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### Evaluating Teacher Experiences and Expectations in Pre K-6th Grade Classrooms

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# Understanding Teachers' Expectations and Experiences in Preschool Through 6th Grade Classrooms

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## Introduction

- Elementary school educators are responsible for helping children learn important competencies, with academic and social intelligences being two of the most vital skills for children to be able to gain from their teachers' instruction (Bleses, 2018).

- The environment teachers facilitate in their classroom becomes a social system with complex interactions between students and teachers, causing learning to be connected to factors that extend beyond cognitive ability and curriculum (Alsubaie, 2016).

- Having a foundation of developmental theory fosters stronger connections and a better understanding of students' behaviors in relation to learning new skills and encountering challenges (Davies, 2019).

- In existing research there is a gap in our knowledge of how to support children developmentally while at the same time ensuring that reach the accelerating standard that has been set.

- This study aims to understand the perspective of teachers by evaluating their expectations of children and their experiences in the field in order to gain a better sense of what resources and skills a teacher needs in order to best support their students.

## Participants and Procedures

- 54 (88.9% female, 9.3% male, and 1.9% preferred not to answer) teachers varying in years of teaching experiences were surveyed on their developmental beliefs and expectations of children in early, middle, and later childhood through motor, cognitive, and socioemotional domains of development.

- Of the 54 participants, 24.1% taught Early Childhood (preschool-kindergarten), 25.9% taught Middle Childhood (1st-3rd grade), 27.8% taught Later Childhood (4th-6th grade) and 22.2% taught multiple age levels.

- 8 out of the 54 teachers had agreed to be interviewed on Zoom regarding their experience in the classroom.

## Qualitative Results

### Theme 1: Curriculum as a Barrier to Students' Achievement

*"What's good for this child doesn't mean it's good for this child and our role as teachers is to figure out how to balance that like how do we hold them all accountable and have them all working but give them what's best for them."*

- White Female 1st Grade Teacher, 55 years old

### Theme 2: Lack of Support from School Administration

*"They're kind of throwing that socio-emotional stuff at us and it's great, but it's also don't forget to push the academics, don't forget to look at your data. Don't forget to, you know, also be a mom to your kids, don't forget to be the doctor to the kids, you know... And that's okay I mean that's our role as their teachers... but at the same point there's also only six hours in the day."*

- White Female 4th-6th Grade Teacher, 33 years old

### Theme 3: Negative Implications for Future Development

*"When children are in kindergarten and aren't reading it's not the end of the world. They might end up being our top readers in third grade. It's just that developmentally they're not there yet... And now we have a child who's wondering, am I smart?"*

- White Female 1st Grade Teacher, 55 years old

### Theme 4: Effects of the Pandemic

*"It definitely has a negative impact on all of our children. You know they're fearful now. I'm hoping because they're young and we say children are resilient... But what will be that impact for four year olds that are being told you can't share, you can't hug your friend if they're feeling sad. I hope with all my heart that when we can get back to hugging."*

- White Female Kindergarten Teacher, 52 years old

### Theme 5: Importance of Facilitating Bonds with Students

*"And I realized that when children suffer, the cognitive development stops. My insistence on putting social emotional learning to the side for academics wasn't serving any purpose at all and I learned that I had to address the whole child. So now, for sure I include social emotional activities into my day. You have to be able to form that relationship with students."*

- White Male 5th Grade Teacher, 80 years old

## Quantitative Results

- In regards to cognitive development for early childhood-aged children, later ( $M=16.83$ ,  $SD=4.64$ ) childhood educators were concluded to have statistically lower expectations compared to that of early ( $M=22.23$ ,  $SD=3.09$ ) and middle ( $M=21.50$ ,  $SD=3.13$ ) childhood educators ( $F_{LCogEC}(3, 53)=7.39$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

- Then for socioemotional development for early childhood-aged children, later ( $M=19.73$ ,  $SD=2.96$ ) childhood educators were also concluded to have statistically lower expectations compared to that of early ( $M=23.15$ ,  $SD=2.76$ ) and middle ( $M=23.00$ ,  $SD=1.88$ ) childhood educators ( $F_{LCSEEC}(3, 53)=6.49$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

## Discussion

- The results of our survey offered evidence that teachers teaching higher grades have significantly different expectations for children in lower grades compared to teachers teaching towards that level, potentially due to the lack of experience higher level teachers have teaching other grade levels.

- Through our interviews we found that many teachers have shared frustrations about the curriculum and the expectations for their students being too developmentally advanced.

- There was also an emphasis on the importance of forming strong relationships with their students, especially during the pandemic, in order to foster feelings of safety and understanding

- Limitations: Data was mainly collected from white teachers from urban schools → Future directions may include more diverse populations along with administrators, peers, and parents who are important figures in the literature for child development

- These findings offer important implications for the future of school systems and curriculums to implement more socioemotional focuses for students to establish trust with their teachers which can foster more effective teaching.