



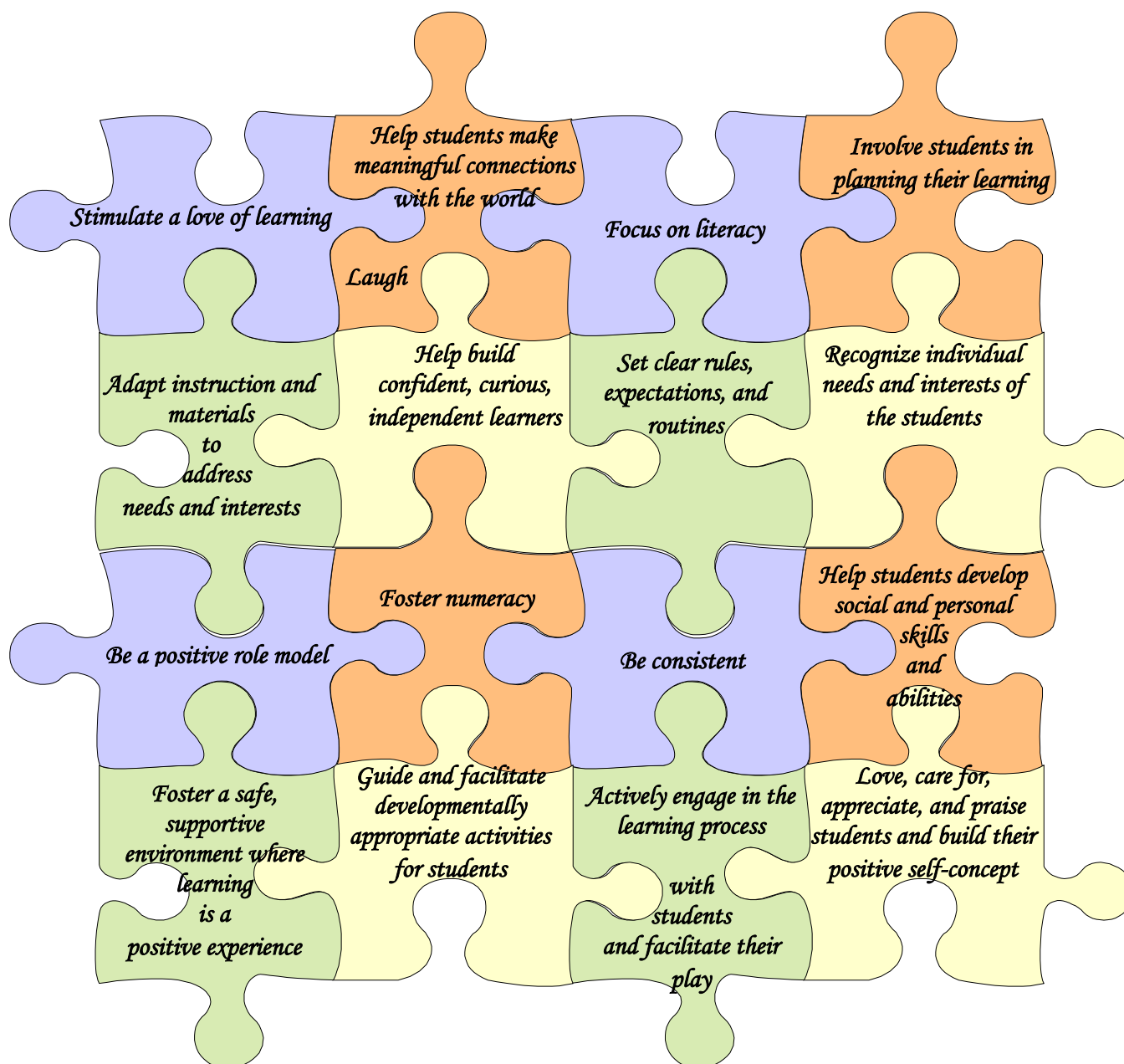
A Summary of Early Childhood Education Principles Into Practice: A Kindergarten to Grade 3 Needs Assessment

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Executive Summary: Put Children First!

Teachers in the 2006 *Kindergarten to Grade 3 Needs Assessment* identified the most important early childhood pedagogy. They identified the following:



Foreword

Why was the Early Childhood Education Needs Assessment Conducted?

Saskatchewan Learning conducted a needs assessment in order to gather information and opinions from early childhood educators. The main purpose of the needs assessment was to determine how Saskatchewan Learning can effectively support sound early childhood education practices in all areas of study from Kindergarten to Grade 3. The needs assessment focused on the following:

- strengthen early childhood education practice in Required Areas of Study
- inform the Kindergarten curriculum renewal process.

How was the Needs Assessment Conducted?

Staff from the Curriculum and Instruction Branch, with input from various educational partners, developed a survey in the fall of 2004. During the winter of 2005, in consultation with Directors of Education, Regional Superintendents of Curriculum and Instruction (RSCI) invited approximately 100 early childhood educators (approximately 14 Kindergarten to Grade 3 teachers per region) from a variety of school settings to participate in the needs assessment.

The surveys were forwarded to the participants and, when completed, returned to Saskatchewan Learning. The anonymity of the participants was protected as the Department staff members who reviewed and analyzed the data did not know the names of the participants who completed the surveys (unless the participants chose to reveal their identities). Ninety-six (96) completed surveys were returned.

A previous Kindergarten needs assessment was conducted in 1990. The intention of the 1990 needs assessment was to provide a comprehensive overview of Kindergarten education in Saskatchewan. A total of 826 needs assessments were distributed to Kindergarten teachers (English – 759 and French – 67), and 524 were returned. The results of the 1990 needs assessment are compared with the results of this needs assessment, where feasible.

Early Childhood Education Support in All Subject Areas

A significant number of early childhood teachers are in the beginning phase of teaching.

One of the main purposes of this needs assessment was to elicit the supports that participants needed to fulfill their roles as early childhood educators. The following section contains information gathered about provincial curricula in the Required Areas of Study. Early childhood educators also provided information about their teaching experience and qualifications. The survey questions collected information regarding respondents' training as early childhood educators and years of experience in Kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms to ascertain if teachers are in the early, middle, or late stages of their careers.

Teacher Experience

The total years (full-time equivalent) of the participants' teaching experience at the Kindergarten to Grade 3 level are shown on the chart that follows.

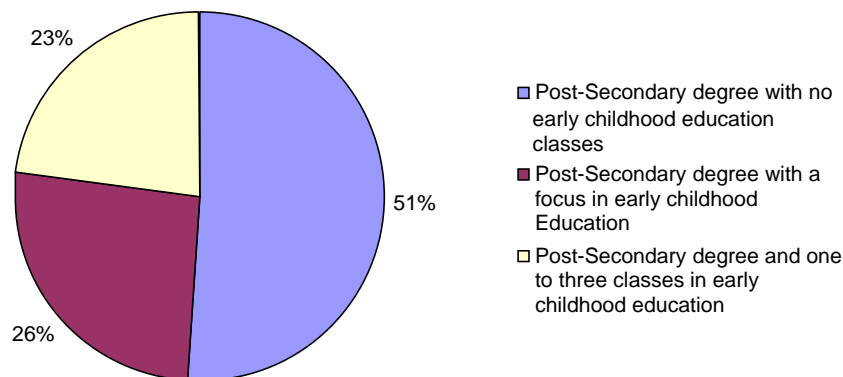
Years of Experience	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35
Number of Teachers	25	21	17	13	8	9	3

The years of experience chart demonstrates that 48% of respondents are in the early phase of their teaching career, 39% of respondents are mid-career, and 13% of respondents are at the end of their career. The majority of early childhood educators in Saskatchewan are beginning to build their practice as early childhood teachers.

Teacher Qualifications

Participants were asked to describe their post-secondary education. The pie graph below offers a visual representation of their responses to training in early childhood education.

Early Childhood Post-Secondary Level Education



Although most participants have a degree in elementary education, the majority of participants do not have university training in early childhood education. Only 7% of participants have taken classes related to early childhood education in the last 5 years. There is a reported lack of opportunity for teachers to develop professionally in early childhood education in the province.

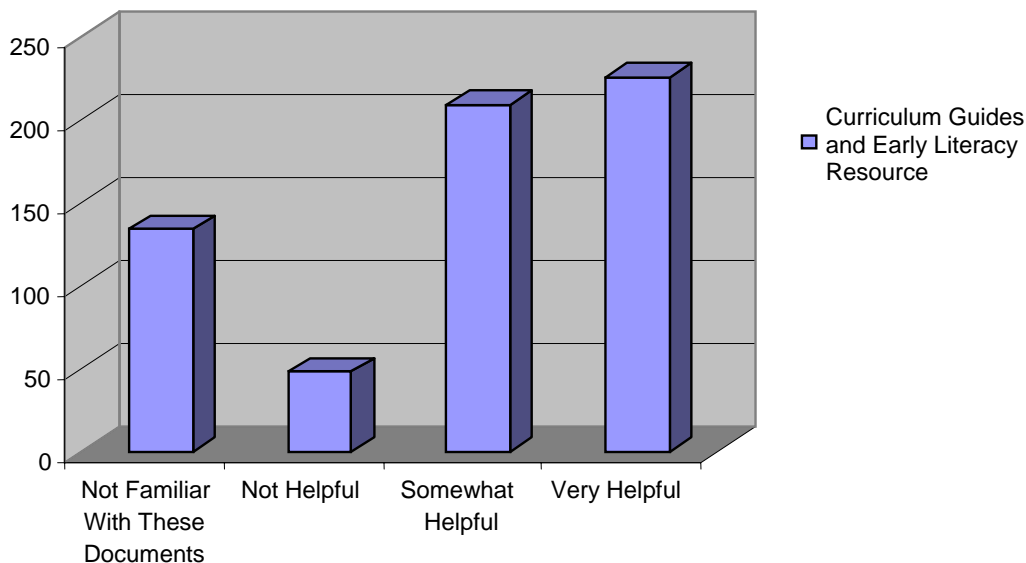
For comparative purposes, in 1990, 20% of the Kindergarten teachers responded as having no early childhood education classes, while approximately 26% had one or two early childhood classes. The comparison between 1990 and 2005 indicates that there is a significant increase in the number of K-3 teachers who do not have university training in early childhood education.

Curriculum Guides and Early Literacy Resource

Early childhood educators were asked to comment on the degree to which the curriculum guides for the Required Areas of Study at the Elementary Level are helpful to K-3 teachers. The Arts Education curriculum guide was not included because it was in the renewal phase during the time of the assessment. A synopsis of the ratings and general comments for curriculum guides and the early literacy document are provided in this section. For more detailed information see Appendix A.

The following bar graph offers a visual representation of the combined responses regarding the usefulness of provincial curriculum guides and the early literacy resource.

Curriculum Guides and Early Literacy Resource



Approximately 20% of the participants were unfamiliar with some of the curriculum documents.

Several teachers indicated that they follow specific commercially produced resources as opposed to the provincial curriculum.

"Curriculum inservices are useful, but tend to be 'shots in the arm'."

Findings include the following:

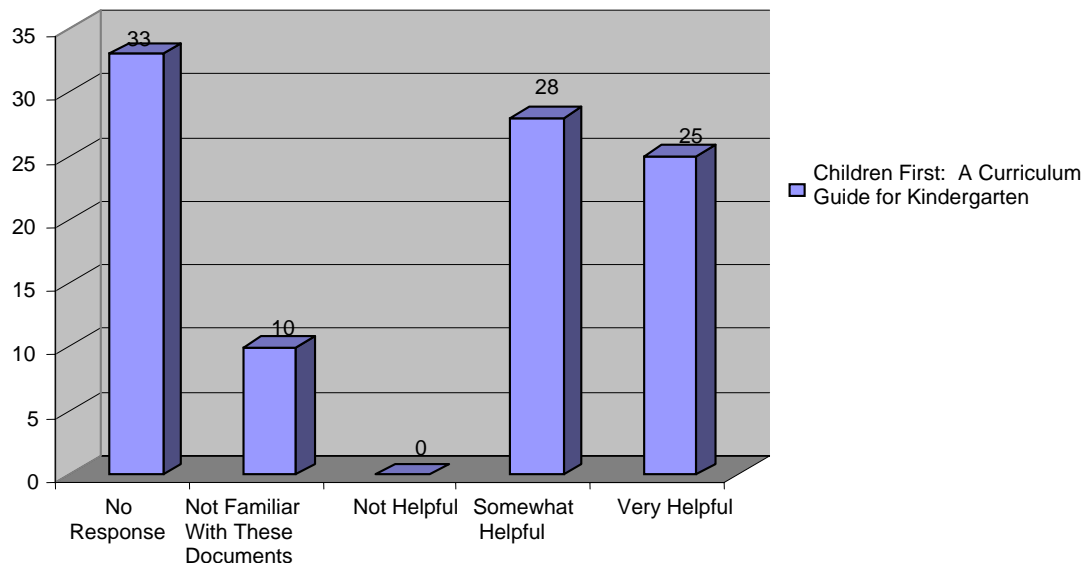
- The participants generally found the Saskatchewan Learning curriculum guides and early literacy resource to be valuable documents.
- Approximately 20% of the participants were unfamiliar with some of the curriculum documents.
- Kindergarten teachers indicated that they would like all Elementary Level curriculum guides to feature guidance regarding Kindergarten including learning objectives and sample themes/units.
- There was variation in the responses regarding the size of the documents. Several participants commented that the documents are too lengthy, while several others requested yet more detail.
- The participants indicated that they would like to have the older curricula such as Science (1990), Mathematics (1992), Kindergarten (1994), and Social Studies (1995) renewed.
- The participants commented repeatedly that they would like to have more sample units and themes included in the curriculum guides for all subjects.
- A number of the participants expressed a desire for easier accessibility to learning resources and equipment. Participants recognized the benefits of using a wide range of learning resources, but found it time consuming and expensive to gather suitable resources to support teaching and learning.
- The participants indicated they would like more time to reflect on new practice and implement curriculum initiatives.
- The participants valued curriculum inservice but felt it was not adequate to support pedagogical changes.

Children First: A Curriculum Guide for Kindergarten (1994)

The following bar graph offers a visual representation regarding the usefulness of *Children First: A Curriculum Guide for Kindergarten*.

Children First: A Curriculum Guide for Kindergarten (1994)

Many of the Grades 1 to 3 teachers did not respond to the questions regarding the Kindergarten curriculum.

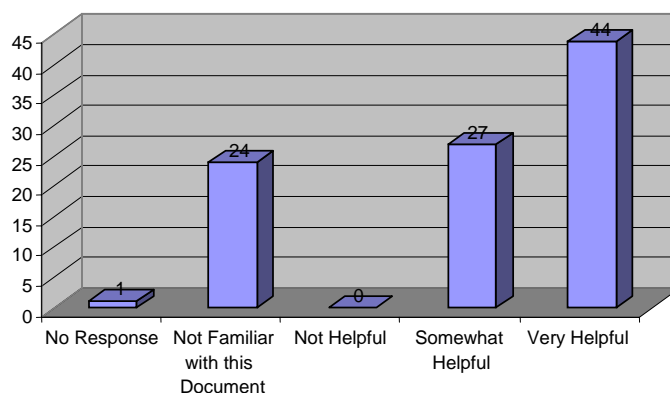


The Kindergarten curriculum guide was rated as helpful by 55% of the respondents and unfamiliar to 10% of the respondents. It is important to note that 34% of the respondents did not reply to the question.

Early Literacy: A Resource for Teachers (2002)

The following bar graph offers a visual representation of the usefulness of the document *Early Literacy: A Resource for Teachers*. The figures on top of the bar indicate the number of teachers who responded.

"I feel better knowing that there is no one method that is best for all children. If you like a method – use it – but be open-minded enough to try other methods."



The Early Literacy resource was rated by 74% of respondents to be helpful and 25% of respondents were unfamiliar with this document. Supportive comments included the following:

- includes background information to understand why strategies are important
- includes a variety of practical strategies
- encourages multiple methods
- includes a detailed developmental continuum
- provides ideas for identifying at-risk children
- develops essential practices and strategies.

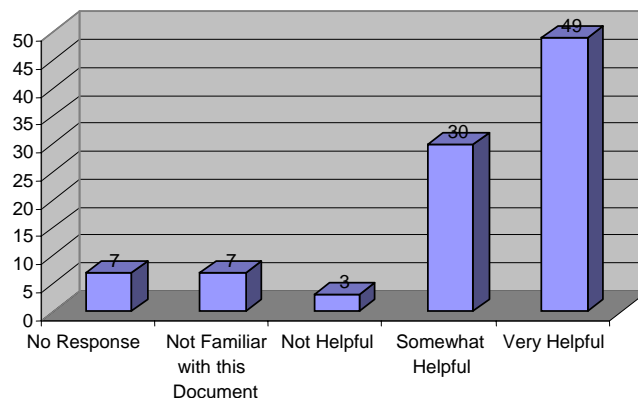
Ideas for improvement included:

- provide more strategies for Grade 3
- provide user friendly evaluation forms
- include a more extensive bibliography
- include computer software suggestions.

English Language Arts: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (K-5) (2000)

The following bar graph offers a visual representation of the usefulness of *English Language Arts: A Curriculum Guide for The Elementary Level (K-5)*. The figures on top of the bar indicate the number of teachers who responded.

"I believe I use the ELA guide often because we've had four days of renewal inservice and I have had the opportunity to learn about and apply the suggested techniques."



The English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum guide was rated helpful by 82% of the respondents and 7% of respondents were unfamiliar with this document. The organization of the guide and the range of developmental levels were cited as the most useful. Other helpful aspects are as follows:

- includes objectives "at a glance" that are useful for planning and day to day teaching
- includes daily and yearly planning
- provides a variety of strategies and activities that are practical
- includes excellent sample units
- provides useful assessment techniques and templates.

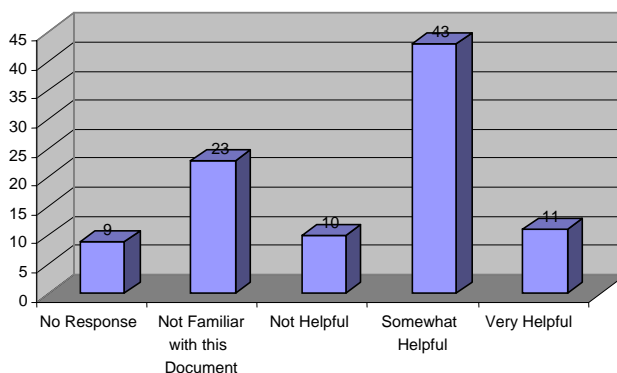
Ideas for curriculum improvement:

- include more ideas on how to teach specific objectives
- include more phonetic skills
- include more strategies
- provide more ideas for use of checklists.

Health Education: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (1998)

The following bar graph offers a visual representation of the usefulness of *Health Education: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level*. The figures on top of the bar indicate the number of teachers who responded.

"The guide is good, but very time consuming for teachers to always be looking for appropriate resources."



The Health Education curriculum guide was rated helpful by 56% of the respondents and 24% of the respondents were not familiar with this document. The following positive comments were shared:

- includes practical yearly planning guide and sample units
- emphasizes healthy lifestyles
- includes a variety of assessment and evaluation techniques.

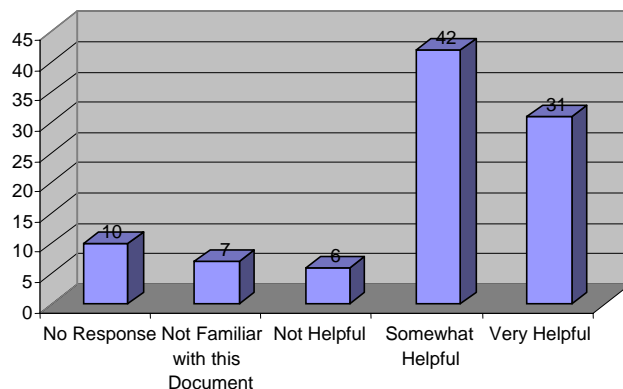
Ideas for curriculum improvement included:

- make objectives more specific
- list resources that are easily available to schools
- include sample ideas for integration into other subject areas
- provide concrete foundational objectives
- provide an increased understanding of the levels and steps of the decision-making process.

Mathematics: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (1992)

The following bar graph offers a visual representation of the usefulness of *Mathematics: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level*. The figures on top of the bar indicate the number of teachers who responded.

"Too many teachers are 'textbook' directed and not 'strand' directed."



The Mathematics curriculum guide was rated helpful by 76% of the respondents and 7% of the respondents were unfamiliar with this document. The following positive comments were cited:

- provides practical strands and scope-and-sequence charts
- is an important resource for beginning teachers
- includes Kindergarten objectives
- is well stated, clear, and straightforward.

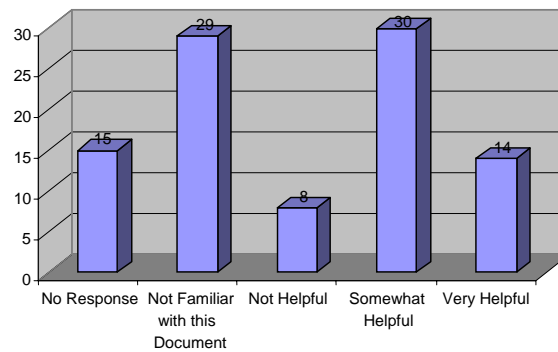
Ideas for curriculum improvement included:

- provide more ideas for assessment and evaluation
- place objectives in easy to read format such as objectives "at a glance" as in ELA
- develop detailed rubrics
- include a scope-and-sequence for quick reference.

Physical Education: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (1999)

The following bar graph offers a visual representation of the usefulness of *Physical Education: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level*. The figures on top of the bar indicate the number of teachers who responded.

Students are at extremely varied levels of gross/fine motor development which makes many of the activities difficult to do."



The Physical Education curriculum guide was found to be helpful by 46% of the respondents and 30% of the respondents were unfamiliar with this document. The following positive comments were suggested by teachers:

- is a short document that is clearly stated
- emphasizes safety
- provides useful tools and supports
- provides a balance between co-operative and competitive games.

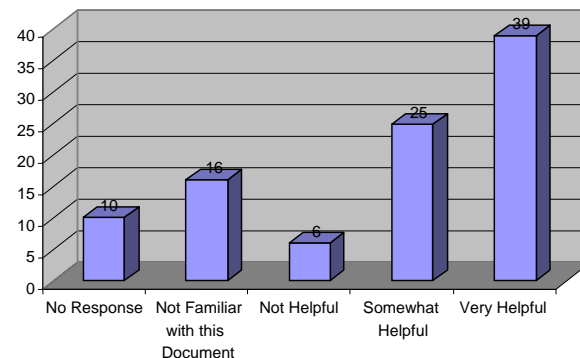
Ideas for curriculum improvement included:

- suggest modifications for special needs students
- include available resources for dance and gymnastics
- include rubrics for evaluation
- include more games and activities
- include more sample lesson plans.

Science: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (1990)

The following bar graph offers a visual representation of the usefulness of *Science: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level*. The figures on top of the bar indicate the number of teachers who responded.

"I like how it is clearly organized with core units and optional units with great activities listed under each unit."



The Science curriculum guide was rated helpful by 67% of the respondents and 16% of the respondents were unfamiliar with this document. The following positive responses were given:

- is a user friendly curriculum
- is formatted for easy reading across grade levels
- suggests practical activities in each unit
- identifies connections between other units and grade levels
- includes helpful sample lessons and units.

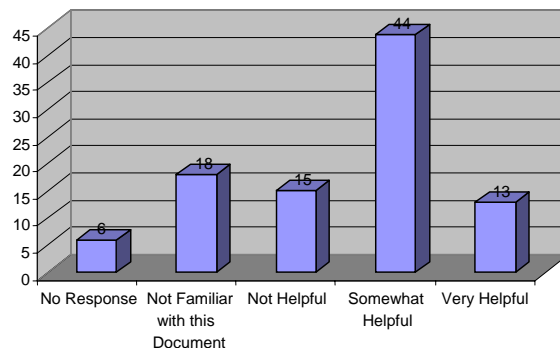
Ideas for curriculum improvement included:

- develop rubrics
- improve checklists
- suggest resources at a level children can read
- include helpful websites
- include safety aspects of experimentation.

Social Studies: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (1995)

The following bar graph offers a visual representation of the usefulness of *Social Studies: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level*. The figures on top of the bar indicate the number of teachers who responded.

"Lots of good ideas, but we don't have a lot of the suggested resources."



The Social Studies curriculum guide was rated helpful by 58% of the respondents and 19% of the respondents were unfamiliar with this document. The following reasons were cited as being helpful:

- provides excellent suggestions to correspond with each module of each unit
- organization of the guide has an easy-to-follow format
- includes interesting units or themes assigned to specific grades
- incorporates valuable Indian and Métis content
- provides information to connect to other curricula.

Ideas for curriculum improvement included:

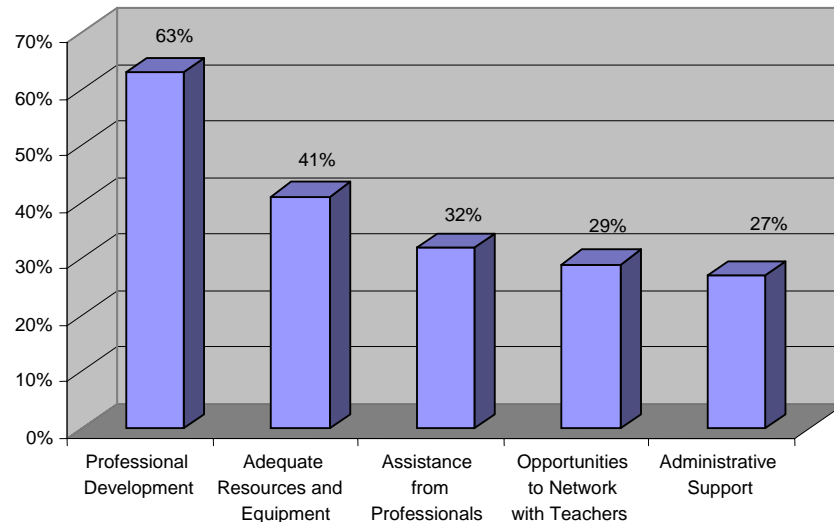
- provide specific learning objectives
- include a natural progression of skills
- provide more specific ideas for delivering content rather than lecture
- include more hands-on activities for young children
- list available resources that are easily available to schools.

Early Childhood Education Support Needed

As stated previously, one focus of the needs assessment was to elicit what support the participants need to fulfill their roles as early childhood educators.

Early childhood educators provided information about program, environment, and organization offering a current provincial understanding of early childhood education issues and practices. For more information about the school year, teaching assignments, student enrolment, and other areas, see Appendix B. Participants were asked about the types of support needed as early childhood educators. The following graph offers a visual representation of the most common responses.

Early Childhood Education Requested Support



Participants indicated diverse needs to support early childhood education across Saskatchewan but the need for the following supports were most prominent:

- professional development
- adequate resources and equipment
- assistance from other professionals
- opportunities to network with other teachers
- administrative support.

Professional Development

The survey questions focused on two forms of professional development: inservice and memberships in professional organizations. A variety of both are available in our province. Most participants indicated a significant need for professional development opportunities including access to inservice, subject or grade level workshops, and consistent curriculum updates.

Inservice

"We are unable to attend various workshops because of budget. Usually one workshop is all we are allowed per two years because our budget is shared among K-9 teachers – so we divide it accordingly."

Early childhood teachers indicated several different perceptions of inservice. Respondents mentioned the need for access to professional development opportunities outside their school division. Teachers indicated that limited access to professional development was due to budget restrictions. For example, a teacher could choose a professional development opportunity once every year or two, or be restricted to a specific amount of money for a conference per year.

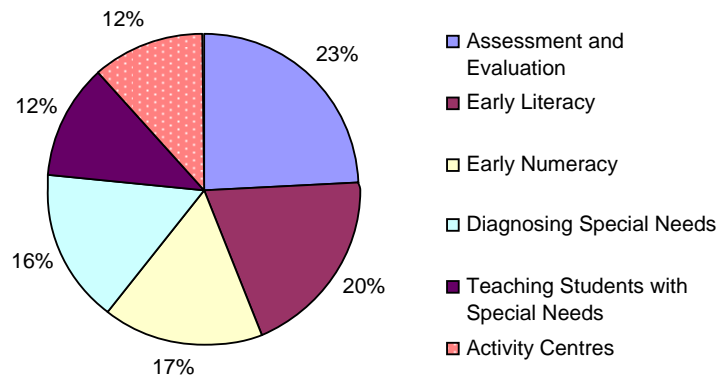
Early childhood educators identified teacher-initiated meetings or grade-alike meetings within the school division as being a valuable form of professional development and a necessary support for classroom teachers. Meetings that focused on grade-alike or subject specific topics facilitated the collaboration and support to build programs based on experience.

The responses to the early childhood education needs assessment indicated teachers would like more curricula inservice in the form of regular, consistent curriculum updates specific to grade levels. The process of one day curriculum inservice or as one teacher commented, "one shot in the arm" inservice was not sufficient to prepare, reflect, and plan for new ideas and initiatives. Kindergarten teachers felt especially that their needs were not being met through school division inservice.

Participants were asked about the types of inservice needed to support early childhood education programs. The inservices that were the most popular choices are shown in the following pie graph.

Types of Requested Inservice

40% of early childhood educators have not attended an early childhood education professional development opportunity in the last five years.



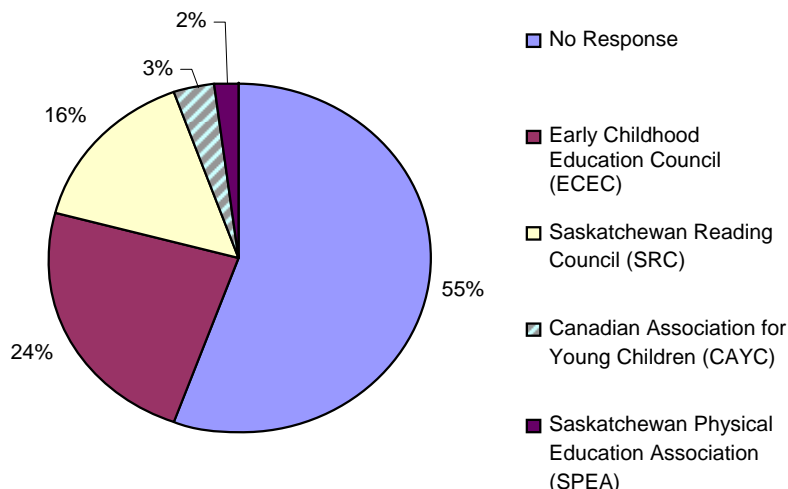
The largest number of responses indicates that participants would like inservice on assessment and evaluation of student progress. Early literacy and early numeracy are other areas identified as important for professional development opportunities. Similar to the Kindergarten teacher responses in 1990, the most common type of professional development was attendance at regular school division meetings.

Membership in Professional Organizations

The participants were asked whether they are members of a Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF) subject council or other group related to early childhood education.

Membership in Professional Organizations

Most teachers (55%) did not indicate that they have a membership in a provincial professional organization related to early childhood education.



In 1990, approximately 50% of the Kindergarten teacher respondents were members of the STF Early Childhood Education Council, while 24% of K-3 respondents were members in 2005. There were a significant number of early childhood educators who did not indicate a membership to a professional organization.

Adequate Resources and Equipment

"I need a classroom that can be set up to fulfill the aspects of an early childhood education space."

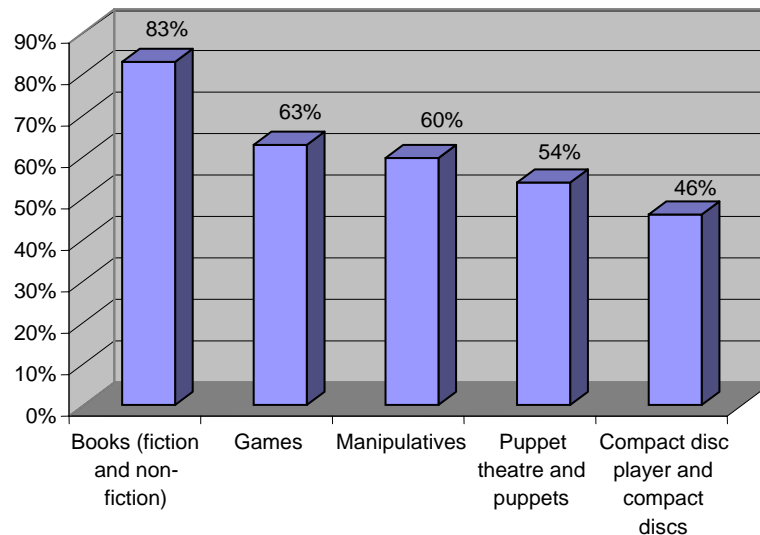
Resources and equipment are an important part of the early childhood education classroom. The items in the environment provide the tools children need to grow and develop and to learn about the world around them. Children's exploring of available materials leads to the quality of the learning experienced.

Learning Resources and Equipment

Participants were asked about the types of equipment owned by the school or the teacher. The following graph indicates the number of teacher-owned materials.

Learning Resources and Equipment

"Found materials are fun and appropriate but the 'something from nothing' mentality is tiresome in the extreme form it has become."



Early childhood education classrooms contain many items personally purchased by the teacher (see Appendix C). The need for adequate resources and equipment indicated by early childhood educators includes high quality literature, manipulatives, computer and computer programs, and a variety of play-based learning equipment.

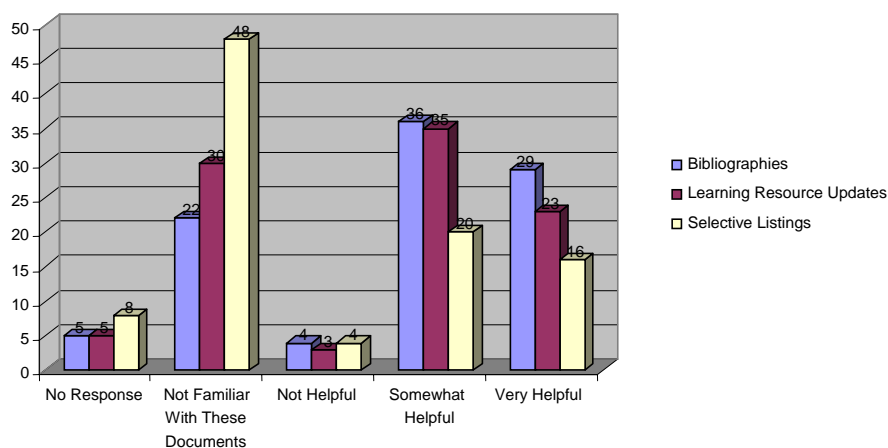
Respondents indicated that equipment is insufficient in classrooms. Outdated manipulatives, worn furniture, and many other items are in need of replacement. Teachers commented on the difficulty of providing quality programs with inconsistent funding and without the resources recommended by the curriculum.

Early childhood educators commented about the need for teacher resources such as professional development books, tapes, and videos. Teachers were asking for materials and resources recommended in the curriculum. Some teachers suggested having a central place for teacher resources, books, and activities to be shared throughout the school division. Respondents appreciated school division theme boxes containing teacher materials about specific topics.

Selection Aids

"Wow, this is the first time I have used the Saskatchewan Learning website! What a useable, practical resource."

There is a significant number of early childhood educators who are not familiar with Saskatchewan Learning's selection aids.



Saskatchewan Learning provides bibliographies, learning resource updates, and selective listings to assist teachers in obtaining resources to support curriculum. Most respondents, as shown above, found the selection aids to be somewhat or very helpful.

Useful Early Childhood Education Learning Resources

Questions in the needs assessment asked participants about the types of useful early childhood education learning resources in the schools and school divisions. The following chart indicates the most common responses. The numeral beside each response indicates the number of participants who provided that response.

	Number of Participants	Types of Resources
<i>The most common response was "helpful human resources such as teacher-librarians and consultants".</i>	36	Helpful human resources (e.g., teacher-librarian, consultant)
	26	Books
	19	Kits
	13	Journals
	12	Videos
	7	Compact discs
	6	Manipulatives
	5	DVDs
	5	Teacher references

Human resources are seen as the most valuable. Several teachers mentioned the importance of teacher-librarians in ordering appropriate educational resources because teacher-librarians are familiar with the range of resources available and how to access them. Collaborating and teaching with consultants, both inside and outside of the classroom, was also valued.

Budget

A question in the needs assessment addressed the area of budget allocations for early childhood classrooms. Participants were asked how much involvement they have with the classroom (or school) budget and the allocation of funds for equipping early childhood classrooms.

Consistent classroom budgets to sustain quality early learning environments are rare.

Early childhood educators' responses varied. Forty percent (40%) of the respondents indicated that they receive a specific amount from the school board annually ranging from \$50.00 to \$1 750.00. Nine percent (9%) of respondents indicated that they receive money on a needs basis and that items are submitted to the principal, board, or committee for approval. Respondents did not indicate a consistent budget to replace or expand existing equipment and resources. A procedure for purchasing larger items such as water/sand tables or furniture over several school years was not in place because budget expenditures are confined to each fiscal year.

Similar to 1990, the needs assessment revealed that a wide variety of budgeting arrangements exist in Saskatchewan schools.

Assistance From Professionals and Others

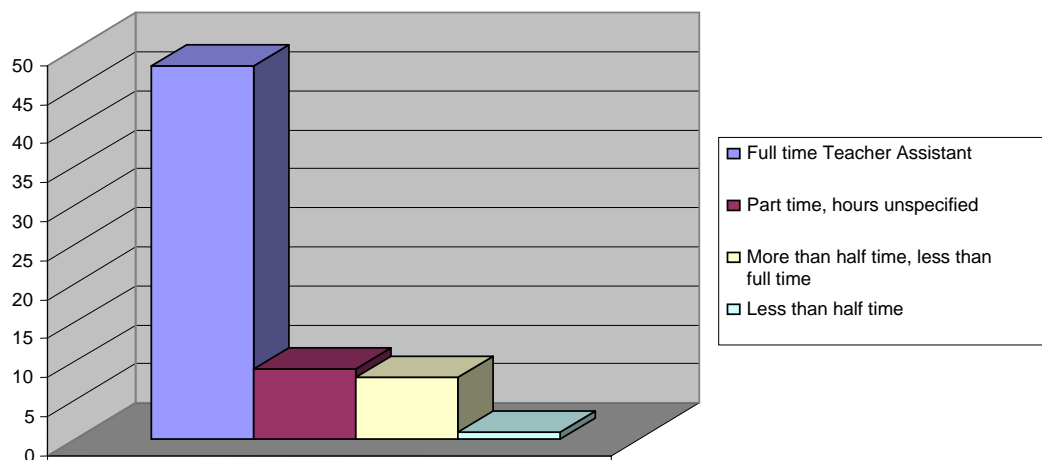
Participants indicated a need to have access to other professionals in the school division such as speech and language pathologists, resource room teachers, educational psychologists, teacher librarians, occupational therapists, and early childhood education consultants. The teachers required assistance in the form of professional collaboration and working together with individual children to implement personal programs in the classroom.

Early childhood educators indicated the need for other professionals to diagnose children with specific needs, but also to provide support in programming and a more in-depth support of implementing the child's individual program in the classroom.

Support of Teacher Assistants

Participants were asked about their experience working with teacher assistants. In particular, participants were asked about the duties, early childhood education, training, and experience of teacher assistants with whom participants worked. The chart below indicates the responses.

Assignments of Teacher Assistants



Seventeen percent (17%) of early childhood educators indicated a need for teacher assistants to be in early childhood classrooms. Teacher assistants support the teacher and students in the classroom by reinforcing instruction, providing assistance for specific children, and assisting with multiple situations that occur with young children.

In 1990, 40% of the kindergarten teachers who completed the survey indicated that they worked with teacher assistants. Thirty-four percent (34%) of the teacher assistants worked full time. The remainder worked from between two and 20 hours a week on a part-time basis.

In 2005, 68% of the K-3 teachers who completed the survey indicated that they work with teacher assistants. Of the teacher assistants, 72% worked full time. The remainder worked on a part-time basis (hours often unspecified). The duties of the teacher assistants in 2005 were similar to their duties in 1990.

Participants were asked to indicate the ratio of adults to children in their classrooms (i.e., teacher and teacher assistant to children). Responses varied from 1 to 4.5 to 1 to 35 with a mean of approximately 1 to 12.5.

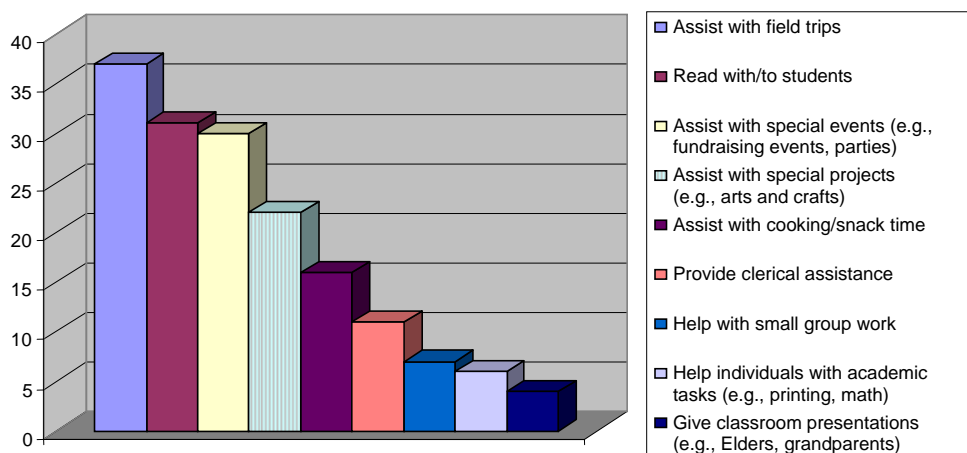
Support of Parents/Caregivers

As in 1990, the majority of educators responding to the needs assessment in 2005 involved parents/caregivers in their programs, and the extent of the involvement varied from classroom to classroom.

In the 2005 needs assessment, K-3 participants were asked whether they involved parents/caregivers in the school program and, if so, to give examples of ways in which these people were of assistance. The following bar graph indicates the different forms of involvement.

There is an increase from 40% to 68% of teachers who work with teacher assistants.

Parent/Caregiver Involvement



Teachers involve parents in the classroom as supportive partners. Most often, parents are invited to help supervise class field trips, read to and with students, and assist with special events that include fundraising and parent presentations.

Early childhood educators indicated a need for parental support for school programs.

Support of Community Agencies and Organizations

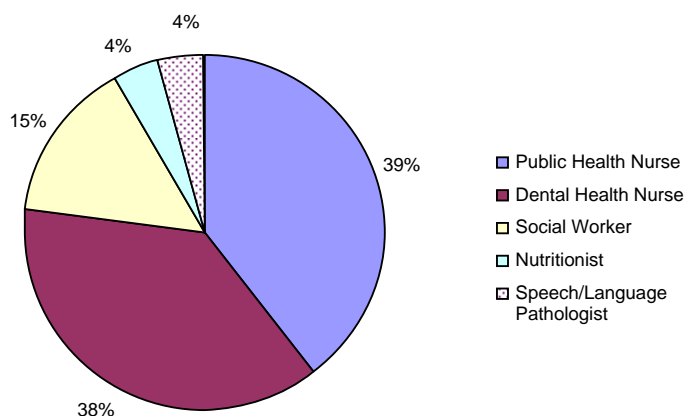
Children learn in a school environment and also in family and community interactions. Saskatchewan Learning encourages schools and communities to seek opportunities to support and foster this larger learning community to broaden the range of programs and services that meet the needs of all children.

In the needs assessment, participants were asked whether they involved community partners and, if so, to give examples of ways in which these people assisted educators and/or students.

Program Support in the School and the Community

The early childhood education needs assessment gathered information about the current Saskatchewan context. The respondents were asked about the kinds of supports available for early childhood education programs. The following pie graph indicates the community support reported by respondents.

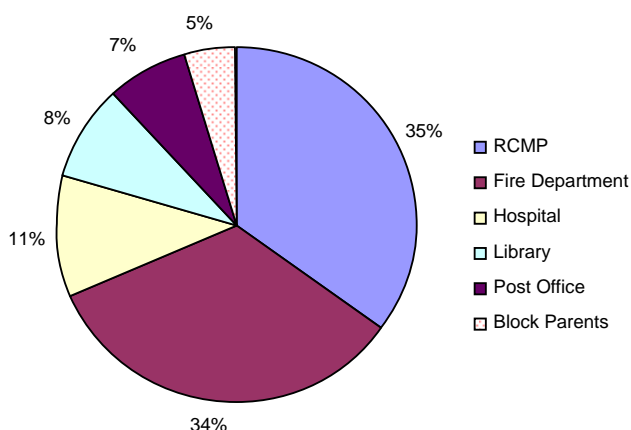
Community Support



Early childhood educators reported that public health has a significant presence in the school providing services such as disease control, immunization, checks for head lice, and vision/hearing

screening. Dental health nurses assist with classroom dental hygiene presentations. Social workers provide counselling for children as well as home liaisons for issues of nutrition, clothing, and care. The following pie graph indicates other types of community involvement as reported by K-3 teachers.

Community Program Support



All agencies provided specific presentations or introduced colouring contest information at the school. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) provided bike safety presentations and assisted in bullying issues. The fire department provided presentations on fire safety. The post office and fire department provided colouring contest information. Field trips to these agencies also occurred in most early childhood classrooms.

"The support I need as an early childhood educator is a supportive administrator who understands the importance of an activity-based classroom."

"It takes a lot of effort to run a theme-based room and gather and change centres."

"I have found my greatest support to be amongst my colleagues."

Support and Understanding of Administration

Early childhood educators were very clear on the need for support from in-school administrators. Teachers were looking for support in the form of curriculum knowledge, classroom advocacy, and personal encouragement.

Respondents indicated a need for administration to be knowledgeable about developmentally appropriate early childhood education practices in order to support those teachers. This included knowledge about early childhood education, child development, and the need for hands-on activities. Early childhood educators felt that an awareness of the needs of young children would build a knowledge base for administrators to help support early childhood (K-3) classroom initiatives.

The in-school administrator advocates for divisional support for budget and personnel. Classroom advocacy involves in-school administrators' decisions based on knowledge of early childhood education practice related to class size, budget allocations, materials and resources, and teacher assistant allocation.

Support or personal encouragement of teachers involved advocating and recognizing program efforts, and appreciating the challenges associated in working with young children.

Networking

Many early childhood educators expressed a desire to network with other teachers in grade or subject groupings both within and outside of the school division. Teachers reported that networking provides the collaboration and support to share ideas, and to gain knowledge and expertise. Respondents valued the time to discuss with colleagues information about the curriculum, new resources, and addressing student needs.

Kindergarten Curriculum Renewal

One of the main purposes of the needs assessment was to inform the Kindergarten curriculum renewal process. The following information was gathered from the survey and, in conjunction with research and other data, will assist the development of a renewed curriculum guide.

Highlights from the survey related specifically to *Children First*, the current Kindergarten curriculum guide, follow:

- The respondents generally indicated that they respect the philosophy and appreciate the flexibility of the curriculum.
- The participants indicated that they would like more sample themes, more specific learning objectives, and scope-and-sequence charts regarding the developmental levels of children.
- The respondents reported that they would like more information regarding the Required Areas of Study in the curriculum guide (e.g., learning objectives from each of the subject area curricula).
- The respondents indicated that the Kindergarten curriculum needs to be updated to continue including research findings and new learning resources.

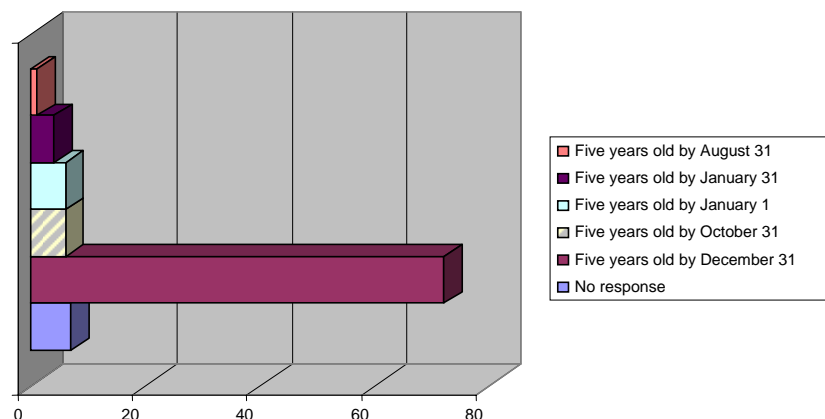
Recommendations, related to the findings above, to guide the renewal of the Kindergarten curriculum follow:

- include specific skills and objectives for Kindergarten
- include a detailed scope-and-sequence of child development
- include and expand objectives from other subject areas
- include specific and current instructional approaches
- provide subject integration content for multi-graded classrooms
- provide ideas for parental involvement
- provide guidance in fostering skills through active engagement
- include references to research that support best practice.

Entry Age

The needs assessment asked participants to indicate the entry age guidelines for Kindergarten in the respective school divisions. The numbers that appear below the following graph indicate the number of participants who provided a particular response.

Entry age was not mentioned as an issue for early childhood educators at the time of the 2005 needs assessment. Class size was mentioned by many respondents.



Full-Day Kindergarten, Every Day

Advantages and Disadvantages of Full-Day Every-Day Kindergarten

A current issue for early childhood educators throughout North America is whether it is beneficial for children to attend a full-day Kindergarten, every day. The needs assessment asked participants to list advantages and disadvantages of offering full-day Kindergarten, five days a week. The following charts indicate the responses. The numeral beside each response indicates the number of participants who provided that response.

Number of respondents	Advantages
32	Would provide more time for teaching and learning
8	Would provide more opportunity for children to develop language skills
8	Would offer a safe, stimulating environment for vulnerable children

64 respondents felt that full-day Kindergarten every day would be difficult for young children while 32 respondents believed that providing more time for teaching and learning would benefit educationally disadvantaged children.

Research results vary indicating the need for caution in moving to full-day, every-day Kindergarten.

7	Would provide childcare
3	Would provide more opportunities for children to develop social and behavioural skills
2	Would allow for better establishment of routines
2	Would foster a more relaxed atmosphere
2	Would offer more opportunities for children to participate in school events
2	Would reduce transportation costs
1	Would eliminate lost time between Kindergarten days
1	Would provide more opportunities for early identification of learning disabilities

Number of respondents	Disadvantages
64	Would be difficult for young children (e.g., tiring, boring, frustrating, overwhelming)
7	Would mean that children have less time to play in a less structured environment ("Kids need to be kids!")
7	Would lessen the time that children spend with their parents
6	Would require more space
4	Would be tiring for the teacher
3	May force larger student/teacher ratios
1	Would be more difficult for boys than for girls
1	Would require more materials
1	May force more structured Pre-Kindergarten programs
1	Would mean that sporadic attendees would fall further behind

The participants listed approximately the same number of advantages as disadvantages. The majority of respondents felt that a full-day Kindergarten, every day would not be beneficial for all children.

Summary of the Early Childhood Education Needs Assessment

Challenges

The purpose of the needs assessment was two-fold: to inform the Kindergarten curriculum renewal process and to determine how Saskatchewan Learning might effectively support sound early childhood education practices in all areas of study from Kindergarten to Grade 3. The collated data from the surveys identified several challenges for teachers, school and school division administrators, and Saskatchewan Learning.

Professional Development

The majority of early childhood educators are in the beginning stages of classroom teaching. Professional development in early childhood education is critical to building an understanding of the philosophical beliefs that provide the foundation for teaching young children. Opportunities for professional development are lacking for early childhood teachers in Saskatchewan.

Adequate Resources

Environments that support children's early learning experiences require adequate resources to actively engage children in learning. Many early childhood educators spend their own money on materials to provide a developmentally appropriate environment. Consistent, appropriate, and long-term budget allocation for early childhood education programs would be beneficial. Early childhood educators indicated a lack of access to curriculum-suggested resources to implement new curricula and to support curriculum objectives.

English as a Second Language

Many early childhood educators indicated a significant increase in the number of children for whom English is a second or other language. Classroom support, for culturally and linguistically diverse children, such as language instruction, instructional strategies, and assessment techniques are essential for successful classroom practice.

Knowledge of Curriculum

Provincial curriculum guides include the learning objectives to be achieved by students at each grade level in each area of study. The needs assessment indicated that approximately 21% of early childhood educators are not familiar with the curriculum guides for Kindergarten or the Required Areas of Study. It is difficult to meet curriculum objectives when one does not have or use the provincial curriculum guides.

New Curricula

Early childhood educators would like curriculum documents to contain more sample units, “objectives at a glance”, and – in the case of the Kindergarten curriculum – developmental continua. Respondents also indicated that they would like new curricula to require less time for gathering suggested resources.

Time

Many early childhood educators reported a lack of time for reflecting on the curriculum and implementing new changes. Teachers reported a need to balance school division, school, and classroom initiatives. A common phrase was “we cannot continue to ‘add on’ without ‘giving up’.”

Conclusion

Saskatchewan Learning expresses its appreciation to the caring teachers who provided valuable information to assist in supporting sound early childhood education practice in the province. Their extensive contribution of information will be used to shape and develop future curricula and related supports for Saskatchewan students and teachers. In addition, Saskatchewan Learning wishes to thank Directors of Education for their support and assistance in distributing and collecting the needs assessment surveys.

Saskatchewan early childhood educators K-3 were asked to reflect on the most important aspects of early childhood education, and practices that foster the most productive learning. The comments appear within the graphic below.

Activities or Experiences That Foster the Most Productive Learning



Saskatchewan early childhood education teachers continue to make a difference in the lives of students.

Appendix A: Use of Curriculum Guides

The survey asked participants, for each Saskatchewan Learning curriculum guide that they were familiar with, to check the most appropriate category. The numerals in the chart below indicate the number of participants who provided that particular response.

Curriculum Guides	No Response	Awareness I understand the curriculum and have the knowledge to teach it.	Exploration I use the curriculum and experiment in some areas of teaching.	Synthesis I adapt teaching to help students achieve curriculum objectives.	Refinement I understand the curriculum philosophy and continue to refine my practice to help students achieve curriculum objectives.
<i>Children First</i>	38	12	7	19	20
<i>English Language Arts</i>	0	13	16	37	30
<i>Health Education</i>	15	24	19	26	12
<i>Mathematics</i>	4	17	15	36	24
<i>Physical Education</i>	28	21	22	16	9
<i>Science</i>	11	15	13	31	26
<i>Social Studies</i>	12	19	23	31	11

Learning Experiences

The survey asked participants to what extent the learning experiences provided for the students match the learning objectives, instructional approaches, and assessment and evaluation techniques suggested in the curriculum guides. Note: NR indicates no response, 1 indicates a low rating, and 4 indicates a high rating.

Children First: A Curriculum Guide for Kindergarten (1994)

	NR	1	2	3	4
• Learning objectives	45	0	5	16	30
• Instructional approaches	46	2	3	16	29
• Assessment and evaluation techniques	47	1	4	21	23

English Language Arts: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (2002)

	NR	1	2	3	4
• Learning objectives	15	0	5	30	46
• Instructional approaches	15	0	3	45	33
• Assessment and evaluation techniques	15	0	11	43	27

Health Education: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (1998)

	NR	1	2	3	4
• Learning objectives	29	4	18	32	13
• Instructional approaches	31	5	23	29	8
• Assessment and evaluation techniques	31	6	23	31	5

Mathematics: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (1992)

	NR	1	2	3	4
• Learning objectives	20	1	1	32	42
• Instructional approaches	20	1	9	36	30
• Assessment and evaluation techniques	21	0	12	38	25

Physical Education: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (1999)

	NR	1	2	3	4
• Learning objectives	41	4	10	31	10
• Instructional approaches	42	5	11	33	5
• Assessment and evaluation techniques	42	11	12	28	4

Science: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (1990)

	NR	1	2	3	4
• Learning objectives	24	2	8	29	33
• Instructional approaches	27	2	11	31	25
• Assessment and evaluation techniques	27	3	19	33	14

Social Studies: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (1995)

	NR	1	2	3	4
• Learning objectives	29	3	15	35	14
• Instructional approaches	28	7	17	38	6
• Assessment and evaluation techniques	29	5	24	37	1

Appendix B: Saskatchewan Context

The information provided in this appendix assists readers in understanding the current situation in Saskatchewan schools.

School Year

Kindergarten teachers were asked to indicate the total number of days in the school year, the starting and finishing dates of the school year, and whether Kindergarten students attend full days or half days.

There was a tendency for Kindergarten to be half days in urban schools with students attending every day, and full days in rural schools with students attending every other day. These results are similar to the 1990 Kindergarten needs assessment results.

As in 1990, the school year varied from 80 to 100 days for those with full-day Kindergarten programs, and 160-197 days for those with half-day programs.

Teaching Assignments

Ninety-six Kindergarten to Grade 3 teachers responded to the 2005 needs assessment. Some of them taught single grades. Others taught split grades. It is interesting to note the variety of combination teaching assignments that make up the Saskatchewan early childhood education context.

Approximately 70% of the respondents have single-grade assignments.

Number of Respondents	Single-grade Assignments
19	Kindergarten, full day, every other day
14	Kindergarten, half day, every day
15	Grade 1 (including one modified class)
13	Grade 2
5	Grade 3

Number of Respondents	Combination Assignments
4	Kindergarten/Grade 1
2	Kindergarten, half-time and special education, half-time
1	Kindergarten, half-time and Grades 4-7 French, half-time
1	Kindergarten and Grade 3, opposite days
1	Kindergarten, half-time and Grade 1, full time, separate classrooms
3	Kindergarten, half-time and Prekindergarten, half-time
1	Grade 1 English language arts, Grade 3 science/french/health education, Grade 4/5 Science
4	Grades 1/2
3	Grades 1/2/3
1	Grade 2 (and Grade 6, Arts Education)
4	Grades 2/3
3	Grades 3/4
1	Grade 3 (and Grade 4 Health Education)

Number of Respondents	Other
1	Curriculum Consultant

There is variation within the combination assignments. Approximately 77% of the respondents with a combination grade are in a multi-grade classroom. Twenty-three percent (23%) of respondents in a combination assignment have subject responsibilities across varying grades. This includes special education, Grade 1 English Language Arts, French, Health Education, Arts Education, and Science in combination with Kindergarten.

Student Enrolment

In response to the question regarding enrolment, the enrolment varied from 5 to 40 students, with a mean of approximately 22 students per class.

Students With Special Needs

In 1990, approximately 50% of the Kindergarten teachers completing the survey stated that they had one or more students with special needs in the classrooms. In 2005, more than 75% of the Kindergarten to Grade 3 teachers stated that they had one or more students with special needs. As in 1990, many of the students with special needs have a developmental delay or speech problems. There was a significant increase, in 2005, in the number of children for whom English is a second or other language.

There are more types of disabilities listed in 2005 than in 1990. Students with special needs included those with physical disabilities, those with emotional or social problems, and those with specific conditions such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder or Down Syndrome.

Students of First Nation and Métis Ancestry

The chart below indicates the response provided to the question regarding how many students in the participants' classrooms were identified as being of First Nation or Métis ancestry. The top row of numbers indicates the number of First Nation or Métis students in a classroom. The bottom row indicates the number of participants who provided that response. Thirteen teachers did not respond.

# Students		0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35
Classrooms	13 (NR)	59	4	6	8	3	1	2

Learning Environment

Young children learn by exploring and investigating. The classroom environment helps set the stage for social learning and encourages student exploration. The following section describes examples of current practice in the context of Saskatchewan classrooms.

Floor Plan

Early childhood teachers were asked to submit a floor plan of their classrooms. The floor plan arrangement allows the teacher to present diverse learning opportunities for children. Various elements of the classroom setting support and reinforce what the teacher offers to children as the curriculum is implemented.

The participants indicated typical classroom arrangements with space for individual desks, tables, and various centers around the perimeter of the room. Classrooms contained specific areas for quiet activities such as a carpeted section and areas to facilitate craft making.

Provisions for Students to Work Alone, in Pairs, and in Small and Large Groups

Participants were asked to submit a floor plan and to provide examples about whether the space in the classrooms makes provisions for students to work alone, in pairs, and in groups. The following chart indicates the responses. The numeral beside each response indicates the number of participants who provided that response.

19	Have child-sized tables and chairs
15	Use open floor space
8	Have a carpeted area
5	Rearrange desks into different groups
5	Have activity centres
3	Section off areas with cupboards, shelves, and other materials
3	Use the hallway
2	Have special chairs (e.g., beanbag, cubic, stuffed, air-filled)

Most classrooms have a separate area for desks that are typically arranged in rows or groups, as well as tables for group learning.

Quiet, Comfortable Areas

Participants were asked about a quiet, comfortable area provided in their classrooms where children can relax and be alone or with a classmate. If students had the benefit of such an area, participants were asked to describe it. The following chart indicates the responses. The numeral beside each response indicates the number of participants who provided that response.

38	Have special areas for quiet time (e.g., prayer corner, cozy corner – with fireplace, tent, bear den, old bathtub full of cushions, library centre, writing centre)
33	Have a carpeted area
23	Have pillows
17	Have special chairs (e.g., bean bag, air-filled, rocking)
3	Use the hallway

Most early childhood education classrooms have a place where students can relax or have quiet time in a soft environment.

Activity Centres

Activity or learning centres are spaces within an early childhood education setting where materials or equipment are gathered and arranged in order to promote hands-on learning that develops specific objectives and skills. Activity centres vary in size, permanence, and rotation of materials.

Types of Activity Centres

Participants were asked whether they had activity centres in the classrooms and, if so, to indicate the types of centres. The following list indicates the most common responses. The numeral beside each response indicates the number of participants who provided that response.

<i>Quiet time centres and listening centres appear to be the most prevalent in Saskatchewan K-3 classrooms.</i>	75	Quiet-time centre (e.g., library)
	64	Listening centre
	60	Writing centre (e.g., office)
	57	Exploration centre (e.g., math, science)
	56	Creative problem-solving centre (e.g., arts education)
	55	Block-building centre
	46	Imaginative play centre
	38	Sand and water centre
	36	Computer centre
	14	Woodworking centre
	13	Game centre
	13	Physical activity centre
	13	Puzzle centre

The most common centres in an early childhood classroom focus on receptive methods for individual learning. Although fewer in number, some early childhood classrooms provide children opportunities for writing, mathematics, and problem solving.

Changing the Materials in the Activity Centres

Participants were asked how often they change the materials in the activity centres, and for what reasons. The following list indicates the most common responses. The numeral beside each response indicates the number of participants who provided that response.

36	Change materials as theme changes
21	Change materials in some centres every three to six weeks
8	Change materials in some centres weekly

-
- | | |
|---|--|
| 6 | Change materials as students' development progresses |
| 4 | Change materials in some centres every two weeks |
| 2 | Change materials in some centres every two to three months |
| 2 | Change materials once everyone has gone through centres |

Equipment and learning resources play an important role in any early childhood education program. As in 1990, educators in 2005 use their own resources to supplement those supplied by the school. The quantity of teacher-owned equipment and learning resources being used in the classroom is significant (see Appendix C).

Manipulatives

In one portion of the needs assessment, participants were asked about the types of manipulatives used and to describe a typical lesson where manipulatives were used. The participants listed a wide variety of manipulatives including pattern blocks, small toys, beads, tangrams, pegs and boards, geoboards, and more. Examples of the most common types of lessons include:

- Patterning
- Adding and subtracting (e.g., with plastic animals, playing cards)
- Sorting, grouping (e.g., sorting plastic bears according to size)
- Counting (e.g., with cotton swabs).

The most common manipulatives suggested were primarily used for math activities. Manipulatives included play money, cube-a-links, base 10 materials, pattern blocks, and counters.

Computers

Participants were asked whether they had one or more computers in the classrooms and, if so, how the computer(s) is/are used by the students. The following chart indicates the responses.

Number of Respondents	Number of Computers
31	1 Computer
25	2 Computers
24	4 Computers
8	No response
7	3 Computers
1	6 Computers

Ways That Students Use the Computers

It was reported that the majority of students use computers to interact with educational programs, games, and stories on CD-ROM. Students also have access to the Internet for information and use of word processing software to publish stories.

Student Assessment and Evaluation

Participants were asked to what extent they use the following methods of student assessment and evaluation. The numeral beside each response indicates the number of participants who provided that response.

	Student Assessment and Evaluation Methods	Never	Sometimes	Frequently
<i>Early childhood educators use a variety of assessment and evaluation methods, but there are a number of methods that many teachers have not yet tried.</i>	anecdotal record keeping	0	41	54
	assessment portfolios	3	30	61
	information sharing sessions with parents/caregivers/ students	1	56	38
	observation checklists	3	49	43
	performance stations	24	49	16
	rating scales	19	49	24
	report cards (samples were provided)	1	28	61
	student conferences	10	61	19
	videotaping	74	11	1
Portfolios and reports cards were the methods most frequently cited. Videotaping was the method that was least used. Other examples of assessment and evaluation that the participants used included school division student benchmark assessments, written tests, reading lists, student self-assessments, rubrics, quizzes, formal tests, and peer assessments.				

Appendix C: Learning Resources and Equipment

Participants were asked which of the following resources/equipment participants have in their classrooms or have access to for use with students. The numeral beside each response indicates the number of participants who provided that response.

Learning Resources/Equipment	School Owned	Teacher Owned	Comments
animal cage	16	9	
aquarium	34	22	
balance scales	88	2	
blocks (a variety)	86	28	
books (fiction and non-fiction)	90	80	
cash register and Canadian play money	76	24	
chairs (small)	91	5	Child's easy chair
compact disc player and compact discs	85	44	
chalkboards (small)	74	11	I made individual ones.
computer and computer software, CD-ROMs	89	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old – hardly used • Need suitable programs
cooking equipment (e.g., blender, mixer, bowls, utensils, metric measuring cups and spoons)	68	31	
DVD player and DVDs	73	14	
experience chart and stand	84	5	
flannel board and felt figures	54	32	Most are owned by me
games (e.g., card, board, floor)	78	60	
globe	84	3	
imaginative play equipment (e.g., costumes, dishes, furniture)	57	30	
Internet access	88	3	
listening post and headphones	76	7	Personal walkman one headset only
magnetic board and magnetic figures	63	23	
magnets (e.g., bar, horseshoe)	81	18	
magnifying glass	82	13	
manipulatives (a variety)	91	58	
musical instruments	81	17	
overhead projector	90	0	
painting easels	53	4	
pocket chart	71	28	
puppet theatre and puppets	51	43	
puzzles (various levels of difficulty)	64	56	
sand table and toys	54	8	
storage shelves or cupboards for student resources (low)	82	11	
storage shelves or cupboards for teacher resources (high)	87	6	
tables (low)	89	2	
television	88	4	
VCR player and videos	88	24	
water table and toys	44	11	
whiteboard	70	9	
woodworking bench and tools	25	4	
workjobs (e.g., sequencing, one-to-one correspondence)	39	50	

