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Whole Child Development: Academic Knowledge Influence

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ED 590 Research and Complete Capstone

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Abstract

In the education systems, the emphasis on academic achievement often overshadows the development of young learners. This pressure was particularly evident in early childhood classrooms, where educators were to prioritize standardized academic outcomes over the broader needs of the whole child (Cade et al., 2022). This research paper explored the tension between academic pressure and development in early childhood education, examining how the intense focus on academic knowledge could undermine efforts to support the social, emotional, and cognitive growth of students (Friedman et al., 2021). A review of existing literature and an analysis of educational practices showed that the emphasis on academic performance often limited educators' ability to nurture a well-rounded developmental experience. The findings suggested that a rebalancing of priorities, incorporating both academic and developmental goals, was crucial for fostering a more supportive and effective learning environment for young children (Developmental Appropriate Practice, 2022)

Keywords: whole child development, developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), standardized academics, early childhood classrooms.

Chapter One: Introduction

Recent shifts towards prioritizing academic skills have significantly reduced educators' ability to focus on whole-child development in early childhood classrooms. This paper explains how the increasing pressure to emphasize academic instruction has compromised educators' ability to address the comprehensive needs of each child. Research conducted throughout the paper illustrates the effects of this educational focus, demonstrating how it takes away from the approach to supporting children's overall growth and well-being (Dowley, 2022).

Importance of Topic

Given the expectations in early childhood education and the challenges faced by young learners, it is essential to understand the impact these issues have had on children's developmental experiences. Educators were increasingly pressured with academic instruction at younger ages, often taking away from the development of each child. Recent shifts in educational standards have created a growing mismatch between the curriculum and the developmental readiness of young children. Teachers found that this force of academic demands often did not align with the developmental stages of their students, raising concerns that such expectations might have rushed children through crucial developmental milestones too quickly (Cade et al., 2022).

This situation shows a need for a more balanced educational approach that focuses on academic learning with developmental support, ensuring that early childhood education includes the well-rounded growth of young learners. Educators were encouraged to base their practices on a deep understanding of child development and the diverse needs of children at different ages. Educational programs must be changed to meet each child's needs and interests, with

consideration of a child's development (Friedman et al., 2022). By focusing on developmentally appropriate practices rather than building solely academic skills, it is possible to create learning environments that better support the overall growth and well-being of young children.

Research Question

This paper addresses the following question: In education systems, educators encounter significant challenges in promoting whole child development. How does the pressure to prioritize academic knowledge in early childhood classrooms impact educators' ability to support the whole development of each child?

Scope of Research

This paper explores studies focused on educational reforms. It covers topics such as whole child development, the pressures schools face regarding academic achievement, developmentally appropriate practices in play, and the assessment of educational knowledge. The research concludes with a summary of current findings and a concluding analysis.

Definition of Terms

Whole Child Development is an educational approach that emphasizes the comprehensive growth of students across multiple areas including academic, social, emotional, physical, and ethical. It recognizes that learning is not just about academic knowledge but also about nurturing well-rounded individuals who are equipped to thrive in all areas of their lives. This approach includes a variety of development and supports students' needs preparing them for lifelong success (Keung et al, 2020).

Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) are educational methods, strategies, and teachings that are age-appropriate and include individual needs and the developmental stage of each child. DAP ensures that teaching practices, learning environments, and educational materials align with children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth. DAP provides meaningful and relevant learning experiences that match children's abilities and interests, promoting development and learning. It emphasizes the importance of creating supportive, engaging, and challenging activities that respect each child's unique development (Friedman et al., 2022).

Standards in education are benchmarks that define what students should know, understand, and be able to do at various stages of their education. Standards outline specific learning objectives and expectations for different subjects and grade levels. Standards serve as a framework for curriculum development, instructional planning, and assessment, ensuring consistency and quality in education across schools and districts (Bolden & Tymms, 2020).

Assessment refers to the process of evaluating and measuring students' knowledge, skills, abilities, and overall progress. There are several different types of methods, including tests, quizzes, assignments, projects, and observations. The purpose of assessment is to provide feedback on student performance, make instructional decisions, and support learning in areas in which there needs improvement. Assessments can be formative or summative (Van Hemel & Snow, 2008).

Conclusion

The findings from these studies demonstrate the importance of whole-child development throughout the education system. State and national levels pressure educators to teach students

academic skills, missing important life lessons, including academic, social, emotional, physical, and ethical knowledge (Bolden & Tymms, 2020). Chapter Two examines research on why educators feel pressured to teach academics and the lack of whole-child development learning. It goes into further detail regarding developmentally appropriate practices.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Throughout the education system, educators are expected to support the development of the whole child, which encompasses not just academic achievement but also social, emotional, and cognitive skills. The pressure of meeting academic knowledge in early childhood education (ECE) has decreased educators' ability to focus on whole-child development, taking away from life-long skills. Cade et al. (2022) mentioned that the beliefs and practices of ECE teachers may sometimes be unbalanced with what is developmentally appropriate for young children. This results in a curriculum and instructional approach that has accelerated children through developmental stages too quickly, thereby neglecting essential aspects of overall growth. With this concern, a literature review was performed to understand how academic achievement and the lack of whole-child development affect early childhood students.

Academic Knowledge in Education

Within the education system, educators are required to teach particular information to students called educational standards. Standards are outlined with what students should know throughout their educational year. Throughout this section, research was conducted on how standards are implemented, how standards influence educators, and the overall education process. In the last ten years, standards have been through reforms in the knowledge children should know. According to Brown (2007), There has been increased thought by policy makers to reform school readiness for young children at federal and state levels. Standards have been created at federal and state levels to create clear and consistent expectations of the academic knowledge students should know. Standards were intended to ensure each child got a clear expectation of learning and an equal educational opportunity (Cunningham et al., 2023). While standards are implemented to ensure each child receives a quality education, the research

mentioned it has often pressured children to understand academic knowledge, disregarding other areas in a child's development. Educators often feel pressure in ensuring their students meet educational standards which changes the way concepts are taught. This includes more of a rigid curriculum, less differentiated learning, and a lack of an engaging environment to support the overall development of each child.

Standard Controversy

Research mentioned while educational standards are used to ensure students are receiving equal learning concepts, it has led to controversy in the education system. Standards have made educators unable to adapt and change to the needs of the class (Graue et al., 2018). While standards have developed into higher knowledge and more content, it has forced educators to focus solely on academics with a lack of whole child development. Teachers responded in saying the biggest challenge is the amount of time standards take to teach (Graue et al., 2018). This problem across the United States has teachers feeling stressed and unable to allow time for social-emotional development, focusing on whole child development. The high stakes associated with meeting standards resulted in curriculums that prioritize academic knowledge while lacking in other areas of growth.

While educators across the United States feel the pressure of academic knowledge, several Minnesota early childhood teachers explained feeling overwhelmed with the academic knowledge needing to be taught to young children (Graue et al., 2018). Educators have faced challenges in supporting students' development in areas of social-emotional, cognitive development, and non-academic areas. The effects of the inability to focus on student needs led to children having a negative impact on cognitive and social interaction, relationships, citizenship, and well-being (Cunningham et al., 2023). While students have diverse needs, non-

academic factors can influence student performance, including social skills, problem-solving, and decision-making. This raised concern about standards not meeting the needs of where the students are at (Brown, 2007). Standards are used to make sure students are getting the same consistent learning each individual needs but lack in the area of supporting overall child development.

Educational standards have been controversial because children develop at different rates, which is caused by the pressure of academic knowledge. Children in early childhood classrooms come into classrooms learning at different rates. With standard expectations, some students will receive success, but many face failures (Graue et al., 2018). This issue creates challenges in creating learning environments that focus on supporting whole child development and developmentally appropriate practices.

Changes Overtime

Over the years, there have been changes made in the education system with standardized tests and assessments. Research has mentioned a change in time from 1998 to 2010 in more standardized tests with fewer activities such as music in art (Brown et al., 2019). This showed concern as academic skills have been the main priority, leaving issues of developing the whole child. Government officials have made changes in not supporting higher education for all young children (Dunphy, 2015). While government changes have been made, educators often feel the pressure of needing their students to have high scores. This is due to the federal, state, and local requirements that are needed in the classrooms (Shelton & Brooks, 2019). Going forward, teachers are in the classroom to experience what students need in learning. Educators are a part of the changes going forward in the education system to support whole child development rather than academic pressure. Research findings suggest teachers should be a part of the discussions to create

standards for young children (Shelton & Brooks, 2019). The changes over the years in the education system significantly affect how learning and teaching are being done.

Through Educators Eyes

Early childhood educators expressed that the need for a large amount of academic knowledge has led to a lack of whole-child development, including a lack of social-emotional skills and knowledge. With educational changes recently, early childhood teachers have realized the content that is expected is not always appropriate, causing children to be forced through developmental stages too quickly (Cade et al., 2022). In a qualitative study, teachers were interviewed to gather thoughts on current standards and reforms happening in education. One teacher mentioned an issue, stating. Standards and academic pressure have gone away from the way children learn best, resulting in inappropriate practices and unrealistic expectations of young children (Brown, 2007). This reaction to current standards reflects the concern that current standards have led to inappropriate developmental practices.

Another area of concern has included educational reforms influencing parental decision-making. An educator mentioned the effects on parents and parents choosing where to send their children to a school that is academically exceeding, causing stress to families and schools. Parents want to give what is best to their children, but it is not always feasible financially. (Brown, 2007). Educators have expressed their frustration with supporting children as a whole in a developmentally appropriate way, but standards cause a lack of support to do so. Different theories have shown how students learn in relation to success, going against standards (Brown, 2007). Parents are driven to give their children the best education experience possible. Research mentioned while schools show academic standard scores, there is no data on the development of the whole child. Research findings indicated that some Educators express concerns with how

current standards often hinder teaching ability to provide a well-rounded education that supports all aspects of the child's growth and development.

Effects on Children

Pressured academic knowledge goes beyond affecting teachers; it is also has impacted students. A quantitative study demonstrated that children feel stress when high academic expectations are required. This has led to adverse outcomes for children. Students experience feelings such as frustration, anxiousness, and stress with school due to the pressure each individual feel. Often it has led to behavioral problems and not wanting to go to school, taking away from academic success (Özcan et al., 2023).

The pressure and need for many standards create negative attitudes towards education and affect children's well-being. Students face pressure to meet academic standards, which has led to increased anxiety and decreased confidence. Students have lower motivation, more distractions, and lower processing skills through standardized tests and assessments (Sievertsen et al., 2016). With this fatigue, students' scores on these tests do not show an accurate representation of what they may know. Policymakers and legislators use standardized tests to evaluate schooling on young children believing it is the most accurate way in student knowledge (Sievertsen et al., 2016). During testing, the student's body language shows frustration, exhaustion, and tiredness (Shelton & Brooks, 2019). Students are worried about not being good enough when students do not receive a certain score. The stress of unknowing content negatively affects student's social-emotional development (Dowley & Rice, 2022). The well-being of students has been greatly affected through standardized tests and assessments.

Research portrays this as leading to several issues, including the willingness of children to learn and the school environment. Academic knowledge pressure has overlooked other areas of development. An educator mentioned the effects of pressure on students. While students accomplish big milestones in kindergarten, it is often overlooked due to the academics that are unknown (Graue et al., 2018). The need for pressured academic knowledge has placed unrealistic expectations for children to follow, taking away from other important development skills such as language, problem-solving, creativity, executive functioning, social-emotional, and physical.

With pressured academics, children are expected to follow rigid learning environments. Often times children are forced to sit down, listen, and follow direct instructions in early school learning (Özcan et al., 2023). Research demonstrates this does not follow developmentally appropriate practices of giving children whole child development learning, according to Özcan et al (2023). Early childhood education should incorporate whole-child learning experiences that support children's social-emotional growth, creativity, and physical development. Zhang et al. (2019) argue direct instruction causes students to lose interest and creativity in learning. Standards pressure academic knowledge by greatly affecting students to lose motivation to learn, explore, and be engaged.

Whole Child Development

Whole child development includes educators ensuring children feel safe, secure and accepted (Keung et al., 2020). This includes physical, social emotional, sensory, cognitive, and communication. With academic pressure in education, research mentioned some of these categories are missing. Kindergarten curriculum and learning should show work towards teaching children problem-solving skills and having hands-on learning experiences (Keung et al., 2020). While research states this is important to development, current standards for kindergarten

include arts, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Much of this is several areas regarding whole child development. Kindergarten is critical to creating whole-person education through ethics, social skills, and lifelong learning (Keung et al., 2020). While there is a lack of whole child development, different movements are in place to support this change. This change could push down current education methods that have not been designed for young children and focus more on whole-child development in all areas (Moreno et al., 2019). While attention has been brought to the idea of supporting whole child development, there have been many issues going along with implementations. Research stated there are unsolved issues of the balance between academic training and other developmental areas (Keung et al., 2020). Teachers have reported difficulty in supporting whole child development due to various reasons, including the shortage of training and resources. Educators have faced issues with curriculum learning on top of all the teaching items that are needed to be complete, causing educators to feel overworked (Keung et al., 2020). The pressure of academics has failed to include all components of whole child development, causing educators to focus solely on academics.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Developmentally appropriate practices are used to ensure educators are supporting students in best practices. Educators are in charge of creating an environment for children to learn that supports developmental areas with executive functioning, attention, working memory, self-regulation, problem-solving, and different ways to learn (Friedman et al., 2021). When examining pressured academics, many of these practices are missing. Through a quantitative study, participants were studied based on developmentally appropriate practices in relation to academics. During the study, McDowell (2020) mentioned educators agreed developmental appropriate practice was not being used for academic needs. Another educator mentioned that

some student's standards may have, but not others. The last educator mentioned academic pressure was in place to measure progress and student needs. In correlation to pressured academics, the research mentioned other needs have to be met first to allow students to learn. The pressure of academics has not given educators the ability to meet students where each child is at and what each child may need. Developmentally appropriate practice includes educators being aware of children varying from child to child. Each child has their own abilities, strengths, and skills that contribute to success (NAEYC et al., 2021). It also includes educators in knowing where children should be developmentally at their age. When looking at a child's specific age, the research mentioned the importance of understanding what to teach them developmentally (McDowell, 2020). This included developmentally appropriate practice in knowing what development is age-appropriate and what is not. Educators have felt the demands in current education requirements as difficult due to changes being made. This is due to the student needs varying from each individual, making standards more difficult to meet (McDowell, 2020). Educators in public schools have struggled to support developmentally appropriate practices while also teaching to the standards states provide. The research acknowledged how academic pressure affected developmentally appropriate practices. This section includes developmentally appropriate practices that include play-based learning and assessments of learning.

Play Impacts

Research mentioned that play-based learning has benefited children in all areas of development using developmentally appropriate practices. When children are involved in play, students develop executive function skills. The most important practice for developing executive functioning skills through social play (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011). Executive function skills include problem-solving, focus, time management, multitasking,

decision-making, communication, and self-regulation. Skills such as planning, working memory, focus, self-control, organization, problem-solving, and perseverance are more critical than children knowing their letters and numbers (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011). In other areas, play supports growth in different problematic areas children may be experiencing. When students play, it helps children cope with anxieties, fears, and traumas an individual may be facing, allowing for children to bring them up. (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). Research states this is valuable to a child's life and their development.

Children learn academics through play as well. While including different props such as money, labels, writing tools, paper, order forms, and charts, children will gain their mathematic and literacy skills. Props in play environments support learning in literacy and math through everyday skills that are experienced in life (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). Play-based learning is a way to incorporate academic skills.

Research findings have shown that children develop life-long skills when exposed to play-based learning which educators lack in this area due to the pressure of teaching more content. Bodrova (2008) states that educators feel pressure due to concerns about children not showing school readiness and falling behind. Such skills further a child's development and academic future rather than push academic skills. Studies have shown a correlation between play and skills, including memory, self-regulation, cognitive skills, oral language abilities, social skills, and school readiness (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Research stated that there are many benefits to help support a child's development with play. In a child's education, it is valuable to have a highly creative and innovative workforce, which starts with how young children are educated in the current century (Miller & Almon, 2009). Play-based learning gives children the ability to build on skills needed throughout their lives.

Not only has there been pressure on teaching children younger but also changes that have happened with technology access. Bodrova & Leong (2003) stated educators see changes from play 30 years ago. Many times, children spend more time playing alone and less time with peers as an effect of playing more video games with fewer educational toys. With less playtime at home, children have not developed the skills needed to support their development. Educators face this challenge with changes happening in the world due to more technology.

Other educators face challenges with a lack of support from administrators. This is due to the lack of knowledge with at home experiences children have. Principals do not understand why playhouses and items are in the classroom and believe they should play at home and learn at school (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). While some children can play at home, several children do not have the ability or resources to develop important life-long skills. Research stated this is why children need to have the ability to gain skills in school settings.

Going forward in supporting play-based learning through the education system, changes need to be made. According to research in classrooms, teachers need to develop a schedule that allows students enough time to play to incorporate developmentally appropriate practices. When children play, it takes time for them to set up, choose their jobs, solve problems, and include other students in their playing. This makes it important to give students enough time to play each day (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). Without giving children, a long enough time to play, students will not be able to carry out the skills needed to learn. Dramatic play is a way children develop important lifelong skills. Children can create their own dramatic experiences with teacher assistance. Educators should give children unstructured items or props, taking away from ones that look identical to real objects and giving students developmentally appropriate practices. Students create their own props through this (Bodrova, 2008). Giving children ways to

implement and explore their own imagination will create a mature play. Props that children create give children the opportunity to use language to describe props and how to use them (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Research stated including this in a classroom can be beneficial to a child's development in social-emotional, language, creativity, imagination, and executive functioning skills.

Another way educators can support play-based learning through developmentally appropriate practices is by using play checklists. This can be done to identify the areas in which different children need assistance. An educator can use a play checklist to support the different sections a child may be lacking skills. Educators can gain insight of a child's knowledge through observations and assessment during play (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). With the awareness of knowing where children's play level is at, an educator can support building important developmental skills that are under-developed.

As there may be concerns with children who are delayed in different areas, play can help support growth in children. Children who have language delays are involved in play and can gradually build on their language skills. Children often include role-playing, such as pretending to be a mom, dad, or animal. It can start with less speaking and language and allow children to become comfortable in the environment (Heideman & Hewitt, 2010). Throughout time, children with language delays will learn more language and use more voice during play. When playing, children use language to speak about actions, roles, and the scene of the play. It allows for more vocabulary and gives children a chance to practice speaking (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). The research mentions if children do not have play opportunities and only work on worksheets, individuals will not have the ability to build on and practice their communication or language skills.

A concern with play culture varies between each child. Through play, children teach each other about their own culture and values (Rettig, 1995). Children with different cultures and beliefs can share and teach others about their own experiences. This is done through dramatic play, carrying out different roles or rules. Educators can help support this by including different cultural diversity props in their rooms (Rettig, 1995). Cultural diversity is not an issue during play-based learning.

Gender can be a way the play is pushed away. As parents or caregivers, it can be challenging when gender preferences are used during play. This includes how girls and boys see roles and practice during play (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). In some societies, boys are to play with trucks, superheroes, and tools, while girls play with housekeeping, puzzles, and areas to interest both genders. Educators can challenge gender stereotypes in play by providing environments, materials, and experiences that support a child's choice. Research has stated this has allowed educators to identify children's interests allowing the educator to add or change materials and environments to extend child learning and development. (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). One way this can be done is by creating dramatic play areas such as a vet, post office, apple orchard, or North Pole workshop. This allows both genders to play in the same area with interest. Another way both genders can incorporate this is by including dolls in block areas for girls and puzzles with construction things on puzzles. Play-based learning can be included with both males and females to develop skills.

The research found that play-based learning is the best way children can learn and practice critical life-long skills such as imagination, problem-solving, socialization, rules, roles, self-regulation, and decision-making. Educators incorporate play into their classrooms to develop a whole child. There are many steps an educator can take to implement more play-based learning

in their classrooms. Play-based learning in a classroom can help a child's social and academic development.

Assessing Knowledge

The research found that standardized tests and assessments are not a true picture of what students know; there are many ways to understand the areas students master that need growth and are missing without the pressure educators and students feel. Through observations, it is straightforward for educators to understand what students know, understand, and feel (Bradbury, 2014). The pressure of teaching to the test for teachers can disappear when observations occur. Teachers can feel they are trusted and can focus on supporting students in the areas where more learning takes place at student levels (Bradbury, 2014). The best way to know a child's development is by watching through observations and seeing how a child is engaged through experiences (Dunphy, 2015). Typically, these observations are best seen during play times. A child's well-being and active learning cause success in a child's learning, feeling energy through themselves during play (Dunphy, 2015). Observations are valuable when using documentation of pictures, running records, and quick knowledge observations. With the observations, educators can then reflect and plan based on the needs of the students in the classroom (Bradbury, 2014). These observations go into portfolios to demonstrate students' true knowledge without the pressure of right and wrong answers.

Public education schools give students tests and assessments to check understanding and knowledge. Starting at age five, students are assessed and given several scores that parents receive compared to the school and national average (Bradbury, 2014). In the United States, scores are used to evaluate teachers and school districts. It is often seen as a controversial discussion in the education system (Shelton & Brooks, 2019). Due to scores being used to evaluate teaching,

teachers often find the need to teach to the test rather than the needs of students. Educators have experienced increased pressure on test results throughout the education system, causing teaching for the test (Bradbury, 2014). While tests and assessments show a snippet of student knowledge, portfolios can demonstrate more of what a child knows and is still learning. Research mentioned that through the use of portfolios, educators can collect work that shows evidence of what a child has learned in relation to learning goals and achievements (Dunphy, 2015). Standardized tests and assessments do not include a portfolio of a child's knowledge, which benefits educators and parents. Throughout the education system, there should be limits on standardized tests due to not showing the best method of what children have learned (Alelaimat et al., 2022). Current standardized tests and assessments have shown an unfair way to demonstrate a child's knowledge and how teachers teach. The tests and assessments educators use do not show developmentally appropriate practices.

Review of the Importance of the Topic

Educators play a role in a child's development and learning. While teaching students academic skills, children develop the knowledge needed for specific skills, and the pressure revolving around academics has led to missing other developmental milestones (Bolden & Tymms, 2020). With the pressure of academics, educators face challenges in supporting whole child development. This has led to inappropriate practices. The goal of educators is preparing students for the future, creating well rounded students (Cade et al, 2022). Students develop at different rates, needing learning to be differentiated. Standards have led to a one-size-fits-all approach, which has taken away from supporting a child (Brown, 2007). Educators have faced pressure to support the academic needs of the students while also trying to support whole child development.

Summary of Findings

Three significant themes the studies and research conducted are educators feeling pressure in academic teaching and taking away from other essential teaching concepts. Standards play a big role in how educators teach children, such as teaching to a specific test, leaving out certain concepts, or focusing solely on academics (Bradbury, 2014). Educators' express frustrations with how the education system is teaching young children.

Not only does academic pressure affect educators, but also children. With academic pressure, students feel the pressure of doing well, causing stress and a bad relationship with school (Özcan et al, 2023). Students do not have the opportunity to build upon skills other than academics.

With academic pressure, there has been a lack of whole-child development and developmentally appropriate practices. Whole child development should include understanding and managing emotions, building relationships, using problem-solving skills, and implementing social skills (Keung, 2020). Education is lacking this. Developmentally appropriate practices include ideas such as play and authentic assessments. Play is a developmentally appropriate way for students to learn essential lifelong and academic skills (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). Current assessments include one-time tests with a score. Developmentally appropriate practices for assessment include portfolios, observations, and work samples to show a true picture of what students know (Dunphy, 2015).

Conclusion

Education has required teachers to follow standards to ensure every child gets the right to learn specific concepts, causing academic pressure. While it allows children to acquire academic

knowledge, it does not focus on the whole child's development or developmentally appropriate practice, causing academic pressure. When standards are used, there is an increase in curriculum expectations, and how a child does is an evaluation of an educator's teaching (Graue et al., 2018). Reforms are being looked at to focus on supporting all and every student. While supporting all and every student, educators must support whole child development. Developmentally appropriate practices include ways to support whole child development (Dowley & Rice, 2022). Research findings suggest that play-based learning develops well-rounded students in appropriate teaching practices. Through play, students not only implement everyday academic skills such as math, literacy, and writing, students all learn social-emotional, decision-making, and problem-solving skills (Miller & Almon, 2009). While play is a developmentally appropriate practice, measuring a student's knowledge also impacts learning. Creating portfolios, collecting work samples, and taking observations are developmentally appropriate practices to collect information on what a child truly knows (Van Hemel & Snow, 2008). Including developmentally appropriate practices in the education system creates well-rounded students, further developing whole child development (Friedman et al., 2021). In the next chapter, insight gained, application, and future recommendations will be discussed.

Chapter Three: Discussion, Application, and Future Studies

Research has demonstrated the effects academic pressure has on students and educators. These findings have highlighted changes throughout the education system, focusing on standards rather than the whole child. Whole child development includes understanding and managing emotions, building relationships, using problem-solving skills, and implementing social skills (Keung et al., 2020). The education system's requirements for teaching young children do not include essential skills in supporting whole child development. A high-quality learning environment includes developmentally appropriate practices, which are often missed (Friedman et al., 2021). These practices include allowing children to learn through play and be adequately assessed to understand what each individual does understand. This chapter includes insights through the research, how research will inform instruction and educational practices, and suggestions for future studies to understand more about academic pressure.

Insights Gained

The insight gained from this research portrayed the importance of academic pressure in the current education system. Educators must teach young children critical academic skills and pressure them to know the information, often from a single test (McDowell, 2020). Standards have put this into place. While each child is learning all the same information, these standards often put in place pressure at young and young ages, forcing children through stages too quickly (Alelami et al., 2022). This academic pressure leads educators to run out of time to focus on other developmental areas.

Research findings indicated that standards are the role that causes academic pressure on educators and children. State standards are used in mathematics, literacy, science, social, art, and

physical education. While these areas have important learning, the pressure of these standards does not always allow children to go into the depth of learning the areas where each child is developmentally (Bolden & Tymms, 2020).

For the research on the effects of pressured academics on teachers and students, findings show that both are significantly affected. Teachers experience stress in providing all the academic knowledge required (Brown, 2007). Educators also feel like they cannot get to all the content, missing other developmentally appropriate areas, which include social-emotional, problem-solving, and executive functioning skills. Educators expressed concern about the hindering of creating well-rounded students due to academic pressure (Graue et al., 2018). Students also feel stress in the pressure of academics, primarily through standardized tests. Findings have found that students lose confidence with stress-pressured academics. Through the loss of confidence, behaviors are more likely to occur (Zhang et al., 2019). Research connected behaviors with children being forced to sit down and listen to instruction rather than learning through practices that best-fit student needs. Teachers and children are negatively affected by academic pressure.

Other insights gained through the research include the need for whole-child development. Whole-child development includes giving children a sense of security through physical, social-emotional, cognitive, and communication. These areas can be learned through experiences children face through learning, which the current education system does not support (Keung et al., 2020). The current system is focusing on academics, with a lack of whole-child development. Ways to implement whole-child development include developmentally appropriate practices. The research mentioned the importance of developmentally appropriate practices in teaching to meet a child's needs (Friedman et al., 2021). One way this can be implemented is through play. Play

allows children to learn critical life-long skills such as imagination, problem-solving, socialization, rules, roles, self-regulation, and decision-making (Miller & Almon, 2009). Standards and academic pressure take away from children's ability to learn through this developmentally appropriate practice. Another crucial developmental practice research suggests is how assessments are performed on children. Instead of a one-test-fits-all, educators should be showing a student's knowledge through observations, portfolios, and work samples (Dunphy, 2015). Academic pressure does not allow educators to support assessments in this way.

Application

The research on academic pressure showed that educators face challenges in supporting whole-child development. Standards play a role in how educators teach young children, focusing on academic skills rather than skills to create well-rounded students (Moreno et al, 2019). Proving proper developmental practices includes skills such as age-level teaching practices, learning environments, and educational materials that align with children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth. Developmentally appropriate practices can be used in play-based learning, which supports meeting children at age-appropriate development (McDowell, 2020). Findings demonstrate that play-based learning includes problem-solving, social-emotional learning, language, and decision-making skills. Play also allows children to use academic skills such as counting, reading, writing, adding, subtracting, and sorting. Giving children the ability to learn at the level each child is at gives individuals the opportunity to become successful in all areas.

While research showed developmentally appropriate play practices, another area includes assessments (Van Hemel & Snow, 2008). Findings suggest changing the way children demonstrate what has been learning. This includes keeping portfolios of a child's work over the

year for progress and up-to-date knowledge. Developmentally appropriate assessment practices also include direct observations of what a child completes in the classroom (Shelton & Brooks, 2019). When a child is asked to sit down for a test, it does not represent what a child knows. Education focuses on the development of the whole child by watching all sets of skills through observations, portfolios, and work samples.

Future Research Recommendations

A limitation of the research on whole-child development includes how standards and requirements change from year to year. Reviewing the current expectations of educators and students in the education system is essential. The impact of standards on students could change if standards focus more on whole-child development by using developmentally appropriate practices. Academic pressure should be researched often to understand the current research it has on educators and children.

Another future study would include the size of the studies. More quantitative data with direct observations and studies could demonstrate how academic pressure affects children more clearly. Observations and studies comparing students who experience standardized tests and those who do not could greatly benefit from changes that may need to be made in the education system. Many research studies were limited in comparing percentages and lifelong effects of taking away academic pressure in schools.

Areas of study could be another area of future studies. While states and countries vary in expectations for educators and students, different research areas could indicate research supporting children's learning. The studies of different areas could include requirements of class

sizes, curriculum, testing, length of the school day, and length of the school year, which vary from different areas of teaching education.

Conclusion

Academic pressure is used in the education system through standards. States have put requirements in place for educators to ensure children are being taught and are mastered through schooling (Brown et al., 2019). The use of standards has dramatically affected both educators and children. Educators face the pressure of teaching the academic skills required by states, taking away from whole child development (Bolden & Tymms, 2020). While educators point out the challenges of ensuring each child meets the requirements, educators also mention the feeling of being overworked and causing stress. This is due to tests and assessments that state officials believe show an evaluation of how the educator teaches (Bradbury, 2014). While there are effects on educators, children face the same pressures of academics. Children face anxiety and stress through the system of standards (Brown, 2007). This is due to not having confidence when one test shows information about their academic learning. Students face these challenges of pressure and dislike school. Research suggested focusing more on whole-child development to create well-rounded students (Moreno et al., 2019). Using developmentally appropriate practices can lead to better learning and development (Dowley & Rice, 2022). Two ways to incorporate developmentally appropriate practices include play-based learning and authentic assessments such as work samples, portfolios, and observations. The education system needs to be reformed to take the pressure off educators and children and focus on developmentally appropriate practices to support whole child development.

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