LEGISLATIVE REPORT

SUBJECT: Report on the two-tiered Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten Program

REFERENCE: Act 219, Twenty Second Legislature, 2004

ACTION REQUESTED: The Department shall submit findings and recommendations to the legislature regarding the implementation of the two-tier junior kindergarten program no later than twenty days prior to the regular session for 2005, 2006 and 2007.

DOE REPORT: See Attachment
INTRODUCTION

The Department is implementing the second of a three-year plan which will establish a junior kindergarten program in all elementary schools by the Fall of 2006. The first year, 2004-05, involved planning and a study of junior kindergarten initiated in two elementary schools. This field study report provides findings and recommendations that reflect best practices for kindergarten. It provides guidance and concrete descriptions of what best practice looks like in the classroom and identifies some of the challenges and professional development needs of teachers. There is limited documentation on full-day kindergarten in Hawaii, which makes this report value-added to the Department and the general community. See Attachment.

During this second year, 37 schools volunteered as pilot sites for Act 219. The schools reflect a range of demographic characteristics and represent all islands and 14 complexes. The principal and kindergarten teachers participated in three all-day trainings, which focused on child development, how children learn and early literacy. Resources were shared with schools as well as tools such as a brochure, accompanying parent letter and a power point presentation for general audiences.

A formative evaluation report is in the process of being conducted by the Hawaii Educational Policy Center to determine the effectiveness of the pilot as well as providing baseline information for a future longitudinal study.

FINDINGS

- Best practices as described by professional literature are occurring in classrooms.
- Teachers are receptive and request new and additional information on the young child.
- Smaller class size has been the most prominent request from teachers.
- Student outcomes in the field study schools showed variation in progress among children in both junior kindergarten and kindergarten classes and among both early and late born children. Average progress also varied by classroom.
- Teacher experience and knowledge of child development and growth appear to be significant factors for student progress.
- High-risk students with no preschool experiences require additional early childhood preparation for teachers and administrators.
- Pilot sites were limited in their efforts to implement changes with no additional resources, i.e., additional staffing and funds.
• Teachers use a variety of assessment tools and may benefit from more in-depth understanding on the purpose of the instrument, what the data says, how it should be used and how to explain this information to parents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Utilize the field study report so there is immediate and intentional efforts statewide to guide teachers towards best practices in their classroom.

• Recognize and invest in available resources and tools such as the Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment (HSSRA), the Hawaii Developmental Domain Checklists, Four-Year-Old Content Standards, and the Family and Community Guidelines, by providing the necessary training statewide to maximize its impact for instruction.

• Provide the resources necessary to implement quality early education:
  • adequately trained personnel, i.e., administrators and teachers
  • appropriate and research-based curriculum and instructional materials
  • planning time
  • an appropriate learning environment

• Provide opportunities to expand early childhood expertise among elementary teachers by supporting mentoring, early childhood endorsement programs, teacher certification in early childhood, partnership with teacher training institutions and community resources so we can build capacity within our education system.

• Work in collaboration with the private sector, i.e., Hawaii Association for Independent Schools, Kamehameha Schools, etc., and other public agencies and professional organizations such as the Hawaii Association for the Education of Young Children (HAEYC) to expand our knowledge of full-day kindergarten in Hawaii through research and forums to impact statewide improvement for young learners.

• Ensure that Act 219 is integrated and/or is part of early childhood initiatives occurring statewide so there is systemwide impact on improving early education.

• Support school level programs and initiatives such as summer academies, transition programs, the Primary School Adjustment Project (PSAP) and parent trainings on child development and parents as first teachers so there is a wide range of support throughout the school year and by various stakeholders.
ATTACHMENT

BEST PRACTICES FOR HAWAII’S JR. KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

A Field Study of Kindergarten Practices At Two Elementary Schools in SY 2004-05

June 2005

by

Kathleen Reinhardt

Early Childhood Consultant

Prepared for Hawaii Department of Education, OCISS-SSSB Student Support Section
Acknowledgements

The author would like to recognize and acknowledge the teachers and principals at Kamaile Elementary and Leihoku Elementary Schools, and the other Department of Education personnel whose cooperation, contributions and dedication to providing appropriate and effective programs for Hawaii’s youngest school children made it possible to complete this field study and report.

Lisa Asano, Teacher, Kamaile Elementary School
Paul Ban, Director, Student Support Services Branch
Dr. Mary (Betsy) Brandt, Evaluation Specialist, Evaluation Section
Mamo Carreira, Complex Area Superintendent, Leeward District
Patricia Childs, Teacher, Leihoku Elementary School
Joyce Kato, School Renewal Specialist, Waianae Complex
Glenn Kila, Principal, Kamaile Elementary School
Roberta Kim, State Resource Teacher, Jr. Kindergarten
Valerie Lee, Teacher, Kamaile Elementary School
Becky Lupski, Teacher, Kamaile Elementary School
Randall Miura, Principal, Leihoku Elementary School
Amy Ng, Educational Specialist, Student Support Section
Kim Noveloso, Literacy Resource Teacher, Waianae Complex
Lani Oshiro, Teacher, Leihoku Elementary School
Cathy Petroski, Teacher, Kamaile Elementary School
Noreen Pine, Teacher, Kamaile Elementary School
Steve Shiraki, Administrator, Student Support Section
Christine Wagner, Teacher, Leihoku Elementary School
Mylabeth Williams, Leihoku Elementary School
Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1

Introduction 13

Assessment 21

Learning Environment 30

Curriculum and Instruction 41

Professional Development 58

Parent and Family Involvement 63

Topics for Further Exploration 67

References 69

Appendices 73
Foreward

The author expresses her deep gratitude to the teachers and the children in the Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms, and to the principals and other staff members at the field study schools for their assistance and welcoming cooperation in the activities related to this field study and report. Every teacher kindly accepted full-day visits to her classroom that allowed the author opportunities to collect dynamic examples of kindergarten practices in operation. All teachers took extra time to answer questions, explain their classroom programs, and share ideas, while maintaining their hectic schedules of end-of-quarter activities. The children in these schools provided wonderful examples of the active, enthusiastic, energetic young learners that kindergartners are! Busy principals gave extended interviews, discussed school goals and policies, and expressed thoughtful insights about the Jr. Kindergarten efforts that were undertaken this year. Department of Education personnel from the district and state offices provided materials, positive guidance and assistance to the author throughout this project. This report attempts to capture the strong commitment of all these participants to contribute positive ideas and methods that will support the success of Hawaii’s youngest children when they enter school.

About the Author

Kathleen Reinhardt is a consultant specializing in early childhood program quality improvement and early childhood data. Kathleen has provided data research and analysis for initiatives and publications of the Good Beginnings Alliance, and data on early childhood and Native Hawaiians for Ho’owaiwai Na Kamali’i. She has authored several Children’s Budget Project publications, was a co-developer of Hawaii’s Preschool Open Doors Project for the Governor’s Office of Children and Youth, and has been a preschool director and a teacher of preschool and elementary grades. Kathleen earned a BA degree from Stanford University and an M Ed in Elementary Education from the University of Hawaii.

Kathleen Reinhardt may be reached at 5412 Poola Street, Honolulu, HI 96821.

E-mail: kathier808@aol.com
Executive Summary

Description of Project
The Department of Education contracted with an early childhood consultant in February 2005 to study two elementary schools implementing a Jr. Kindergarten model and report findings and recommendations that reflect best practices for kindergarten.

Best Practices. The author consulted references from current literature on quality kindergarten and early childhood education to identify best practices.

Findings. Findings describe practices observed at field study schools to identify, confirm and reveal what is actually happening in these Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms.

Recommendations. Information about recommended practices is intended to be useful to the pilot sites implementing Jr. Kindergarten programs in SY 2005-06.

Assessment

Best Practices

- A variety of assessment methods, including checklists, teacher observations, and other informal methods are used to appraise children’s current understandings and plan individualized instruction.

- Assessment is systematic, on-going, performance-based, and draws on the teacher’s knowledge of child development and learning.

- Informal assessments are closely related to classroom instruction and learning goals.

- Teachers use both formal and informal assessments, including early learning readiness measures, to understand what children know and can do, plan appropriate instruction, assess effectiveness of instruction and make adjustments as needed.

- Assessments address well-defined, comprehensive learning goals and standards that are important for young children.

- Assessments are related to a series of developmental and knowledge benchmarks that provide information about children’s progress.

- “High stakes” decisions about enrollment, placement, or special services are based on multiple forms of evidence, not on results of a single test.

Findings

What teachers used at field study schools

- Informal measures including checklists, running records, observations, samples of children’s work, teacher-student conferences and teacher-designed tasks (including “game-like” tasks) are used throughout the school year to assess children’s knowledge and skills and plan instruction to address the needs of individual students.
Checklists align with Hawaii Kindergarten benchmarks.

- Initial assessments included informal and formal measures.
- Teacher observations and checklists are used for quarterly progress assessments.
- Formal measures used at the beginning and periodically throughout the school year included:
  - Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA): Measures important early literacy skills in naturalistic setting, used at intervals to track progress.
  - Phelps Kindergarten Readiness Scale: Teachers found this useful, indicating a need for attention to developmental areas not addressed by typical checklists.
  - Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment (HSSRA): Teachers needed more information about potential uses in classroom planning at beginning of the year.
  - Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS): Used to assess and track phonemic awareness skills, kindergarten benchmarks. Avoid overuse; a better alternative is to assess these skills in classroom activity contexts.

**Student outcomes are varied.**

Student outcomes in literacy as assessed by the DRA show considerable variation in progress among children in both Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten classes, and among both early- and late-born children. Average progress also varied by classroom.

**Recommendations for Assessment**

1. Provide information to teachers of young children about:
   - the purposes of assessments,
   - criteria for selection of assessment instruments,
   - understanding and assessing all aspects of young children’s development,
   - administration, interpretation and use of data for any standardized assessment to be used, and
   - cautions and concerns about “high stakes” testing.

2. Discuss kindergarten teacher’s concerns about the reliability of teacher observations and professional judgment in relation to “subjectivity” of data.

3. Identify what teachers need and want to know about children and appropriate tools for obtaining this information.

4. Ensure that results of any assessment can be explained and understood by parents, and provide additional information to help teachers communicate results.

5. Help teachers develop skill in using assessment information for planning.

6. Provide additional preparation for use of the Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment (HSSRA), including:
   - how teachers can use the HSSRA and the value of their professional knowledge of children, and
   - information about “ready schools” for principals.
Learning Environment

**Best Practices**

- Class size and adult-child ratio for 4 and 5 year-olds is 20:2; for 6-8 year olds: 15:1.
- Classrooms function as a caring community of learners.
- Teacher-child relationships are positive and consistent; teachers are socially warm and responsive and their interactions support children’s learning and development.
- A well-organized classroom and orderly routines provide a structure for learning.
- There is a balanced schedule of:
  - large-group, small-group, and independent activities,
  - teacher-directed and child-initiated activities,
  - independent and guided activities, and
  - active and quiet activities.
- Research-based guidelines and rating scales are used to understand and implement high quality kindergarten programs.

**Findings**

**Reduced class size.** Reduced class size is considered to be a major contributor to the success of Jr. Kindergarten programs at field study sites.
- Schools attempted to keep class size in the 15-17 student range.
- Jr. Kindergarten teachers found ways to include additional adults in the classroom through use of student teachers, para-professional teachers, special services teachers (e.g. ESL) and volunteers.

**Classroom community.** Field study teachers intentionally build classroom community when they:
- emphasize children’s shared responsibility for group learning,
- treat students as a “family,”
- help children learn cultural and school values,
- develop meaningful classroom rules,
- establish activities and routines that support positive relationships among students,
- provide opportunities for children to assume responsibilities.

**Positive teacher-child interactions.** Positive teacher-child interactions are an essential component of high-quality early childhood programs and successful learning environments. Teachers in field study classrooms:
- build positive teacher-child relationships and classroom climate through warm,
responsive interactions with children, by communicating in a natural and genuine manner, by conveying positive expectations and encouragement during instruction, through sensitively adjusting activities in response to children’s needs, and by maximizing opportunities to interact with individual children; and

- demonstrate effective classroom management and discipline that is caring and tailored to individual needs when they use preventive techniques and anticipate possible problems, give clear and specific directions, provide many opportunities for children to respond actively, recognize positive behavior, and provide focused but inconspicuous guidance to children whose behavior is “out-of-line.”

Classroom routines. Field study kindergartens pay particular attention to establishing classroom routines and children’s self-management skills. School reform models at both sites emphasize helping children “know what to do” through teaching specific behaviors for familiar routines and developing familiar structures for instructional activities, which help classrooms to run smoothly.

Balanced schedule of activities. Kindergarten classroom schedules can be analyzed in relation to best practice recommendations about “balancing” the types of instructional settings that children experience during each day, e.g. participation in whole group activities, small group activities, learning center activities, and classroom routines. Field study kindergartens were observed to provide considerable time for children’s independent work on assignments, with limited use of learning centers.

Recommendations for Learning Environments

1. Reduce class size and increase adult-child ratios.
   - Use additional adults in the classroom effectively so that:
     - increased adult to child ratios result in more adult-child interaction and enable use of recommended learning strategies (e.g. small group activities and learning centers), and
     - all adults in the classroom have effective roles interacting with children.
   - Allow adequate time for planning.

2. Maintain continuity to ensure that children experience classroom community.
   - Caution is advised when changing a child’s class assignment.
   - Classroom teachers collaborate and plan with special subject teachers and/or personnel from special service programs to ensure continuity of experiences for children.

3. Use small groups and learning centers.
   - Provide adequate time for small group and learning center work that actively engages children in direct experiences, self-initiated activities, and interactions with other students.
Executive Summary

- Independent work and practice can be effectively integrated into small group and learning center activities.
- Provide information and professional development that will assist kindergarten teachers in implementing small group and learning center activities, including information about room arrangement, learning materials, and management techniques.

4. Use quality rating scales such as the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEC), and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) when designing programs and monitoring quality.

Curriculum and Instruction

Best Practices

- Teachers use a wide repertoire of teaching strategies that are appropriate for the developmental levels and individual needs of children.
- Children’s early literacy development is a major focus for Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten curriculum and instruction.
  ◊ The curriculum provides a balance of systematic code instruction and meaningful connected reading experiences.
  ◊ Major goals are to help children develop early literacy skills and to motivate children to enjoy and learn from books and other forms of print.
- Teachers understand the role of play in children’s development and provide ample opportunities for children to learn through play.
- Teachers construct and adapt curriculum to address the different needs of the individual children in their classroom.

Findings

Academic programs. Research-based academic programs can support early literacy development in kindergarten. A successful academic program actively engages students, proceeds at a rate that permits children to master skills, uses instructional strategies geared to young children, focuses on success, includes home reading, and allows time for other types of kindergarten learning activities. Kindergarten classrooms demonstrated many characteristics of this type of successful academic program, but not all of the desired characteristics were observed during field study visits.

Importance of play. Play activities support cognitive, language, social, and creative development during the early childhood years. Kindergarten-age children are capable of
complex, elaborated, interactive play that supports the development of memory, self-regulation, distancing and decontextualization, oral language abilities, symbolic generalization, successful school adjustment, and better social skills. Examples of play activities and playful experiences were observed in field study classrooms, although the time provided for play was typically very brief.

Varied teaching strategies. Teaching strategies that support children’s learning in kindergarten include incidental teaching, thematic teaching, tactical teaching and direct teaching (Hatch 2005). Examples of all these strategies were observed in field study classrooms. Field study kindergarten teachers are particularly accomplished in using direct teaching strategies that include frequent interactions with individual children focused on learning literacy skills.

Hands-on mathematics. The mathematics curriculum materials used in field study kindergartens provide many opportunities for children to engage in hands-on, active learning.

Language arts instruction. A broad variety of instructional strategies are used in daily language arts instruction that addresses both children’s learning of formal literacy skills and provides opportunities for children to appreciate books as literature and as information sources. In field study Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms, children were observed to engage in numerous early literacy experiences that included:

- direct instruction on specific literacy skills as well as skills instruction presented in the context of reading and writing experiences,
- independent skills practice including hands-on activities and worksheets,
- child reading experiences (guided reading, partner reading, reading aloud to the class, and independent reading),
- teachers reading Big Books, children’s literature, and informational books to children and viewing videotapes of children’s literature, and
- daily independent writing and “author’s chair” activities.

Early literacy curriculum guide. Early literacy curriculum and instruction at field study sites appears to focus more on practices that will improve academic achievement skills than on presenting meaningful connected uses of literacy as proposed by the Hawaii Early Literacy Evaluation Guide.

Meeting individual and group needs. Teachers provide individualized instruction and adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of their classroom group. Teachers frequently provide one-on-one instruction and scaffold teaching to meet the needs of individual children in field study kindergarten classrooms. Individualized instruction is provided during times when children are working on independent assignments and in small group sessions. Teachers introduce specific activities that match the developmental needs of children, e.g. activities to develop fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination.
Recommendations for Curriculum and Instruction

1. Ensure that the Jr. Kindergarten curriculum addresses all areas of children's development and includes all content areas.

2. Broaden teachers' repertoire of teaching strategies by providing information about a variety of appropriate and effective kindergarten teaching practices.

3. Provide curriculum resources and materials that will help teachers to integrate content areas and use thematic teaching, e.g.
   • integrating language, literacy and mathematics instruction throughout the curriculum;
   • using themes related to field trips; and
   • developing projects that build on children's interests.

4. Involve children in socio-dramatic play experiences to develop thinking, oral language, literacy and social skills.

5. Focus the language and literacy program on practices recommended for young children.
   • Use the Hawaii Early Literacy Evaluation Guide,
   • Develop children’s oral language skills,
   • Provide multiple ways, including hands-on activities, for children to practice emerging literacy skills,
   • Adapt writing experiences so all children experience success, and
   • Follow research guidelines for kindergarten practices for phonological awareness, phonemic and phonics instruction and other aspects of early literacy.

Professional Development

Best Practices

• All school personnel have ample opportunities for professional development and training specific to early childhood programs.

• Teachers have preparation in child development and learning, family and community relationships, observing and assessing young children, teaching and learning, and professional practice.

• Principals use the evaluation guidelines provided by the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

• Kindergarten teachers are aware of and work toward accomplishment of high professional teaching standards for early childhood.

• Teachers and program administrators have specialized college-level course work in child development and early childhood education.
Findings

**Broad support for professional development.** Teachers and principals at field study schools, as well as district support personnel emphasize that professional development as critical in supporting the successful implementation of Jr. Kindergarten programs.

Professional preparation for implementing the Jr. Kindergarten program at field study sites was limited, and teachers’ individual experience working with young children is varied.

**Kindergarten teachers** expressed their strong support for receiving additional professional development experiences focused specifically on early childhood development and learning. Teachers also suggested:

- attention to the unique qualities and needs of kindergarten students in school-wide curriculum reform and other professional development activities,
- mentoring and classroom observations to help new kindergarten teachers,
- opportunities to attending national conferences such as “I Teach K,” and
- providing resources for teachers to enroll in degree-related early childhood courses.

**Principals recommended** professional development on early childhood practices for all staff in primary grades, other school personnel who work with young children, literacy and curriculum coaches and student support service coordinators. All of these school personnel influence the characteristics and quality of kindergarten programs at the school level. Principals noted that:

- master level teachers are needed for Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten,
- early childhood preparation is particularly important when teaching high-risk students without preschool experiences,
- teachers changing grade levels (e.g. in looping) need professional development,
- experienced teachers will benefit from experiences that help them to systematically organize their early childhood knowledge, and
- effective communication with parents is an important focal area.

**District personnel** involved with field study schools also recommended that professional development reach personnel in supporting roles at schools, as well as school and district management teams.

**How teachers learn.** Research and literature on professional development for teachers emphasizes that teachers learn from their own practice; through interactions other teachers and peer coaching; through implementing new practices with support and feedback; and through reflection to integrate new ideas with their background knowledge.

The Jr. Kindergarten field study brought teachers together within and across schools as a professional learning community. These experiences indicate the value of grade-level teaming for professional development among teachers at school and complex levels.
Recommendations for Professional Development

1. Utilize early childhood expertise of Department of Education personnel and others who have professional training in early childhood development and education.

2. Professional development designed to support successful implementation of the Jr. Kindergarten program would include:
   - child development,
   - characteristics of quality early childhood environments,
   - early childhood instructional strategies, teaching methods and classroom materials,
   - child assessment methods,
   - planning and adapting instruction and learning experiences for individual children,
   - effective teamwork between working together in classrooms, and
   - communicating with and involving parents.

3. Develop topic-focused workshops and distribute resource materials.

4. Use proven professional development methods including peer study groups, focused observations, workshops designed to include implementation and feedback, self-study materials, attending national and local conferences, and university course work.

5. Encourage schools to form kindergarten study teams for sharing information and ideas and supporting each other in implementing early childhood best practices.

6. Consider developing a resource pool of individuals with early childhood expertise.


Parent and Family Involvement

Best practices

- Schools follow Department of Education policies in sharing responsibility for children’s education with families and working with parents as knowledgeable partners.

- Principals support regular, sustained home-school communications.

- Teachers collaborate with families through regular, frequent two-way communication.

- Schools recognize that children’s home, community and cultural experiences impact their development and learning.
Findings

Parent involvement presents a continuing challenge for the field study schools.

- Many parents did not have successful school experiences themselves.
- Working families spend long hours commuting and have multiple priorities when at home.
- School reform efforts to engage families have had limited success.

Home-school communication. Both schools emphasize home-school communication and consider the kindergarten year crucial to establishing positive relationships.

- Home reading is emphasized.
- A home-school notebook system for daily communication with families is used at both field study schools.
  - About 30% of parents do not regularly sign the home-school notebooks.
  - Some teachers devote personal time to sharing information with families via the notebooks.
- Teachers involve parents in helping children to learn basic skills by sending home materials for practice.

Home situations. Teachers expressed concern about the difficult home situations that some children in their classes experience. Home situations also affect children's learning opportunities, e.g.:

- children do not attend school regularly, and
- children enter kindergarten late in the school year.

Importance of community-based early childhood efforts. Teachers and principals focus on the need for community efforts to reach families and to provide programs that will support children's learning in the years before they enter kindergarten.

- Current resources often do not reach the children who are most at-risk.
- Principals support campus-based programs for preschoolers and their families, but these reach only a small percentage of children.
- Information about children's preschool experiences is incomplete.

Recommendations for Parent and Family Involvement

1. Provide transition activities that involve children and parents at the beginning of the Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten year (or before).

2. Have a systematic method for all teachers to use when collecting information about children from parents at the beginning of the year.
   - Interviews can help teachers to establish a “partnership” relationship with parents when teachers regard parents as experts in knowing their own child.
3. Teachers could work together with school special services personnel to plan and implement kindergarten transitions and other activities for parents (e.g. develop the transition plan for entering students, meet with parents of preschoolers and identify a linkage person for outreach).

4. Connect with early childhood programs in the community.
   - Learn about preschool programs that children attend.

5. Connect with community-based early childhood initiatives.

**Topics for further exploration**

- Use of school level personnel to increase teacher-child ratios in Jr. Kindergarten without diluting other needed services.
- Additional resources for targeted interventions at schools with high percentages of at-risk children.
Project Description
The Department of Education contracted with an early childhood consultant in February 2005 to study two elementary schools implementing a Jr. Kindergarten model and report findings and recommendations that reflect best practices for kindergarten. The author consulted references from current literature on quality kindergarten and early childhood education to identify best practices. This report is intended to provide information about recommended practices that may be useful to pilot sites implementing Jr. Kindergarten programs in SY 2005-06.

Key Questions
1. What best practices for kindergarten as recommended in professional literature and research on early learning are demonstrated at the field study schools in the following areas?
   - Learning environment
   - Curriculum and instruction
   - Assessment
   - Professional development
   - Parent and family involvement
2. What are some outcomes for kindergarten students at the field study schools?
3. What types of professional development do principals and kindergarten teachers at field study sites think would be useful for themselves and others involved in implementing Jr. Kindergarten programs?
4. What other suggestions do teachers, principals and other school personnel at field study schools have that may be helpful to future pilot sites as they plan for Jr. Kindergarten?

Process – Procedures for Field Study
Classroom Observations
Data were collected at the two field sites via classroom observations, interviews, and a review of test data and curriculum materials. A schedule of dates for observation in each of nine Kindergarten and Jr. Kindergarten classrooms was established with the classroom teachers in advance of the visits. A single observer spent one full day, plus ½ day (either AM or PM) in each classroom near the end of the third quarter of the school year (February-March 2005), collecting data for a “snapshot” view of each classroom. Timed process recordings were kept during each visit, including types of instructional activities, curriculum content, classroom arrangement, materials, evidence of assessments being used, management methods, instructional language, routines, and many other observable phenomena. Digital photographs captured student work and classroom interactions. A list of questions guiding the classroom observations is attached (see Appendix).
Interviews
An interview was held with each classroom teacher to follow up and obtain the teacher’s input on the most successful practices, any changes made in the curriculum and instruction during the year, assessments and their uses, professional development needs and recommended resources. Interview topics also addressed services for children with special needs and family-school relations. School principals were also interviewed to discuss how the overall school philosophy and instructional model affects the kindergarten program, obtain the principal’s views on topics addressed by this kindergarten study, and identify issues needing further attention (see interview questions for teachers and principals in Appendix). District and complex personnel in supporting roles for the pilot schools provided data on student outcomes and assisted with collection of additional information for the field study.

Document reviews

Student outcome data
Data on student progress in early literacy and reading skills as assessed by the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) were reviewed for each field study site. For one site, DRA beginning and mid-year assessments were used; for the other site, the DRA scores were obtained in September and May. Data from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) used by one field study school were also provided.

Methods of analyzing data
The contractor developed categories for analysis of classroom observations in order to quantify some of the observational data on language and literacy instruction and group activity settings. All observation notes were organized by topic area.
Introduction

This study provides a “snapshot” look at classrooms at one point in time near the end of the third quarter. Data do not show all the different types of teaching methods used on different days or throughout the school year. Because the observation period was brief, it was not possible to avoid atypical days when “other” activities replaced regular classroom instruction. Combined or averaged data for two observation days may vary from typical daily classroom schedules.

Information on best practices for quality kindergarten

As background information related to best practices in kindergarten, current literature from national research studies, early childhood professional organizations, reading specialists, quality rating studies, school readiness studies, elementary school principal organizations, and other expert sources was reviewed. Major sources included:

- *The Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC)* (Hemmeter, Maxwell, Jones Ault & Schuster 2001) on characteristics of quality programs in primary grades, K through 3.
- Recently published research reports from the National Research Council that are relevant to kindergarten practices: *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers* (Bowman, Donovan & Burns 2001), *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children’s Reading Success* (National Research Council 1999), and *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998).
- Recent publications on early literacy and reading from the National Institute for Literacy: *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read* (2001); and the Report of the National Reading Panel: *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction* (2000).
- A position statement on Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation in Programs for Children Birth Through Age 8 adopted jointly in 2003 by the National Association of Early Childhood Specialist in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) and the National Association of Young Children (NAEYC).
Jr. Kindergarten Field Study


The information about best practices in this report is focused on practices observed at the field study sites and is not intended to provide guidance on all elements of a quality kindergarten. Review of the references listed above will provide a more comprehensive view.

**Description of Field Study Schools**

Both field study schools are currently involved in school-wide reform programs that place priority on efforts to meet Annual Yearly Progress student achievement goals for all subgroups as required for school accountability. One school is currently using the America’s Choice reform model, the other uses the Open Court Reading Skills model; both schools place strong emphasis on high expectations for students as well as systematic and sequenced teaching of the language arts and mathematics to meet state standards at all grade levels (including kindergarten) and improve achievement test scores. School-wide teamwork is key; teachers work with faculty coaches to plan curriculum at each grade level that articulates with the overall content for elementary years.

The demographic characteristics of the field study schools are not representative of statewide statistics for Department of Education schools, as shown in the accompanying chart. These schools have a higher number of low-income students (indicated by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced school lunch programs; qualifying families must have income below 185% of the federal poverty guidelines for Hawaii), a higher percentage of Hawaiian or part-Hawaiian children (an ethnic group often considered educationally at-risk, particularly when associated with low family income), higher rates of students with English as a Second Language (ESL), and lower scores on academic achievement tests (Hawaii Department of Education 2005). Teachers at field sites also reported more boys than girls in the kindergarten population, more frequent
absences, many transient students, and children who enter kindergarten late in the year. According to research studies, children in low-income communities are likely to be perceived as less ready to meet academic demands and behavioral expectations when they enter school (Shore 1998). A large-scale National Center for Education Statistics descriptive study, *America's Kindergartners*, found wide differences in children's cognitive skills and knowledge when they enter kindergarten (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2000). A subsequent analysis of this data identified major differences in performance on tests of reading skills (emergent literacy, phonemic knowledge, and language development) and mathematical knowledge at kindergarten entry that were related to children's racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds (Lee & Burkam 2002).

Children in the field study schools are therefore in particular need of quality kindergarten programs that will positively influence their school success. The experience at these sites may be particularly informative for schools that enroll children who are likely to enter school “behind” at the start because of their socioeconomic status.

**Caveats**

As exploratory sites, the field study schools implemented Jr. Kindergarten programs without additional personnel or resources. The observations in this study provide information on the existing practices in field study classrooms as they began to develop Jr. Kindergartens without specific guidance on the best practices for quality kindergarten or a designated curriculum “model”.

The field study findings are also limited by a short-term, “snapshot” approach that cannot adequately capture the sequence of activities that take place over days and months in kindergarten classrooms. For example, it was not possible to collect detailed information on children’s initial kindergarten experiences (which would illustrate what kindergarten teachers do in the early months of the school year to help children bridge between home, preschool, and the more formal academics they will encounter in elementary school). Because observations took place near the end of the 3rd quarter of the school year, it is reasonable to expect that teachers would be moving toward more academic experiences in order to prepare children for the next year in first grade. In interviews, teachers’ reported that their 1st quarter kindergarten activities are focused on establishing routines, and children have more play opportunities, as would be expected.

This report does not attempt to review classroom practices in relation to Department of Education standards and requirements for kindergarten. The aim is to describe current practices in the field study schools that illustrate “best practices” recommended by research and literature on quality kindergartens that would be helpful to schools implementing new Jr. Kindergarten pilot programs. The field study schools are highly invested in providing the best possible start in kindergarten for all the children they serve.
Kindergarten Characteristics

Definitions
In literature on early childhood, the term “preschool” often refers to children and programs before formal schooling begins in first grade, usually at the age of six. In this context, kindergarten is considered to be a preschool program. The “preschool years” from age three through five are also considered as a unique stage in the sequence of children’s development (Bredekamp & Copple 1997) with developmental characteristics that are distinct from those of the “primary years” from age six through eight. For this study, kindergarten is viewed as a sub-category of “early childhood” education, which covers children ages birth through eight (typically including grades K-3) (Bredekamp & Copple 1997; NBPTS 2001).

Kindergarten a transition year
Kindergarten ideally forms a bridge between children’s experiences at home and in early education programs and those of the more structured school years (Kauerz 2005).

Developmental characteristics of kindergarten children
This report is based on the belief that kindergarten children learn in different ways than children in later elementary school grades, and that the understandings and teaching strategies represented in the early childhood professional discipline can provide insight and assistance when combined with knowledge of elementary school practices in developing programs for children ages four, five and six.

Early childhood is a distinct period of human development. All children experience a major change to more mature thinking behavior at the end of this early childhood period – a change that develops gradually, usually when children are between the ages of 6 and 8. This change is recognized in the research of psychologists Piaget and Vygotsky, cognitive theorists, and reading specialists, as well as through social and cultural expectations. “... between 5 and 7 years of age, most children begin to acquire the ability to think about and solve a wide range of problems. They are more proficient and flexible in their use of mental representations. The changes that occur in children’s cognition during these years equip them to perform the mental operations required for reading, mathematics, and other content learning in the early grades” (Bredekamp & Copple 1997). Most elementary school instruction and teacher preparation is currently geared to the developmental characteristic of individuals who have reached or are moving into this later stage of cognitive ability.

However, kindergarten children are more likely to still be in the preschool phase of development. Normal variation in development during the years from four through six is very broad; this situation requires schools to understand the importance of being “ready for children” since children of this age group will always arrive at school with a broad range of abilities and experiences (Bredekamp & Copple 1997; National Education Goals Panel 1998b; NBPTS 2001). For example, many of today’s children are already in
Introduction

possession of strong early literacy skills and content knowledge when they enter kindergarten, as a result of preschool and home experiences that include extensive exposure to books, use of computers, travel, and familiarity with many different places, events, and phenomena. Other children may not have had the same opportunities, and variation in development is normal for this age group even when life experiences are similar. Both Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten programs must be prepared to accommodate children with a broad range of knowledge and skills.

Research on kindergarten

Literature and research specific to the kindergarten year is limited. Research on how young children learn and develop that is relevant to children in kindergarten has most often focused on programs serving children ages three through five years (Bowman et al 2001). Kindergarten-age children are definitely a part of this group, although on the “outer edge”. Research on primary grade children ages six through eight may also pertain to kindergarten children. Recent research on emerging literacy and beginning reading has provided considerable information that is pertinent to this age group (Snow et al 1998; National Research Council 1999; National Reading Panel 2000; National Institute for Literacy 2001).

Hawaii’s kindergartens

Literature on kindergarten is not always appropriate to the experience of the Hawaii public school kindergarten programs. In Hawaii, the kindergarten program is an established part of the state public school system. Although age 6 is the mandatory age of school entry, Hawaii has offered full-day kindergartens for 5-year-olds in public schools since at least 1955, and almost all children in Hawaii children attend public or private school kindergartens (Hawaii State Data Book 2002; Hawaii Council of Private Schools 2002; U.S. Census Bureau 2005). Nationally, half-day kindergarten is still the most prevalent form. According to Education Week, only 8 other states required districts to offer full-day kindergarten in 2001 (Doherty 2002). In Hawaii’s statewide kindergarten system, funds allotted for kindergarten classes and compensation for kindergarten teachers are equivalent to those for grades 1 through 12, a situation that is not common among other states. At a time when most states are still struggling to provide full-day programs for many children, Hawaii leads the nation in these forward-looking kindergarten policies, and has the opportunity to demonstrate effective kindergarten practices.

Hawaii Kindergarten Standards and Benchmarks.

The Department of Education provides essential standards, benchmarks, and indicators for kindergarten children’s performance in the curriculum areas of Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Fine Arts, Physical Education, Health, Career and Life Skills, and World Languages. Six General Learner Outcomes (GLOs) focus on children’s progress toward becoming a self-directed learner, community contributor,
complex thinker, quality producer, effective communicator and effective and ethical user of technology (Hawaii Department of Education 2004). These standards and learner outcomes guide classroom curriculum and instruction during the kindergarten year. Teachers plan curriculum to cover all content addressed by the standards during the kindergarten year, and each child is expected to meet or exceed all kindergarten benchmarks by the end of the school year. Field study schools use standardized tests, e.g., the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), and other evidence to assess kindergarten children’s progress toward Grade 1 entry benchmarks.

Clarifying kindergarten goals.
The context of No Child Left Behind and state performance accountability requirements may place significant constraints on learning goals for children during the kindergarten year. Curriculum planning, the way learning experiences are presented in kindergarten classrooms, and interpretation and application of the standards and performance indicators for individual kindergarten children all have critical impact. What is the best way for kindergarten experiences to prepare children for future academic success? Is earlier better? What might be lost when early academic materials are presented to children who are not yet “ready” to succeed at learning those specific skills? It is important to ponder these questions when planning for Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten, because school accountability requirements including Annual Yearly Progress goals do not directly relate to kindergarten practices, and each school has the responsibility to make these judgments about how their youngest children will be educated.
Assessment

Best Practices for Assessment

Varied assessments methods support individualized planning.
Assessment is on-going and performance-based, e.g. anecdotal observations, checklists, journal entries; results are used for planning individualized instruction (National Association of Elementary School Principals 1998).

On-going observation and assessment. “Accomplished early childhood teachers are systematic and insightful observers of young children at work and at play. Assessment is not a separate event in the classroom calendar; rather, it is a daily, ongoing, performance-based activity” (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards 2001).

Alignment with teaching. “…the content of classroom assessments must be closely aligned with what children are learning, and the timing of assessments must correspond to the specific days and weeks when children are learning particular concepts. Often, this means that informal assessments are made by observing children during an instructional activity” (Shepard et al 1998).

Formal and informal. *Teachers use both formal and informal assessments to plan and guide instruction...* to gauge what things children already know and understand, what things could be understood with more practice and experience, and what things are too difficult without further groundwork. This may include appropriate use of early learning readiness measures to be used in planning next steps of instruction. Teachers also use their assessments of children’s learning to reflect on their own teaching practices, so that they can adjust and modify curricula, instructional activities, and classroom routines that are ineffective” (Shepard et al 1998).

Address developmental and educational goals. “The objects of assessment include a comprehensive, developmentally, and educationally important set of goals, rather than a narrow set of skills.” (National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education 2003).

“In order for assessment results to be useful instructionally, they should be tied to clear developmental or knowledge continua, with benchmarks along the way to illustrate what progress looks like” (Shepard et al 1998).

Multiple sources inform decisions. Decisions about enrollment, placement or remedial services are based on many sources of information; decisions are never based on a single test score. Alternatives to retention include multi-age grouping, looping, extended school day or year, tutoring and coordinated home involvement (National Association of Elementary School Principals 1998).
Best Practices at Field Study Schools

Planning instruction and addressing needs of individual students

Teachers at field study sites reported that checklists and running records are most useful in planning curriculum and instruction to address the individual needs of children. Most teachers use informal assessments including checklists and observations as their primary sources of information for planning instruction. Other types of assessment include frequent reading conferences to collect information about children’s reading strategies, running records of children’s reading progress, and samples of children’s work (e.g. writing workshop products). Some teachers use the “checkpoints” and skills checks provided in the Open Court Reading basal reader series and mathematics curriculum materials. Another assessment method is to assign tasks that children can do while the teacher can observe them – this method can be used with hands-on activities, games, etc. All these types of assessment are on-going throughout the year and closely aligned with classroom learning experiences and goals.

Kindergarten checklists

Kindergarten checklists used in some field study classrooms include:

- Concepts of print
- Emergent reader inventory
- Interview guides (teacher/child): e.g. “Myself as a Reader” (Wright Group Publishing, Inc.) provide information about a child’s reading interests, habits, attitude toward reading, home reading experiences, perception of self as a reader, methods used to read unknown words.

Observational records, “running records”, and other informal assessments

Teachers at the field study schools reported observing children’s daily classroom performance in reading, writing, and other skills as well as evidence of the foundational skills related to Department of Education General Learner Outcomes, and recording evidence of progress in running records or keeping anecdotal records for each child. Teachers’ written anecdotal observations (e.g. recording information about the type of assistance a child needs when writing, or about tasks a child can perform independently, work habits, etc.) and samples of children’s work provide a record of children’s progress when kept at regular intervals. Many of the skills tested on formal assessments such as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) can be assessed through observation of children’s performance during direct instruction, made up game-like “tests”, informal tasks, etc. Teachers must know and understand the content and skills to be assessed in order to substitute naturalistic for formal assessment. Using alternative types of assessment can eliminate the need to formally test children often or spend large amounts of time on assessment activities at the end of each quarter.
Quarterly skills assessment.
Checklists are a useful part of the initial assessment at school entry, focusing on skills children are expected to know in kindergarten. A variety of checklists are used throughout the school year to track children’s skills and report progress to families. Checklist items used for the quarterly Kindergarten Progress Report at one field study school include:

- Writing stage: scribble, drawing, symbols, random, sounds, word/sentences
- Upper and lower case letter recognition
- Letter/sound association - beginning consonant sounds
- Letter/sound association - beginning vowel sounds (long and short)
- Numeral recognition (1 – 20)
- Oral counting (highest number in sequence)
- 100 sight words (how many child reads from list)
- Recognition of shapes (square, circle, triangle, rectangle, oval, diamond)
- Names coins (penny, nickel, dime, quarter)
- Knows value of coins (penny, nickel, dime, quarter)
- Recognizes and names colors (red, yellow, blue, green, purple, white, orange, brown, black, pink, gray)
- Writes own name

Teachers’ recorded observations of children’s work and behavior provide classroom-based evidence for reporting children’s progress on the six General Learner Outcomes, which were included with the quarterly report cards this year.

Formal assessment of children’s progress
High quality formal assessment tools can provide reliable and detailed information about student progress toward mastering important skills. Most formal assessments permit data to be aggregated and analyzed to understand the overall progress of the classroom group or grade level cohort. Periodic formal assessment can determine if children are meeting expected benchmarks for learning; these results can also be used to inform “data-driven” planning at the class, grade, and school level.

One formal test used at both field study sites to assess children’s progress in early reading is the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) (Beaver 2001). The DRA provides a series of leveled books and record sheets to assess students’ accuracy, fluency, and comprehension levels, and determine where each student stands relative to grade level performance expectations. At the “emergent” level, the DRA includes previewing and
predicting, oral reading, and observation of reading behaviors (directionality, one to one matching, monitoring, concept of letters and words and use of cue sources); the “early” level also assesses oral reading and strategies (phrasing and fluency, intonation, problem solving, and analysis of miscues and self-corrections) and comprehension (retelling), response (favorite part, making connections). This assessment tool seems particularly appropriate in that skills are assessed in a naturalistic context and most of the critical early literacy skills identified as essential by the National Reading Panel are addressed. The DRA is intended for use at the beginning and at each grading cycle during the year; field sites reported using the DRA for initial, mid-year, and end-of-year assessment.

One field study school is using another formal test, the *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)* (Good & Kaminski 2001) at the beginning and throughout the year in kindergarten classrooms. Four tests focus on assessing children’s phonemic awareness and related skills: Letter Naming Fluency (LNF), Initial Sound Fluency (ISF), Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) and Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF). The DIBELS training manual suggests this testing schedule for kindergarten: ISF and LNF in fall; ISF, LNF, PSF and NWF (optional) at mid-year; and LNF, PSF and NWF at the end of the K year. This assessment plan seems reasonable, since the DIBELS tests (individually administered) would only be used periodically, and are designed to provide data about children’s skills that are scaled to progress benchmarks and more easily quantified for group analysis than a checklist. However, the DIBELS supplemental “progress monitoring” materials seem to emphasize more frequent testing of children who need extra or “intensive support.” Continuous testing with DIBELS to monitor children who are “behind” would not be recommended best practice in kindergarten, since progress in these skills can also be monitored in the context of more meaningful classroom activities.

**Student outcomes in field study classrooms**

Overall results from the DRA assessments at field study sites show that children are gaining early literacy skills at varied rates in both Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms, and that average progress also varies among the classrooms. At one site, the children in the Jr. Kindergarten class moved ahead an average of 3 reading levels from September through May. Wide variation was evident among children in a regular kindergarten class, where about a third of the children moved up only 3 reading levels, while the remaining two-thirds gained an average of almost 7 levels. In another classroom at this site, children moved ahead only an average of 1.7 levels.

At the other field study site, mid-year DRA results show an overall average gain of about 1.7 reading levels in Jr. Kindergarten classrooms, compared to an average gain of 3.5 levels in the regular Kindergarten (but within both types of kindergarten, there was considerable variation in progress among both late- and early-born children). When mid-year DRA data indicate variations in average gains among classrooms, schools have an opportunity to offer additional support.

The DRA data can provide a valuable baseline understanding of student results to assist
Assessment

25

schools in establishing realistic goals for children’s literacy progress during Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten, and to track effectiveness of the school’s curriculum and instruction. Because the DRA assessment tools provide specific information about each child’s reading skills and strategies, results can also be analyzed to focus both individualized teaching in the classroom and professional development for teachers.

Based on DIBELS test results during fall, winter and spring at one field study school (all four tests were administered according to the recommended schedule), many kindergarten children are successfully progressing in the phonemic awareness skills important for early literacy development. The percentage of children scoring at benchmark level increased from about 20% in the fall to 45% in the spring. Slightly more than half of the children initially needed “intensive” support, and only about a fourth of the children were still in this category after spring testing. However, results again varied widely by classroom, with 60 to 83% of the children in two classes at benchmark status, and more than half of children in two other classes still needing “intensive support.”

Initial assessment of children’s readiness

To gain initial information about the knowledge and skills of children entering kindergarten, the “Phelps Kindergarten Readiness Scale II (PKRS-II) (Phelps 2003) was administered at field study sites near the beginning of the school year. The PKRS-II, individually administered, provides an overall readiness score and scores in three “processing domains” (verbal, perceptual and auditory) that are predictive of school achievement and focus on children’s problem solving and reasoning abilities rather than memorized facts. The manual states that the PKRS-II “can assist school personnel in identifying preschoolers who have developmental delays likely to result in academic difficulties.” The PKRS-II manual also provides a brief section on “linking assessment results with remediation” that suggests activities and resources to use as supplemental exercises for students who exhibit weaknesses. Teachers and support personnel did not receive professional development regarding administration of the PKRS-II assessment or use of the results.

Although the PKRS-II does not meet all criteria for best assessment practices, and this test is not designed primarily for instructional planning, the teachers at field study schools found the results valuable in providing new awareness and insights about children’s abilities and difficulties. For example, many children used immature pencil grasps and could not copy shapes, indicating difficulty in performing the fine motor skills and eye/hand coordination tasks needed to complete most pencil-paper tasks. Many children also did poorly on items that required them to answer questions about words (vocabulary), apply reasoning in answering questions (verbal reasoning), and produce words to complete simple analogy statements. Many could not answer test questions that required understanding the words “same” and “different” – a key meaning for this test. These results helped teachers gain awareness of the limitations of children’s language skills and they were able to use this knowledge in selecting more appropriate learning experiences for children’s at the beginning of the school year. However, teachers at the
field study sites did not mention using PKRS-II materials as a reference in planning instruction.

Teachers reported that the PKRS-II provided better information than that available in previous years when kindergarten students were assessed primarily on memory tasks (e.g. knowledge of alphabet, shapes, number recognition) at school entry. However, the National Research Council findings indicate that letter identification is the strongest predictor of reading success: “Just measuring how many letters a kindergartner is able to name when shown letters in a random order appears to be nearly as successful at predicting future reading, as is an entire readiness test.” (Snow et al 1998).

The Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment (HSSRA)
The Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers at field study sites participated in the Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment (developed under the auspices of Hawaii’s School Readiness Task Force) (Brandt & Grace 2004) to provide information about the readiness of their kindergarten classes at the beginning of this school year.

The HSSRA Kindergarten Class Profile provides information about how teachers view the readiness of the children in their class at kindergarten entry as a group, and about the combined (average) readiness of children in all kindergarten classes at each elementary school. All items are rated on a scale of 0 to 5, with 5 the highest score. This “children ready for school” assessment was designed:

- to track improvement over time of groups entering kindergarten in Hawaii, and
- for schools and kindergarten teachers to use in planning curriculum and instruction.

Implementation of the HSSRA would have been improved if teachers had received specific training to understand the purposes and uses of this survey. In recalling their responses to the HSSRA, two teachers expressed concern that most answers involved “subjective” interpretations, and said they found it difficult to arrive at “averages” for their class without collecting information about individual students (which is not required for completion of the survey). Survey questions did not seem specific enough, e.g. does children’s “familiarity with books” include all the print concepts assessed at kindergarten entry? Others involved with the field study schools also commented about how HSSRA results might vary according to each teacher’s interpretation of survey items and what each teacher rated as important.

Teachers reported that many items on this assessment are relevant to the types of activities that kindergarten teachers spend considerable time doing during the 1st quarter of the school year. The charts below illustrate some types of information provided by the HSSRA that could be used to assist with school or classroom planning at the beginning of the school year.

Field study site 1 results (Fall 2004) - teachers’ survey on readiness of children:
Overall school mean: 3.86. Teachers rated children highest (4.4) on physical well-being
items. Strongest ratings for children included personal hygiene (5.0), familiarity with how books work (5.0), interest in books and print (5.0), comes to school well rested, fed and alert (4.7). Lowest rated areas: knows names and sounds of some letters (1.7), is independent in caring for self and own belongings (2.7). Teachers rated children at 3.3 or above on all other items. (Hawaii Department of Education 2005).

Field study site 2 results (Fall 2004) - teachers' survey on readiness of children:
Overall school mean 3.30. Teachers rated children highest (3.8) on social-emotional behaviors. Strongest items: large muscle control (4.5), personal hygiene (4.3), satisfaction with accomplishments (4.3), expressing emotions through appropriate actions and words, respect for others, listens to group discussions and stories, follows classroom routines (all 4.0). Teachers rated children weakest in academics, specifically literacy concepts and skills (2.7). Lowest rated items were communicating ideas and descriptions in phrases and sentences (2.0), knowing names and sounds of some letters, small muscle control, and independence in caring for self and belongings (all 2.3) (Hawaii Department of Education 2005).

The HSSRA also includes a “school ready” survey to be completed by principals each fall. HSSRA instruments were developed to provide a systematic approach to assessing school
readiness in Hawaii that will:

- have clarity of purpose
- be comprehensive by encompassing all three aspects of readiness – child, school, and family/community support
- be in accordance with best practices and guidelines put forth by early childhood associations and early childhood assessment experts (Feeney, Grace & Brandt 2001).

One school principal reported that when he completed the HSSRA survey questions on “ready schools” he was not able to determine its purpose or how this type of information could be used. These comments indicate not only a need to explain the HSSRA, but also the need to educate principals about concepts of school readiness and invite them to contribute to planning that connects with their point of view.

**Recommendations on Assessment**

**Provide information for teachers and other personnel.**

Experience using new assessment tools at the field study sites this year increased awareness about the need for more systematic attention to the use of assessments. To prepare for assessment use in the Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten programs, teachers, principals and support staff at the field study sites recommend that information, professional development and technical assistance be provided on all aspects of assessment for teachers, support personnel, and principals, including:

- information about the purposes and intended uses of different types of assessments,
- criteria for selection of assessment instruments to be used for specific purposes,
- the importance of assessing all aspects of children’s development and understanding assessment results in relation to the characteristics and continuum of children’s development in the early childhood years,
- specific information on administration, interpretation and use of data for any standardized assessment or system-wide assessment to be used (e.g. the HSSRA), and
- cautions and concerns about the use of assessment in making “high stakes” decisions.

**Support teacher use of professional judgment.**

Discuss with kindergarten teachers the reliability of teacher observations and professional judgment in assessing the development and progress of young children in relation to concerns about the use of “subjective” data.

**Identify what teachers need and want to know about their children and what methods are most appropriate to use, for example:**

- kindergarten entry assessment tools that provide information on all aspects of children’s development (physical, cognitive, language, social-emotional, and approaches to learning) as well as specific information that will help teachers plan instruction;
- methods for assessing important kindergarten skills when children enter school, including: children’s vocabulary, and their familiarity with and/or ability to answer dif-
ferent types of questions involving verbal reasoning that are typical of teacher-child interactions in school; children’s eye/hand coordination and fine motor skills; children’s ability to understand, remember and repeat information, including stories and sentences; and children’s development of phonological awareness; and

- guidelines and strategies for observing and keeping records of children’s progress; and ways to track children’s progress toward kindergarten benchmarks.

**Ensure that results of any assessment can be explained and understood by parents.**

Teachers may benefit from additional information about communicating assessment results, for example:

- presenting results in the context of a child development framework,
- encouraging parents to provide additional information that may help the teacher to understanding their child’s abilities, interests and needs,
- ways to engage parents in supporting their child’s success, and
- how to convey results in ways that support parents’ positive but realistic expectations for their children.

**Help teachers develop skill in using assessment information for planning.**

This includes:

- ways to use assessment information in planning classroom instruction that will meet group and individual needs, and
- analysis and use of formal assessment results as part of grade-level and school planning.

**Provide additional preparation for use of the Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment.**

- Teachers could apply information from this assessment in initial planning for their classes if they are provided with additional information about the purposes, uses and rationale for this survey. The HSSRA survey, which is supported by research and validation in Hawaii classrooms, relies on the professional judgment of kindergarten teachers as the most reliable source of information about the initial readiness of children in their classrooms.
- Providing additional information about school policies and practices that support children’s school readiness would help principals to understand the need for this survey and the potential roles that principals play in promoting “ready schools”. 

Learning Environment

**Best Practices for Learning Environment**

**Class size**

“As recommended by recent research, children are assigned to a class in accordance with the following ratios:

- For four- to five-year-olds: 20:2 (on professional and one paraprofessional for a class of 20 or fewer students);
- For six- to eight-year-olds: 15:1.” (National Association of Elementary School Principals 1998)

**A caring community of learners**

Children need to understand that school is to learn, every child learns, all help each other to learn. “The early childhood setting functions as a community of learners in which all participants consider and contribute to each other’s well-being and learning…each child is valued.” (Hatch 2005; Bredekamp & Copple 1997)

**Socio-emotional climate and quality of teacher-child interactions**

“A positive, responsive, and caring environment promotes the interaction of children with materials, other children, and adults” (National Association of Elementary School Principles 1998). Teacher-child relationships are positive and consistent. “…teachers’ active, intentionally instructive behavior as well as socially warm and responsive approach appear closely linked to children’s functioning….Accordingly, quality is conceptualized in terms of specific teacher-child interactions that contribute to children’s learning and development.” (Pianta 2003)

**Classroom organization and structure**

“Children experience an organized environment and an orderly routine that provides an overall structure in which learning takes place.” (Bredekamp & Copple 1997)

**Class schedule and activity groups**

“The schedule provides a balance of:

- Teacher-directed and meaningful child-initiated activities;
- Active and quiet activities;
- Independent and guided activities; and
- Large-group, small group, and individual activities.” (National Association of Elementary School Principals 1998)

**Characteristics of quality**

Schools and classrooms use research-based guidelines and rating scales to understand and implement the characteristics of quality kindergarten programs (NAEYC 2005; Harms et al 2005; Hemmeter et al 2001; Pianta 2003)
Best Practices at Field Study Schools

Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms at field study sites provide a comfortable, relaxed and nurturing atmosphere for children. Teachers communicate positive expectations for all children (regardless of the child’s level of performance) by emphasizing “you are a reader,” “you can write, and express their belief that all children can learn. Attention has been given to reducing class size and increasing adult-child ratios in Jr. Kindergarten classrooms. There is a strong emphasis on building group cooperation and caring.

Class size

Field study sites consider reduction of class size in Jr. Kindergarten classes to be a major goal for the success of this program. Lower class size enables teachers to work with individual children more often, to more easily manage the class as a group, and to understand each child’s needs and plan appropriate instruction. Groups were reduced from the typical 23 to 25 students in kindergarten classes at the field study sites to 15 – 17 in Jr. Kindergarten; this was accomplished by placing more children in regular Kindergarten classrooms. One school hoped to keep Jr. Kindergarten class size at 13, but it was not possible to stay at this level due to increases in enrollment. Many teachers at the field study sites commented on the reduced class size as the most valuable feature of a program for Jr. Kindergarten children. One principal remarked that although reduced class size is important, it is also essential to have skilled teachers.

In addition to reducing class size, all of the Jr. Kindergarten classes were able to find ways to make additional adults available to assist in the classroom for at least part of the day. Adult-child ratios smaller than 15:1 are recommended for groups that include four and five-year-olds; classroom “teams” typically include a lead teacher with an assistant or aide. Adults present in addition to the teachers in field study classrooms included full-time student teachers and part-time observation-participation students from University of Hawaii and Chaminade University, para-professional teachers (PPTs) assigned part-time to Jr. Kindergarten, teachers from the English as a Second Language (ESL) program, and parent volunteers. The presence of additional adults can make it possible for teachers to focus more directly on instructional work with a portion of the students, without having to attend to the types of interruptions that occur while monitoring the entire class. Teachers can more easily implement teaching strategies that are recommended for young children including working with small groups, interacting with individual children, and use of learning centers.

A caring “community of learners”

Teachers find many ways to build community, and these efforts were particularly notable in several of the Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms at field study schools. Teachers devote considerable time and effort to establishing and supporting the continuation of positive group social relationships and caring. Helping children understand positive values and expectations for their own behavior and learning is an on-going theme.
Jr. Kindergarten Field Study

Efforts to build a classroom community that incorporates cultural and school values such as “family” and “pride” demonstrate teachers’ awareness of the importance of the Hawaiian heritage of many children in these schools, and the importance of helping children to develop internal motivation to learn.

Observed examples of classroom experiences that build “community”

Daily routines include many opportunities for children to join together in various chorale recitations, including poems, songs, and class rules. One class has memorized the school “creed” (a long composition with advanced vocabulary) and recites this daily with clear enunciation and good expression.

Children partner for a variety of class activities: to discuss their experiences or reactions to stories, listen to each other read aloud, share information about books they have read, work together using mathematics materials (e.g., coins, pattern blocks), engage in “dance” and movement activities.

The teacher refers to the class as a “family.” Children need to help others “in the family” so that “no one gets left behind.” “Let’s take turns so everybody can learn.” Children have opportunities to demonstrate appropriate behavior as group leaders: “leaders have to set the example.”

Class rules are memorized, with accompanying motions, and repeated often by the whole group. The teacher uses the rules as references for behavior situations.

Children are given reasons why some behaviors are not acceptable in large group sessions, e.g. calling out, talking, distracting motions – because it takes away the learning time for all.

Rules in one classroom focus on building children’s concern for others and developing internal values to guide actions:

- Never hurt anyone on the inside or the outside.
- Do attentive listening.
- Try your best.
- Be “pono.”
- “My head knows the right thing to do; my heart chooses to do the right thing.”

Quality of teacher-child interactions

Many instances of positive teacher-child interactions were observed in the field study classrooms. Teachers demonstrate both warmth and responsiveness to children and determination to guide their successful academic progress. At best, teachers use every available opportunity to interact with individual children informally as well as during instruction. Teachers demonstrate their caring and positive regard for children through classroom management methods and use of language. Because they have gotten to know each child well, teachers are able to tailor discipline methods to fit individual children’s needs. Teachers also convey positive expectations as they actively engage with and support children’s involvement in all types of learning experiences.
Learning Environment

Observations that illustrate teachers building a positive climate

A teacher shares her thinking and ideas with children throughout the day through lots of teacher talk – asking questions, having conversations, making comments, describing, explaining, “thinking out loud,” telling her plans, wondering, remembering, joking, pretending.

One teacher dramatizes and pretends to act like a child who doesn’t know how to write as a way of demonstrating how to use “invented spelling” and listen for sounds of letters when trying to write. Children in the class instruct “the child” on how to write the story.

The teacher talks with children about real events, e.g. about what they did on the previous day when they had a substitute teacher, “How did it go yesterday?” “Did you do all your work?” “Were there any problems?” tells what she did when out of the classroom (“I had a meeting all day long”). Talks with children about tsunamis when the sirens go off (a real concern in this community).

“Chorus” responses are acceptable – built into large group sessions.

The teacher uses a puppet to lead large group singing, etc.

The teacher is responsive to children’s attention and involvement level and adapts instructional activities flexibly – extends, shortens, provides breaks, has alternatives ready, allows extra time so children can finish a task they are absorbed in doing – after asking for the children’s opinions.

The classroom has a relaxed though business-like pace, children are not rushed, have enough time to move between activities, get ready on their own.

A teacher’s manner is natural, conversational, “silly” on occasion. This teacher uses body and facial language, voice intonation, evidence of feelings (surprise, pleasure, shock), talks in different voices, whispers, gives children chances to correct her, scolds herself, describes what she is going to do.

Teachers stop activities when they are not working (e.g., if most children in the class can’t do it, or many children do not pay attention), and find ways to adapt activities so they will reach children who are not interested, ask questions to see what children understand.

There is evidence of nurturing, supportive relationships between the teacher and children, e.g., one boy completes drawing a picture, takes it to show the teacher, lays his head on her shoulder as they talk.

Some examples of effective and positive management and discipline techniques

Children sit in assigned places during large group sessions to ensure that children needing individual attention are close to the teacher, so that she can quietly guide them if needed.

Directions are very clear and specific – tell children what to do: “Eyes over here.” “Face the board, please.” “Hands in your lap.” “Learning bodies up.” “Close your books.” “Return to your seats.” “Clean your tables, bring your books up.”
Children enjoy signals for attention in which they can participate, e.g., Teacher: “1-2-3, eyes on me” Children: “1-2, eyes on you” or counting backwards in unison while taking their seats. “Criss-cross applesauce” is a guidance phrase that seems popular with young children.

Teachers use preventive management: e.g., in introducing new materials, the teacher demonstrates how to hold materials, what to do and what not to do when using the materials, and explains what will happen if children do not “use it correctly.” Preventive guidance includes reminders about expected behavior: e.g., “will we have conversations outside? In the bathroom?”

Teachers immediately and frequently recognize good examples of desired behavior, e.g., immediately after children go to their seats, the teacher notices: “Table 3, very nice.” Teacher comments are positive, e.g., “Oh, look how much rubbish we have in the trash.”

Teachers use verbal or other signals (e.g., says “freeze,” rings bell, etc.) to break in to clarify or add new instructions at intervals during an activity, rather than giving all instructions in advance. This helps to break up complex tasks into parts that can be managed by kindergarten children.

Room arrangement is used to assist management, e.g., a separate carrel with seating for four children is used when children need quiet focus during individual work assignments. Children can choose to use this area (or the teacher may assign children to work there).

The teacher takes a child who has been disturbing the class outside the classroom for a brief talk, then returns and holds him on her lap (when sitting with the large group).

A teacher keeps three children who were getting very active and inattentive during a whole class activity with her after the rest of the children go to other activities, talks with them quietly, then helps them find activities that will engage their interest and involvement.

A teacher recognizes the positive rather than negative side of “out of line” behavior: one boy spends a long time cleaning up an area of the classroom and continues to pick up new items even after the teacher has asked and reminded him several times to stop and join the rest of the class in preparations to go home. When he is finished and joins the other children, the teacher thanks him “for cleaning our classroom.”

Classroom organization and routines
Two teachers commented that establishing classroom routines and building children’s self-regulation skills is always their major focus during the 1st quarter of the school year. A school reform model used at the field study sites also emphasizes the use of “rituals” or instructional activity structures that become familiar to children so they will know what is expected and what to do without having to be told (e.g. “calendar” or “author’s chair”), and “routines” that provide children with specific instructions and models of how to behave in common daily situations (e.g. how to walk to the cafeteria). These patterned behaviors are intended to decrease time off-task, “down-time”, behavior and discipline problems.
Observations of effective classroom organization and routines

Children are assigned to classroom jobs, e.g. weather reporter, announcer, calendar reader, lights monitor.

Children follow familiar routines when performing daily learning activities – teachers briefly remind them of routine tasks after the routine is established (e.g. write the name of the book in your reading log.)

For established routines, the teacher tells children the expectations and allows time for them to successfully comply, e.g. “I need everybody reading. On the count of zero you should all be reading” – then counts backwards slowly, with interruptions, so children all have time to scramble around, get from the current activity to their desks. The teacher then follows up: “Very nice, table X. I see table Y reading.” (The length of the count can be adjusted according to realistic time expectations.)

Children are responsible for organizing and managing their own belongings at the beginning, end, and throughout the school day.

Teachers integrate routines (e.g. selecting books for home reading, washing hands) within independent work sessions so all children do not have to wait in lines, teacher can interact with individual children, children have more time on learning tasks.

Teachers who use learning centers have established systems for children to select centers, the number of children who may work in each center, acceptable ways to use materials, clean up, etc.

Class schedule and activities

A valuable perspective on incorporating the varied components that support learning in kindergarten programs focuses on developing a “balanced approach” in the daily use of different types of student groupings, learning tasks, child-initiation, and classroom space (Hatch 2005).

A "Balanced" Kindergarten Day

Teaching in the New Kindergarten (Hatch, 2005)

Although there is no single best way to organize and manage a kindergarten classroom, a balance in use of time and space discussed in literature on the “new kindergarten” (Hatch 2005; Leuenberger 2003) is represented in the accompanying chart using the “activity setting” categories listed below. In a full day schedule, this would suggest about two hours of whole class instruction, 45 minutes of small group time, and almost 1-1/2 hours in learning centers.

For the field study, “activity setting” categories were defined to describe and analyze the types of learning experiences observed during visits to Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms. Since these visits represent only one and a half day in each classroom out of
the entire school year, the analysis can only provide a “snapshot” view of how children spent their time during this brief observation period. Also, the combined average of several classrooms yields a much different picture than that of each individual classroom. The value of this analysis is primarily as a sample or visual tool showing how teachers might look at the organization and schedule of activities in their classrooms in relation to recommendations about using a balanced approach.

Classroom “activity settings” (or “participant structures”)— the various types of activities and group structures that provide the setting for teacher-child interactions and other learning during the day— include:

- **“whole group”** experiences led by the teacher;
- **“small group”** activities either with the teacher or other assigned partners (including partner activities);
- individual **“seatwork”** (children do specific assigned activities at their tables or desks, e.g. complete writing assignments, do worksheets, use manipulative math materials such as pattern blocks or unit blocks);
- **“centers”** (children can choose from several activities, move from their seats to work in various defined spaces or areas around the classroom, use special equipment or complete specific learning tasks);
- **“quiet choices”** where children do not have specific assigned tasks but are expected to choose among a limited set of activities while at their seats, e.g. reading, writing in journals, finishing worksheets (or in some classes may also participate in optional group activities such as watching videos or eating snacks, usually without peer conversations);
- **“routines”** such as lunch, recess, bathroom breaks, hand-washing, getting drinks, snack time (for all children), organizing materials to take home, morning attendance and other check-in activities, other transitions between classroom activities; and
- **“other”** includes special school events or activities (e.g. picture-taking, assembly, fire drills) or other unusual occurrences that are not part of the teacher’s typical daily plans (but often occur in schools).

Observations of individual classrooms were combined to provide composite averages for the five Jr. Kindergarten and four Kindergarten classrooms. Among Jr. Kindergarten classrooms, children averaged about the same proportion of their time in whole group activities (including instruction of the whole group while children are at their seats) as shown in the “balanced” schedule, but on the average spent much less time in small groups or center activities. Instead, children spent time doing individual work assignments at their seats or doing other “quiet choices” – primarily writing in journals, looking at library books, or finishing worksheets. It should be noted, however, that the instructional reform models used in these two schools emphasize providing large amounts of time for children’s independent work.
Considerable variations in the use of time were observed among the different Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms and on the different days observed. In Jr. Kindergartens, whole group experiences ranged from 28% to 40% of the overall time, small group settings from 0 to 8% of time (3 of 5 teachers used small groups or partner work), seat-work from 5% to 24%, and use of centers ranged from 0 to 20% of observed class time (4 of 5 classes used centers).

Among the Kindergarten classrooms, time spent in whole group activities varied from 35% to 47% of the entire day, time children spent in small group times varied from 2% to 3% of the day (all used small groups or had children work with partners), time doing seat-work from 13% to 33% of the day, and only one Kindergarten class used centers during the days observed.

It does appear that the Jr. Kindergarten teachers may have made some adjustments in classroom activity settings from those more typically used in regular Kindergartens, moving toward a more “balanced” style of grouping and scheduling activities, and providing for more child-selected activities.

**Observed Examples of Effective Use of Learning Centers**

Reading level group activities in one classroom included the use of learning centers, i.e. a library center (set up to explore specific topics or literature genre), and an alphabet center (a variety of alphabet manipulatives and hands-on tasks, plus a “read the room” activity). Groups are assigned to specific reading centers but activities within each center offer choices and can be done independently by children; quiet talk among peers is encouraged (children can read to each other, work together on activities); the teacher works with each group on level-appropriate reading instruction during part of this time.
Quality rating scales

Extensive research on quality in early childhood programs for children ages birth through 8 has provided information about the characteristics of these environments that result in positive outcomes for children. Several rating scales provide specific guidelines that can be used for self-study and program evaluation. In addition, the National Association for the Education of Young Children criteria for accreditation of early childhood programs supplies detailed information about characteristics of quality programs (NAEYC 2005).

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Revised Edition (ECERS-R) (Harms et al. 2005) is intended to measure quality in early childhood programs serving children ages 2-1/2 through 5 years of age, including kindergarten classrooms. Ratings are based on observation of the classroom. Sub-scales cover Personal Care, Space and Furnishings, Language and Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure, and Parents and Staff.

An ECERS-R item applicable to public school kindergarten environments is “Room Arrangement for Play” (from the Space and Furnishings sub-scale). Programs with no defined interest centers are rated “inadequate”; for an “excellent” rating classrooms must have at least 5 different interest centers providing a variety of learning experiences, with centers organized for independent use by children, and additional materials available to add to or change centers. Criteria for a “good” room arrangement includes at least 3 defined and conveniently equipped interest centers, separation of quiet and active centers, and arrangement of space so children will not be interrupted when working in centers.

The Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC) (Hemmeter et al. 2001), intended for use in kindergarten through grade 3, measures:

- **Physical Environment** (room arrangement, display of child products, classroom accessibility for including children with disabilities, health and classroom safety);
- **Instructional Content** (use of materials, use of computers, monitoring child progress,
Learning Environment

teacher-child language, instructional methods, integration and breadth of subjects); and

• Social Context (children’s role in decision-making, participation of children with disabilities in classroom activities, social skills, diversity, appropriate transitions, family involvement).

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta et al 2005) is an observational instrument that is focused specifically on the interactions of teachers and children in a classroom. The CLASS is suggested for use across the early grades to measure aspects of:

• the social-emotional climate of the classroom (positive climate, negative climate, and teacher sensitivity);
• classroom management (regard for student perspectives, behavior management, and productivity); and
• the quality of instruction (concept development, instructional learning formats, and quality of feedback).

Recommendations for Learning Environments

Reduce class size and increase adult-child ratios.

Effective teaching requires focused interaction between adults and young children, which is best accomplished through a team approach that enables teachers and other adults to work with small groups and individual children.

• Aim for small class sizes and adult to child ratios that are as close as possible to recommended best practices for Jr. Kindergarten students for a major portion of classroom time during each school day.

• Review possible options for use of additional school personnel in Jr. Kindergarten classrooms as part of planning for the Jr. Kindergarten program. Assign personnel early in the year when teachers are establishing classroom operating routines and instructional structures to support effective classroom teamwork.

• Use additional adults in kindergarten classrooms effectively so that:
 ◊ Increased adult to child ratios result in more adult-child interaction and enable use of recommended learning strategies (e.g. small group activities and learning centers)
 ◊ All adults in the classroom have effective roles interacting with children.

• Teachers need time to plan together with other adults assigned to their classrooms throughout the year.

• Provide information that will support teachers as effective classroom “team” leaders and help them involve other adults in direct interactions that support children’s learning.

Maintain the continuity of classroom communities.

Consistency of relationships is important for young children; it is therefore important to
be cautious about changing a child’s class assignment or having individual children leave the classroom group in order to receive special services.

- Classroom teachers collaborate and plan with special subject teachers and/or personnel from special service programs to deliver or integrate these activities with ongoing classroom experiences so as to support continuity and meaning for children (see National Association of Elementary School Principals 1998).

Use **small groups and learning centers.**

Young children benefit and learn from the types of active involvement in direct experiences, self-initiated activities, and interactions with other students, including informal conversation and play opportunities, that take place during small group activities and in learning centers. Attention to the amount of time children work in small groups and use learning centers could provide children with more opportunities for these important learning experiences.

- Independent work and practice activities can be effectively integrated within small group and learning center settings that engage children’s interest;

- Kindergarten teachers need additional information and professional development experiences that focus on room arrangement, classroom activity schedules, and appropriate types of learning materials, along with management techniques to support use of varied types of learning activities.

- Current kindergarten classroom environments may be influenced by the guidelines for classroom organization and appearance for all grades from K through 6 that are set by some school reform models. Although these models may focus on different aspects of the classroom environment (e.g. standards bulletin boards, word walls, classroom book displays and libraries), most of the elements are compatible with recommended best practices for kindergarten classrooms.

- One field study principal suggested that a Department of Education recommendation on the use of learning centers to provide direct learning experiences and use of appropriate curricula to support early language and literacy development in Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten would make it more likely that schools would implement these practices.

Use **quality rating instruments for program design and monitoring.**

Establish learning environments in Jr. Kindergarten programs that are designed to meet or exceed “good” level practices as defined in early childhood program quality rating scales. Program quality rating instruments such as the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC), and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) are recommended for self-study, planning and program evaluation.
Curriculum and Instruction

Best Practices for Curriculum and Instruction

Support for all areas of development. Teachers have a planned curriculum that supports all areas of children’s development: physical (gross and fine motor), social and emotional, intellectual (including language, conceptual, content area basic knowledge and skills), and aesthetic (National Association for the Education of Young Children 2005).

Varied teaching strategies. Teachers develop and use a wide repertoire of effective teaching strategies that enhance children’s learning and development and are adapted to the developmental levels and unique needs of children (Hatch 2005; Bredekamp & Copple 1997; National Association of Elementary School Principals 1998).

Literacy and language. Early literacy and language skills are a major focus during kindergarten. “The program includes a balance of systematic code instruction…and meaningful connected reading…” (National Association of Elementary School Principals 1998).

Two paramount goals for literacy development in kindergarten are to:

- Develop a solid familiarity with the structure and uses of print, format of books and other print resources; familiarity with sentence-by-sentence, word-by-word, and sound-by-sound analysis of language; and basic phonemic awareness and ability to recognize and write most of the letters of alphabet.

- Help children get comfortable with learning from print; develop interest in the types of language and knowledge that books can bring them. This includes motivating children to be literate and making them feel like successful learners. (National Research Council 1999; Snow et al 1998).

Importance of play. “Accomplished early childhood teachers understand the important role of play in all areas of children’s development...provide ample opportunities for various types of play within the school day (National Board for Professional Teacher Standards 2001).

Adapting instruction to individual and group needs. “Teachers incorporate a wide variety of experiences, materials and equipment, and teaching strategies in constructing curriculum to accommodate a broad range of children’s individual differences in prior experiences, maturation rates, styles of learning, needs, and interests.” (Bredekamp & Copple 1997).

Jr. Kindergarten curriculum

Children need a content-rich curriculum in their first school experiences. Hawaii’s performance standards outline a broad curriculum for the kindergarten year with the content
areas of language arts and mathematics receiving major attention. Social studies, science and the arts are important areas through which young children can explore the natural world and community, relating new learning to their prior experiences and own interests. Art experiences are particularly important to enable creative expression and communication of thinking in the early years; before children command reading and writing, they can express ideas through art media. Hawaii’s General Learner Objectives (GLO’s) focus attention on children’s personal and social development, approaches to learning, thinking and communication skills. Attention to physical development in kindergarten includes planning so children can be active while learning, develop fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination, and participate in group physical activities.

There is ample evidence from research that young children learn through:

- active exploration of materials, efforts to solve problems, manipulating objects to represent and apply concepts using a variety of materials and situations;
- interacting with adults who scaffold learning specific to each child’s “zone of proximal development”;
- receiving specific instruction on basic building blocks for literacy and mathematics;
- many opportunities to practice new skills in a variety of situations and settings;
- connecting new information to their personal experiences;
- engaging in activities that capture their interest, including those that allow “playfulness” (creative application of new ideas); and
- involvement with other children in socio-dramatic play opportunities.


Both academic learning and play experiences are appropriate in kindergarten programs. Information on both types of learning strategies is included as a reference point for examination of practices observed in field study classrooms.

**A successful academic kindergarten program**

A study comparing results of academic with non-academic kindergarten programs in the same school district found that children in the academic kindergarten consistently outperformed the comparison sample in reading, mathematics and language – and were at or near national median (grade level) in all academic measures on 3rd grade achievement test scores (Gersten & George 1990).

This study outlines the guidelines used for the academic component of the kindergarten program:

- students are active, not passive (although teacher controls instructional sequence),
- majority of instruction is conducted in small groups,
- children receive clear and immediate feedback from teacher, and are provided with extra practice as needed,
- only a small amount of worksheet activities are used,
includes a blend of oral reading and systematic practice in (word study activities),
• academic programs do not preclude time for play, socialization, and art,
• students experience unremitting success,
• instructional sequences are designed to match a typical 5-year-old’s attention span,
• symbols and concepts are introduced at a much slower rate and in a much more interactive fashion than in conventional basal reading readiness series,
• much academic content is taught through games,
• a 90 minute to 2 hour daily time period is devoted to academics,
• short paperback books children can read independently, a home reading program, read-alouds, and game-like practice activities are used,
• children spend 30 minutes in independent academic activities,
• oral language and listening comprehension components are included, and
• synthetic phonics are taught in small steps with repeated practice, with a slower rate of introduction of new sounds. “Students were allowed as much time as necessary to learn each new sound before the next was introduced,” and sounds were taught before words.

In the academic kindergarten program described, the remainder of day consisted of traditional kindergarten activities: play with dolls, puppets, blocks, board games; art projects; music; projects related to holidays and social studies. Informal social interactions with the teacher and other children were emphasized.

Factors that the researchers recognized as contributing to the success of this program included attention directed to ensuring that the children’s first exposure to academic learning was fun; providing many examples and ample practice and review opportunities; and a program designed to enable students to succeed - avoiding frustration and stress. Academic lessons were highly interactive, with use of choral as well as individual turns.

**Academics in field study kindergartens**
Many of the practices described as successful for introducing academics to kindergartners were observed in field study classrooms, including: students actively responding rather than passive during lessons; children receiving immediate feedback as they practice skills; teachers targeting questions so that most children are successful during teacher-directed lessons; short and varied instructional sequences; games frequently used to teach content; devoting a large block of the day to literacy activities; children taking home short, leveled books that they can read on their own; children spending part of the time doing independent activities. However, other characteristics of the successful “academic” kindergarten model described above were not observed during classroom visits.

**The role of play**
Kindergarten-age children are capable of complex, elaborated, interactive play. Play activities support cognitive, language, social, and creative development during the early childhood years. Play is linked with the development of many foundational skills and complex cognitive activities. Research shows children’s high quality, complex play is related to the development of memory, self-regulation, distancing and de-contextualization,
oral language abilities, symbolic generalization, successful school adjustment, and better social skills (Bodrova & Leong 2003).

The work of Vygotsky and Elkonin (Bodrova & Leong 2003; Berk & Winsler 1995) defines four principal ways that play influences child development; only when these four outcomes are in place can young child profit fully from academic activities. Play:

- affects the child’s motivation,
- facilitates cognitive de-centering,
- advances the development of mental representations, and
- fosters development of deliberate behaviors (physical and mental voluntary actions).

Socio-dramatic play, role play or pretend play must be mature play. Children may need the teacher’s help to achieve this. Teachers facilitate play when they:

- help children create an imaginary situation,
- help children act out various roles, and
- help children plan their play (Bodrova & Leong 2003).

In field study sites, children were observed engaging in some play experiences and playful activities. However, most of the children’s play was observed to be at an explorative rather than mature level; for example, children rarely defined roles or conversed to develop play scenarios. Children had very brief periods to become involved in play with materials such as blocks, construction toys, and puppets.

**Examples of Play and Playful Experiences**

Participating in songs, clapping rhymes, motion “dances” and routines that develop finger and large muscle control, the ability to listen and follow directions, and new vocabulary.

One boy builds an elaborate symmetrical block structure.

Engaging in a “reading the room” activity, with props (long pointers, glasses and clipboards) – children work as partners, one pointing out the print, letters, words or symbols they can read while the other child writes on the clipboard. The focus is on doing, not correct performance.

Performing “letter aerobics” movements corresponding to the position of letters above, on, or below the line and a silly activity song “A Tui Ta” that requires good listening skills.

Two boys playing that they were cooks in a “home area” stocked with Oriental cookware, dishes and foods (rice bowls, chopsticks, a wok, sushi, a shoyu bottle) frequently repeating “Japanese” and “Chinese” in their conversation and making occasional phone calls. Later, they got out tools and became home repairmen.

Children are sprinkled with “magic dust” so they will be invisible as they creep back to their seats.

**Using a variety of teaching strategies**

In *Teaching in the New Kindergarten*, Amos Hatch (2005) suggests that teachers use a problem-solving approach in order to choose instructional methods that fit children and
situations, applying a continuum of strategies that include incidental teaching, thematic teaching, tactical teaching, and direct teaching. Explanations of each strategy and examples of teacher’s using these strategies in field study classrooms are outlined below.

**Incidental teaching** involves setting up and taking advantage of teachable moments, both with individual students and in group situations. Teachers design activities that focus on particular curriculum goals, then provide support or scaffolding to help children accomplish tasks that are just slightly beyond what they can do on their own. A scaffolding framework described by Berk and Winsler (1995) includes joint problem-solving, inter-subjectivity or two-way communication, warmth and responsiveness so that children feel safe in taking risks, staying within the child’s “zone of proximal development,” and promoting self-regulation by increasing children’s responsibility and control during incidental teaching interactions. Teachers at field study sites frequently use a scaffolding approach in their interactions with children who are attempting to write independently. Other examples of incidental teacher are described below.

**Examples of Incidental Teaching**

Taking advantage of opportunities to teach vocabulary in meaningful situations, e.g. children practice rowing “gently” as they sing “Row, Row the Boat.”

Teacher uses a rich vocabulary but stops to discuss the meanings of words that children may not know, e.g. “unusual,” “imagination,” “accident.”

As part of reading group sessions, the teacher asks children about the kinds of books they like to read.

The teacher dismisses children from the large group to their seats by letters in the child’s name: “if you have a “w” in your name, get up…”

**Thematic teaching** includes the use of units, projects, and integrated theme studies where instruction is organized around an identifiable topic. This type of teaching helps children to see connections and apply skills and concepts in a meaningful context.

Teacher-planned units need to be presented in a systematic way so that children are helped to understand the relationships of the parts. Children are more directly involved in selecting and planning projects that typically involve investigation, constructions, and play scenarios focused on a topic of interest to children (Katz & Chard 1989; Helm & Katz 2001). Teachers plan integrated theme studies that organize skills and information from multiple content areas around a topic that has meaning to children.

Thematic teaching is not in frequent use at the field study sites, because materials for theme-based units and activities are not provided by the Open Court and America’s Choice curriculum models that are being used. However, lessons that connected to field trip studies (zoo, animals), involved observation of nature, or focused on familiar home or community experiences (grocery shopping, a parade) were observed to engage children’s interest and enthusiasm.
**Example of Thematic Teaching**

Class activities and assignments, and books read in class are related to a recent field trip to the zoo. Children recorded information about animals on clipboard activities while on the trip, then follow up by reading these in class. Children draw and write about their favorite zoo animal, make “cut and paste” pop-up books with scrambled sentences about zoo animals, based on a story read in class. One girl writes a long story describing the whole trip to the zoo (including the bus ride) and reads it aloud to the class.

**Tactical teaching** describes how teachers design and use various situational arrangements in the classroom to deliver instruction in a variety of different ways that are tailored to the needs of the group and individuals. The strategy involves knowing and applying a variety of useful tactics or tools to adjust classroom situations in relation to teaching objectives and the needs of individual children and the entire group. Tactical teaching is used in combination with incidental, thematic and direct teaching and includes grouping, modeling and demonstrating, coaching, tutoring, discussing and questioning, providing a variety of practice experiences, and individualizing instruction.

**Examples of Tactical Teaching**

Using “game” formats for skills practice with the large group playing the role of audience, individual children taking roles as game participants.

Partner activities to discuss writing plans. Teacher’s instructions can be brief after this type of partner activity is established as a classroom routine: “Find a friend where you are sitting. Tell them about 3 animals you saw (at the zoo). Your friend has to ask you questions about your animal.” After a short interval, the teacher breaks in, “OK, freeze – did you partner get a chance to talk? Switch over.”

Teaching vocabulary with picture cards (or actual objects) and encouraging group discussion. Discussion relates word meanings to children’s experiences and children’s comments are encouraged; this discussion helps to build a context for understanding new words. This type of activity can help teachers to understand how children use words, what “common” words are unfamiliar to them, and how they perceive objects represented in pictures so she can help them make discriminations (e.g. apron vs. dress). Grouping pictures or objects by beginning letters also helps children to apply beginning sounds in identifying unknown words (e.g. when the children say “cockroach,” the teacher points out that “it begins with a /b/.”)

Children practice skills using materials provided in “alphabet” centers and “math” centers during language arts and math time periods.

**Direct teaching strategies** involve systematic teaching of content and skills that are organized in a planned and logical sequence. Hatch (2005) presents a framework for this strategy, based on the work of Slavin (1997), that involves specific steps: setting the stage for learning, presenting new material, monitoring and adjusting, and providing independent practice. This strategy is considered to be most effective when teaching basic skills and concepts.
Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers were observed to use direct instruction creatively in ways that maintain group attention and involvement while including much interaction with children. Lessons are fast-paced, and include games, music, movement, chanting, choral reading, etc. Examples are included in the section below on teaching literacy skills. Direct instruction is an important strategy for teaching early literacy skills, and was the most common strategy observed during large group skills instruction. Several field study teachers have had specific professional development on using direct instruction and are competent and comfortable in using this teaching strategy, preferring it to Open Court Phonics materials because the lessons are shorter and more interactive. One teacher who has had specific training in direct instruction considers this method to be the best to use for children who have not been exposed to the basics of reading during their early years, because the direct instruction materials systematically cover all the necessary skills, and tell the teacher specifically what to teach and how to teach it.

**Hands-on and active math lessons**
Most teachers at the field study schools are enthusiastic about the mathematics curriculum materials they are using, Everyday Mathematics (UCSMP 2001), which includes many innovative ideas for applying mathematics concepts in hands-on activities. Several classes were learning about coins as a mathematics topic during the observation period. These and other creatively designed mathematics lessons provided many opportunities for children to engage in hands-on, active learning, as described in these examples.

**Examples of Hands-on Mathematics Lessons**
To learn about coins (penny, nickel, dime, quarter), children in one class work with partners sitting on the floor, each with a small bag of coins and sorting container. Children use magnifying glasses to examine coins, then sort and count their coins. The teacher selects partners that are at similar skill levels – some children can sort and organize by groups of ten, others are still learning to sort and count one to one. Coins are distributed for counting, making groups of 5, 10, exchanging pennies for nickel or dimes (useful to introduce these activity components in stages – explore, count, make groups, exchange – and structure each step carefully). Children are at different stages in ability to do this activity.

A dramatized story of the “mighty chief” who couldn’t keep track of things is used to introduce a lesson on counting and making groups of 10’s (the solution to the chief’s problems). Using piles of paper clips, children take turns helping their partner “chief” learn to count and group by tens. Children repeat a scripted message “Mighty Chief _____(child’s name), will you please count out a group of 10”. Teacher demonstrates what to say and do. Children must count all their clips, make groups of ten, count the groups of ten, record the number of 10’s, count how many leftover, record 1’s number. Then recount all clips by 1’s, moving 1 clip with each number counted; the total must be the same number as written down. The teacher groups children with appropriate partners, gives out bags of clips – all have to wait until the drum beat begins to start working with their clips. Teacher changes the bags of chips if partners finish counting one set. This activity did not get frenetic and children worked seriously and carefully, and all were able to complete all the steps in this complex task!
Including a variety of instructional strategies in daily language arts instruction

Classrooms in field study schools were observed to have much strength in this area, with many examples of creative teaching specifically adapted for kindergarten-age children. Children are demonstrating successful learning in both Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms, i.e., learning letter sounds, segmenting sounds in words, blending sounds to make words, beginning to write on their own, participating in guided reading.

The National Research Council states that: “The underlying instructional activities (for kindergarten language and literacy development)…are relatively few in number:

- Oral language activities for fostering growth in receptive and expressive language and verbal reasoning,
- Reading aloud with children to foster their appreciation and comprehension of text and literacy language,
- Reading and book exploration by children for developing print concepts and basic reading knowledge and processes,
- Writing activities for developing children’s personal appreciation of the communicative dimensions of print and for exercising printing and spelling abilities,
- Thematic activities (e.g. socio-dramatic play) for giving children opportunity to integrate and extend their understanding of stories and new knowledge,
- Print-directed activities for establishing children’s ability to recognize and print the letters of the alphabet,
- Phonemic awareness activities for developing children’s phonological and phonemic awareness, and
- Word-directed activities for helping children to acquire a basic sight vocabulary and to understand and appreciate the alphabetic principle” (Snow et al 1998).

Classroom observations for this report did not focus on specific student performance goals of the reading and writing programs at these schools, although there was ample evidence that teachers were addressing kindergarten standards.

Data on classroom activities and instruction observed during the morning language arts “time block” at the field study sites were grouped into six categories defined by the author in order to describe and compare the various types of early literacy instruction taking place, as follows:

- **Writing experiences** includes preparation for writing, children’s independent writing time, and “author’s chair” when children read their own writing to the class
- **Teacher read-aloud** includes books read aloud by adults to the class and videotapes of children’s literature.
• **Child reading experiences** includes guided reading in groups, independent reading, partner reading, and “reader’s chair” when children read aloud to the class.

• **Skills worksheets** included various types of work that children do independently using printed formats, paper-pencil tasks, cut and paste activities, etc.

• **Whole class skills in context** includes skills instruction using language experience stories and messages, Big Books lessons, listening activities and participatory activities such as repeating rhymes, songs, or chants.

• **Whole class skill work** includes all types of direct instruction on specific phonics, phonemic awareness, letter and word recognition skills, etc.

A large variety of methods were in use in all classrooms, although the particular combination of activities observed varied from one class to another, as would be expected. Observations from all the Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms were combined to obtain an average percentage of time spent in various activities for each type of kindergarten class. The accompanying chart shows the average percentage of time spent on each activity by type of kindergarten on the days observed. Both Jr. Kindergartens and Kindergarten spent about 30% of their language arts time on writing experiences. Kindergartens used a larger amount of their time doing skills worksheets and whole class skills work than Jr. Kindergarten classes. Jr. Kindergarten teachers provided more teacher read-aloud time, and taught more skills in the context of authentic reading and writing events. Times spent on child reading experiences were similar in both types of kindergarten. The differences seem to represent adaptations intended to match instruction more closely to the learning needs of children in the two types of kindergarten. In fact, several Jr. Kindergarten teachers mentioned changing their teaching strategies to eliminate basal reading series exercises and phonics activities that required children to pay attention during relatively long group sessions or to complete pencil-paper tasks, substituting
teaching strategies that included active movement, use of hands-on materials, and story-based skill lessons.

Teachers in field study classrooms were observed to use many interactive and active learning strategies that captured children’s enthusiastic participation.

**Examples of strategies for teaching early literacy skills**

**Dynamic direct instruction with children actively interacting and responding:**
- Children do motions for short vowel sounds: /a/ - apple in hand; /e/ - elephant (make trunk); /i/ - itching; /o/ - octopus (wave arms); /u/ - up (point up).
- Using a game format to practice reading sight words and “word family” words.
- Teacher is careful to call on children at appropriate times so all can be successful.

**Singing a rhythmic song with the sound of every consonant and vowel.**

**Children use imaginatively designed large pointers to demonstrate one to one reading, indicate words and letters that they recognize in the classroom.**

**Children make up rhymes using two rhyming words and a pattern sentence – but their rhyme has to make sense** (this also helps teacher to identify children who do not understand, e.g. one child says words in a rhythmic manner instead of using words that rhyme).

**Children enthusiastically write (and sound out) dictated words on individual white boards (with markers and erasers). Teacher gives many hints. Children are active; teacher can see who can apply skills being taught.**

**Trying all the letters of the alphabet to see if they make real “word family” words.**

**In a small group, children use magnetic letters (red vowels) on metal trays with three taped boxes to practice making words (by changing the first letter). Trays each have one vowel, seven consonants. Children touch letters, make sounds, blend to say word: “say it fast”. Children take turns choosing the first letter to make a word, say the word — all have to find same letter and make the word on their tray.**

**Children suggests words and draw pictures to illustrate the words on large alphabet charts; these charts become references for children to use when writing.**

In field study classrooms, skills instruction typically covered a large variety of letter-sound skills (e.g. consonant sounds, vowel sounds, beginning sounds, blending sounds in words, word families, segmenting sounds in words, and reading nonsense words) during large group sessions. While these activities may constitute practice for more able students, some children in the group have not yet mastered many of these skills. Teachers use focused questioning with easy questions for some, hard for others to individualize instruction during large group sessions. Some teachers also work with small groups of children of similar skill level to provide intensive instruction that is within children’s “zone of proximal development” (Berk & Winsler 1995). This type of intensive, individualized instruction on literacy skills was most often observed in field study classrooms when teachers were interacting with children who were trying to write on their own.
Examples of teaching literacy skills in context

“Guided writing” where teacher models how to record thoughts using letter sounds and conventions that the children are learning.

The teacher helps children retell the story from a book read to them, asks “what happened first, next, ...last”; says “I’m thinking” and asks children to close eyes and think about the story they just heard.

Calendar and morning message routines are used to teach comprehension, sight words, initial sounds, symbol recognition, letter sounds, methods for sounding out words, word spacing, writing conventions and punctuation rules, upper and lower case letters, use of pronouns, concepts of day, week, month – as opportunities occur in the message or routine. Children help to write some of the words. Content is related to children’s interests and experiences.

Teacher has the children demonstrate positions (first, middle, last) when reading a children’s book about “in the middle”. Also relates positions to beginning, middle, end of the book.

Names of all children in the class are included on the “word wall”. Charts or labels with children’s names are also evident as part of classroom print.

Examples of read-aloud and Big Book lessons

Reading a Big Book story about colors, teacher has children identify red objects in the pictures and on the page, including words and a question mark, then says, “now let’s bring it back to us; if you have red, stand up...red shoes on, sit down...red on pants, sit down...etc.”

Children listen and are very interested in a Big Book story about a 4th of July parade. The teacher provides many opportunities for children to make predictions, notice and discuss details in the pictures, talk about their own experiences, participate in reading and practice new vocabulary as she reads aloud. This lesson demonstrated how teachers can involve children, keep them interested in long stories and help them relate new information in books to their own lives.

The teacher selects poems, ABC books, a book about months, a story about going to the grocery – all can be related to the children’s own experiences. Children listen and participate actively in read-aloud discussions with the teacher; this also provides the teacher with many opportunities to learn about the children’s interests and lives, and to see what they know and understand.

Teachers listen and respond to individual children during group read-aloud sessions, recognize and reinforce connections that children are making between the book and their own experiences.

Examples of child reading experiences

Children learn to “browse” and select books that interest them from a good supply and big selection of small size “leveled” reading books, with stories and non-fiction topics that appeal to children’s interests (e.g. spiders, sea animals, our earth, volcanoes, or fire). Children later tell the class about a book that they read.
Children keep an assortment of books at their seats (in bags, bins, etc.) for use during daily independent reading time. These include Xeroxed books, “level” books, books chosen from the class library, child-made books, and other reading tools used in class.

The teacher guides a group of children in choral reading of several small “level” books; the children point to each word as they read.

Children are asked to select and practice reading a familiar “level” book aloud at their seat during independent reading as preparation for reading to a partner.

Children partner for reading “level” books aloud. Preparation includes teacher demonstrating what to do and what not to do (e.g. how to sit, where to sit - next to each other so can see print, pointing when reading, listening, watching for pointing, questions to ask each other, how to answer questions: “What is she going to do when I read?” “If she talks while I’m reading, is that listening?” “She gets to ask me one question.”.) Teacher models reading a book, has a child ask her a question, “What part did you like?” Teacher tells what she liked and why: “you must tell them why”. Questions include asking why, where, who, what happened first, last, what story is about. Teacher reminds children to ask questions mid-point in the reading activity.

Children read familiar words and symbols, including labels and logos from local stores, that have been collected and mounted on an environmental print chart.

**Examples of children motivated to engage in literacy**

Children actively comment about their experiences during read-aloud sessions, and teachers take time to talk with the children, listen to their comments.

Children pretend to read familiar books aloud – singly, or together in a group, one acting as teacher, etc.

Children play at writing each other’s names.

Children come to the classroom early to read books in the class library.

**Independent writing**

All field study classrooms use a similar method for daily writing activities, and most were focusing on writing responses to literature during observation days. After a read-aloud story, the children discussed their responses (what did you like about the story?) with partners or the whole class, and were given time to think about and describe what they planned to write. Teachers sometimes model writing and involve children in listening for letter sounds as they write. Children then write independently at their seats, and typically draw a picture to accompany their writing. Children are encouraged to listen for the sounds in words and use “invented spelling” when writing in all kindergarten classes. Teachers move around the room and assist individual children to write their ideas. Children are encouraged to read back what they have written as they write. After the writing session, there is an “author’s chair” session, when some children read their written pieces to the class. Children also practice asking questions about and commenting on the writing presented during “author’s chair.”
A few of the kindergarten teachers raised questions about the effectiveness of lengthy independent writing sessions for some of the children in their classrooms. Quite a few children were still having difficulty writing their names; a large number were not able to successfully read back words that they had copied or written.

**Examples of children's writing experiences**

During “author’s chair,” a microphone and “boom box” speaker are available; child authors can **choose** to use these when reading their own writing to the class.

Children write some of words for the calendar and morning message.

Children have individual “strategy folders” for reading and writing with alphabet, letter sounds and words (pictures), sight word lists, etc. The teacher talks about using their strategy folders as a “learning tool”. Children were observed to be using their folders during writing. The teacher recognized instances of this, commented about children who were using their “tool kit”.

Teacher helps a children find “a clue in the room” to assist in writing – uses alphabet charts illustrated with pictures. Children can take their clipboards around the room, copy words from the print charts.

**Activities to develop children’s oral language**

It was not possible to record or analyze characteristics of teacher-child language or child-child language in this brief study; however, this would be a useful future study. Since oral language development is an important goal for kindergarten, children need many opportunities to talk and express their ideas.

**An Early Literacy Evaluation Guide**

The literacy curriculum observed at the field study sites was also reviewed in relation to the *Hawaii Early Literacy Evaluation Guide* developed under the auspices of Hawaii’s School Readiness Task Force (Grace & Brandt 2004). A different “cultural philosophy” is apparent in the literacy curricula of the field study schools that are focusing intensively on improving the academic achievement of students; there is much more emphasis on early application of curriculum and instruction that introduces specific skills expected to improve reading achievement scores. Strategies in use at the field study schools are related to research findings of the National Reading Panel and National Institute for Literacy as contained in literacy curricula that have been validated by the federal Department of Education for use in Title I schools (Hawaii Department of Education OCISS/ISB 2004). The *Hawaii Early Literacy Evaluation Guide* emphasizes providing language and literacy experiences that are meaningful to children and capture their interest, integrating these experiences with children’s existing understandings, and focusing literacy experiences to extend children’s thinking. Ideally, it is important that both of these outcomes be achieved for all children (National Research Council 1999; Snow et al 1998).

**Instruction that meets the different needs of groups or individual children.**

In every classroom there were occasions for teachers to provide one-on-one individualized instruction and assistance in the context of on-going activities (sometimes listening to a
child read, more often giving specific help with writing) during the day. Teachers take
time with each child, and try to respond to all children who need or request help. Teachers
go to the child’s seat, kneel down or sit at the child’s level or lean over when giving
assistance.

Observations of teachers providing individualized and scaffolded instruction

Much one-to-one scaffolded instruction on literacy skills takes place during independent writing in all Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten classrooms.

Teachers were tutoring children or assisting them with completion of skill-related worksheets.

A teacher interacts with children to extend or assist with a pattern-block mathematics activity, posing questions to challenge capable children, modeling or verbally leading others through the necessary steps.

A teacher provides skills instruction that is adapted to different children’s levels, for example, one group uses alphabet manipulatives to make word-family words, while another group completes a pencil-paper practice assignment using word family words. The teacher provides a very specific “walk through” on how to complete a worksheet assignment for some children; others work independently.

Teachers adapt questions to each individual child’s level during whole group instruction.

A teacher has a few children who need extra help with skills work sit beside her near the reading group table so she can help them in-between small group sessions.

One teacher reported that information from the school-entry assessment indicated that many children in her Jr. Kindergarten class had limited fine motor skills. The teacher, who has a background in Montessori methods, provided a large variety of fine motor activities including squeezing sponges; working with playdough; and using basters, eye droppers, tongs with cotton balls, and tweezers to help children develop muscles needed for paper-pencil work.

Many teachers are providing individualized extra help for children in their classes who do not yet recognize all alphabet letters, know few letter-sound connections, recognize few sight words, or are still learning number symbols and one-to-one counting. Types of individualized help observed include actual tutoring sessions (outside of school time), one-to-one instruction with children while other children do seat work, assisting children as they attempt to write on their own, using a para-professional teacher to work with the child inside or outside of the classroom, and sending home flash cards or other work for practice.

Some teachers adapt instruction for children at different reading levels by using flexible small groups for guided reading and skill instruction (children move between these groups at their own pace). In two classes, teachers prepare separate packets of worksheets each day for children to work independently on letter and sound skills; these are adapted to include different materials related to the skills and reading level of the child.
Recommendations for Curriculum and Instruction

Ensure that the Jr. Kindergarten curriculum addresses all areas of children’s development and includes all content areas.

Children need a content-rich curriculum in their first school experiences.

- Developmental areas include physical, social, emotional, language, aesthetic and intellectual.
- Content includes language, literacy, mathematics, scientific inquiry and knowledge, social studies, creative expression and appreciation for the arts, and physical development and skills (NAEYC 2005).

Reflect on learning goals for Jr. Kindergarten children.

Jr. Kindergarten programs will need to balance awareness of the broad variation in development among 4 and 5-year-old children with the intent of helping each child to meet all kindergarten standards and reach his or her highest potential. Realistic expectations focus on each child’s progress, support individual growth, and ensure that all children experience success. Since children’s development progresses at different rates during these early years and children start school with wide variations in experience and knowledge, goals for individual progress during the first year of school need to be viewed flexibly in relation to a continuum that maintains incremental accomplishment of learning goals over several early elementary years (e.g. grades K through 2).

Guidance is needed at the system level, because individual schools or classrooms may find it difficult to implement developmentally appropriate practices in Jr. Kindergarten in the current context of accountability focused on each child accomplishing established goals within a fixed annual time period.

Expand teachers’ repertoire of teaching strategies by providing information about a variety of appropriate and effective kindergarten teaching practices.

- Encourage teachers to refer to research and literature on how children learn in the early years, e.g. the importance of play, language interactions, etc., when developing curriculum for Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten, rather than relying on the recommendations of a single author, study or curriculum design (Hatch 2005).
- Teachers enhance children’s learning when they work with children in learning centers, devote attention to providing materials and props that will attract children’s curiosity, model ways to use materials, talk with children about their ideas and questions, help children describe what they are doing, and pose open-ended questions or problems for children to solve.

Provide resources and materials that will help teachers to integrate content areas via thematic teaching.

This teaching strategy offers rich opportunities to connect children’s learning with direct experiences and work on topics that are meaningful and involving for children (NBPTS 2001).
Since development of language arts and mathematics skills are the major focus during kindergarten, early childhood best practice would suggest that efforts be made to integrate language, literacy and mathematics instruction with other content areas in Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten. A wealth of literacy materials developed by the International Reading Association (Morrow & Gambrel 2004; Roskos et al 2004; Schickedanz & Casbergue 2004, Strickland & Schickedanz 2004), National Association for the Education of Young Children (Neuman et al 2000), Teaching Strategies, Inc. (Heroman & Jones 2004) and many others (e.g. Weitzman & Greenberg 2002; Breakthrough to Literacy®) provide information on ways to accomplish goals for learning literacy within a content rich curriculum.

Themes related to field trips or other special events can be expanded through related classroom activities.

Include projects and themes that support children's exploration, curiosity, investigation, problem solving, planning and reflecting.

Content-rich direct experiences are particularly important for children in disadvantaged communities.

Involv[ing] children in socio-dramatic play experiences that develop thinking, oral language, literacy and social skills.

Play experiences can be related to field trips and thematic topics, particularly if efforts are made to help children understand the roles that different people play in various settings. Teacher involvement can facilitate children’s learning through play. Provide adequate periods of time for children to become absorbed in the type of complex, interactive play that contributes to children’s cognitive and language development (Bodrova & Leong 2003).

Focus the Jr. Kindergarten language and literacy program on practices recommended for young children.

Instruction is adjusted to individual needs so that all children experience success. Motivation is most important! Talk is encouraged. Copious quantities of all types of children’s literature and informational books as well as other types of print materials (magazines, signs, computers, labels, games, newspapers) are available.

Consider the recommendations of Hawaii’s Early Literacy Evaluation Guide to ensure that the curriculum supports children’s meaningful connection with books and literacy along with their acquisition of literacy skills.

Include activities that develop oral language and provide opportunities for children to talk with adults and other children. Oral language development contributes to children’s acquisition of early literacy, communicative and cognitive abilities.

Encourage teachers to offer a variety of skill practice exercises, e.g. hands-on activi-
ties to replace worksheets, “alphabet” or “word” centers where children use a variety of games and other activities to practice skills.

- Adapt independent writing expectations so all children experience success, e.g.:
  ◊ provide activities that develop children’s fine motor skills, e.g. for children having difficulty writing their name;
  ◊ offer a variety of writing tasks and purposes for writing and opportunities for children to write throughout the day;
  ◊ incorporate writing activities into dramatic play scenarios (e.g. post office, restaurant, grocery store);
  ◊ provide a broad variety of writing materials, tools, hands-on stamps, printing, computers, and games that require reading and writing; and
  ◊ encourage and respond to children’s drawings. Celebrate kindergarten children’s newly developed capabilities in representational drawing and provide many opportunities for children to develop drawing along with learning to write (Thompson 2005).

- Be aware of guidelines for literacy development during kindergarten, including phonological awareness, phonemic and phonics skills. Research supports the use of small groups that closely focus skills instruction to the student’s level (National Institute for Literacy 2001). Accomplishments realistically expected by the end of the kindergarten year include:
  ◊ “Reads” familiar texts emergently, i.e. not necessarily verbatim from the print alone.
  ◊ Recognizes and can name all upper and lower case letters.
  ◊ Learns many, though not all, one-to-one letter-sound correspondences.
  ◊ Given spoken sets like “dan, dan, den,” can identify the first two as the same and the third as different.
  ◊ Given spoken sets like “dak, pat, zen,” can identify the first two as sharing the same sound.
  ◊ Given spoken segments, can merge them into a meaningful target word (National Research Council 1999).
Professional Development

Best practices for Professional Development

Inclusive of all staff members. “The principal provides ample opportunities for all staff members to benefit from professional development and training specific to early childhood programs” (National Association of Elementary School Principals 1998).

Teacher preparation in early childhood. Teachers have college-level preparation that encompasses “...child development and learning, family and community relationships, observing, documenting and assessing young children, teaching and learning, and professional practice and development” (NAEYC Accreditation Standards 2005).

The most recent guidelines for the preparation of early childhood professionals require all teachers and program administrators to have specialized college-level course work in child development and early childhood training (Hyson 2003).

Address all skill areas essential for teaching. Accomplished early childhood teachers understand young children; model equity, fairness and diversity; understand and appropriately use multiple assessment methods; promote child development and learning; have knowledge of integrated curriculum; use multiple teaching strategies; take part in family, community and professional partnerships; and engage in reflective practice (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards 2001).

Use guidelines for self-assessment. The principal conducts periodic self-assessment of the components of early childhood programs by using the evaluation guidelines that are provided by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (National Association of Elementary School Principals 1998).

Professional development at field study schools

The consultant collected information about professional development opportunities and needs at field study sites through interviews with teachers, principals, and district support personnel. All of these parties emphasized the role of professional development as critical in supporting the successful implementation of Jr. Kindergarten programs.

As explained in the introduction to this report, teachers at field study schools did not receive specific professional development on early childhood practices prior to implementation of their experimental Jr. Kindergarten programs. During the school year (mainly during the 3rd and 4th quarters) a number of reference materials with information about
early childhood best practices and characteristics of quality kindergarten programs were made available to teachers and principals by state and district support personnel and the early childhood consultant. Teachers were therefore dependent on their individual knowledge and experience for expertise in meeting the needs of younger and less “ready” kindergarten children.

**Professional development related to school reform**

Teachers at both schools did participate in extensive professional development and articulation activities focused on implementation of the language arts curriculum and other school reform efforts throughout the school year. These activities included work on implementation of curriculum specific to the kindergarten level, based on practices recommended by the school reform curriculum model. Kindergarten teachers were actively involved in these sessions.

**Variations in teacher experience**

The teaching experience and early childhood background of the nine teachers is varied, as follows:

- two of the nine teachers have extensive experience teaching kindergarten plus specific training for early childhood,
- two others have 3 to 4 years of experience teaching kindergarten as part of a looping sequence where they also teach 1st grade,
- two others have recently returned to teaching after career breaks, have past experience teaching kindergarten, and are currently in their 2nd or 3rd year as kindergarten teachers,
- one is teaching kindergarten for the 1st full year, but has previous experience teaching upper elementary grades,
- one started mid-year and is a recent graduate of the University of Hawaii, and
- one is a long-term substitute during the regular teacher’s maternity leave.

**Teachers’ views on professional development needs**

Teachers expressed strong support for additional professional development experiences focused specifically on early childhood development and learning. Kindergarten sometimes seems to be in a world of its own, with little attention paid to concerns specific to young children in professional development, articulation, or school reform activities. Some teachers reported that their past preparation and experience teaching kindergarten does not match expectations for teaching in the current kindergarten program. Teachers suggested that new teachers and those new to kindergarten could use the help of a mentor or coach (e.g. for ideas on management of the kindergarten classroom), as well as opportunities to observe in other kindergarten classes. Teachers would also like to observe other kindergarten programs and visit preschools that children in their classes have attended.

Several teachers have actively sought additional professional development experiences by attending conferences or taking courses. Teachers with the most childhood preparation
also remain active in seeking out additional experiences to keep up with current expertise (e.g. attending the “I Teach K” national conference) and these teachers also continually strive to apply early childhood knowledge in designing and adapting instruction to the needs of children in their classes. One teacher stated that she would be interested in continuing education or degree-related coursework in early education if this is offered.

**Principals at field study sites** have different professional backgrounds and experience in early childhood education. Both principals support the need for professional development directed not only to Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers, but to all staff in primary grades and others who work with these children, as well as literacy and curriculum coaches and student support services coordinators at their schools. One principal believes that master teachers are needed for Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten, and that a background in early childhood education is particularly important when teaching high-risk students who do not have preschool experiences. Most of the teachers who will be assigned to Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten classes next year did not teach kindergarten during the current year; all need professional development in early childhood education. Even experienced kindergarten teachers need professional development experiences that will help them organize their knowledge more systematically. Principals also recommended that professional development focus on effective ways to communicate with and involve parents.

One principal stated that the interventions during Jr. Kindergarten are key to moving children ahead. This is why curriculum resources and professional development are essential to support this program.

**District personnel** who provided support to the field study schools also discussed the need for professional development that would reach teachers as well as personnel in various supporting roles (e.g. literacy coaches, the school leadership team members) at schools and district management levels. Professional development related to the selection and use of assessments for young children is one need; all components of the Jr. Kindergarten program need to be supported by professional development.

**A professional learning community**

One benefit of the Jr. Kindergarten field study is that it brought all the teachers together within and across schools as a professional learning community. In addition to attending three state-level meetings regarding Jr. Kindergarten, some teachers met with the complex resource teacher as study groups to examine and make recommendations for a Jr. Kindergarten retention/promotion policy and to discuss best practices. These experiences indicate the value of grade-level teaming for professional development among kindergarten teachers at the school level.

**Successful professional development methods**

Research and literature on professional development for teachers emphasizes that teachers learn from their own practice and through interactions other teachers. Providing in-
formation that will be directly applied in classroom situations, along with support and feedback as teachers implement new practices; using peer coaching and other formats that involve active learning and interaction; and providing ways for teachers to connect and integrate new ideas with their background knowledge are important to successful professional development (Bransford et al 2000).

**Recommendations for Professional Development**

Utilize early childhood expertise.
In implementing the Jr. Kindergarten program, it would be valuable to locate and draw on the expertise of Department of Education personnel and others with professional training in early childhood development and education.

Design professional development to support successful implementation of the Jr. Kindergarten program.
Include information to address these topics:

- **child development** during the early childhood years (ages 3 through 8);
- **characteristics of quality early childhood environments** and ways to arrange classroom space;
- **early childhood instructional strategies, teaching methods and materials** that can be used to deliver the Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten curriculum;
- **child assessment methods** including systematic use of teacher observations and informal records, and appropriate uses of standardized tests for young children;
- **planning and adapting instruction and learning experiences** to align with each child’s academic skills and other developmental characteristics, based on child assessment information;
- **effective teamwork between adults working together in classrooms**; and
- **ways to communicate with and involve parents and families of children**.

Develop topic-focused workshops and distribute resource materials for Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers to introduce the major content areas listed above.

Use proven methods of professional development for teachers and other personnel, including:

- study groups with peers, focused and led by individuals with expertise;
- focused observation of other kindergarten classrooms and programs;
- workshops focused on particular topics that teachers view as relevant, followed by implementation activities, with support and feedback;
- use of self-study materials, including quality rating scales, with focused changes supported by discussion and expert assistance;
- self-directed learning;
• providing funds and leave time for teachers to attend local and national early childhood professional development conferences, e.g. Hawaii Association for the Education of Young Children, National Association for the Education of Young Children, and “I Teach K”; and

• considering ways to support Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers who wish to obtain a M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education at the University of Hawaii.

Encourage schools to form kindergarten study teams for sharing information and ideas and supporting each other in implementing early childhood best practices.

Activities could include use of quality rating systems for self-study. The kindergarten grade level chair or another designated teacher with specific early childhood professional preparation could be responsible for team leadership. Professional development in peer leadership and connections to resources for early childhood expertise would support success of study teams.

Develop a resource pool.

Consider developing a resource pool of individuals with early childhood expertise who could provide professional development and consultation for teachers and other personnel. This resource pool could be comprised of Hawaii individuals with early childhood and consulting background (e.g. Department of Education personnel with expertise in early childhood, University of Hawaii professors, graduate students and community college instructors, people with M.Ed. degrees in early childhood education, consultants trained by Kamehameha schools, Hawaii Association for the Education of Young Children (HAEYC) accreditation project mentors, and people with training in nationally recognized curriculum development systems such as High Scope, Creative Curriculum, Work Sampling, Montessori.) Expertise could be specific to various areas, e.g. literacy, observation and assessment, planning the learning environment, working with parents. The resource pool could be used to develop and provide focused workshops with individual consulting/follow up at the school level, and could work with academic coaches or study team leaders in schools. Each Jr. Kindergarten could be allotted a designated number of consulting hours.

Build skilled leaders.

Build early childhood leadership among Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers by supporting attendance at professional events, NBPTS certification, and graduate level preparation. The HAEYC offers an annual professional development conference that includes sessions of interest to kindergarten and early elementary teachers. Several national conferences are specifically geared to early childhood and kindergarten teaching. Other activities could include visits to exemplary kindergarten classrooms in the Department of Education and Hawaii private schools, visits to high quality preschools, and visits to early childhood programs located in each school’s own community.
Parent and Family Involvement

Best Practices for Parent and Family Involvement

Schools partner with parents. “The Board of Education recognizes that a child’s education is a responsibility shared by the school and the family during the entire period the child spends in school. To support the goal of the Department of Education to educate all students effectively, schools and parents must work as knowledgeable partners.” (Hawaii Board of Education 2003)

Regular home-school communication. “The principal assures that there is regular, sustained communication between home and school.” (National Association of Elementary School Principals 1998)

Two-way communication. “Early childhood teachers work in collaborative partnerships with families, establishing and maintaining regular, frequent two-way communication with children’s parents.” (Bredekamp & Copple 1997)

Importance of children’s home experiences. “The principal and staff understand that children’s home, community, and cultural experiences impact on their development and learning.” (National Association of Elementary School Principals 1998)

Parent involvement goals and challenges

Parent involvement presents a continuing challenge for the field study schools. Reaching the goal of involving all families is particularly difficult for schools located in low-income communities where many parents did not have successful school experiences themselves. In addition, many working families in the field study school communities must spend hours commuting from home to jobs and have other priorities for spending their precious hours at home. Special events that include families are held at both schools. Both principals are intensely focused on finding effective ways to involve all the families in their school communities. However, in many cases the parents whose attention is most needed by their children do not respond, and it is difficult to extend parent participation beyond the “core” of involved families.

Home-school communication

Both schools emphasize home-school communication and have devoted considerable effort to building connections between the school and children’s families. Principals stressed the importance of establishing positive home-school relationships when children are in their kindergarten year, as a basis for future cooperation.

As part of the America’s Choice school reform emphasis on literacy, all children are expected to read at home. Parents are enlisted to read with children at home and to support
children’s independent reading; goals are set and parents encourage children to meet these goals.

**Home-school communication notebooks**
Both schools use a home-school notebook system for regular communication with families. All teachers in field study classrooms send these notebooks home each night during the week and check entries every day, posting school notices or brief notes to parents. The kindergarten home-school notebooks include records of books that children choose for home reading each evening. Parents are asked to sign each daily entry, and help their children maintain book logs. Teachers report that this method is successful in maintaining communication with many families, but about a third of the parents do not regularly sign the notebooks — their children even miss field trips, etc.— and these children are often the ones that are the least ready for school.

Some teachers take these notebooks home at the end of each week and write individual messages to inform parents about what happened to their child during the week. Teachers who provide this type of information regularly must devote large amounts of their personal time to this purpose. Teachers choose to spend time on this type of communication because they are very committed to engaging families and helping them find ways to help their children learn, and feel that sharing detailed information will contribute to these goals.

**Families helping children learn**
Some teachers also send home materials so parents can work with children who need extra help, and report that parents are successfully helping children to practice recognizing letters, learning sounds of letters, etc. One teacher has been involved in the development of a project that creates take-home kits that contain activities for children and parents to do together related to a specific topic or theme; this grant-funded project has been working well and there are plans for its expansion.

**Difficult home situations**
Several Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers expressed concern about the difficult home situations that some children in their classes experience; these include impoverished circumstances, poor housing, disorganized lifestyles, children facing serious family deprivations including death or illness of parents, use of drugs, foster care and homelessness, usually combined with a lack of attention to children’s learning needs. Many children are living with grandparents, or children move around among family groups, often changing schools. Some children do not attend school regularly – parents know that kindergarten attendance is not mandatory. Children enter school late in the year, or are often tardy – missing essential parts of the day. These home situations present difficult challenges for teachers who sincerely desire partnerships with parents that will help children get off to a good start at school.

Many children who face these difficult home situations could eventually receive services
through the Primary School Adjustment Program (PSAP); additional planning to effectively use PSAP services to reach kindergarten children and their families as early as possible could be explored. Joint planning could also focus on ways other school support personnel, such as the Parent Community Networking Center (PCNC) facilitator, could assist teachers in communicating with and involving parents and families during the kindergarten year.

**Importance of community efforts**
Both principals and teachers at the field study schools spoke about the need for community-wide efforts and programs to reach children and their families in the early years before they reach school entry age in order to increase children’s readiness for school. One teacher spoke about the need for structured programs outside of school where children from disorganized homes can interact with adults, play with other children, do homework, etc. The current after school program provides these types of experiences, but is not available for children whose parents do not work.

**Preschool program experiences**
Available information about kindergarten children’s experiences attending preschool programs is incomplete at both field study sites; although most teachers have some knowledge of children’s preschool experiences, they often lack details about the type of program, its content, or the length of time children were enrolled. Principals are familiar with and support the value of early childhood programs that take place on the school campus (e.g. Head Start, Keiki Steps “play and learn” for parents and children). However, these programs currently serve only a small percentage of children and families.

**Recommendations for Parent and Family Involvement**
Provide transition activities that involve children and parents at the beginning of the Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten year (or before).
Transition experiences are important in establishing initial impressions and attitudes about the relationship between home and school. Although transition activities at field study sites were not discussed during this study, school programs for orienting children and families to kindergarten can also focus on getting acquainted with parents. A phased-in transition plan might include informal sessions with a small number of children present so teachers can meet with parents and children together (children can explore the classroom). Meeting with parents informally can help to “break the ice” for more formal parent interviews and on-going communications. If possible, meet with entering students and their parents as early as possible (e.g. at the end of the previous school year or during a brief summer program).

Use parents as informants.
A systematic effort to collect information about children from parents at the beginning of the year is recommended, e.g., as was done in the Department of Education’s Early Provi-
Jr. Kindergarten Field Study

sions for School Success (EPSS) program (Hawaii Department of Education OIS/GEB 1994). Interviews can help teachers to establish a “partnership” relationship with parents or other family adults by seeking parents’ expert information about their own child. It is important for teachers to regard parents as genuine “experts;” to emphasize positive things the family has done, is doing, or wants to do to help their child; and to acquire ideas about family strengths as well as problems. There is no substitute for face-to-face conversation. If parents are not available, involve other family members who have responsibility for the child, e.g. grandparents, aunties, older siblings.

**Form school transition teams.**
Work together with school personnel from special service programs such as the Primary School Adjustment Program (PSAP) or Parent Community Networking Center (PCNC) on planning and implementing kindergarten transition activities as well as other events and activities that involve families. Cooperative activities could include development of a transition plan for entering students, meeting with parents of preschoolers, and identifying a linkage person for outreach.

**Connect with community early childhood programs.**
Principals and kindergarten teachers could visit and become more familiar with the early childhood programs in their community so they will know more about the kind of learning experiences that are provided, characteristics of the learning environment, schedules, routines, etc. Relationships between elementary and preschool programs can help to align curriculum and expectations for children and can provide other two-way benefits, including helping preschool teachers to better understand the expectations for children in kindergarten.

**Connect with community early childhood initiatives.**
Children’s readiness for school involves the whole community. For schools in disadvantaged communities, the “big picture” involves finding ways to reach families before children start school “already behind”. Schools need to connect with “hard to reach” families as early as possible in child’s life (Lee & Burkam 2002; Future of Children 2005).

Schools could support and become involved with community-based early childhood initiatives that aim to build leadership and interest families in becoming involved in their children’s learning during the early years, as well as to build and coordinate community resources that will benefit young children. One such initiative is the Kellogg Foundation’s Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kinds (SPARK) (W.K. Kellogg 2002). The Hawaii SPARK initiative, under the auspices of the Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture (INPEACE) involves Hawaiian families and other community members in planning and parenting-education programs.
Topics for further exploration

Use of school level personnel to increase teacher-child ratios in Jr. Kindergarten

One critical concern facing schools in providing quality programs for young children is the need to lower the current teacher-child ratio so children have more opportunities to interact with adults (the recommended ratio for 5 year-olds is 10:1). Flexibility for principals in use of staff could support these efforts.

The chart below shows the Jr. Kindergarten and Kindergarten children who were receiving services or support from special programs at field study schools, including Special Education (SPED), Students with Limited English Proficiency (SLEP), the Primary School Adjustment Program (PSAP), and speech therapy or other services. A higher percentage of these children were in Jr. Kindergarten, although percentages varied by classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th># Ch</th>
<th>SLEP</th>
<th>SPED</th>
<th>PSAP*</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of Ch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Jr. K</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All K</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Does not include children observed or reported by teacher as having challenging behavior who have not been referred for services.

One field study school principal suggested that personnel from special services programs could work in the Jr. Kindergarten program, e.g. Educational Assistants (EA’s) could be assigned to work with children during a part of each day. Although integration of special services into classroom programs is a recommended practice, it is essential that the integrity of support programs is maintained and personnel adhere to their roles. Individual schools need to review existing personnel resources, consider possible options, and maintain effective services.

Communicating information about Jr. Kindergarten

Field study school principals emphasized that communicating information to schools piloting Jr. Kindergarten programs is important. Communication concerns include:

- clear communication between pilot sites, complex and state offices;
- adequate and timely information for initiatives, including research data, alternatives and options;
- further discussion to understand how federal mandates align with best practices for working with young children;
Jr. Kindergarten Field Study

- a need for collaboration between elementary school and early childhood communities to discuss kindergarten philosophy and practices; and
- a communication network among pilot sites.

Resources Needed to Reach At-Risk Children Early

Principals at both pilot sites commented on the difficulty of addressing the needs of a disadvantaged school population without additional resources. Because there are so many children needing extra help at school entry in these communities, extra resources are needed. School demographics could be considered when allocating any available resources for targeted interventions.

The National Research Council recommends providing additional funding for schools with high numbers of children lacking early literacy skills: “Schools with kindergartners who are poorly prepared in language and literacy skills must have programs that are better than or at least equivalent to the programs found in schools with well-prepared kindergartners. In order to provide such reading programs, schools with under-prepared students need extra funding. To be effective, the extra funding should be used for methods with previously established success, and should be coupled with smaller student-teacher ratios, capable, experienced teachers and specialists, and a sufficient quantity of high-quality books and other materials” (National Research Council 1999).
References


McAfee, O., D.J. Leong and E. Bodrova (2004). Basics of Assessment: A Primer for Early Childhood Educators. Washington,
DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.


Wright Group Publishing. “Myself As A Reader” checklist.
Appendix
Questions for Kindergarten Classroom Visits

Curriculum and Instruction
  ● Curriculum content  
    ○ What specific content areas are addressed?  
    ○ What is classroom schedule? How is time allotted among various content areas?  
    ○ Are specific “packaged” curricula used? Are lessons scripted?  
    ○ How does the teacher adapt and use various curricula to meet the needs of specific children? (e.g. high achievers, low performing children)  
    ○ How does the teacher make the curriculum content relevant to the experiences and interests of individual children in the class? (examples)  
    ○ How does the curriculum support children’s learning in all areas of development: cognitive, physical, social, emotional, aesthetic?  
    ○ How often, and for how long, are children engaged in large-muscle physical activities?  
    ○ Do children have a rest time during the day?  
  ● Instructional methods  
    ○ Are there instances of large group, small group, and individualized teaching? How is time allotted among these types of activities?  
    ○ What kinds of learning materials are available for each of the various content areas and developmental areas?  
    ○ What are the predominant instructional methods and types of learning experiences for each content area?  
    ○ What are some examples of teacher-directed activities and child-directed activities?  
    ○ What types of teacher-child interactions are taking place throughout the day?  
    ○ What types of questions does the teacher ask? (give examples of how questions are used)  
    ○ Is there time for children to discuss, reflect or review what they have been doing and learning?  
  ● Integration of curriculum across content areas  
    ○ Do children work on the same or related topics of study in more than one content area?  
    ○ Is the curriculum organized by “themes” or “projects”?  
    ○ How do classroom follow-up activities incorporate learning experiences from field trips, special events, etc.?  
  ● Language and literacy curriculum (specific focus)  
    ○ What literacy experiences are occurring in the classroom?  
    ○ What language experiences are occurring in the classroom?  
    ○ Are children actively engaged in a variety of individual literacy activities? Writing? Reading books? Exploring print? Listening?  
    ○ How are language and literacy tasks used in other content areas?  
    ○ Do children talk to the teacher? What types of interchanges occur? Are conversations sustained?  
    ○ Do children talk to each other? What occasions, purposes, support talk with peers? Are conversations sustained?  
  ● Child involvement in classroom activities  
    ○ What types of tasks are children doing in the classroom?  
    ○ Do children show interest in the activities? Which activities are of particular interest to the children?  
    ○ Do all children participate in planned activities?  
    ○ What types of children’s work are displayed in the classroom?  
  ● Children’s choices and interests  
    ○ What kinds of choices about their work do children make?  
    ○ What is the teacher doing during times when children choose activities?  
    ○ Are individual children able to study topics and pursue activities of particular interest to them?  
    ○ How are children’s interests evident in the classroom?  
    ○ Are children involved in planning learning experiences?  
    ○ How are play activities incorporated into the daily schedule?  

Learning Environment
  ● Room arrangement
What is the floor plan, and how is space arranged within the classroom?

Are there areas for small group and individual work?

Are there specific locations set aside for work in specific content areas? (e.g. writing center, library, science table)

How is the space used by children – what is the “flow” of work within the classroom?

**Group size and teacher/child ratio**

- How many children in the class?

- Are any children in special programs (e.g. ESL, PSAT, etc)? How many? What is the schedule for these activities and how does this affect the regular classroom schedule?

- Are other adults regularly present in the classroom (e.g. special teachers, OT, volunteers, PTT, EA, student teacher)? How often? (get details)

**Classroom materials and equipment**

- What types of materials are predominantly used by children in the classroom?

- What types of print materials are available throughout the classroom?

- How many books, of what types?

- Are hands-on, manipulative activities available? What types, and how are they used?

- Are there materials for dramatic play, construction, sensory exploration, art, music?

**A safe and responsive environment**

- How is the classroom organized and conducted to support group cooperation and self-management skills?

- What concerns and needs are expressed by children (if any), and how does the teacher respond?

- Does the teacher anticipate possible problems and take preventive action?

- Are children attentive and involved, restless or distracted? (give specific examples, as needed).

- Is there evidence of the children’s interests in classroom displays?

- Is there evidence of the children’s families, home culture, and/or other non-school experiences in the classroom?

**Classroom community**

- What classroom rules are in effect? How well are the rules observed? How are rules enforced?

- How are problems that occur in the classroom addressed?

- Is there a time for children to raise questions and discuss topics of interest to them?

- What responsibilities and jobs do children take care of in the classroom? How are children selected for these duties?

**Outdoor and/or physical activity materials and equipment**

- What equipment is available on the playground?

- What types of outdoor space can be used – e.g. for gardening, art, other explorations of the natural environment?

- What equipment and materials are used for outdoor physical education?

- Is there a P.E. curriculum/teacher, etc.? How often? Special equipment provided?

- What other types of physical movement activities are used in the classroom, and what materials are available for these activities?

**Assessment**

- **Formal assessments**

  - Are any formal assessment instruments being used to assess children’s skills and progress? What is used, how used, how children respond.

- **Informal assessments**

  - Is the teacher using any informal tools to understand and record the children’s skill level?

**Parent/Family Involvement**

- What interactions does the teacher have with parents/families during the day?

- Is there evidence of parent/family involvement in classroom displays?

- Are any parents present in the classroom? For what purposes?
Questions and Topics for Kindergarten Teacher Interviews

Curriculum
• What parts of curriculum are most successful? Why?
• What things have not been successful? Why?
• Is curriculum appropriate for all children in the class? (explain)
• What is not included in current curriculum that would be valuable for kindergarten children? Why is this needed?
• What field trips take place, how often? Are any other types of “outside of the classroom” study events used?
• Are any outside “experts” used to conduct special learning sessions? (regularly or occasionally)

Learning Environment
• What features of learning environment would you change, if any?
  o Class size
  o Number of adults
  o Daily schedule
  o Learning materials
  o Room arrangement
  o Other
  o Do any children have special needs? What types of needs?
  o Are any children in special programs (e.g. ESL, PSAP, etc)? How many? What is the schedule for these activities and how does this affect the regular classroom schedule?
  o Are other adults regularly present in the classroom (e.g. special teachers, OT, volunteers, PTT, EA, student teacher)? How often? (get details)

Assessment
• Formal assessment
  o What structured instruments are currently used to assess children’s skills and progress? (List of all used during school year – get samples)
  o How often is each administered?
  o Which of the above are useful in identifying and planning the experiences children need to meet kindergarten learning objectives? How do you use these tools?
  o For what other purposes are child assessments used?
• Informal assessment
  o What other types of assessment do you use to understand children’s skill level and plan instruction? (e.g. checklists, observations, anecdotal records, work samples)
  o How have you used the specific assessment results for children in your class to adapt the curriculum content and learning experiences in your classroom? i.e. what do you plan and do differently, because of these results?
    o Need information about results: # children in class performing below expectations, # children at expected level, # children above
• Value of assessments for kindergarten students
  o Which assessment tools (formal or informal) are most useful and why?
  o Are there any assessments that you would not recommend? Why not?
  o Is the current timing schedule and frequency of assessments working? Would you recommend any changes?
  o What information about children would you like to have that is not available from current assessment methods?
  o Does the school (or grade level) have an overall structure and schedule for student assessments?
  o How is student progress reported to parents/families?

Professional Development
• School-level improvement activities
  o Does the school follow a model for school reform/improvement?
  o What professional development has been focused on kindergarten level?
• What is professional background of teacher?
  o Teaching experience and degrees
  o Years teaching kindergarten
  o Specialized preparation for teaching kindergarten/primary
(continued on next page)
• Workshops and conferences
• Other

- What professional development experiences would be helpful to your success in teaching kindergarten children?
- What resources on kindergarten have you used that you would recommend to other teachers?

**Topics for Principal Interviews**

- How does Jr. K fit into the overall school program and goals?
- How is the Jr. K and K program affected by America’s Choice (or other school improvement model), and efforts to meet Annual Yearly Progress needed for No Child Left Behind?
- Does the America’s Choice model (or other school improvement model) address differences in child development during early years?
- What types of decisions did your school have to make in order to implement the Jr. K program? (e.g. allocation of various resources)
- What DOE policies influence the implementation of Jr. K?
- Is the current school budget adequate to support implementation of a quality Jr. K and K program? (e.g. class size, adult-child ratio) What recommendations should be made?
- How were teachers assigned to Jr. K and K classrooms?
- What types of professional development on early education and child development were provided to Jr. K and K teachers? What resources for assisting teachers are available?
- How were children assigned to Jr. K and K classrooms this year? What factors were considered? What was the principal’s role?
- What are school policies on use of special services for K students? How are services coordinated with classroom teachers? How are part-time teachers (PTTs) or para-professional yeachers (PPTs) used at school?
- What is the school policy on promotion and retention? What were school’s expectations for Jr. K students?
- Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment (HSSRA) – review fall 2004 survey questions and results on readiness indicators for school:
  - Children ready results
  - School ready results
- What types of transition activities are provided for children entering kindergarten?
- How is the school involved with community early childhood organizations and providers?
- Is the principal familiar with NAESP Standards for Quality Early Childhood Programs and self-evaluation tools?
- What are most significant problems in improving student achievement?
- How is children’s achievement improving?