequate and not globally competitive (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report also highlighted a disturbing pattern of the lack of achievement among disadvantaged students. This led to states adopting challenging standards and assessments for the purpose of rectifying low achievement among schools and preventing the lifelong consequences that result from poor school achievement (Stuckart & Glanz, 2007). Before the adoption of Common Core, as a result of the *Nation at Risk* report, guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) were developed to address academic instructional concerns of preschool and kindergarten curriculum (Goldstein, 2008). The original DAP guidelines were developed in the mid-1980s to respond to

a growing emphasis on developmental appropriateness. According to Bredekamp (1987), DAP provides an important philosophical framework and set of related pedagogical guidelines in Early Childhood Education emphasizing age appropriateness and individual appropriateness. Age appropriateness refers to the knowledge that teachers should possess of the child's developmental stages (physical, emotional, social, and cognitive). Individual appropriateness refers to teacher knowledge and appreciation of each child's uniqueness and providing activities and materials that are meaningful and challenging. The DAP guidelines were reworked in the mid-1990s to reflect changes in the field's understanding of young children's learning. The revised guidelines specified early childhood teachers should not only take the developmental norms established by psychology and the specific strengths, interests, and needs of the children being taught into consideration, but should also incorporate the values, beliefs, priorities, and practices shaping the social and cultural contests of their students' lives into their instructional decisions (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Developmentally appropriate practice requires teachers to teach lessons by meeting children where they are developmentally so that all teaching reflects on the child as a unique individual (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Many teachers were trained and educated on how to use developmentally appropriate practices and are currently utilizing these practices within classrooms today. Developmentally appropriate practices are well organized, predictable, and includes various learning contexts such as: centers, small groups, large-groups, and one-on-one practicing (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). However, there have been contradictions on how to teach a rigorous curriculum, such as CCSS, while engaging students in developmentally appropriate practices. According to Copple & Bredekamp (2009), Developmentally Appropriate Practices mean that all teaching practices should be at an appropriate level for each child's age,

individual developmental status, their personal needs, and their cultural diversity. Developmentally Appropriate Practice does not mean making things easier for children, but rather making sure that a child's experiences are appropriate for their development, and challenging enough to allow them to progress while maintaining their interest.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) have expressed concerns that the focus of the CCSS, which is to prepare children for college and careers, may cause a narrowing of Kindergarten curriculum and will result in a neglect of social and emotional development (NAEYC, 2009). Within their position statement, which was adopted in 1996, they recommended that standards should never be used to retain a child. This position statement also discussed five guidelines for DAP, which include: creating a caring community of learners, teaching to enhance development and learning, constructing appropriate curriculum, assessing children's development and learning, and establishing reciprocal relationships with family. The first guideline of creating a caring and community of learners occurs within the classroom. Positive relationships are built among teacher and peers. Children learn to respect and acknowledge differences in abilities and value each other. Social relationships are also formed as children learn to play in an organized environment. The second guideline of assessing children's development and learning occurs when teachers build positive relationships with the students, observe children playing and interacting with their environment, and planning their instruction accordingly. Teachers also must understand that children learn in the context of their families and communities and strive to build a relationship and understanding of their student's families and environments outside of the school. The third guideline focuses on constructing appropriate curriculum. According to NAEYC, a developmentally appropriate curriculum provides all areas of child development (physical, emotional, social, linguistic, aesthetic, and

cognitive). It is socially relevant, intellectually engaging, and meaningful to the child. A developmentally appropriate curriculum activates prior knowledge and fosters new concepts while integrating across all subject areas. The goals are realistic and attainable for most children within the determined age range. The fourth guideline of assessing children's learning describes assessments as ongoing, strategic, and purposeful. Assessment data should be communicated with parents and reflect progress toward learning and developmental goals. The assessments should be appropriate to the age and experiences of the learner. According to NAEYC, these assessments should include observations, descriptive data, and work samples. The assessment data should be used to identify specific learning needs and help teachers to plan accordingly. The fifth and final guideline focuses on establishing reciprocal relationships with families. Reciprocal relationships with families include finding a balance of communication between how teachers and parents can both contribute to each child's needs. An understanding that both the teacher and parent know the child and can contribute to their education is imperative. This educational task is viewed as a joint decision making process. Retention is a process that requires many factors to be considered within these guidelines. This study concentrated on how teachers experienced Kindergarten retention and how the standards related to retention.

Theoretical Framework

Retention is primarily based on students who have not mastered required grade-level expectations. The apparatus of accountability and high-stake testing has increasingly put early childhood educators in the position of having to look away from a child's developmental trajectory and toward an abstracted goal (Brown, 2009, 2010; Goldstein, 2007). David Wood (1988) warned, "Where the gap between a child's current level of understanding and that demanded by what is being taught is too great, then we cannot expect to find the child

concentrating on what is being said and done" (p. 283). The theoretical framework that this study is based upon is the theories on the development of young children and critical theory.

Jean Piaget places human cognitive development into four hierarchal stages: ages 0-2 as sensory motor; ages 2-7 as preoperational; ages 7-11 as concrete operational; and ages 11 and older as formal operational. Kindergarten students are in the preoperational stage. In this stage, students should focus on concepts such as one-to-one correspondence, classifying according to similarity and past-present-future but primarily on the present. Thinking should be based on perception rather than logic. When students reach the concrete operational stage, they can see things from different points of view but need more concrete reality events. According to Piaget's level of formal operational stage, students are then developmentally ready to test hypotheses and begin using abstract thought processes. Piaget's theories include the belief that humans are limited to biological systems that are structured by a body of rules of growth and development, and these governing laws of development can only be varied within limits. Individuals fit into the broad spectrum of growth and development but vary widely in their abilities and rates of growth in all areas – cognitive, social, physical and emotional (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). Piaget stresses that ages are approximate and the stages of cognition focus on how children are actively constructing their own development through interactions with their environment.

Lev Vygotsky (1978) described in his book, *Mind in Society*, the "Zone of Proximal Development," or ZPD, as the area where a child can operate on a higher level with a minimal amount of assistance. It is the distance between guided learning and independent learning. This "scaffolding," then, is the support lent to a child to help him work on a higher plane than that on which he could operate alone (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). Vygotsky sees the mind as a

psychosocial organ with its own schedule of development. He believed that educators must support this process in order to further the mind's development. The revision of DAP added an emphasis on sociocultural issues. Vygotsky focused on ways social and cultural issues affect cognitive development. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development emphasizes the differential meanings and values of biological and environmental factors according to the specific context, and here context is understood as including the historical development of culture (Vygotsky, 1978). He discussed six assumptions that foster this development. According to Vygotsky, the first assumption is that adults must convey to children the way their culture interprets and responds to the world. Adults can do this by putting individual objects into categories such as bananas, apples, strawberries into the category of fruit. The second assumption made by Vygotsky is that thought and language becomes increasingly independent in the first few years of life. Then thirdly, the complex mental processes begin as social activities and this occurs as the child internalizes the process. Vygotsky fourthly believed that children can perform more challenging tasks when assisted by more advanced individuals. Actual development occurs when the upper limit of tasks for the child can be individually performed. Level of potential development occurs when the upper limit of tasks for the child can be formed with assistance. The fifth assumption reflects on the ZPD by recognizing that challenging tasks promote maximum cognitive growth. The final assumption concerning play discusses how children need play in order to stretch themselves cognitively.

Elkind (1989) stated that any philosophy of education must include some conception of the learner, of the learning process, of the information to be acquired, and of the goals or aims of education. He discussed these developmental philosophies of education where the conception of the learner as learners who all develop mental abilities, but these levels develop at different rates.

He stated that the conception of the learning process includes learning as a creative activity, where new knowledge does not automatically transfer to former knowledge. The conception of knowledge includes how the learner constructs the knowledge. Its focus is not on the accuracy of knowledge, but the difference of knowledge and how a child explains his/her understanding. Lastly, he discussed the conception of the aims of education as a combining factor of all three stated above. The aim of education, according to Elkind, is to produce thinkers who are creative and critical. He believed that this type of learning is supported through developmentally appropriate learning environments that challenge the child's emerging mental abilities. In his books, *The Hurried Child (*1981*)* and *Miseducation* (1987), Elkind centers on ways that education and society rushes our children by forcing them to participate in learning that are not developmentally appropriate. This study was also be guided by Critical Theory which relates closely to Elkind's beliefs about society and its role in education.

Critical Theory focuses on being critical of the prevailing views of society. Bohman (2015) discusses how Max Horkheimer defined critical theory as meeting three requirements of it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time. It must explain what is wrong with current social reality. It questions how our educational system can best offer education to all children. Papola-Ellis (2014) uses a cascades metaphor to describe the impact of policies and initiatives, like CCSS, on individuals within the school setting. He discusses how the formation and implementation of educational policy within our schools can be much like a waterfall, or a policy cascade. He describes that this policy cascade occurs when teachers adopt the actions and ideology demonstrated by others above them in the hierarchical structure of the school system which results in the erosion of their own professional knowledge. Papola-Ellis (2014) goes into great detail of policy cascades by describing that the information begins with a

small group of people who are in a position of power, much like the top of a waterfall. He states that the cascade starts when the policy is young, or at the creation and initial implementation stage, growing in strength as more states, schools, and teachers learn about it. The group at the top could be authors of standards, members of the government, or other groups that have decision-making power. As the information begins to fall downward, it typically passes through state officials, district administration, and building principals before it reaches teachers. Throughout the process, policy cascades have the power to erode the beliefs of the individuals they touch, and he believes that teachers will potentially begin to ignore their own beliefs and interpretations, and instead look at the actions of those who encountered the policy before them. According to Papola-Ellis, this process reflects the theoretical foundation of critical theory; power relations that exist in all aspects of society mediate all thought (Apple, 1999; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). When certain individuals—often the classroom teachers—accept their position in the cascades as natural or necessary, the marginalization of those individuals is reproduced and continued over time (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011).

Kohn (2010), questions how a relatively small group of experts designed standards, test questions, and curricula for society based on their personal assumptions about what it means to be well educated. He continues to report that the items all teachers teach will be "based on evidence" rather than reflecting "individual beliefs about what is important." His response is that it would be charitable to describe this claim as disingenuous as evidence can tell us whether a certain method is effective for reaching a certain objective – for example, how instruction aligned to this standard will affect a score on that test. But the selection of the goal itself – what our children will be taught and tested on – unavoidably reflects values and beliefs. He proceeds

with the question of should those of a single group of individuals determine what happens in every public school in the country?

Michael Apple (1970), a critical theorist, focuses on relevance and knowledge. In *Relevance and Curriculum: A Study in Phenomenological Sociology of Knowledge*, Michael Apple describes relevance as a social construction. He discusses how objective reality or how the social world becomes subjective reality or the world to individuals. He questions who defines relevance and what knowledge is relevant and most importantly whose knowledge is most worth. Michael Apple also argues in this book that "relevance is not a property inherent in the world as such; it is the result of selective and interpretative activity within and observing the reality which surrounds him" (p. 62).

Although CCSS are not national standards but serve as state standards as states can choose to adopt, many people view CCSS as an opening to national standards. Mathis (2010) points out that very little evidence supports that having national academic standards will improve the quality of American public education and the push towards having these standards may pull the attention from other needed reforms in schools. Michael Apple also shares his views on national standards. In his books *Ideology and Curriculum* and *Official Knowledge*, he discusses or questions whose knowledge is taught and who will benefit from the education produced from the group who creates such standards. This leads to the powers of society in determining which groups' knowledge should take precedence over all other groups' knowledge. In Apple's 1988 publication of *Teacher's and Text: A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education*, he shares his ideas on the process of deskilling teachers. This process involves teachers finding themselves more subjected to outside control and often reduced to enforcers of decisions that are made by government and state officials. As Apple (1988) pointed out, plans of

teaching are predetermined and teachers are reduced to the level of practitioner; these keep teachers under control. This study utilized cognitive developmental theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Elkind and elements of critical theory to help determine if the CCSS are perceived by teachers as developmentally appropriate or if they indeed hinder academic achievement and initiate retention.

Statement of the Problem

With specific emphasis on early grade retention, there is evidence that increased academic demands on Kindergarten students have resulted in an increased number of students retained in kindergarten (Okpala, 2007). The efficacy of retention as a method of preventing further failure has been debated for decades (Hong & Raudenbush, 2005). Even though research represents an educational depiction of the negative outcomes for retained children, holding children in kindergarten for more than one year remains a highly popular strategy. Retention among students primarily results from not mastering or low achievement of the standards. Many children have more than one factor that contributes to their low achievement, which makes it difficult to determine who will meet success with retention as an intervention and who will need further remediation to be successful in school. Many primary teachers (grades K-4) believe that retention is useful in maintaining grade level standards in light of high stakes state testing (Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004). In the primary grades, especially kindergarten, retention is often used as one of the primary responses or interventions to low achievement since many educators believe that it is more helpful than harmful for a student to have a second chance at mastery of the curriculum.

Research has revealed positive and negative effects of retention; however, retention without modifications in instruction is ineffective and possibly harmful (Jimerson, 2004).

Interventions for struggling students are necessary, especially when retention or social promotion is proven to have little to no effect on academics. Wu, West, and Hughes (2008) used a new statistical analysis called propensity score analysis to determine the effects of grade retention on long-term mathematics and reading skills. This study was conducted on 784 students from three Texas school districts. All 784 students were matched with non-retained students based on their propensity scores. Four years of collected data, which compared and analyzed the achievement scores of the paired students, revealed mixed and inconclusive results. The researchers believe that more data must be presented in order to determine conclusive results of the effects on long-term mathematics and reading skills.

Teachers are struggling with offering students developmentally appropriate learning experiences and their obligation to teach the curriculum and skills mandated by their states. Teachers are continuously developing formative assessments to provide insight into students' progress in learning, as well as meeting the standards, but are struggling to find a balance with applying developmentally appropriate practices within rigorous mandated standards. In a position statement, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recognized the ethical responsibility to use standards; however it is unrealistic to expect that standards be fully implemented without the benefit of policies and funding that supports a system of high-quality developmentally appropriate experiences for all children (NAEYC, 2009).

In order to set and reach challenging and achievable goals with children, educators must be cognizant of the developmental learning sequences. More research needs to be conducted to determine if the Common Core State Standards are developmentally appropriate for Kindergarten students and if they are playing a role in Kindergarten retention. Miller and Almon (2009) state that policymakers have overlooked the plethora of research and evidence that

dictates that young children learn best in settings that are developmentally appropriate. Kindergarten classrooms have for a long time been able to maintain DAP, but "the testing mania that is now invading kindergarten is based on a false assumption—that standardized assessments are the best way to gauge young children's progress in school" (p. 17). Hatch (2002) states that getting children to do more sooner sounds like a logical way to cure the ills of education and he encourages others to talk to educators who have comforted children who cannot distinguish between a 3 and a 5 or who is employed to coax a child to constantly demonstrate their inabilities to perform on grade level. With the rigorous CCSS, age of accountability on the role of teachers, and the pressures associated with standardized testing, it is difficult for teachers to implement essential components of a developmentally appropriate practice. Previous research has studied socio-economic status, race, gender, and other factors that cause retention but have not researched the possible effect of the developmental relevance of the CCSS.

Significance of the Study

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation led to states creating common standards with various levels of rigor and expectations. This would help eliminate students relocating from one state to another and experiencing large gaps in educational expectations, causing frustration for administrators, teachers, parents, and students (Newman & Roskos, 2013). Another objective of the NCLB legislation is closing the achievement gap by ensuring "all children have a fair, equal, significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education, and reach a minimum of proficiency on State academic standards and State academic assessments" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 1439). The achievement gap is measured by comparing scores of high-achievers to low- achievers. Within the mandates of NCLB, schools had to show year-to-year student achievement on statewide assessments by meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In

2011, The U.S. Department of Education offered the ESEA Flexibility Waiver that would allow states to exempt from NCLB. Georgia applied for a new system in 2012 and began the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). This system report analyzes progress in key areas such as content mastery, student attendance, and levels of preparation for college and career readiness. This accountability system is rated by points. If states do not receive the proper quantity of points, they face possible loss of funding and may have their school controlled by state officials.

Some students who enter Kindergarten are developmentally ready to learn presented concepts. However, some of these students are not. The concept of retention is not declining. There is tremendous pressure that schools are under to have all students demonstrate proficiency by a specific grade level. Research on the effects of early grade retention has produced inconsistent results, which makes it troublesome to draw firm conclusions about kindergarten retention effects (Allen, Chen, Willson, & Hughes, 2009; Hong & Yu, 2007; Jimerson, 2001). According to Allen et al., (2009) and Lorence (2006), inconsistent results usually arise for a number of reasons. First, several studies have failed to adequately deal with selection bias because the inability to control the pre-treatment differences between repeaters and the comparison group. They report that this makes it difficult to distinguish changes in post-treatment outcomes which are caused by the treatment from changes caused by these pre-existing differences. They state that several researchers have attempted to deal with this by controlling for pre-existing differences or by matching retained and promoted students on important outcome-related child characteristics, yet, only a few studies have been identified as methodologically sound, having both adequate comparison groups and statistical controls. In their meta-analysis, Allen et al. (2009) found that the design quality of studies is associated with

the variability in effect sizes. They report that studies which successfully modify for pre-treatment differences generally find less negative effects of grade retention on achievement compared to studies using poor methodological controls for pre-treatment which are not equivalent.

Mantzicopoulos (2003) focused on the effect of contextual and individual variables on the retention rate of students after Kindergarten. The study contained 3 cohorts of students from Head Start who attended any of eleven elementary schools in an urban mid-western public school district. A total of 261 students were part of the study, including 132 boys and 129 girls, with an ethnic breakdown of 199 (76.2%) Caucasian, 45(17.2%) African American, 4 (1.5%) Hispanic, 1 (<1%) Asian, and 12 (4.6%) deemed as other. The school district in which the study was conducted did not practice Kindergarten retention; rather, students who were deemed not ready for the demands of first grade after a year of Kindergarten were placed in a developmental first grade program. At the end of Kindergarten, 53 of the children were not promoted (NPR). The other 208 students, who were promoted (PR) became the comparison group. Mantzicopoulos (2003) found that the transition classrooms were more developmentally appropriate than the comparison schools, emphasizing cooperation across grade levels, the importance of home-school connection, and increased efforts to meet individual children's varying learning styles, interests, and ability levels. Results also indicated that while child background characteristics such as age, gender, and race were not statistically significant factors for non-promotion, transition status and parental perceptions of school effectiveness and their child's adjustment were.

Another alternative of retention that some schools have used as a way to advance low performing students to the next grade level is social promotion. Lorence and Dworkin (2006)

conducted a study which focused on the reading scores between retained third graders and socially promoted third graders through their tenth grade year. The data set was large enough to compare the retention effects across racial and ethnic segments of the school population. They examined only those that failed the May 1994 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) reading test. The researchers compared the average reading scores of those that failed the third grade test and were required to repeat third grade (experimental group) to those who also failed the test but were socially promoted (control group). They found that the students who were retained scored higher each year on the reading test than those who were socially promoted.

Despite perceived academic advantages, there is also research that suggests that retention may cause damage in later years, such as increased drop-out rates, while only temporarily addressing the immediate academic issues (Bonvin, Bless, & Schuepbach, 2008). Jimerson et al. (2002) discusses that the relationship between the practice of grade retention and dropping out of school clearly demonstrates that early grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of later school withdrawal. According to the National Research Council, students who are retained and drop out of school are more likely to be unemployed, live on public assistance, or be in prison (Alexander et al., 2003). Students who are retained are paid less per hour and receive lower employment competent ratings when they do have a job (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003).

Although there is disagreement about the alternatives, effects, and results concerning retention, there is agreement on the fact that the rate of human development is an individual process. The increased focus on academics may take away from focusing on the social and developmental areas that affects their learning throughout their entire educational journey. Johnson, Ironsmith, Snow, and Poteat (2000) suggested that although more emphasis is being put on academics, all people that are involved in the education of the child including parents,

teachers, and administrators need to understand the importance of social skills on the overall performance and long-term success of the student. Johnson et al. (2000) focused on the development of social relations in preschool children and how it affected their performance as the children progressed in elementary school. Data were gathered using a socio-metric interview to assess a child's peer relationships. Information gathered by interviewing the children and teachers was analyzed to assess the relative social acceptance of children in the classroom. Results indicated that children who were rejected (defined as those who were actively disliked by their peers) or neglected (neither liked nor disliked) were at risk for future problems such as juvenile delinquency, psychological issues, and dropping out of school. Retention may cause a loss of social relations and result in a downward educational spiral.

Research Questions

The research questions required the study to focus on discovering the meaning or purpose of the phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of teachers who have retained Kindergarten students. In examining teachers' experiences with Kindergarten retention, teachers' opinions on Developmentally Appropriate Practices of Common Core State Standards were examined. The following research questions were utilized to support this study:

- How do teachers describe their experiences with retaining Kindergarten students?
- What are teachers' perceptions of developmentally appropriateness of Common Core Standards as it relates to Kindergarten retention?

Summary

Curwood (2007) discusses how the concerns about Kindergarten retention are on the rise within the current climate of high-stakes testing and escalating Kindergarten expectations. Common Core State Standards are in place and teachers are mandated to plan their instruction

and to assess students for mastery according to these standards. Frey (2005) states how these high-stake standards are causing teachers to question how standards are contributing to retention. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of teachers who have retained Kindergarten students. It also gained insight to how teachers perceive the standards as developmentally appropriate. The use of Critical Theory in focusing on best practices that our system uses to best offer education to our children may help provide support in achieving mastery. The research of using Developmentally Appropriate Practices may help in warranting that all students learn the curriculum and meet the standards while meeting their individual needs. Teachers are struggling with offering students developmentally appropriate learning experiences while meeting their obligation to teach the curriculum and skills mandated by their states. Teachers are continuously developing formative assessments to provide insight into students' progress in learning, as well as meeting the standards, but struggle to find a balance with applying developmentally appropriate practices within rigorous mandated standards. Research showed conflicting realities of the effects of retention as well as distinctive realities of students who were retained. These realities include drop-out rate, poverty, and overall future prospects of all involved. Retention occurred when students fail to meet academic expectations. There existed no research on the actual impact of common national standards in the United States because there have never been such standards. This research was important for students, teachers, parents, policy makers and society overall because an inquiry into the standards may provide imperative information that may lead to necessary intervention. Most importantly, perspectives of teacher's experiences of retention may help teach others more about Kindergarten retention.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature contains key components of research which relate to the underlying structures of the study. Historical influences helped to gain an understanding of the journeys of Kindergarten from the creation to present day. A comprehension of Developmentally Appropriate Practices helped portray the expectations of instruction and learning within the Kindergarten classroom. The movement towards Common Core State Standards (CCSS) portrayed the history of pursing the goal to increase student achievement. Research on retention and how it is determined, perceived by teachers, and affects student performance concludes the review.

Historical Journeys of Kindergarten

The history of Kindergarten has changed in the areas of purpose, teaching practices, and student expectations. Kindergarten was developed by Friedrich Froebel, a German Educationalist, in 1837. According to Gutek (2002), the pioneering work of Froebel on the education of young children and their families has remained one of the greatest influences on modern Kindergarten education. It was termed Kindergarten as it "signifies both a garden for children, a location where they can observe and interact with nature, and also a garden of children, where they themselves can grow and develop in freedom from arbitrary political and social imperatives" (Nutbrown, Clough & Selbie, 2009, p. 23). Froebel's rationale for Kindergarten was the purpose of education as guiding human beings to become thoughtful and intelligent (Brehony, 2009). According to Bruce (2011), Froebel believed that children needed teachers who were advocates for educating the future generation of adults. Froebel concentrated on certain principles of teaching that he felt led to the method of learning. Bruce (2011) stated

that these principles were play, guided freedom, wooden blocks, child watching, utility, self-discipline, nature study, and symbols. He described Froebel promoting play as the most important principal where it serves as the medium where learning should take place. He stated that Froebel believed that play channels direct sensory experiences and physical activities into rich symbolic experiences that take children to a higher functioning level by utilizing their imaginations. Froebel also believed that play was valuable in helping Kindergarteners to take control of their thoughts, feelings, relationships, and physical beings. Bruce (2011) also discussed guided freedom as teachers facilitating students' independence by allowing them to use materials at their disposal because it teaches children responsibility that will allow them to coexist with adults in a learning community. Wooden blocks were discussed as Froebel's first encounter with gifts and occupations as children. According to Bruce (2011), children develop autonomy, independence, asking assistance from peers, and consulting books and other materials in the room by utilizing building blocks. He stated that Froebel believed that mathematically inspired shapes would help Kindergarten children learn balance, construction, architecture, and engineering. The child watching involves teachers observing Kindergarten children with the purpose of supporting their learning. According to Bruce (2011), Froebel believed that teachers could gather data that was necessary to plan their instruction to help move children to a higher level of cognition and utility would allow children to use their knowledge and understanding to make connections to what they need to know and understand. The self-discipline aspect was described by Bruce (2011) as Froebel's belief that teachers should teach students how to develop self-discipline by being an example of how they should grow up to live their own lives. He supported extrinsic rewards by finding happiness in the reward that they created themselves. The nature study and symbols include learning the relationships of things occurring naturally in

nature and teaching children that symbols are powerful tools that help children to pretend, imagine, and transform within these experiences (as cited in Bruce, 2011).

In 1859, Elizabeth Peabody, a teacher from Boston, met Margaret Shurtz, a teacher trained by Froebel who had opened up the first German-speaking Kindergarten in the United States. This meeting led Ms. Peabody to open the first English-speaking Kindergarten which focused on teaching reading, arithmetic, singing, writing, and French (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000). After discovering that her Kindergarten program was not aligned with Froebel's, she toured Europe and visited Froebel's Kindergarten facilities. According to Lascarides & Hinitz (2000), Ms. Peabody returned to the United States and revised her program to include more child-centered facilities which focused on more play than academic concepts. She began to spread the model of Kindergarten through lectures and presentations. The replica of Kindergarten began to spread and Susan Blow opened up the first public school Kindergarten in St. Louis in 1873 (Weber, 1969). Kindergarten continued to expand all over the United States until the Great Depression. According to Weber (1969), funding for Kindergarten became scarce and caused administrators to doubt the value for Kindergarten as it was viewed primarily as an experience of play.

Shepard and Smith (1989) reported that education reformers even believed that educational standards were lowered, thus causing incompetent high school graduates. They concluded that the doubt of value on Kindergarten decreased when Russia launched a satellite and proved to lead over the United States in knowledge and technology as well as at this time in history there were also great concerns over civil rights issues. In an effort to rectify the unequal schooling of minorities, the federal government began to fund programs such as Head Start (Elkind, 1986). According to Hayes (2007), the United States Department of Education

appointed a taskforce known as the National Commission on Excellence in Education where a major reform effort to improve teaching, learning, and student achievement took place and caused the implementation of standards in all curriculum areas. The National Commission on Excellence in Education published, *A Nation at Risk*, a report stating that our schools were inadequate and not globally competitive (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report helped fuel the fire of educational reform. This report also caused the constructivist approach of learning to gain attention and favor by many early childhood educators in the later part of the twentieth century (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2005).

During this time in the twentieth century, Piaget's development of the new approach of defining intelligence in children gained educator's attention (Gardner, 2000). According to Piaget (2001), children are born with reflexes which later become replaced with constructed mental schemes or structures that allow them to interact and adapt to their environment by adaptation, the process of building knowledge through continuous activity of self-construction, or by accommodation, the process of changing cognitive structures after interacting with the environment. These are both critical elements of constructivism. Terms such as student-centered, child-guided and child-centered learning are used to describe a constructivist approach (Mooney, 2000). Constructivism looks at the processes within the mind rather than influences outside of it. According to Siegler (2010), three of the most important constructive processes within children in relation to Piaget are generating hypothesis, performing experiments, and drawing conclusions from observations; and this constructivism occurs when children develop and test a theory to determine whether it is valid or has a flaw. Piaget (2001) believed that the combination of maturation and actions to achieve a balance within their environment caused advancement into a higher cognitive developmental stage. According to Driscoll (2000), Piaget

differentiated three types of knowledge that must be present at all stages of cognitive development: physical, logical-mathematical, and social. Academically oriented kindergarten is more prevalent today and despite the high focus and rigorous curriculum being presented, teachers have to bear in mind that Kindergarten students' fundamental development characteristics of constructing knowledge, solving problems, and engaging in social interactions have remained the same (Hughes & Gullo, 2010).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was established and was described as the "most important legislation since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965" (Shannon, 2004, p. 12). According to the U.S. Department of Education and Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, [USDOE OESA] (2002, p. 9), NCLB was a "landmark in education reform designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America's schools". The four key principles of NCLB were to provide (a) stronger accountability for results; (b) greater flexibility for states, school districts, and schools in the use of federal funds; (c) more choices for parents of children from disadvantaged backgrounds; and (d) an emphasis on teaching methods that have been demonstrated to work (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007). Funding was targeted as a way to control how schools adhered to NCLB. According to a statement made by USDOE OESA, (2002, p. 11), "The NCLB Act puts a special emphasis on determining what educational programs and practices have been clearly demonstrated to be effective through rigorous scientific research" and "federal funding will be targeted to support these programs and teaching methods that improve student learning and achievement". A primary emphasis of this legislation was to ensure that schools focus on the progress of sub-samples of the school population who have traditionally performed less well in school (Smith, 2005). Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) was created to

measure achievement. According to the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the annual academic assessments of student achievement were used to determine whether public schools were making AYP toward enabling all students to meet the state's academic achievement standards and narrowing the academic achievement gap. While the ultimate aim was that all students in each group would meet or exceed a state's proficient level of academic achievement by 2014, each state must have established a timeline and intermediate goals to meet this requirement. A school was deemed as not making AYP if the assessment scores for the entire student body or for any specific subgroup did not meet the state objectives for reading and mathematics or a group did not show annual improvement (i.e., the percentage of students in the group who did not meet proficiency decreased by 10% from the previous year) (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).

Primary grade teachers often find themselves torn between contradictory frameworks for practice, caught in the crosswinds of early childhood philosophy, and the mandates of formalized schooling (Crawford, 2004). According to the study conducted by Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006), regardless of teacher's instructional approach, the findings revealed that all teachers described Kindergarten as increasingly more academic. All of the participants in the study indicated that there was a significant shift from a developmental perspective to a focus on academics in Kindergarten. The findings of this study demonstrate the complexity involved when trying to maintain developmentally appropriate instruction in Kindergarten regardless of one's beliefs. In contrast, Goldstein's (2007) qualitative study on two Kindergarten teachers responses to the demands of NCLB suggests that teachers agreed their jobs were made more complex by the changing climate of Kindergarten, neither teacher perceived their professional commitment to using DAP to teach the mandated curriculum as difficult. The teachers believed that this contributed to the support they received from their administration.

Movement toward Common Core State Standards

The standards movement, so pervasive across educational settings today, is clearly at odds with the strong tradition of child sensitive pedagogy in early childhood education (Hatch, 2002). Milligan (2012) noted that one of the factors influencing the growth of full-day Kindergarten is the academic rigor that schools are held accountable for as student performance has taken on higher priority and Kindergarten need good teachers equipped with good curriculum for their time to be worthwhile.

A draft of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) was released in 2009. The drafters believed that the standards would provide appropriate goal posts for all students and defined year-end expectations through a cumulative progression designed to enable students to meet college and career readiness expectations by the end of high school (CCSSI, 2012). According to Sloan (2010), the standards were supported by evidence indicating that mastery could lead students on the path to higher education and as well to the workforce.

According to a study conducted by Gallant (2009), Kindergarten classrooms and teachers are in a dilemma. Gallant led a mixed methods study which surveyed 229 Kindergarten teachers to gather data concerning the current state of Kindergarten in the state of Michigan. The study revealed major tension about student performance in Kindergarten. According to Gallant, teachers described Kindergarten as more academic in nature, placing increased emphasis on writing and reading instruction. Kindergarten teachers reported an increased focus on accountability, rigorous state standards, and high-stakes testing. Teachers also discussed a decreased opportunities for socialization, play, and exploration.

According to McNeil and Klein (2011), the most recent, significant and central feature of the education agenda put forward by the Obama Administration was Race to the Top (RTT).

The program dedicated $4.35 billion for a competitive grant program that would be allocated only to states that met specific criteria established by the Department of Education to demonstrate that state decision makers would follow the direction set by Secretary Duncan. The draft criteria that the Secretary of Education set for evaluating state plans revolved around four broad policy objectives: adopting internationally benchmarked standards; improving the recruitment, retention, and compensation of teachers and school administrators; improving data collection; and implementing strategies to turnaround failing schools (McNeil & Klein, 2011). RTT grants were designed to encourage and reward states that had strong records of using these policies and practices and that presented plans in their RTT applications for furthering policies and practices in these areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Federal funding was used to intrigue states to follow requirements that would assess areas of school performance. Later in 2011, The U.S. Department of Education offered the ESEA Flexibility Waiver that would allow states to exempt from NCLB. Georgia applied for a new system in 2012 and began the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI).

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

According to Bredekamp (1997), the history of the need of developmentally appropriate practice dates back to the early 1900's when the International Kindergarten Union appointed 19 experts to be a part of a committee whose task was to develop standards for Kindergarten children. This committee, The Committee of Nineteen, issued three reports which addressed teacher-directed instruction; a program that emphasized play and child initiated activities, and a third that was a compromise, but included the need to involve the home and community in the life of the school (Bredekamp, 1997). Conversely, as a result of *A Nation at Risk*, concrete Developmentally Appropriate Practices were created to address academic instructional concerns

of preschool and kindergarten curriculum (Goldstein, 2008). In 1997, Bredekamp and Copple later revised the developmentally appropriate practice guidelines to emphasize the teacher as a "reflective decision maker, planning for children on three important dimensions" (Aldridge & Goldman, 2002, p. 100) including what is known about child development and learning, what is known about the individual child in a group, and what is known about the cultural and social contexts of the students we teach.

According to Copple and Bredekamp (2009), Developmentally Appropriate Practices are well organized, predictable, and includes various learning contexts such as: centers, small groups, large-groups, and one-on-one practicing. Due to the varying developmental levels found in one classroom, Kindergarten teachers must have a deep understanding of the children within the age range to be able to provide the most developmentally appropriate and effective experiences for them during this important Kindergarten year (Miller & Almon, 2009). The DAP guidelines of 1997 reflect an informal approach to early childhood education that emphasizes child-directed learning and are based in part upon Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized an approach that views humans as active participants in their own existence and that at each stage of development children acquire the means by which they can affect their world and themselves. He maintained that learning leads development and that the developmental process lags behind learning. He stated in his conception, the challenge is not to match learning to a child's developmental level, but to involve the child in learning activities beyond his actual developmental level in the presence of more capable peers or adults. Vygotsky also emphasized the importance of educational context on the learning process by studying explored contextual influences on teachers' experiences, and more specifically on the philosophical choices they make in their classrooms. The educational context

can have a profound effect on teachers' decision making and therefore on children's learning. An important theme throughout Vygotsky's writings is his emphasis on the unique qualities of our species and on how we as human beings actively realize and change ourselves in varied contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). His study examined teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences in order to explore how people change themselves according to their school environment.

According to the NAEYC (2009), DAP describes a research-based approach to teaching young children from infancy through third grade. The central ideas according to the NAEYC are: DAP requires meeting children where they are, teaching practices should be appropriate to children's age and developmental status, DAP does not mean making things easier for students only suited toward their learning and developmental stage, and that best practices are based on research knowledge and not on assumptions of how children learn and develop. According to Goldstein (2008), standards provide goals close to where children at a given age and range of learning opportunities are expected to be, while DAP provide an array of tools and considerations that early educators use to reach these goals. Huffman and Speer (2000) investigated achievement levels for kindergarten and first grade in the areas of letter/word identification and applied problems. The subjects in their study were predominantly African American and Hispanic in urban schools and considered to be at-risk as the result of declining achievement levels, frequent school moves, and increasing grade retention. The male subjects were at greatest risk because of poverty, the absence of a father-figure, and racial prejudice. The Huffman and Speer study compared students from classrooms that they classified as "DAP," for developmentally appropriate practice, or "DIP," for developmentally inappropriate practice. They identified DIP classrooms as those which "emphasized basic skills and highly-structured, direct teaching approaches" (Huffman & Speer, 2000, p. 169). Developmentally appropriate

practice classrooms were defined as child-centered, emphasizing applied knowledge and real-world tasks. Classrooms in this study were divided into three levels depending on a researcher's observation of instructional practices, classroom environment, and student interaction. They were classified as high-, moderate- and low-DAP. It was expected that DIP-oriented classrooms (low-DAP) would yield students who scored better on simple, rote learning tasks such as calculation and letter-word identification; and students from DAP-oriented (high-DAP) classrooms would achieve better on applied knowledge and real-world tasks such as applied problems and passage comprehension. Moderate-DAP classrooms used hands-on activities and varied instructive techniques. It was found that moderate-DAP students performed significantly higher on letter-world identification and applied sciences in the spring semester in both kindergarten and first grade. However students in low-DAP classrooms scored higher on measures of math calculation than those in moderate-DAP. This study provided evidence that there are positive effects for kindergartners and first graders in developmental appropriate classrooms, and students from an "impoverished urban setting performed significantly better on tests of letter-word identification and applied problems in more DAP classrooms than did children in less appropriate classrooms" (Huffman & Speer, 2000, p. 180).

In a case-study research project, Goldstein (2007) found "that using the [developmentally appropriate practice] versus standards dilemma framing to represent the variety of challenges presently facing teachers blurred significant details, minimized important distinctions, and obscured the complications involved in teaching kindergarten in today's educational climate" (p.40). Both of the participants in her study had multiple years of experience and became teachers when a "child-centered, play-based approach was considered best practice for kindergarten" (p. 45). They both had strong convictions about creating a learning environment

with materials and opportunities that allow children to explore their world through play and experimentation. The teachers in Goldstein's study did not find it difficult to maintain their commitment to using developmentally appropriate practice, but their new obligations to teach the standards made their jobs complex. Instead they found new ways to use established practices and preferred activities to teach the standards using developmentally appropriate ways. However, one key factor that influenced the outcome of this study was the high performance status of their school on the high-stakes standardized tests required by their state. The principals were relaxed about allowing teachers teach "the standards guided by their own professional judgments" (p. 47). The primary source of concern for these two kindergarten teachers was the pressure they received from first grade teachers who demanded a higher mastery of skills prior to entering first grade and parental demands for academic skills or traditional materials used for instruction.

Common Core and Developmentally Appropriate Practice

In 2012, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recognized that the Common Core State Standards represented cause for both opportunity and concern (NAEYC, 2015). They prepared a brief discussing how the experiences of young children should be grounded in developmentally appropriate practice. In the introduction of the CCSS, it states the standards define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach. The introduction discusses how play with young children is not specified by the standards, but it is welcome as a valuable activity in its own right and as a way to help students meet the expectations (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). According to the NAEYC (2015), some of the language within only the Kindergarten English Language Arts standards are somewhat

compatible with DAP by stating some children may require support from adults and how some young children learn and express their learning differently from older children and may be demonstrated either with some support from teachers or in a variety of developmentally appropriate ways. In referencing the Math standards, NAEYC (2015) states while the Kindergarten Math standards does not include the same attention as the reading standards for children to demonstrate understanding with support from adults, the math standards sometimes recognize the developmental variation in how children can demonstrate learning and understanding. NAEYC (2015) references the example, in the standard for Operations and Algebraic Thinking; children are expected to "represent addition and subtraction with objects, fingers, mental images, drawings, sounds (e.g., claps), acting out situations, verbal explanations, expressions, or equations" (p. 11). Likewise, in the Geometry standard, children engage in manipulation of objects to demonstrate an understanding of shapes encountered in their environment: "Model shapes in the world by building shapes from components (e.g., sticks and clay balls) and drawing shapes" (p. 12).

Piaget used several concepts to discuss the process of intellectual organization. According to Osborn and Osborn (1974), Piaget's five concepts include schema, adaptation, assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium. Schema includes cognitive structures that categorize concepts by common features into common groups. As children learn, they begin to add new concepts to prior categories. Adaptation refers to the adjustment or ways children modify their schemas to adapt to new content. Assimilation is the process of integrating new material into existing schemas. Accommodation takes it a step further by adding or adjusting the schema to include new stimuli. When earlier schema does not fit the new content, the child must adjust or create a new cognitive structure. Equilibrium is used to describe the process of finding

balance between new information. According to Piaget, Kindergarten students fall into the cognitive development area of pre-operational. Piaget (1952) considered the concrete operational stage, which includes children ages 7-11, as a major turning point of the cognitive development because it marks the beginning of logical and operational thought.

Kindergarten Retention

In a survey of views on grade repetition, teachers and principals described common characteristics of retained children as under motivated, developmentally and emotionally immature, and consider these reasons as appropriate rationale for grade level retention (Jimerson, et. al., 2002). According to Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, and Appleton (2006), retention is a school practice that requires a student to remain at the current grade level for the following school year and occurs when students fail to meet the requirements to be promoted to the next grade level. Retention is predicated upon the idea that exposing students to the same material a second time will boost their academic performance (Christenson, 2005). According to Kaufman (2003), nearly 10% of all students are retained nationally, and, in general, up to 50% of all students are projected to be retained before they reach the ninth grade (Kaufman, 2003). In one year, 8% of kindergarteners (one of every 12, over 300 kids) in the city of Indianapolis failed school and are repeating the grade this year (King, 2010). King, a reporter for the *Indianapolis Star*, wrote that kindergarten was “once a place where children primarily learned social skills” but now “children’s artwork is accompanied by a caption noting the chapter and verse of the guideline that the work fulfills” (2010, p.13). Some factors that play a role in failing to meet requirements are maturity and failure to meet standards. Research clearly shows that children who arrive to kindergarten with stronger cognitive, language, social, and behavioral skills have

an easier time in the first few years of school, do better later in school, and are less likely to later repeat grades and/or drop out of school (Duncan et al., 2007).

During the latter part of the twentieth century, Kindergarten programs transitioned to full day programs and increased the pressure to focus on reading, writing, and arithmetic skills (Fromberg, 2006). According to McLennan (2011), Kindergarten gradually transitioned from an environment for exploration and play into a setting for academic preparation that emphasizes use of a standard curriculum. Play and social development formally served as the core of Kindergarten; however, Kindergarteners are now expected to read instead of tying shoes so that academic standards can be met (Graue, 2009). Due to the academic changes in Kindergarten, retention has also been viewed as a preventative measure or early intervention (Silberglitt, et. al, 2006). According to Taylor (2009), a study was conducted by the Maternal Child Health Bureau of approximately 300 students who were retained in Kindergarten. The retention prevented sixty percent from receiving and Individual Education Plan. Social promotion has been used as an intervention or alternative of retention. Social promotion is moving a student on to the next grade level without having acquired the necessary skills (Gleason, et. al, 2007). Another alternative to retention is redshirting. The practice of redshirting is withholding students out of Kindergarten for one year when the student is eligible to attend due to age requirements (Frey, 2005). Gulino (2008) found that delayed entry into Kindergarten led to academic skills consistent with peers. Years ago, the Gesell Institute of Child Development came out with research that claimed that there is a 50% chance that a child is at least a grade ahead of the one that he/she should be in based on the knowledge that most schools determine if a child is ready for school based on their age, rather than consideration for their individual rate of development (Light, 2006). Some states have developed readiness assessments to help determine if children

are ready to begin school and if the child is deemed as not ready, then the child waits another year before starting school (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2011), Hispanic and African American boys who have a lower socioeconomic status, live in a single parent home, or have a high transiency rate are at higher risk of retention, in addition to students who have persistent behavioral and emotional problems or those students labeled as English Language Learners.

In the early 1990s, a tool known as the Retention Decision Simulation Instrument was developed by researchers to assess teachers' viewpoints regarding retention. The outcome of this study confirmed that teachers make use of data from a variety of different sources before retaining or promoting any student (Witmer, et al., 2004). Teachers believe that some retained children are immature, especially when retention takes place in the primary grades (Ball, 2007). This justification for retention is that the practice allows students to mature psychologically and socially, yet retention often fails to accomplish this goal. Retention has also linked to students' self-esteem; it usually has negative effects and students feel that they are being stigmatized and punished as a result of being retained (Foster, 1993). Xia & Glennie (2005), report that teachers believe that retained students will be less discouraged when the learning gap closes between them and the students who were not retained.

According to Hong and Raudenbush (2005), the two primary strategies that have been used in past retention studies are same-grade comparisons and same-age comparisons. The same-grade studies which constitute the majority of all retention studies compared the outcomes of children repeating a grade with those who experienced the grade for the first time. The same-age studies compared the outcomes of retained children with those of same-age children who were, in fact, promoted to the next grade (Hong & Raudenbush, 2005). Short-term gains are

evident among students who have been retained, but declines in student academic performance become apparent approximately three years after being retained. Students must receive targeted interventions to address their specific needs. Generally, research has found that retention has not been successful given that academic declines in reading, mathematics, and language arts occur in addition to declines in self-esteem and increases in behavior problems (Jimerson, 2006). Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis (2004) compared the effects of grade retention and grade promotion. Their research suggested that the repercussions of retention may include increased academic failure, a greater number of high school dropouts, and lower student self-esteem (Witmer, et al., 2004).

At the elementary level, teachers' attitudes about grade retention are based more on short term positive outcomes some see after retaining a student, making the intervention appear successful (Xia & Glennie, 2005). Witmer et al. (2004) found teachers in general believed grade retention was an effective practice and Kindergarten through Second grade teachers were more positive about grade retention than upper elementary teachers. Okpala (2007) not only noted the increased trends in retention rates, but also sought to examine teacher perceptions regarding the retention of kindergarten students. Okpala used the sequential-exploratory design method to examine teacher perceptions. Variables included the certification status of the teachers, and number of years of teaching experience as well as the undergraduate major of participating teachers. The results of the study indicated that while all respondents perceived kindergarten retention as "a necessary intervention tool in the larger context of increased accountability and educational reform," (p. 403) there were variations in the perceptions of long-term benefits of retention. Study participants who were certified had a lower perception of the benefits than those who were non-certified (M = 3.17 SD = 0.71 and M = 4.46 SD = 0.30

respectively). Furthermore, teachers with more than 5 years of teaching tended to have a lower perception of retention benefits than those with less than 5 years of experience (M = 3.44, SD = 0.64 and M = 4.34, SD = 0.47).

A study conducted by Neuharth-Pritchett (2001) examined kindergarten retention rates and their relationship to teacher beliefs and classroom practice. Whether the educators taught in a setting that exhibited a high level of developmental appropriateness or not, they agreed that academic ability was the most critical issue when considering retention, followed by emotional maturity and attendance. While there were no significant differences between the two groups of teachers on their self-reported beliefs about non-promotion, the number of students recommended for retention that were placed within classrooms with teachers who did not typically practice developmentally appropriate instruction was substantially higher. Teachers in these classrooms assigned more weight to the characteristics of attendance and emotional maturity when making decisions to retain kindergartners, whereas the other group of educators focused more on internal child characteristics. In essence, teachers who practiced more developmentally appropriate strategies in their classrooms were less likely to retain kindergartners. Interestingly, although the local school board's retention policy stated that kindergartners were required to meet the minimum passing requirements on a checklist of developmental skills and attend 160 of the 180 days of school in order to be promoted, these requirements were not always upheld. Rather, if a child was extremely close to the cut off scores for advancement to first grade, teachers would request promotion.

Jimerson et al. (1997) stated in their literature review that low academic achievement is one of the most frequent reasons given by teachers recommending retention. In a 2005 study, Hong and Raudenbush identified 207 pretreatment covariates in a sample of 471 retained

students and 10,255 promoted students. Prior to retention, the retained students performed more poorly in terms of achievement scores in literacy, mathematics, and general knowledge than the promoted students. In an ad-hoc study, Hong and Raudenbush (2005) followed the retained kindergartners and "concluded that kindergarten retention left most retainees even further behind" than before and impeded cognitive development over the repetition year (p. 220). Those who were at-risk of failure, but were promoted to the next grade, appeared to have a better chance of growth acceleration.

In a study that examined kindergarten teachers' beliefs about the students' readiness and maturity, the researchers found that teachers' beliefs fell into one of four categories (Smith & Shepard, 1988), related to beliefs about the nature of child development. Of the 40 teachers interviewed, almost 50% (19 teachers) were labeled *Nativists*, which was defined as those who believe children acquire school readiness along an evolutionary continuum outside of the influence of others. Teachers labeled as Nativists had significantly greater rates of retention than did others in the study. The other three categories of teachers were labeled as *Remediationists* (those who believed that all children, regardless of readiness, would be able to learn the material if additional instruction were provided by teachers, parents, or tutors), *Diagnostic-Prescriptive* (those who believed special education services would address specific difficulties the struggling student was having), and *Interactionists* (those who believed that children move through specific stages of development in their journey towards readiness by interacting with teachers and parents). When all of the teachers from the study were surveyed a year later, Smith (1989) found that they continued to view retention as a helpful intervention for at-risk students. The teachers believed that the outcome of retention would increase children's confidence and decrease the

amount of stress in their school life. The teachers also believed that those students who were retained would eventually emerge as class leaders.

Summary

Key components of this research explored the journeys of Kindergarten. The original journey of Kindergarten has changed due to increased expectations of student achievement based upon increased expectations from our nation. A comprehension of developmentally appropriate practices portrayed the expectations of instruction and learning within the Kindergarten classroom. Common Core State Standards (CCSS) pursue the goal to increase student achievement. The journey of these developmental practices began with the planning of Kindergarten instruction and although the standards have made it difficult to remain accurate, the research showed the importance of keeping instruction in line with the students' developmental capability. Teachers must find a balance amongst all of these expectations and achieve mastery.

The most common reasons for retaining children are one or more of the following: (a) not meeting grade-level curriculum requirements, (b) not meeting socio-emotional developmental milestones, and (c) having difficulties learning the English language (Jimerson et al., 2006). Research has shown that teachers often view retention as an intervention tool to better prepare students and prevent future failure. This study helped to gain understanding of how teachers experience retention and how these experiences can teach others about Kindergarten retention.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in conducting this study. This chapter revisited the purpose of the study and the guiding research questions. It also provided a detailed depiction of the qualitative research methods that was utilized to conduct the study, study participants, research procedures, data analysis, and quality considerations.

Research Questions

The initial phase of the process in a phenomenological research begins with acknowledging the need to understand a phenomenon from the point of view of the lived experience in order to be able to discover the meaning of it. The research questions required the study to focus on discovering the meaning or purpose of the phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of teachers who have retained Kindergarten students. In examining teachers' experiences with Kindergarten retention, teachers' opinions on Developmentally Appropriate Practices of Common Core State Standards were examined. The following research questions were utilized to guide this study:

- How do teachers describe their experiences with retaining Kindergarten students?
- What are teachers' perceptions of developmentally appropriateness of Common Core Standards as it relates to Kindergarten retention?

Phenomenology

A phenomenological method was used to study the experiences of teachers who have retained Kindergarten students. According to Dall'Alba (2009), the complex and ever-evolving

world holds a unique complexity in the 21st century that can be deeply analyzed and understood through phenomenological research and analysis.

Phenomenology originated in Europe through the work of Edmund Husserl (1970). According to Laverty (2003), Husserl developed his ideas as a critique of modern psychology by trying to apply the methods of natural science to human issues because human subjects do not simply react to external stimuli, but rather, they responded to their perceptions of the meaning and significance of the stimuli. People do not objectively observe things or actions and understand them through a process of induction and generalization, but rather they grasp the phenomena through an on-going dialogue between themselves and the world (Laverty, 2003).

Grumet (1976/1981), Heideggar (1968), and Merleau-Ponty (2012) are additional philosophers who expanded on the philosophical analysis of human nature and phenomena. This expansion by these philosophers on philosophical analysis challenges more positivistic and scientific explanations of human phenomena by deterring from the objective, positivistic and scientific explanations and focusing more on the subjective, ontological and constructivist analysis (Pinar et al., 2008). According to Merleau-Ponty (2002), phenomenology is something to be understood only through a specific methodology which can only be constructed and followed by the researcher as an understanding known only to the individual and "it does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point". Phenomenology "tries to give a description of the experiences as they are, without taking account of their psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide" (pp. vii-viii).

Research Method

Transcendental phenomenology was the appropriate method for this research while searching for an understanding of the meaning of the participants' experiences. According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenology is created of broad steps that guide the research process. These include phases of epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and finally the synthesis of texture and structure.

Moustakas (1994) described two fundamental processes in phenomenological-oriented studies as the Epoche and Phenomenological Reduction. The word *Epoche* comes from the Greek language and means to abstain from judgment and to refrain from ordinary ways of looking at things. The Epoche is the first essential step when conducting phenomenological-oriented research. It requires that the researcher clear their mind from biases, preferences, preconceptions, and feelings. They must set aside ordinary ways of looking at things and examine them as if for the first time. This process has been characterized as bracketing because the researcher brackets out the world, in order to examine the phenomenon anew, freshly, and with an open mind.

Phenomenological Reduction follows the Epoche and referred to the process of reducing a complex phenomenon to its basic elements as explained by Moustakas (1994). The researcher narrows their attention to what is essential in the phenomenon. Things that are unnecessary or irrelevant to the phenomenon are eliminated so that the researcher is able to examine it in its pure form. Phenomenological Reduction requires continued reflection from the researcher so that every time they look at the phenomena, they are able to see a different angle or perspective of the phenomena. As new perspectives emerge, the phenomenon becomes clearer and new dimensions appear and according to Moustakas (1994) the aim of the imaginative variation is to

discover the underlying and precipitating factors accounting the experiences. Imaginative variation occur when these essences are determined by studying the phenomenon in depth and determining the invariant element. The textural and structural descriptions are found in the analysis section of the study. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), this occurs when the researcher identifies concepts and categories by segmenting the interviews into smaller units and labeling their properties. The researcher then groups related concepts into categories and begins to categorize the properties along some analytic dimensions. By grouping related concepts into categories, it allowed the researcher to address the needs of the study by building upon the interviews by carefully analyzing the data. This process helped narrow down the essential components of the phenomenon. The three-interview structure that was used within this study focused on the participants' understanding of their experience. According to Vygotsky (1987), this process of putting experience into language is a meaning-making process.

Participants

Creswell (2007) discussed the importance of selecting the appropriate candidates by recommending that the selection of participants be made by the researcher based on their knowledge of these individuals and their potential willingness to participate and their potential for open contributions. Participants for this study were selected by purposeful sampling and consist of Kindergarten teachers from a rural Elementary school in Georgia. Purposeful sampling is the dominant strategy in qualitative research and was the method used in the selection of participants for this study as it seeks information-rich cases, which can be studied in depth (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling is used to identify potential participants with certain characteristics. That is, purposeful samples are cases that are selected because they are "information rich and illuminative" (Patton, 2002, p. 40). According to Englander (2012), it is

the researcher's responsibility to select participants who report having had a specific experience of the phenomenon and the researcher has a general sense of the expected parameters and interest of the phenomenon. Englander (2012) also stated that this process is legitimate because data analysis is what transcends the actual discoveries of the phenomenon. The researcher of this study has this general sense due to the structure of Kindergarten within the current school structure. The participants of the study were all of White ethnicity due to having only White teachers employed in Kindergarten at the current time in the study site. Participants varied in number of years of experience but were required to have 4 to 30 years of Kindergarten experience as selection criterion. All participants must have had the experience of retaining at least two students in Kindergarten.

Englander (2012) suggested finding the participants before conducting the study to discover who has experienced the phenomenon and to gain consent of participation. Initial invitations of participation were sent through an email to each possible participant. The researcher explained that permission of conducting the study was pending approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and that this email only sought an agreement to participate and background information that would provide data for the IRB. The email consisted of an invitation to participate, a brief introduction to the topic of study, and a brief summary of the requirements of participation (Appendix A). Each participant was asked to respond to the invitation, to include the number of years each participant has taught including specific grade levels, and confirm their experience of retaining students.

Data Collection Procedures

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001), in many cases of a phenomenological study, the researcher has had personal experiences related to the phenomenon. Bogdan and Biklen (2003)

explained that phenomenology attempts go beyond simple facts to look at the dynamics of encounters, people's behaviors in certain situations, the ways people make sense of the world, and the ways people explain their reality. They discussed how "researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (p. 23). Merriam (2009) remarked that “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5).

Interviews were the primary avenue of data collection. McNamara (2009) discussed the importance of the preparation stage in order to maintain a focus as to how the interviews should be conducted to provide maximum benefit to the proposed research study. McNamara (2009) applied eight principles to the preparation stages of interviewing which included: choosing a setting with little distraction, explaining the purpose of the interview, addressing terms of confidentiality, explaining the format of the interview, indicating how long the interview will take, telling participants contact information for future questions, asking participants for any questions before beginning the interview, and not depending on the researcher’s memory to recall the participants answers. To provide a secure environment, the researcher conducted the interviews in a private room selected by the participants where they would not feel restricted or uncomfortable to share information (Turner, 2010). The researcher cooperated with the participants to designate the time of day or times of day that are most convenient for them. The interviews were scheduled around their teaching schedules, occurring prior to classes, following classes, and during break times for the participants.

Three semi-structured interviews were used throughout this study. According to Seidman (2006), Dolbeare and Schuman designed the series of three interviews that allows the interviewer

and participant to reconstruct the details of their experience. The first interview was identified as Focused Life History. This interview required the participant to tell as much as possible about themselves in light of the topic up to present time. The second interview was identified as Details of the Experience. During this interview, the participant discussed a detailed description of their experiences with Kindergarten retention. The third and final interview was identified as Reflection of the Meaning. This interview included the final conclusion of interviews where the participant reflected on the previous statements in the interviews to gain an understanding or meaning of the phenomenon. Although the interviews were constructed as semi-structured regarding the questions or focus of the interview, they allowed the participants to leave their responses as open-ended responses. Standardized open-ended interviews are extremely structured in terms of wording the questions, but questions are worded so that they responses are open-ended (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Leaving the interview responses open-ended allowed the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desired and it allowed the researcher to ask probing questions as a follow-up. According to Creswell (2007), the only weakness with this type of interview occurs when coding the data due to researchers having difficulty extracting similar themes or codes from such broad interview transcripts. However, according to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003), this type of semi-structured interview reduces researcher biases by having to determine specific themes and codes. According to Seidman (2006), the three-interview structure incorporates features that increase validity by placing participants' comments in context and allowing them to check the internal consistency of what they say within the interviews. This process allowed the researcher to meet the goal of understanding how the participants understood and made meaning of their experiences.

Interview questions were created by the researcher (Appendix B) and followed the guidance of Seidman (2006). Creswell's (2009) definition of qualitative interviews provided this study with the necessary components for the researcher to conduct face-to-face interviews in order to obtain views and opinions from the participants. The interview questions were verbally stated one-by-one and identical questions were asked to each participant. According to Giorgi (2009), the questions that are part of a phenomenological interview should meet the criteria of description, not a traditional question that initiates the interview but the interviewer who asks the participant for a description of a situation in which the participant has experienced the phenomenon. The timeline for all interviews was one week or less between each interview. The entire interviews were audio recorded as the participants responded to each question. The digital audio recording provided the researcher the opportunity to listen carefully to responses given by the participants. The first interview was transcribed and pending interview questions were created throughout the course of the data analysis. This process continued until all three interviews were completed and thoroughly coded and analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of reviewing the data from transcripts of the interviews and identifying themes. Moustakas (1994) generated a structured method of analysis for a phenomenological study that provides "the most practical, useful approach" (Creswell, 2007). The process of analysis was designed to determine the essence of a phenomenon.

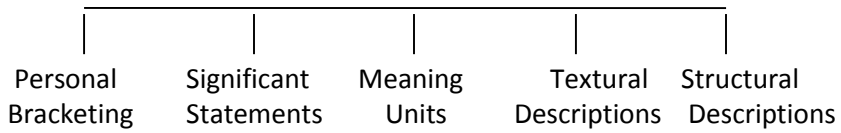

Figure 1. Creswell's Template for Coding a Phenomenological Study (2007, p. 170)

Essence of the Phenomenon

The first stage included the bracketing process discussed earlier where the researcher used epoche as a tool to remove personal biases. The second and third stages included developing a list of significant statements followed by grouping the statements into larger units of information called "meaning units" or themes (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). After identifying themes, the researcher completed the third and fourth stages of analysis by writing textural and structural descriptions. According to Creswell (2007), a textural description describes what the participant experienced and a structural description describes how the participants experienced the phenomenon.

After the first interview, the interviews were transcribed and according to Moustakas (1994), every statement of the interview is viewed as having equal value. Specific statements were identified within the transcripts. Natural meaning units were then created by utilizing Moustakas (1994) method of horizontal statements. These horizons occurred when data was divided into units of meaning and was characterized by the division of each meaning. Moustakas (1994, p. 95) describes the horizon as "the grounding or condition of the phenomenon that gives it a distinct character." The statements were then clustered into themes and later grouped into major core themes. According to Moustakas (1994), these themes begin the stage of creating textual and structural descriptions that describe the essence. Additional interviews were conducted and coded to further investigate the phenomenon.

Quality Considerations

The process of verification of qualitative data employs the application of checking, confirming, and being reassured that the contribution of data is reliable and valid (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Creswell (2009) suggested researchers engage in

validity strategies to confirm accuracy of the findings. One strategy which supported the verification process and was considered one of the most important to implement was the use of member checking. This strategy was employed in this study. Member checking gives the opportunity for the researcher and participant(s) of the study to engage in opportunities for comments, questions, and feedback (Creswell, 2009). In this study, the participants were asked to check the transcripts for accuracy. In addition, after the analysis of the interviews was completed, the participants were given an opportunity to disclose any discrepancies found within the documented transcripts. All participants signed a document declaring the accuracy of the transcripts or document any discrepancies (Appendix D).

Controlling for Personal Biases

As the Teaching and Learning Specialist for my school district, my responsibility is to fully implement Response to Intervention (RTI) at each grade level. I work closely with Kindergarten teachers to identify and monitor students who require intensive interventions. At each conclusion of the school year, retention is addressed as an intervention for some students who have failed to show adequate progress or mastery of standards. Failure to meet Kindergarten standards is often addressed and categorized by developmental/maturity level, age, gender, etc. as we review the student data collected throughout the school year.

In order to separate my personal experience with retention as a classroom teacher of eleven years, I used processes to eliminate biases, assumptions, and beliefs. According to Moustakas (1994), epoche is a process that the researcher should engage in before conducting the interview, so that any past associations or biases may not color the interview. The epoche occurs throughout the research process. Before each interview, I journaled my thoughts and feelings in an attempt to bracket all previously held biases and preconceptions. There were a

total of three journal entries. The first journal entry included, but was not limited to, a personal disclosure of events that I have experienced as I have retained students and the experiences of observing the retention of Kindergarten students through RTI. The second journal entry shared thoughts and reactions concerning the responses from the first interview. It also included desires for the upcoming interview. The third and final journal entry took place before the third interview. It was very similar to the second journal entry by containing personal thoughts and reactions. This process helped the researcher to identify biases and preconceptions before each interview as a method to prevent barriers within the research.

Summary

Many primary teachers (grades K-4) believe that retention is useful in maintaining grade level standards in light of high stakes state testing (Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004). In the primary grades, especially Kindergarten, retention is often used as one of the primary responses or interventions to low achievement since many educators believe that it is more helpful than harmful for a student to have a second chance at mastery of the curriculum. A phenomenological approach allowed the researcher an opportunity to encounter the lived experiences of teachers who have retained students. It not only examined teachers' experiences with Kindergarten retention, but also examined teachers' perceptions on Developmentally Appropriate Practices of Common Core State Standards. Purposive sampling was used to select participants and three interviews were conducted and analyzed to determine lived experiences of retention and practices used within participant's classrooms. Participants had an opportunity to check validity of each analysis through member checking. The researcher controlled personal biases by journaling personal thoughts and experiences with retention and perceived assumptions.

Conducting a transcendental phenomenological research study helped provide insight to teachers' experiences with Kindergarten retention, the factors that lead to retention, and teachers' perceptions of the developmentally appropriateness of the standards. This research helped teachers gain an understanding of retention and expectantly advised teachers who may experience retention.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of teachers who have retained Kindergarten students. In examining teachers' experiences with Kindergarten retention, teachers' opinions on Developmentally Appropriate Practices of Common Core State Standards were examined. This chapter presents results of the analysis of data gathered from the transcendental phenomenological study. The following research questions were utilized to support this study:

- How do teachers describe their experiences with retaining Kindergarten students?
- What are teachers' perceptions of developmentally appropriateness of Common Core Standards as it relates to Kindergarten retention?

Demographic Profile of Participants

The researcher used purposive sampling to select the participants for the study. All eight Kindergarten teachers within the school system were asked to respond to an initial e-mail requesting years of service and experience of retaining students. Out of eight potential participants, only four participants qualified to participate in the study due to years of experience, occurrence of retention, or for personal reasons.

Pseudonyms were used to keep each participant's identity confidential. The following table consists of the statements returned to the researcher within the response of invitation.

Table 1.

Description of Participants

Participant Name (pseudonym)	Years of Experience	Subjects/Content Taught	Number of Students Retained
Cora	8	Pre-K, Kindergarten	4
Susan	9	Kindergarten, 2nd SPEd, 5th SPEd	3
Abby	10	Pre-K, Kindergarten	2
Jenle	13	Pre-K, Kindergarten	5

Data Collection

Permission to complete the study was granted by the Institutional Review Board (Appendix C). Data were collected primarily through interviews. Three semi-structured interviews with each participant were used throughout this study. The location of each interview was situated in the researcher's office. The interviews were conducted three to five days apart and each interview took approximately thirty minutes. According to Seidman (2006), Dolbeare and Schuman designed the series of three interviews that allows the interviewer and participant to reconstruct the details of their experience. The first interview was identified as Focused Life History. This interview required the participant to tell as much as possible about themselves in light of the topic up to present time. The second interview was identified as Details of the Experience. During this interview, the participant discussed a detailed description of their experiences with Kindergarten retention. The third and final interview was identified as Reflection of the Meaning. This interview included the final conclusion of interviews where the participant reflected on the previous statements in the interviews to gain an understanding or meaning of the phenomenon. The interviews were taped and transcribed. Each participant received a copy of the transcript as a way to member check for accuracy. The final statements

were shown to the participants for their approval and permission for use in the final analysis (Appendix D).

Data Analysis

A qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was used to conduct this research. Patton (2002) describes phenomenological approaches as a way to focus on how humans make sense of experiences and transform the experiences into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning. Patton (2002) described phenomenological analysis as a way to understand and clarify the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon. Patton also discussed how qualitative researchers begin the data analysis process by drawing from "the analytic insights and interpretations that emerged during the data collection" (2002, p. 437). Two of the most common ways to analyze data in a phenomenological study are to craft individual profiles and to analyze text for patterns across cases (Creswell, 1998).

The data analysis in this transcendental phenomenological study used a process of horizonalization, which used significant statements that were taken from the transcripts to describe elements of experiencing the phenomenon. The significant statements described how the participants experienced the phenomenon. *NVivo 11* was utilized by the researcher to organize and analyze data from the interviews. The transcripts from the interviews were recorded into the program and the specific statements were coded into individual nodes. As the interviews with the participants were reviewed and analyzed, several sub-categories emerged within each interview. These sub-categories were analyzed and revealed categories. These nodes were created from the patterns across cases in which Creswell (1998) conversed above. Each interview was displayed to present the process of analysis and coding. A narrative description of each theme can be found following each figure.

Theme I: Focused Life History

The first interview focused on the histories of the participants by inquiring personal information such as the reason for becoming a teacher, family history of educators, rewards and challenges of teaching, experience with retention, defining developmentally appropriate practices, and usage of the Common Core State Standards. One goal of this interview was to establish a relationship with the participants and to build trust. Beginning the interview process with introductions and an opportunity to discuss their personal lives and experiences found to comfort the participants and relieve anxiety within the participants.

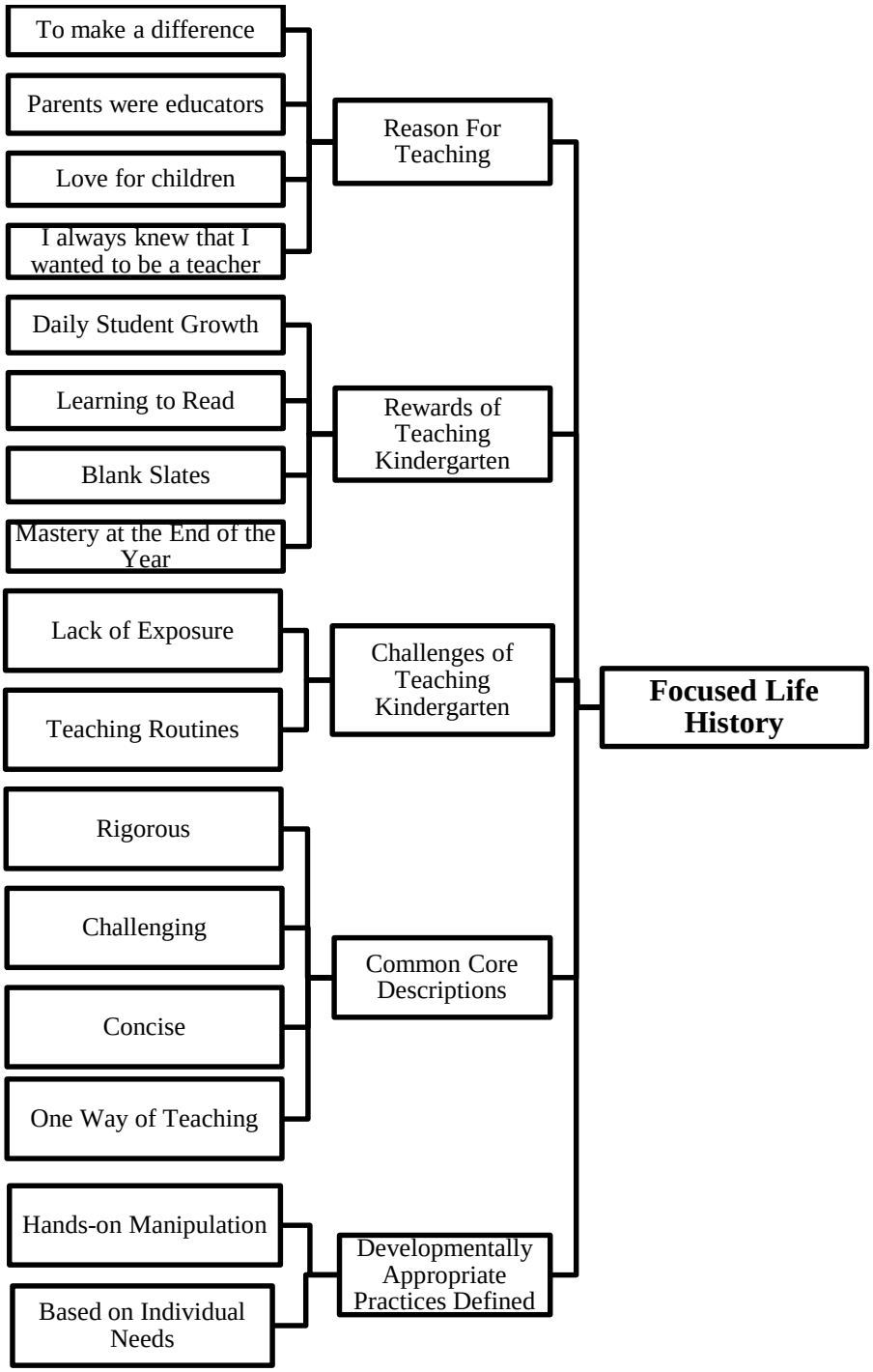

Figure 2. Focused Life History

Reason for Teaching

The participants indicated in their interview responses that the love of children was one major reason that they decided to become teachers. Cora answered this question by saying, "I

kind of always knew that I wanted to become a teacher. I've always enjoyed working with kids and I do enjoy seeing the progress that they make." Most participants knew that they were going to be a teacher at a very early age. Jenle said, "I've always wanted to become a teacher, I can't ever remember not wanting to teach or do something else." The only participant who had parents as educators, Susan, replied, "I just knew that I wanted to be a teacher because it is what I grew up around." Abby realized that she wanted to be a teacher by working with children and said, "I always worked with the church in different activities with the nursery and like babysitting and my heart has just always been with the kids in striving to make a difference in as many lives as I could." The passion of teaching Kindergarten was evident among each participant.

The reasons for teaching were centered on student learning. It was also obvious that participants obtained a desire to become teachers at early ages. Having parents as educators did not play a significant role in the desire to become a teacher, as only one participant experienced having parents as educators.

Rewards of Teaching Kindergarten

All participants responded with the common response that observing student growth and learning throughout the year was a great reward of teaching Kindergarten. Abby responded:

> I feel like the greatest reward is seeing them read when they leave Kindergarten. They come not knowing any letters and then by the time they leave me, they are reading fluently. So, I feel that is the greatest, biggest reward.

Susan said, "You get the academic growth, especially at this age where you are teaching them how to read. I feel that is very rewarding." Cora mentioned student growth, "I think that especially Kindergarten, they come to us as a blank slate and to get to see the progress that they

make and those “ah-ha” moments that they have.” Jenle also referenced the term “blank slates” and commented, “I love Kindergarten especially because they come to you at the beginning of the year a lot of them are blank slates and by the end of the year you just see how much they have grown.”

Rewards of teaching Kindergarten centered on the observation of student growth. Seeing the growth of where students began their journey in Kindergarten to where they finished the year was the most common reward expressed by the participants. Exposing children to letters and sounds that resulted in reading by the end of the year also served as a rewarding.

Challenges of Teaching Kindergarten

The challenges of teaching Kindergarten resulted with a common notion among participants. The lack of exposure or reference to the home lives of students was mentioned in three interviews. Susan commented her biggest challenge as, “The environment that they go home to and what they are exposed to, and the lack of exposure at home.” Cora tied her response in with her previous blank slates comment, “I guess going back to the rewards, they come to us as blank slates, and you know, some have been to preschool and some have not. Some have those support systems and some don’t and so it’s really just hard.” Abby also addressed the home lives of students but added how it affects behavior issues within her classroom. She replied, “The main challenge I feel is behavior. It can really affect classroom performance and I feel like sometimes there is not help at home therefore impacting what you can and can’t do in the classroom and the consistency of that home life makes a big impact as well. So, I would definitely say that behavior is one of the main challenges that I face as a Kindergarten teacher.” Abby also stated, “I feel that the Common Core State Standards are a challenge. I feel that there is one way of teaching and not much outside the box. I feel like it’s

my way or no way, so it has been different for me and a lot more concise this year using Common Core." Jenle was the only participant who addressed routine issues and maturity issues. When asked about the challenges of teaching Kindergarten she replied, "Snotty noses. Teaching them how to get their lunch trays, tying their shoes, etc."

Teaching Kindergarten was recognized as challenging by children's lack of exposure before entering school. Participants responded with challenges of the home environment in which children come from and return to each day. Behavior issues also served as a challenge as it prevents teachers from teaching and students from learning. Participants also indicated a challenge as Kindergarten students also demonstrate difficulty with routines and procedures.

Common Core Descriptions

Asking the participants to describe the Common Core State Standards in the first interview helped to gather their overall perceptions of the standards. This question resulted in various opinions of the standards as two participants described them as little change from the previous Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) and two participants described them as being different. Susan stated, "I feel like we already in Kindergarten did a lot, there wasn't a lot of change for us in Kindergarten because we already used a lot of manipulatives and hands-on, and it didn't affect us quite as much as the other grades." Jenle similarly responded with, "I like the Common Core State Standards, they haven't changed that much." However, Abby and Cora had different opinions concerning the standards. Abby described them as, "I feel that the Common Core State Standards are a challenge. I feel that there is one way of teaching and not much outside the box. I feel like it's my way or no way, so it has been different for me and a lot more concise this year using Common Core." Cora said, "I think they are definitely different from the GPS and the standards that we have had in the past. They are definitely more rigorous,

sometimes I think that some of them are not developmentally appropriate for this age group, but they are challenging which is a good thing."

Descriptions of Common Core State Standards varied. Two participants' initial perceptions resulted in little change and an appreciation of the standards as Jenle stated, "I like the Common Core State Standards, they haven't changed that much." The other two participants portrayed more of a critical perception as Cora mentioned, "They are definitely more rigorous, sometimes I think that some of them are not developmentally appropriate for this age group, but they are challenging which is a good thing." They described the standards as rigorous, different, and challenging.

Defining Developmentally Appropriate Practices

The purpose of asking each participant to define Developmentally Appropriate Practices allowed the researcher an opportunity to gather expectations within these practices. It also helped to see if participants understood the definition of Developmentally Appropriate Practices. In most cases, the participants did stumble over this question with facial characteristics that portrayed uncertainty. Three participants defined the term by referencing age appropriate activities. Abby said, "Developmentally appropriate means things that are suitable for five year olds. Things they should be able to do not asking much above their expectations. It should be something that I feel like my child should be able to do at five years old -nothing unattainable." Cora's definition added, "I would say those things that are appropriate for their age level that they are ready to kind of do independently." Jenle described these practices as, "Skills that the students are ready for according to their age and ability." Susan did not define Developmentally Appropriate Practices, but gave examples of her perception of how she provides these practices,

"I think just providing them with visuals, manipulatives, different options to work through math and language, academic scenarios."

Evidence of understanding developmentally appropriate practices were described by providing opportunities for students to work on independent levels. The responses given by the participants did reveal a concerning knowledge of expectations within developmentally appropriate practices, which is later connected to how it applies to Common Core Standards and the retention of Kindergarten students. The reference of how children enter Kindergarten as blank slates and how participants reflect on the reward of watching the slate become full of knowledge by the end of the year represents the current demands of education. Teachers are expected to ignore the social needs of their students through the use of developmentally appropriate practices and focus on filling those slates with academic knowledge.

Theme II: Details of the Experience

The second interview focused on specific details of the experience of retention, specific details of using developmentally appropriate practices, and began to focus on participants' perceptions concerning the developmentally appropriateness of the Common Core. The responses from the participants were geared to address both research questions, "How do teachers describe their experiences with retaining Kindergarten students?", and "What are teachers' perceptions of developmental appropriateness of Common Core State Standards as it relates to Kindergarten retention?"

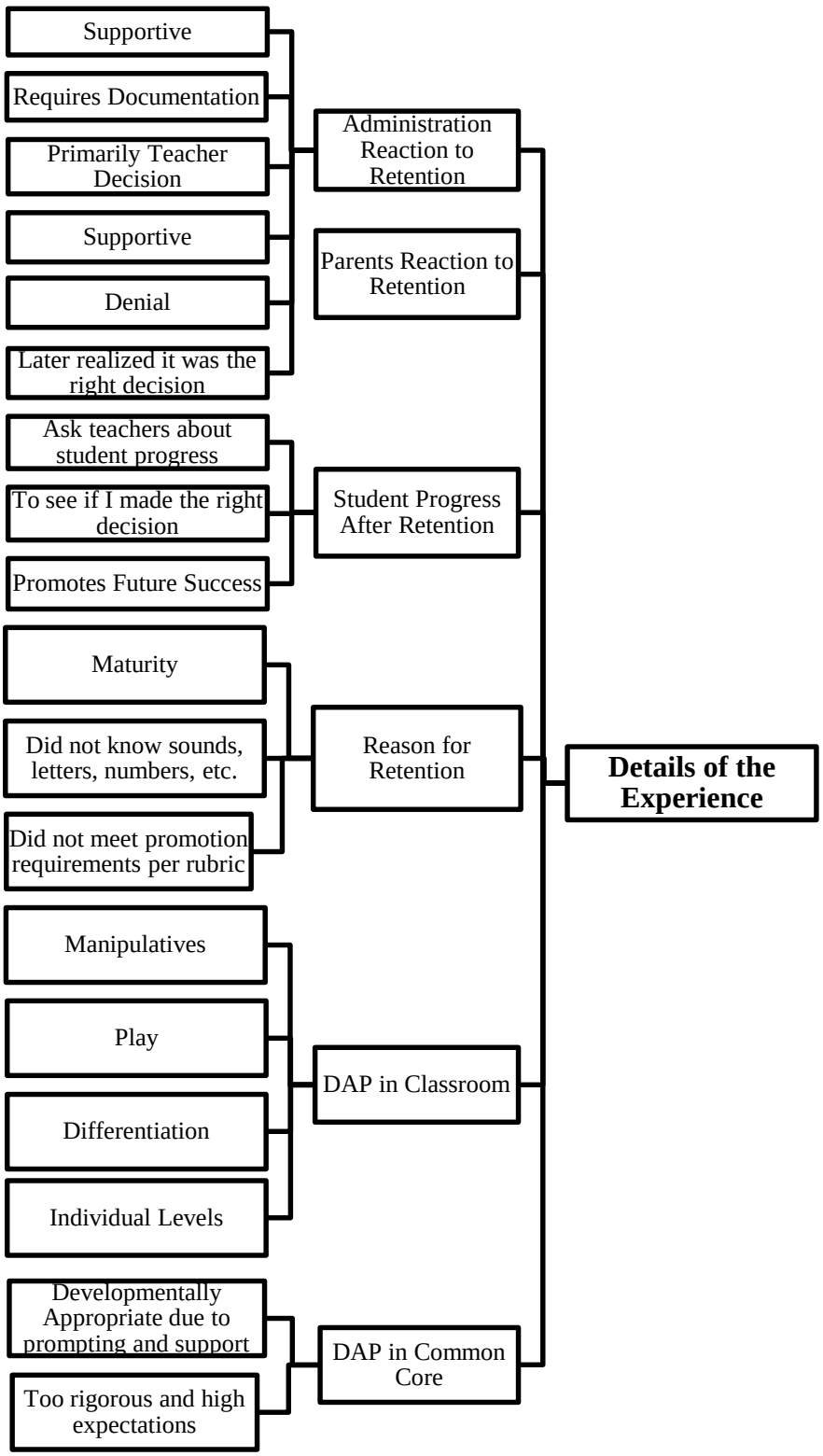

Figure 3. Details of the Experience

Reasons for Retention

The participants suggested multiple reasons for retention but all the reasons were related to student performance or maturity. Cora stated, “Some of it, in some cases, was just what I thought was immaturity, you know they just weren't ready to go on. They were struggling academically, but I didn't really feel like it was a learning problem, they just weren't ready.” Specific standards not mastered by students were also listed by participants. Abby stated, “I analyzed the standards for Kindergarten and compared them to where she would need to be for first grade and she had not mastered a lot of critical Kindergarten standards, so that led me to the decision of her needing to be retained.” Jenle answered, “She didn’t know her sight words, didn’t know her letters, and her sounds. She wasn’t decoding, just wasn’t ready to read, and also with her math. I just had to retain her, I couldn’t send her on.” Meeting the requirements deemed by the promotion rubric also served as a validating reason for retention. Susan confirmed, “We have a rubric that we go by in Kindergarten that we take our core or our most important standards and evaluate what is the basic needs that they need to be to go on to first grade in a Regular Ed. Classroom, and we go off that rubric.”

Maturity and student performance was portrayed as factors that contributed to retention. Teachers used a rubric to determine promotion. The rubric only contained performance indicators for standards and lacked any social or developmental features. This rubric served as evidence for administration and parents and verified the need for academic retention.

Administration’s Reaction to Retention

All participants reported that administration was supportive with their decisions to retain students. Participants felt that administrators trusted in their professionalism and knew the promotion rubric was in place to show appropriate documentation. Professionalism was addressed by Abby, “They knew the name and she was in Response to Intervention, but that was

as far as administration was involved." Cora explained how administrators require documentation by stating, "We have to show that it is a good fit for the child, that they need to be retained because they can't be retained if they have already been retained. " The remaining participants responded with a simple, "Yes", showing no concerns from administration in regards to their retention decisions.

Administrators required teachers to complete the promotion rubric to verify the need for retention. Participants indicated that administrators were supportive in their decisions to retain due to the evidence the rubric reinforced. Interventions shown through RTI also served to support their decisions to retain.

Parent Reaction to Retention

The reactions to retention among parents varied. Some parents realized the need for retention and gave full support. Jenle stated, "They knew that she was struggling and wanted her to be in Kindergarten again." Other parents struggled with retention. Cora stated some parent concerns as, "I had parents who didn't want them to be retained, didn't want them to be left back, and not be with their friends." Due to this question being asked after administration reaction to retention, Abby connected her response, "I had to give the name to administration, but as far as a parent being upset to the point where she talked to administration; that did not happen."

Participants were very confident in their decisions to retain students. Teachers are required to report promotion in danger each nine weeks to inform parents of possible retention. They did not appear anxious about informing parents that their child would be retained due to providing the evidence of the rubric which supported their decision. Any parent who disproved of retention later decided, with given evidence, the need for retention.

Student Progress after Retention

The participants reacted to this question with responses that portrayed interest in how the students progressed after retention, but all showed signs of feeling limited with inquiring about this knowledge. Abby's response stated, "I do ask questions to the current teacher that she has now but I try to not be too involved, but I do check on her nonchalantly." Jenle's response warranted validation of her decision as she stated, "I do. I like to check on her to make sure that my decision to retain was a good one. Just for future reference with my other students and to see how they are doing." Cora's response was similar when she stated, "I do the best to keep up with them just to see how they are doing and to see if it was a good decision or not, and most of the time it is."

Showing interest in student progress after retention reflected that participants feel responsible for students who do not master the standards. Direction of how to pursue the knowledge of student progress displayed a common theme among participants. It was evident that participants did not want to seem overbearing to peers as they inquired about their decision to retain.

Use of Developmentally Appropriate Practices in the Classroom

The participants indicated in their interview responses their experiences of using Developmentally Appropriate Practices within their classrooms. Their responses helped the researcher understand their knowledge of Developmentally Appropriate Practices. Abby declared, "Kindergarten is really the foundation, so a lot of the Kindergarten standards, the words with prompting and support are included in the standards, so I think that is developmentally appropriate for five and six year olds. So, also, I also use manipulatives a lot with Kindergartners, so I think if I were to require them to do something without that

manipulation, that would not be developmentally appropriate, but with the manipulation in my classroom, that is one good way that I use developmentally appropriate activities." Cora replied, "I try to use as much or incorporate as much play for the little ones. As rigorous as the standards are, it's kind of hard sometimes, but I try to fit it in where I can and make it fun for them." Susan described using these practices as, "I use it with instructional strategies as in teaching, as in math with working with subtraction and addition, I would start with a number line and if the child is unsuccessful in working with a number line, we would move down to one-on-one manipulatives like counters and bears. If they are unsuccessful in moving them or keeping them in order, we would use a Rak-n-Rak."

The participants offered several examples of how they use Developmentally Appropriate Practices within their classrooms; however, their uncertainty of what defined developmentally appropriate caused various responses. Participants' knowledge of Developmentally Appropriate Practices within their classrooms reflected fun activities, the use of manipulatives, modifying activities to correspond to student's independent levels. These various activities reflected a contrasting knowledge of developmental practices.

Developmental Appropriateness of Common Core State Standards

The responses from the participants varied regarding their thoughts concerning the developmental appropriateness of the Common Core State Standards. This question was the first to begin delving into their perceptions of the developmental appropriateness of the Common Core State Standards and to begin to answer the research question. Three participants responded with no concerns about Kindergarten standards. Jenle responded, "I like them. They are fine. They have become a little bit easier and have taken some of the standards out and not placed on the students. So I like it better." Susan concurred by saying, "I don't really have any concerns. I

very much like Common Core for Kindergarten. I do think that I like the changes that were in math with working with manipulatives and doing things in a different way. I think it was developmentally appropriate, the changes for Kindergarten." Abby similarly responded, but added concerns about other grades by saying,

> I think for Kindergarten developmentally appropriate standards are evident in our grade level. However as they move up, I think that a lot of the standards are not developmentally appropriate. But with Kindergarten level, as I mentioned before with prompting and support is with almost every standard, especially ELA. With Math, it includes manipulation, so I think Developmentally Appropriate Practices are evident in Kindergarten.

Another participant revealed concerns about the developmental appropriateness of the standards. Cora stated, "I don't think they are developmentally appropriate, most of them. I feel like everything has been pushed down onto these little ones and it's hard for them and I think that is one reason why we keep retaining kids, because they are just not ready."

Participants' initial response concerning the developmental appropriateness of the standards was limited. Cora was the sole participant who created a connection between the developmental appropriateness of the Common Core State Standards and Kindergarten retention. Abby gave examples of how the standards are not developmentally appropriate but did not associate the standards with retention. All participants' reactions to retention justified that teachers need reassurance when retaining students. Although participants were not comfortable in how to approach the situation of checking on the student, their need of making sure that their decision proved necessary reflects that great amount of burden which is placed upon teachers. The final interview contained more opportunities for reflection and connection to meaning.

Theme III: Reflection of the Meaning

The final interview consisted of questions which allowed participants to reflect more upon the meaning of their experiences. Questions required comprehensive responses which were analyzed and coded into specific categories. Participants were asked to reflect on their concerns regarding retention, their colleagues' perceptions of retention, strengths and concerns regarding the Common Core State Standards, and the standards determining retention.

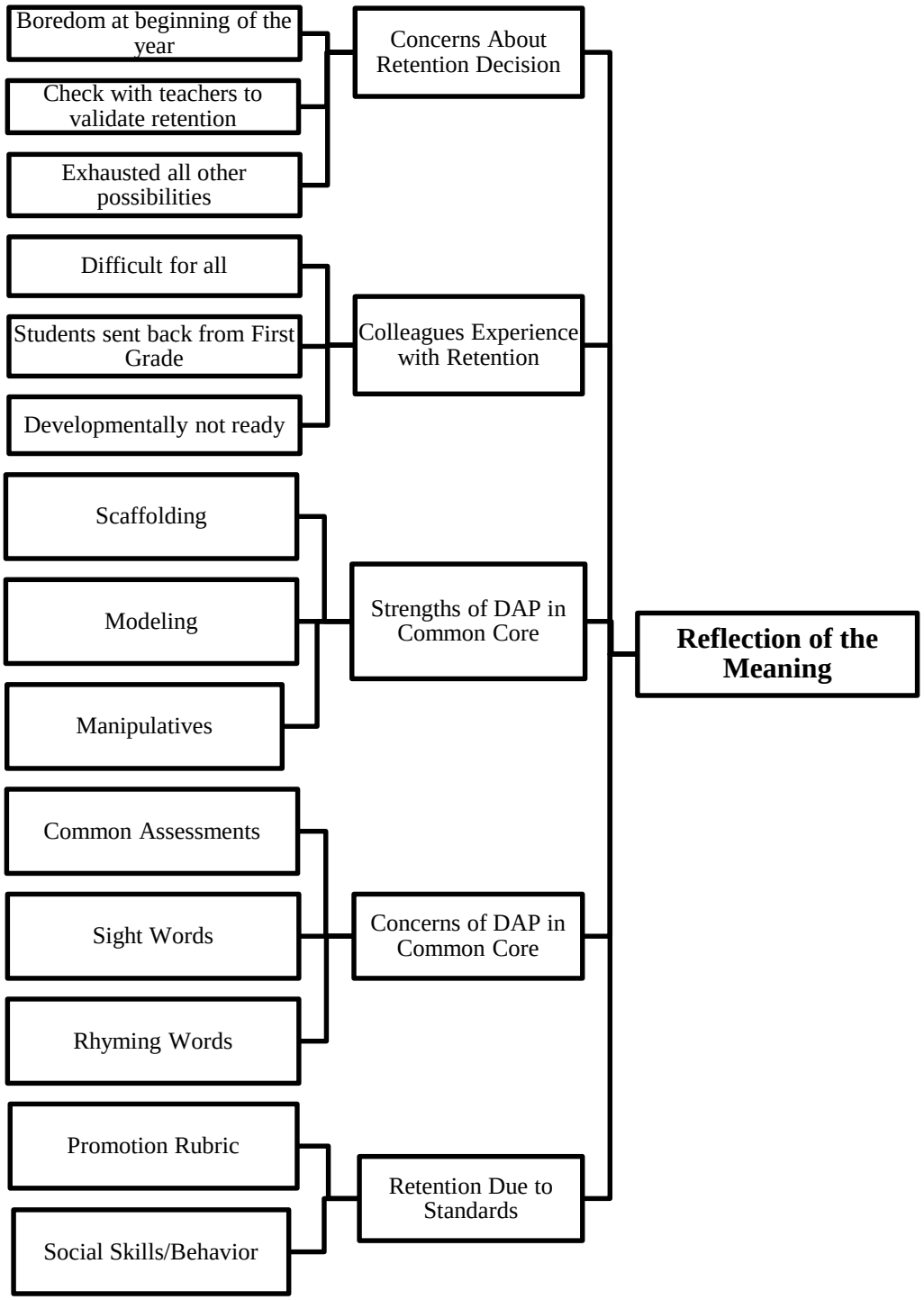

Figure 4. Reflection of the Meaning

Concerns about Retention

The interview question inquired participants' concerns regarding retention as a way to answer the research questions pertaining to their individual experiences of retention. As all participants want to make the best decision for their students, only two participants shared concerns regarding retention. Abby was concerned about the entire year of retention that students must complete and expressed her desire for a transition grade that would include the latter part of Kindergarten and the beginning of first grade. She was concerned that students would be bored with the easy content at the beginning of Kindergarten as they often fail to master standards by the end of the year. Abby stated, "I have felt that I have not made the appropriate decision because they, the expectations for Kindergarten are one thing and the expectations for first grade are another, so sometimes I think they will be bored if I retain them at the beginning of Kindergarten. However, they get whatever they need at the end of Kindergarten so it's kind of like sometimes I wish there were a transitional Kindergarten to first grade because the skills are so easy at the beginning and they progress so much in the middle and the end." Jenle builds on her decision making skills each year by keeping in touch with retained student's teachers and stated, "Sometimes I go back behind myself and check on them with their teachers so that if I need to change my way of thinking for other students I can." Cora and Susan were confident in their retention decisions and showed less concern due to the exhausted efforts of their work throughout the year. Cora stated, "I don't think I've ever really questioned my decision. I feel like the ones that I did retain, I put a lot of thought into it. It was the right decision." Susan's response was similar and stated, "I always feel like if I've made the retention call that I have gone through various circuits and I always feel, if I've made the decision to retain somebody then I feel solid in it."

The participants portrayed confidence in their decisions to retain students. One concern led to the need of a transitional classroom that would prevent students from having to repeat the entire year of Kindergarten. The exhaustive efforts of participants revealed assurance of decisions to retain.

Seeking Colleagues' Support with Retention

As a way to gather information regarding teacher's experiences with retaining Kindergarten students, the researcher asked how their colleagues experienced retention. As the researcher meets with teachers in a team effort with Response to Intervention, it is found that teachers often find comfort in sharing their experiences with colleagues. In the interview, the researcher asked participants to share their colleagues' experiences with retention. The bond among colleagues was evident in their responses. Cora displayed the collaboration among teachers' decisions and stated, "I think, you know, when we talk about it we are pretty much on the same page. It's not something that we take lightly, so it is something that we feel good about when we do retain a child. That it was the right decision and everyone has pretty much been on the same page about that." Jenle discussed how Kindergarten teachers feel that retention allows students a year to strengthen their skills and stated, "I think most of my colleagues in Kindergarten have the same thoughts about retaining, if they are not developmentally ready, to give them another year to catch up those basic skills." Susan reiterated the feelings that retention was necessary and said, "I feel like whenever we do retain at this level in Kindergarten, and most of us always feel like it is an extreme necessity to retain. So we feel positive that we made the right choice." Jenle elaborated on the experience of retention and the difficulty of teachers making this decision and stated, "It is very hard for my colleagues and I to make the decision of retaining or not. There have been several occasions where we have promoted a child to first

grade and once the first grade student has got to first grade, they have been sent back, so personally as a teacher that would be very upsetting for me as a teacher and a parent. So, I'm always struggling with whether or not I am making the right decision. I just try to consider all of the standards, socially, and developmentally where they are and what is best for them."

The participants recognized collaboration among peers within their decision to retain students. It was evident that the collaboration gave a sense of confirmation and helped when teachers know that others share similar personal and professional thoughts and concerns. Although participants already seemed confident in their decisions, having others who have experienced retention proved to increase assurance.

Strengths of Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Common Core State Standards

Participants were asked to describe strengths of Developmentally Appropriate Practices in the Common Core State Standards in order to gain an understanding of their perceptions as it related to Kindergarten retention. Only one participant refrained from discussing only their concerns and shared strengths of Developmentally Appropriate Practices in the Common Core State Standards. Abby gave her opinion of the importance of using Developmentally Appropriate Practices and gave examples of how they are used in Common Core State Standards, "I do feel that Developmentally Appropriate Practices are crucial for a child's success. I do feel that the standards for Kindergarten are developmentally appropriate. I feel that for ELA, everything is with prompting and support. We are allowed to scaffold and assist a lot per the standards. In math, students are given manipulatives and visual clues to help them reach their level. So, it's differentiated and the standard states giving them opportunities to use manipulation to accomplish the task that is asked." Abby also stated, "Common Core does a good job of providing prompting and support for ELA. Kindergarten students need to see that

modeling and I think it is critical that we lay the foundation for them in Kindergarten and providing that prompting and support is a good tool for laying that foundation."

Prompting, opportunities to support, and manipulation were key components of perceived strengths of the developmental appropriateness of the Common Core State Standards. It was evident that participants value the opportunity to model and provide visual tools to increase learning opportunities.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Common Core State Standards

Participants were eager to share apprehensions of Developmentally Appropriate Practices in the Common Core State Standards and how it relates to Kindergarten retention. Intriguingly, the participants went beyond the actual standards and discussed how the teaching expectations did not meet the developmental levels of students. For example, Cora had previously identified her perception of how Developmentally Appropriate Practices related to Kindergarten retention by stating, "I don't think they are developmentally appropriate, most of them. I feel like everything has been pushed down onto these little ones and it's hard for them and I think that is one reason why we keep retaining kids because they are just not ready." However, Cora added in the third interview,

> I know like with sight words, I don't think they are necessarily developmentally appropriate. Most of the standards are, and I think that some of the other requirements that are on us as teachers, the way that we have to teach them sometimes make them not as developmentally appropriate. But I think what the standards are asking the children to do is on their level.

This reflection of stating that most of the standards are developmentally appropriate but the expected instructional methods placed on teachers causing the standards to become inappropriate

was a common theme among participants. Jenle was very specific as she discussed concerns about the standards and said,

> Some of the Common Core Standards are too difficult for Kindergarten, for this age. For example, rhyming. A lot of the children don't get it to the end of the year or some of them do not get it in Kindergarten period. So I think some of the standards are too difficult. They are not developmentally ready.

Abby added the assessments required by the State when she stated,

> I do feel that the standards for Kindergarten are developmentally appropriate. I feel that for ELA, everything is with prompting and support. We are allowed to scaffold and assist a lot per the standards. In math, students are given manipulatives and visual clues to help them reach their level. So, it's differentiated and the standard states giving them opportunities to use manipulation to accomplish the task that is asked. However, I do feel that some of the State-wide testing is developmentally inappropriate for Kindergarten. The DIBELS test does hit the standards for Kindergarten; however, timing is added into the DIBELS which is not anywhere stated in the Kindergarten standards that timing is a consideration for mastering the standards. So, therefore, I do feel like our standards are developmentally appropriate, I feel that I make all of my activities developmentally appropriate because we are open to do that as long as we are teaching the standard. However, I do not feel that the testing is always developmentally appropriate.

Susan also discussed her concerns about testing,

> I feel like developmentally appropriate practices – we make adaptions in class help, but when we come to testing we are hindering because we are testing in a common form but

> we are adapting to children's individual needs and making things developmentally appropriate for the individual, therefore, we are not assessing the way we are teaching sometimes.

Susan elaborated even more on the topic of testing,

> The State is pushing to go to common assessment which can be good and negative, I feel that some of it is not developmentally appropriate in Kindergarten because of their learning to read and write, and so if a child cannot read and write, it is hard to assess math on a standardized test if they are unable to read it for themselves, independently.

Sight words, rhyming words, and timed assessments were concerns perceived by participants when they responded to the developmental appropriateness of the Common Core State Standards. It was evident that participants were concerned about the requirements of how they must assess the students, more than the standards that they must teach the students.

Retention Due to Standards

When participants steered the interviews to State assessments and expectations, the researcher asked if standards were not imposed, would retention still have taken place. This question was geared towards having the teachers think if the standards were the only reason they retained students in Kindergarten. It also helped to answer the research question concerning their experiences with retaining Kindergarten students. They all agreed that retention would have occurred, and gave reports on how they formally decided retention based on the Kindergarten promotion rubric. Jenle stated to the question concerning if retention would have taken place, "Yes. Because you know if they are ready for first grade and the ones that I have retained were not ready." Cora's response confirmed, "Most of them, probably, because they were really struggling with the basics so I probably would have. There was a couple that were

probably borderline that maybe would not have been retained but most of them I probably would." Abby stated, "I do believe that standards play a major role in retention as we are deciding whether or not we can promote or retain. We are given the promotion rubric, so if there are things that are checked on that rubric, we have to retain that student. So I feel like the standards do keep them back from being promoted."

The researcher asked if the promotion rubric contained any other areas such as social skills, behavior, etc., other than mastery of standards. Jenle answered, "No, it's all based on standards and you either meet or you don't. Three is meeting, two is you kind of get it, and one is not meeting. It's a total of all of the standards that we test. Total is either retained, discuss it with parents, or either they are promoted." Abby answered, "No, it does not. It is all standards relating to ELA and Math." Cora responded with similarity but added that report cards contain concepts such as social skills and behavior. Cora responded, "No, we have those on the report cards so that parents are aware that there is a record but it doesn't, it's strictly the standards, have they mastered the standards."

The purpose of this question required participants to converse their perceptions regarding standards as the sole reason for retention. Although participants' responses were more concerned with the maturity or developmental levels of the students, they all stated that only standards played a role in the promotion rubric which took precedence in the decision of retention. The promotion rubric demonstrated that requirements were centered solely on academics and ignored developmentally appropriate practices.

Quality Assurance Method

The researcher followed Creswell's (2009) suggestion and engaged in the validity strategy of member checking. After the transcripts were transcribed, participants were provided

with a copy of the transcripts to review for accuracy. Participants were encouraged to review the transcripts and disclose discrepancies. All of the transcripts were returned and checked that the participant read the transcripts and confirmed accuracy (Appendix D). Only one of the participants returned the transcripts with minor corrected typos. The typos found within the transcripts did not affect the validity of the transcripts. The researcher commented, "Sorry, it was just the teacher coming out in me." The researcher asked if the participant would like a corrected copy, in which the participant declined and signed admittance to accuracy.

The researcher also used Moustakas' (1994) process of epoche throughout the study as a method to prevent biases. Before each interview, the researcher journaled thoughts and feelings concerning the experiences of past retentions as a teacher, and observations of retention of Kindergarten students through the process of Response To Intervention. This process allowed the researcher an opportunity to bracket any previously held biases and preconceptions. The researcher found that each journaling event was useful in providing time to reminiscence years of teaching experiences. It also served as a technique to remain focused on the purpose of the study and research questions which guided the study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described results of the experiences and perceptions of Kindergarten teachers who have retained students in Kindergarten through the responses of three interviews. According to Seidman (2006), Dolbeare and Schuman designed the series of three interviews that allows the interviewer and participant to reconstruct the details of their experience.

The first interview was identified as Focused Life History. This interview required the participant to tell as much as possible about themselves in light of the topic up to present time. This interview served as a strong relationship building activity and set the tone for all other

interviews. The participants responded well when discussing their biographies as teachers. Participants all shared their desire to become teachers at an early age. They described their perceptions of the rewards and challenges of teaching Kindergarten. They also gave their perception of how they define Developmental Appropriate Practices.

The second interview was identified as Details of the Experience. During this interview, the participants discussed a detailed description of their experiences with Kindergarten retention. Participants also gave more insight to their experiences with developmentally appropriate practices and working with Common Core State Standards. This interview began to provide specific details that initiated answers to the research questions. Participants elaborated on specific ways that they incorporate developmentally appropriate activities into their classrooms. They also described their experiences of teaching the Common Core State Standards by providing details of how the standards made their curriculum more rigorous and challenging.

The third and final interview was identified as Reflection of the Meaning. This interview included the final conclusion of interviews where the participant reflected on the previous statements in the interviews to gain an understanding or meaning of the phenomenon. Participants gave specific details of their experiences with retention, Developmentally Appropriate Practices, and Common Core State Standards. They reflected on specific standards that were not considered developmentally appropriate. Participants also reflected on individual experiences of retention and specific issues that caused the retention.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study explored the perceptions of Kindergarten teachers' experiences with retaining Kindergarten students and their perceptions of the developmentally appropriateness of the Common Core State Standards. This section of the study examined qualitative findings as they relate to the research questions and the literature previously discussed within this study. The data collected and analyzed for this study answered two research questions:

1. How do teachers describe their experiences with retaining Kindergarten students?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of Developmentally Appropriate Practices of Common Core State Standards as it relates to Kindergarten retention?

Three interviews revealed data that portrayed teachers' descriptions of retention and the developmentally appropriateness of Common Core State Standards. The interviews were divided into these three sections: Focused Life History, Details of the Experience, and Reflection of the Meaning.

Focused Life History Findings

Through the interview process, the researcher found commonalities among the histories of the participants. All participants knew at an early age that they wanted to be a teacher. In fact, none of the participants experienced a change in profession to become a teacher, as they all sought Education as their initial degree. The love of children and wanting to make a difference in their lives fueled their pursuance of teaching. Only one participant had the history of family members being Educators and guided their decision to become a teacher. The love of teaching

and love for their students that was displayed by participants portrayed that they have the students' best interest at heart.

The rewards of teaching Kindergarten were similar by being focused on mastery of the standards and a demonstrated growth throughout the year as their greatest reward. Two of the participants referred to Kindergarten students as "blank slates" and discussed the joys of observing the slates becoming full of knowledge. The term "blank slates" referred to students who have not attended preschool and have a lack of educational knowledge such as letters, numbers, etc. Learning to read was also mentioned as a great reward by participants. It was clear that watching students learn and being an active participant of this learning experience resulted in satisfaction of being a Kindergarten teacher. This satisfaction of being a teacher and striving to help students reach mastery of the standards demonstrates their willingness to help students succeed. The challenges of teaching Kindergarten also shared commonalities as teachers' main concern was reported as a lack of exposure. This supported the research by Duncan et al. (2007) who stated that children who arrive to Kindergarten with stronger cognitive, language, social, and behavioral skills have an easier time in the first few years of school, do better later in school, and are less likely to later repeat grades and/or drop out of school. Participants referred to this lack of exposure by the home lives experienced by their students.

The initial responses of Common Core descriptions by the participants were noted as rigorous, challenging, and demonstrating a "one-way" of teaching. Although teachers did not make a connection between the standards and retention in the first interview, their responses of Common Core State Standards supported the statement made by Okpala (2007) that there is evidence that increased demands on Kindergarten students have resulted in an increased number of students retained in Kindergarten. According to the previously discussed study conducted by

Gallant (2009), concerning the dilemma faced by Kindergarten classrooms and teachers, the study revealed major tension about student performance in Kindergarten. According to Gallant, teachers described Kindergarten as more academic in nature, placing increased emphasis on writing and reading instruction.

All participants hesitated for a moment when asked to define Developmentally Appropriate Practices. It was uncertain if that term was not frequently used since attending college, or if the participants were not confident providing their personal definition. However all participants, except for one who gave examples of how she uses Developmentally Appropriate Practices, gave a definition that included age appropriate activities or teaching students on their individual level. Cora's definition added the term independent as she stated, "I would say those things that are appropriate for their age level that they are ready to kind of do independently." The participants' responses backed the underpinnings of DAP guidelines of Copple and Bredekamp (2009) who stated that Developmentally Appropriate Practices requires teachers to teach lessons by meeting children where they are developmentally so that all teaching reflects on the child as a unique individual. Susan, who defined by examples, also supported the guidelines when she stated, "I think just providing them with visuals, manipulatives, different options to work through math and language, academic scenarios."

The first interview focused on the lived histories of each participant. It provided a common baseline of data for the researcher. It was established that all participants have a love of teaching, share commonalities among the rewards and challenges of teaching, share the challenging description of Common Core State Standards, and have an understanding of Developmentally Appropriate Practices.

Details of the Experience Findings

The purpose of the second interview was to inquire deeper into the details of the participants' experiences with retention and the developmentally appropriateness of Common Core State Standards. This section was coded into categories or nodes such as administration and parent reaction to retention, keeping up with student progress after retention, teacher reasons for retention, Developmentally Appropriate Practices teachers use within their classrooms, and the interview also began to delve into the participants' experiences with Developmentally Appropriate Practices found within the Common Core State Standards.

The participants did not report a great quantity of data concerning their administration's reaction to retention. Many participants simply replied that they were supportive of their decisions. They did report more information concerning the parents' reaction to retention. Some parents were supportive and knew that their child was struggling and could benefit from another year in Kindergarten. Some participants shared how some parents are in denial and do not feel that retention is necessary, but after they see progress the next year, they feel more comfortable regarding the decision of retention.

Participants' responses to keeping up with student progress after retention deemed uncomfortable feelings and emotions. The researcher sensed that participants had the desire to remain in contact with the student, but did not know how to complete this task without offending the new Kindergarten teacher. Abby's response, "I do ask questions to the current teacher that she has now but I try to not be too involved, but I do check on her nonchalantly" it justified her uncertainty of what is appropriate and what is not appropriate. Reasons for retention resulted in common justifications. Lack of maturity or not being developmentally ready was referenced by participants. This data supports Ball's (2007) discussion on how teachers believe that some

retained children are immature, especially when retention takes place in the primary grades. Cora responded concerning her reasons for retention as, “Some of it, in some cases, was just what I thought was immaturity, you know they just weren't ready to go on. They were struggling academically, but I didn't really feel like it was a learning problem, they just weren't ready.”

The second interview had similar responses as the first interview when inquired about the use of Developmentally Appropriate Practices. Participants appeared hesitant to answer the question as if they were concerned to not answer the question accurately. However, their responses continued to be in agreement with research. Manipulatives and play were mentioned. Abby frequently discussed manipulatives and once stated, “I also use manipulatives a lot with Kindergartners, so I think if I were to require them to do something without that manipulation, that would not be developmentally appropriate, but with the manipulation in my classroom, that is one good way that I use developmentally appropriate activities.” In regards to play, Cora specifically stated, “I try to use as much or incorporate as much play for the little ones. As rigorous as the standards are, it's kind of hard sometimes, but I try to fit it in where I can and make it fun for them.” Their understandings and usage of Developmentally Appropriate Practices coincided with the guidelines created by The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2009) which encouraged teachers to teach to the developmental level of learners.

The last question in the second interview was the beginning of bridging the participants’ perceptions of the developmental appropriateness of the Common Core State Standards. Using research previously stated in this study, according to the NAEYC (2015), some of the languages within only the Kindergarten English Language Arts standards are somewhat compatible with Developmentally Appropriate Practices and stated some children may require support from

adults. Abby's experience with the developmentally appropriateness of the standards was almost identical. Abby said, "I think Kindergarten developmentally appropriate standards are evident in our grade level. However as they move up, I think that a lot of the standards are not developmentally appropriate. But with Kindergarten level, as I mentioned before with prompting and support is with almost every standard, especially ELA. With Math, it includes manipulation, so I think Developmentally Appropriate Practices are evident in Kindergarten." The connection of thought processes or reflections between the NAEYC and Abby showed a correlation that demonstrates reality to Kindergarten teachers. As Goldstein's (2007) research project showed that teachers who were taught how to teach using Developmentally Appropriate Practices found ways to incorporate these opportunities, Abby and the NAEYC found a way to incorporate these practices in Kindergarten while adhering to the Common Core State Standards.

Reflection of the Meaning Findings

The third and final interview sought to discover the participants' reflection of the meaning of their experiences retaining students in Kindergarten and discovered their perceptions of Developmentally Appropriate Practices in the Common Core State Standards as it related to Kindergarten retention. This section also discussed how the responses of the participants connected with the study's theoretical framework on the development of young children and critical theory. This relationship was shown through asking the participants questions regarding their concerns about retention, the strengths and concerns with regard to Developmentally Appropriate Practices found in Common Core State Standards, and if retention was due to these standards.

Concerns about retention contributed to a desire for a new style of grade levels. Abby expressed her desire of wanting a transitional first grade classroom due to her feeling that

retention leads to students being bored at the beginning of Kindergarten. She emphasized how students need more support in the standards taught towards the middle and end of the school year. This desire reinforced Mantzicopoulos' (2003) study in a school district that did not practice Kindergarten retention; rather, students who were deemed not ready for the demands of first grade were placed in a developmental first grade program. The study found that the transition classrooms were more developmentally appropriate than the comparison schools, emphasizing cooperation across grade levels, and the increased efforts to meet individual children's varying learning styles, interests, and ability levels. This type of classroom setting needs to be addressed for students who narrowly fail to meet promotion requirements.

In order to have received a more in-depth response to the strengths and weaknesses of Developmentally Appropriate Practices in the Common Core State Standards, the researcher should have asked this question as a separate entity. Only one participant referenced the use of prompting and support as a strength. Three of the participants did not comment with a strength but only reported their concerns. The concerns of the participants reverted back to Papola-Ellis (2014) when he used a cascades metaphor to describe the impact of policies and initiatives, like CCSS, on individuals within the school setting. He discussed how the formation and implementation of educational policy within our schools can be much like a waterfall, or a policy cascade. He described that this policy cascade occurs when teachers adopt the actions and ideology demonstrated by others above them in the hierarchical structure of the school system which results in the erosion of their own professional knowledge. The concern of how the State mandates testing portrayed this type of cascade. Participants were very concerned that this type of assessment leads to instruction that is not developmentally appropriate.

Theoretical Connections

The concern of testing highlighted the components of critical theory as it discussed the prevailing views of society. Apple (1988) pointed out how plans of teaching are predetermined and teachers are reduced to the level of practitioner; these keep teachers under control. Susan supported this theory when she stated, ""I feel like developmentally appropriate practices – we make adaptions in class help, but when we come to testing we are hindering because we are testing in a common form but we are adapting to children's individual needs and making things developmentally appropriate for the individual, therefore, we are not assessing the way we are teaching sometimes." Apple (1988) also discussed how the government and state officials are deskilling teachers by subjecting them to outside control and reducing them to the enforcers of decisions. Susan elaborated even more on the topic of testing, "The State is pushing to go to common assessment which can be good and negative, I feel that some of it is not developmentally appropriate in Kindergarten because of their learning to read and write, and so if a child cannot read and write, it is hard to assess math on a standardized test if they are unable to read it for themselves, independently." This also supported Crawford (2004) when he stated that primary grade teachers often find themselves torn between contradictory frameworks for practice, caught in the crosswinds of early childhood philosophy, and the mandates of formalized schooling.

According to Gallant (2009), teachers described Kindergarten as more academic in nature, placing increased emphasis on writing and reading instruction. Kindergarten teachers reported an increased focus on accountability, rigorous state standards, and high-stakes testing. Elkind (1989) discussed these decreased opportunities as he referenced a hurried curriculum. Cora's comment mirrored Elkind's work when she stated, "I don't think they [CCSS] are developmentally appropriate, most of them. I feel like everything has been pushed down onto

these little ones and it's hard for them and I think that is one reason why we keep retaining kids, because they are just not ready." Abby also gave a specific example of a test that teachers are required to administer and discusses how this expectation is not developmentally appropriate when she stated, "The DIBELS test does hit the standards for Kindergarten; however, timing is added into the DIBELS which is not anywhere stated in the Kindergarten standards that timing is a consideration for mastering the standards. These comments also supported the developmental framework of Piaget. Jenle referenced a specific Common Core State Standard that she feels is inappropriate for young children who are in Piaget's preoperational stage. Jenle stated, "Some of the Common Core Standards are too difficult for Kindergarten, for this age. For example, rhyming, a lot of the children don't get it to the end of the year or some of them do not get it in Kindergarten period." Concepts such as rhyming would go against Piaget's theory that children at this age can only think based on concrete rather than abstract.

Data from this study also supported Vygotsky's idea of scaffolding. Abby stated, "I feel that for ELA, everything is with prompting and support. We are allowed to scaffold and assist a lot per the standards. In math, students are given manipulatives and visual clues to help them reach their level. So, it's differentiated and the standard states giving them opportunities to use manipulation to accomplish the task that is asked." It is evident that teachers strive to utilize developmentally appropriate activities to compensate for the demands that are placed upon them from other capacities. The scaffolding and assisting that Abby referenced, coincides with one assumption made by Vygotsky. His assumption that children can perform more challenging tasks when assisted by more advanced individuals played true as teachers shared how support with manipulatives and differentiated tasks helped allow students to master the Common Core State Standards.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of teachers who have retained Kindergarten students. It also examined teachers' experiences of the Common Core State Standards in regards to the developmentally appropriateness for Kindergarten students. After conducting this examination, it was evident that there are many opportunities for future research. Limitations of the study were also presented in this section. The researcher decided that the limitations within the study would be beneficial if shared with the recommendations in hopes to strengthen future research. This section of research also included the method of bracketing or using epoche to yield biases.

The conclusion of the interviews began unraveling debatable concepts within the Kindergarten promotion rubric. Participants reported that Kindergarten report cards contained a section on behavior and social skills but the promotion rubric focused only on the mastery of standards. Piaget and Vygotsky, to only name a few, spent numerous years studying the developmental stages of young children. As Kindergarten is a crucial introductory year for children, this study could be the foundation of future research to determine the need for promotion to be averaged by including additional components. It was evident that promotion requirements were weighed solely on mastery of standards. Participants voiced concerns regarding the common assessment requirements from the State and how the assessments were not developmentally appropriate with assessing the standards. Future research to find ways to balance assessments may prevent this initiative from the State and may provide support for teachers as they battle the position of being an advocate for their students' individual needs. Participants also shared the need for a transitional classroom. Future research may be conducted to determine how transitional classrooms may provide student support. This may prevent

students from having to participate in early curriculum and prevent the participants' concerns of boredom at the beginning of the school year.

Limitations of the study mostly derived from the selection of participants. Participants were selected for this study using purposeful sampling in order to identify participants with certain characteristics. The data in this study was primarily derived from four out of eight possible participants. According to Englander (2012), it was the researcher's responsibility to select participants who report having had a specific experience of the phenomenon. The qualifications of having to have retained more than two students did contribute to only four qualifying participants. Although only four participants contributed, one interview question focused on their colleagues' experiences with retention. This question provided insight to the experiences of others and beyond the experiences of only four participants. The responses from the participants revealed that retention is a conversed topic among all teachers and those teachers relied on each other's feedback when making the decision to retain.

The researcher believed that recording the interviews contributed to anxiety among participants and created a form of limitation or barrier. All participants commented on how nervous the tape recorder made them feel and the researcher contributed the shortened length of responses to recording the participants. Once the recorder was turned off, the participants began talking more freely about the standards and their experiences with retention. The researcher used this opportunity to encourage participants to provide the information during the interview but found that turning on the recorder always resulted in feelings of nervousness and rapid responses. This type of environment prevented participants from elaborating and providing the study with a greater amount of specific examples of standards. The researcher recommended

that participants were given the questions to review before the interview took place. This could have helped strengthen responses and provided more insight.

According to Moustakas (1994), epoche is a process that the researcher should engage in before conducting the interview, so that any past associations or biases may not color the interview. The epoche occurred throughout the research process. Before each interview, the researcher journaled (Appendix E) thoughts and feelings in an attempt to bracket all previously held biases and preconceptions. Although bias may occur even when bracketing takes place, the researcher found this process to be refreshing and an important part of each interview's preparation process.

Conclusion

The data from this study helped to answer the research questions, "How do teachers describe their experiences with retaining Kindergarten students?" and "What are teachers' perceptions of Developmental Appropriate Practices of Common Core State Standards as it relates to Kindergarten retention?" It was evident that mastery of Kindergarten standards is the primary criteria for promotion. Behavior and social skills were ranked on report cards throughout the school year, but played no role in achieving promotion. The promotion rubric that is required for advancement does not include any other concepts besides mastering the standards.

This study revealed concerns of teachers who feel that they are required to assess young children in ways that infringe on Piaget and Vygotsky's theories of development. Teachers commonly used the phrase when describing students who were retained as, "they just were not ready". These comments led to the discussions of immaturity and lack of being developmentally prepared to advance to the next grade level. Specific standards were addressed when discussing

the developmentally appropriateness of the standards. Teachers did not feel that students were ready to learn sight words, rhyming words, and were not ready to be timed on completion of a task.

Critical theory questions how our educational system can best offer education to all children. Teachers remained to have the freedom to use Developmentally Appropriate Practices within their classroom when teaching the Common Core State Standards but were required to use assessments that did not always incorporate tasks which were developmentally appropriate. The concerns of mandated assessments exhibited the control that was referenced by critical theorists such as Michael Apple. Apple (1988) referred to this process as deskilling of teachers. This process involved teachers finding themselves more subjected to outside control and often reduced to enforcers of decisions that are made by government and state officials. Participant responses did reflect these feelings of control and expressed the difficulty of creating a comfortable balance between their personal feelings of appropriate instruction verses the mandated requirements of the system.

This chapter has provided a discussion of the findings and recommendations for future research, which included limitations and bracketing. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of teachers who have retained Kindergarten students. It also examined teachers' perceptions of the developmental appropriateness of the Common Core State Standards as it related to Kindergarten retention. It was the researcher's objective that teachers connect with the experiences from the participants within this study and use the data to discover ways to find a balance that support their love for children and strengthen their desire to help them grow as learners.

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Appendix A

Dear Colleague, March 8, 2016

I would like to extend an invitation requesting your participation in a proposed study as I am pursing my Doctorate in Education at Georgia Southern University. This study will not begin until approval is received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). However, I would like to pursue a request of response to participate and gather background information that will help me prepare data for the IRB process.

The study is entitled, "A Phenomenological Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Kindergarten Retention: Are Standards to Be Blamed?" This study will focus on lived experiences of Kindergarten teachers who have experienced retaining students. It will consist of approximately three interviews that will each last no longer than one hour. I will schedule the interviews with you around a convenient time and place that best meets your needs. Confidentiality of the interviews and data from this study will be guaranteed through assignment of a pseudonym as an alternative of disclosing your identity. Eligibility to participate in this project requires the experience of teaching Kindergarten and the experience of retaining more than two students.

Please respond to this request by March 13, 2016. If you would like to participate, please include in your response the number of years of teaching experience and grade levels taught.

I greatly appreciate your consideration of participation and look forward to hearing from you soon. If you have any questions, please contact me. Thanks again!

Sincerely,

Ginger DeLaigle

Name:_____

Years of Experience: _____

Grade Levels Taught:_____

Retained more than two students in Kindergarten: _____ YES _____ NO

_____ I would like to participate in your study. I am eligible and meet the requirements of your study.

_____ I am not able to participate in your study at this time due to not being eligible and meeting the requirements of your study or for personal reasons.

Appendix B

Interview Questions for First Interview

(Focused Life History)

1. Why did you want to become a teacher?
2. Do you have other educators in your family?
3. How many years have you taught Kindergarten?
4. What are some of the rewards you feel are a part of teaching in early childhood?
5. What are some of the challenges you feel are a part of teaching in early childhood?
6. Have you ever retained a student in Kindergarten?
7. Approximately how many students have you retained?
8. How would you define developmentally appropriate practices?
9. How would you describe using the Common Core State Standards?

Tentative Questions for Second Interview

(Details of the Experience)

1. Can you describe an experience in detail of when you retained a student?
    a. How did the parents respond?
    b. How did the school administration react?
    c. What factors led to your retention decision?
    d. Do you keep up with the student's progress after they have been retained?
    e. How are the students moving through their school years?
2. Can you describe how you use developmentally appropriate practices within your classroom?
3. What are your thoughts concerning the developmental appropriateness of the Common Core State Standards?

Tentative Questions for Third Interview

(Reflection on the Meaning)

1. Do you ever feel if you made the "appropriate" decision to retain a child in Kindergarten?

2. Have parents ever called to discuss their child after they have been retained?

3. How do your colleagues describe their experiences retaining a Kindergarten student or their positions about retaining and their experiences?

4. From your perspective, what factors caused the retention of the students in which you retained?

5. How do you feel that the use of developmentally appropriate practices helped or hindered the child's progress throughout the year?

6. Are there any specific examples of strengths or concerns of the developmental appropriateness of the Common Core State Standards?

7. Would you have retained the student if the standards were not imposed?

8. Do you feel that the standards play the biggest role in retention?

9. Does your promotion rubric include any other components than standards such as social skills or behavior?

Appendix C

Georgia Southern University
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Phone: 912-478-0843
Fax: 912-478-0719
IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu
Veazey Hall 2021
P.O. Box 8005
Statesboro, GA 30460

To:	Mary (Ginger) DeLaigle
From:	Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees (IACUC/IBC/IRB)
Initial Approval Date:	03/15/2016
Expiration Date:	02/28/2017
Subject:	Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research – **Expedited**

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H16326** and titled **"A Phenomenological Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Kindergarten Retention: Are Standards to be Blamed?"** it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to a maximum of **8** subjects.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research. Description: **The purpose of this research is to examine the live experience of teachers who have retained Kindergarten students.**

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period. Total project approval on this application may not exceed 36 months. If additional time is required, a new application may be submitted for continuing work. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

Appendix D

Dear Participant, March 31, 2016

Your participation and willingness to share your experience with Kindergarten retention has been valuable and much appreciated. As a final request, I would like for you to read the transcripts from our interviews to verify accuracy. If you find any discrepancies, please notify me immediately. Thank you again for your participation.

Ginger DeLaigle

_____ I have read the transcripts from each interview and verify the accuracy of the documents.

_____ I have read the transcripts and have discrepancies with the accuracy of the documents.

Please sign below with your assigned pseudonym:

_____

Appendix E

Epoche/Bracketing Journaling

March 20, 2016:

As I begin the journey tomorrow of my first interview for this study, I am excited and yet anxious because I want this study to be as credible as possible. Preparing for the interview made me begin to bracket some of my personal feelings and emotions concerning retention and it also has made me think about the research that I have already studied as I have traveled this journey.

I was a classroom teacher for eleven years. I taught five years in first grade and six years in second grade. I have been out of the classroom for six years. I exited the classroom as an Instructional Coach and now serve as the Teaching and Learning Specialist for the district. I specialize in the Response to Intervention (RTI) process and I work closely with all teachers from each grade level. As a classroom teacher, I did not retain any students. Looking back, it is not that I did not have students who struggled, but it seems that they achieved more of the standards that they seem master today. Of course some students performed poorly than others, but the difference between proficiency levels never seemed to warrant retention.

As I work closely with teachers with RTI, I definitely see a greater difference among students concerning proficiency levels. Stronger students seem to do a better job of keeping up with the standards, but weaker students have great gaps that are evident compared with peers. I feel that this lapse of being out of the classroom for several years will allow me to become more open to reasons of retention. I question if I would have had to retain students since the rigorous curriculum of the CCSS. The research has also reminded me of the factors such as poverty and maturity levels also play a role in retention. As the leader of RTI, I often ask the question of their birthdates and other factors that cause lower maturity levels.

I am exciting to begin this journey of interviewing and discovering my participants' experiences with retention. Although I have no personal experience of retaining a student, I do have the experience of deciding if a student will be retained through an intervention process. I have experienced the uncertainties that accompany making that decision. These thoughts and knowledge of my experiences will be placed aside as I take on a clear picture while discovering the journeys of others. I must remain open and their experiences must take precedence and be factual data within this study.

March 23, 2016:

Overall, I believe that the first interview went really well. I was extremely nervous during the first interview but it became easier with the other interviews. I think it was the tape recorder more than anything that made me nervous.

After completing the first interview and beginning the second, I immediately began to see similarities between the interviews and then some differences began to emerge. The first similarity between the interviews was that participants feel that the lack of exposure plays an important role in the challenge of teaching in early childhood. They also felt that it was a struggle to teach them the "simple" concepts of tying shoes, and picking up lunch trays.

In some ways, I think the question about their views of what deems as developmental appropriate threw them off and I think it was because they struggled to define the concept of developmental appropriate. I could see their wheels turning in their heads to define this and remembered how I had to do a lot of research to really interpret or grasp the concept of developmental appropriate.

One thing that shocked me some participants shared that they liked the Common Core State Standards. I really thought that they would say they disliked them and had issues with teaching the standards to Kindergarten students.

I look forward to finding out how their personal experiences with retention and if they feel that the standards are developmentally appropriate.

March 25, 2016

The second interviews went very smooth. I struggled to keep my mouth closed and not ask them to elaborate or begin conversation about their responses. I had to keep reminding myself to stick to asking the questions.

It was very interesting to hear their personal experiences with retention and how parents and administrators reacted to the retentions. The concerns of parents did not surprise me because I have dealt with parents in RTI and their concerns of their children not being up to par with their classmates. I have heard several parents express their concerns of the affect it would have on their children if they were held back and saw their classmates leave them behind. The lack of concern within administration did not surprise me. Most participants described them as not so much being supportive but really as trusting their decisions to retain their students. I have experienced the administrators placing trust in the teachers and in the promotion rubrics that are put in place by our board policy.

The reasons for retention concentrated mostly on the participants' belief that the student was simply not ready for first grade. They either reported lack of maturity or lack of mastering the standards as being their reasons for retention. When I asked them if they kept up with their student's progress, I could see their dedication to their former students and their desire to make sure that they made the right decision in retaining them. When I asked them to talk about the

progress of students, they often referred to RTI taking place for those few who have not made progress. As the leader of RTI for my district, this always notifies me that testing will most likely occur when students do not make adequate progress after retention.

I still feel that the developmentally appropriate questions are causing the participants to stumble with their responses. I do not know if they are just unsure of what exactly developmentally appropriate practices entails or if they do not quite understand if they are really incorporating these practices accurately.

I was really surprised when the participants responded that they felt the CCSS were developmentally appropriate. Only one participant expressed her concern about the standards not being developmentally appropriate. She even commented that she feels that the standards are causing retention.

I look forward to completing the final interview in hopes to finalize the process of determining their experiences and gaining meaning from their experiences that I can share with others.