A STUDY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT ALUMNI PERCEPTIONS OF THE QUALITY OF PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION FOR EMPLOYMENT IN LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHILD CARE SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

The first purpose of this mixed method study was to contribute to the information base for future curriculum development regarding a low income practicum study for two-year and four-year child development majors attending a Midwest University. This study also determined turnover rate in child care centers. Prior studies attribute: lack of teacher preparation during pre-service education, low compensation of early childhood teachers, and lack of diverse faculty offerings during college as reasons given for providers leaving child care in less than one year. This study used survey data collected from 54 alumni. Personal interviews gathered data of perceptions from alumni about their college training and job tenure. Findings from this study do not suggest that high turnover rate in the workplace is related to a lack of a purposeful planned low income practicum study before graduation as this researcher seeks.
CHAPTER 1
Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1997) states that newly hired teachers without adequate training are often placed with low-income and high minority groups of children. Pre-service teachers are graduating without the skills necessary to prepare them for educating all children. Therefore, the least prepared teachers may be educating the most at-risk children. These teachers may be ill-trained to provide quality learning experiences for at-risk children. This may be indicated by changing jobs or leaving the field of child care.

Basing her work on Haberman’s 1987 theories of supporting quality hiring practices for urban teachers, Edith Guyton (1994) stated, “Letting students [future teachers] choose to work in lower SES [Social Economic Status] schools may enhance chances for success.” Because teachers tend to expect less from low income children (Jehl, 2007), it needs to be noted “research shows that higher education can better prepare teachers for challenges of working with very disadvantaged and diverse children” (Hart & Shumacher, 2005, p. 9).

At a Midwestern regional university, students studying child development currently graduate without a practicum experience in a low socio-economic environment. Students who major in Human Environmental Studies, Child Development Option, spend three semesters in a University laboratory school which serves children six weeks to five years of age. Children and families who attend one of the three university early childhood programs represent various ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic levels, but only a
small percentage of the children and families are considered low socio-economic status according to the federal poverty guidelines. Upon completing three semesters of training in one or more of the lab schools, students spend one semester in a final practicum experience working in a child care setting. Although there is some flexibility with placement, most students train with one preschool that has secured a great amount of grant funding, thus making the preschool center a financially secure setting.

Pretti-Frontczak, Giallourakis, Janas, and Hayes (2002) identified a need for pre-service teachers at Kent State University to demonstrate skills in supervised practicum placements which include family centered opportunities. Skills substantiated as important included demonstration of cultural differences such as income levels, children with special needs, and various backgrounds. The main focus was to prepare teachers to work with children and families with disabilities. To ensure quality, Ohio state licensure was developed to guarantee graduates complete 300 clock hours of supervised practicum placement with young children ages three to eight years. Nine college courses support this certificate. Students wanting additional certification with infants and toddlers had to include an additional practicum experience. At this time, neither the state nor this regional campus has such requirements for non-certificated majors in place.

This study may contribute to the information base for future revision of the child development curriculum state wide. The study can be particularly helpful to those assessing a two-year (Child Care and Guidance A.A.S.) and four-year (Human Environmental Studies- Child Development Option, B.S) degree programs at the university of study. Chapter one will outline the conceptual underpinnings of the study; will identify the problem statement, purpose of the study; and will state research
questions posed by the researcher. In addition, this chapter will list limitations, define key terms, and the assumptions of the study.

**Conceptual Underpinnings for the Study**

Using 15 years of personal experience as an employee of a Midwestern regional University, this researcher noticed that child development graduates left job employment and even the field of child development. Graduating students ask for written letters of recommendations and shortly after obtaining a job, students are asking for another letter of reference. Concerns some of the students have are lack of preparation for a “real world” job or that they have just not found an appropriate job that meets their college preparation (Merriam, 1998, referencing McMillan & Schumacher, 1984). A curiosity of this phenomenon led to this research as an effort to find a reason for leaving good job opportunities and/or the field of child development (Merriam, 1998; Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2003).

Several reasons for leaving the field of child development emerged during a review of related literature. These included: (a) the lack of appropriate teacher-training preparation during pre-service education, (b) low compensation of early childhood teachers, and (c) the lack of diverse faculty offerings during college. All factors lead to a high rate of job turnover in the field of child care; leaving the fast food industry as the only employment organization who has a higher turnover rate than child care (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). In fact, “high rates of turnover contribute to a worsening teacher shortage in early education which, in turn, is fueling a pervasive, nationwide crisis in the quality of early care and education services that young children receive” (Whitebrook &

Although research supports one reason for a high turnover rate in child care is directly related to compensation and benefits package, this research investigated whether graduating child development majors at this regional campus are leaving employment before one year because they are not prepared for the work environment. Students who graduate with a child development degree from the institution of study spend three semesters training in one of the University lab schools. Children and families in two of the lab schools are primarily middle to upper socio-economic income level while one lab school serves children from the college student population which represents a much lower socio-economic level. Ironically, this preschool trains few or no child development majors in the program of study. Therefore, only majors who work in a low socio-economic setting prior to their college career or work simultaneously with their degree will have experience in a low SES child care environment when they leave this Midwestern University.

Consistently, research has demonstrated a direct correlation between quality early child care and school readiness for children entering kindergarten. Li-Grining & Coley (2006) found in a review of background literature in “both experimental (Campbell, Pungello, Miller-Johnson, Burchinal, & Ramey, 2001; IHDP, 1990; Lamb, 1997; Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993; Yoshikawa, 1995) and nonexperimental studies (e.g. NICHD, 1998, 2000b, 2003; Votruba-Drzal, Coley, & Chase-Lansdale, 2004) have positive associations between the developmental quality of child care and children’s social, cognitive, and language skills, particularly for economically disadvantaged
Interactions between young children and adults influence children’s development, therefore it is of particular interest to policy makers and parents to find quality early childhood education (Burchinal & Cryer, 2003). However, most research to identify high quality early childhood care, reflects white, middle income children, and little research has specifically focused on low socio-economic status children or even immigrant children (Mistry et. al, 2008, Burchinal & Cryer, 2003).

Since the United States has a diverse population of families, it is important to consider children who are not directly related to white, middle income research. Specifically, Hernandez (2004) noted “one in five children living in the United States today is either foreign born or has at least one foreign-born parent” (cited in Mistry et. al, 2008, p. 193). In 2001, Head Start preschools served over 800,000 three and four year old children while an additional 2 million children were in child care funded by state or federal low income programs for families (Fuller et. al, 2004). Head Start programs surrounding the Midwestern University of study employs many graduates even when students have not been assigned a practicum experience with Head Start or any other low income, high minority environment. This phenomenon led to the formulation of the problem statement and research questions of the study.

Statement of the Problem

In the fall of 2007, the child development faculty of the Midwestern University launched a major revision of curriculum based upon two issues evidenced as student and employer concerns. Past and present students were concerned regarding preparation for teaching positions, and the concerns of local child care employers also believed the students were ill- prepared as employees. One of the three University Laboratory Schools
was voicing the most distress. The director of the full day preschool consistently faced high turnover rate of staff and stated her frustration of poorly prepared graduates of the university to work as a lead teacher in her center. Children who are served at this university child care center are primarily from low socio-economic college students.

Faculty discussed issues of disheartened child development majors who had graduated from the program, obtained a job, and quit the job shortly after being hired. Looking at the practicum experience, it was evident that the students did not have experience in low socio-economic environment during their college career. The problem studied in this research is whether there is a relationship between students having a prior experience within a low socio-economic environment and their tenure of employment in low socio-economic child care environments.

The Midwestern University of study is a public four-year institution, with one main campus and four regional campuses spread throughout the service region. The University confers a four-year child development degree as well as a two-year child care and guidance degree and is the only four year public university in a 100 mile radius issuing the non-certificated degree. This means graduates are unable to work in a public school setting, yet most of the literature studies have been completed with certificated positions. The child development program is not in the College of Education and is housed in the College of Health and Human Services.

Purpose of the Study

This mixed methods study investigated the practice of a Midwestern University’s students studying in the child development program and graduating without prior planned exposure in a low socio-economic environment. Many of these students will seek
employment with Head Start. Head Start is a federally sponsored child care program serving low socio-economic children and children with disabilities who are three to five years of age. Because of the higher salary and benefits package offered by Head Start, it is a primary employer of the institutions non-certificated degree graduates. However, graduates who accept teaching positions in Head Start tend to quit their job in a short period of time and many leave the field of child care indefinitely.

This observation led the researcher to wonder if there is a relationship between student preparation and job longevity. The purpose of this research will be to determine if there is a relationship between prior experience in a low SES child care setting before graduation and job longevity. Perceptions of alumni of the program will provide a qualitative component considering this question.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research questions “reflect the researcher’s thinking on the most significant factors to study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 60) and guide the curiosity of the investigator. Quantitative questions deduce how data will be collected, shape the study, and answer what the investigator seeks while the hypotheses are more specific to the analysis of the study (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative questions help deepen the study with descriptions of context. The problem to in this study is to determine if there is a relationship between providing students with prior experience within a low SES environment, and tenure of employment in low SES child care environments. To answer this problem, the following specific questions were posed:

1. Is there a significant relationship between the number of child development graduates at this institution of study who had an experience in a low socio-
economic child care setting before completing the degree and those who have not had a low SES experience before graduation?

2. What perceptions do graduates have regarding leaving child care settings in less than one year?

3. What perceptions do graduates have for staying in a child care setting for more than one year?

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between the numbers of graduates who had a low SES experience before completing the child development degree and those who did not have a low SES experience before completing a child development degree.

Limitations and Assumptions

The results of this study will apply only to one regional university program. Global transfer of knowledge should not be widely generalized or expected. The results of the mixed methods study are intended for program use within the primary university. However, other programs with similar concerns may wish to consider the findings of this study.

An added limitation of this study is that the purposeful sampling of a survey method will decrease the generalizability of findings. In answering the research questions, the researcher will rely on subjects supplied by the University Alumni Center. The researcher will assume this is a comprehensive list of graduates to gain insight.

Another limitation of this study is political dynamics. As an insider researcher, the balance between the “organization’s formal justification of what is desired in the project
with tacit personal justification for political activity” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 71) will be delicate. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) continue to say heads of departments may block research. Although this is not the case for this researcher’s study, there is some caution of other faculty members to share syllabi and course requirements for practicum placement of University students. In addition, the personal association of the researcher with the university could lead to personal bias.

Definition of Key Terms

Socio-economic position is a multifaceted issue, especially when concerning early childhood education. Young children become the future of our society, so it is crucial they are given every opportunity for success. The next chapter will address the high turnover rate of early childhood educators and the obstacles of educating pre-service teachers. Specifically for this mixed methods study, the following definitions will be utilized.

Cooperating teacher. A teacher of young children employed in a child care setting not owned and operated by the University. The cooperating teacher is responsible for grading university student(s) activities while participating in a practicum experience.

Supervising teacher. A lecture teacher employed by the university who functions as a liaison between the cooperating teacher and the student(s) in the field. Although not present for all 120 clock hours of training, the supervising teacher will make contact with the cooperating teacher and the student(s) in the field.

Instructor. A description of a University full time employee with a master’s degree hired to teach undergraduate child development courses.
**Pre-service teacher.** A candidate working toward a degree in early childhood education.

**Early childhood teacher.** The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education defines this as a certificated degree serving children birth through third grade. Most private child care centers do not require certification granted by the state. Responsibilities of this position usually include planning and implementing curriculum based on developmentally appropriate practices, developing and maintaining caring, cooperative relationships with children, parents, and co-workers, and demonstrating professionalism at all times. Early Childhood teachers may hold a two-year or four-year degree in child development or early childhood education.

**Non-certified teacher.** Employees who have completed a two-year, four-year, or even partial college credit in child development and can be employed in a child care setting. Non-certified teachers are not recognized on the state of Missouri’s salary scale in public schools.

**Field or Practicum placement.** Child development students spend three semesters working in the University Laboratory School on the main campus or one of the regional campuses under direct supervision of a master teacher. The final “on the job training” takes place in a public child care setting outside the University.

**Field or Practicum experience.** Child development students’ final culminating experience consisting of 120 clock hours during a 15 week semester.

**Job turnover.** “Occurs when a teacher or director leaves a child care center, but does not necessarily leave the child care field” (Whitebrook & Sakai, 2003).
**Teacher turnover.** “The number of teachers who leave a program during a year” (Granger & Whitebook, 1989 cited in Hale-Jinks, Claudia, Knopf, Herman, Kemple, Kristen, 2006).

**Occupational turnover** “occurs when a teacher leaves a job at a [child care] center and also departs from the child care field” (Whitebrook & Sakai, 2003).

**Low income family/household.** Defined by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education means a group of people who may or may not be related and who do not live in an institution or a boarding house, but who are living as one economic group. Students who are temporarily away at school should be counted as members of the family; however, students who are full-time residents of an institution are considered a family of one. The family’s income is determined before deductions for income taxes, employee's social security taxes, insurance premiums, charitable contributions, bonds, etc., but does not include any income or benefits received under any Federal program. The family is deemed low income based on the number of family members ([http://www.dese.mo.gov/divadm/food/documents/FreeandReduced-DirectCertbooklet2009-2010.pdf](http://www.dese.mo.gov/divadm/food/documents/FreeandReduced-DirectCertbooklet2009-2010.pdf)).

**Socio-economic status (SES).** “Generally conceived of as separate sources of capital, including financial, human, and social capital, has been argued to matter for children because it enables parents to provide their children with the goods, services, parental actions, and social connections that promote children’s well-being” (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; entwisle & Anstone, 1994 as cited in Mistry et. al, 2008).

**Head Start.** “The Head Start program is a federally sponsored program administered by the Office of Head Start (OHS), Administration for Children and
Families (ACF), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Head Start is a national program that promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families” (http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/About%20Head%20Start/about_headstart_intro.html).

*Early Head Start.* “Launched in 1995 to provide comprehensive child and family development services for low-income pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers ages birth to three years. Early Head Start (EHS) programs were established to provide early, continuous, intensive and comprehensive child development and family support services on a year-round basis” (http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Early%20Head%20Start/Approach%20%26%20Program%20Design/ehs%20quality%20final%203-02%20(2).pdf).

*Cross Sectional Design.* In this study relates findings from alumni will hold constant for future graduates as curriculum is revised.

**Summary**

Preparing quality teachers who have the ability to effectively educate low income, special needs, at-risk, and all children should be a crucial goal for all higher education settings. The Midwestern University, is attempting to provide quality teacher preparation by revising curriculum and becoming more purposeful regarding practicum placement of pre-service teachers. The purpose of this research is to determine if there is a relationship between job preparation and job longevity. Perceptions of alumni of the program will provide a qualitative component considering the practicum experience. Presumably, this will lead to better teacher preparation and will contribute toward the preparation of future
teachers to work in low income child care settings and remain in the profession with
desire and success.

Chapter two presents a review of literature addressing: (a) the lack of teacher
preparation during pre-service education, (b) low compensation of early childhood
teachers, and (c) the lack of diverse faculty offerings during college while attempting to
close the gap of ill-prepared teachers. Chapter three will discuss the methodology the
researcher will use to investigate the child development program of University of study.
Chapter four will analyze the data from the study and chapter five will outline the
findings and recommendations for future studies. Appendices will include the revised
Child Development Alumni Survey as well as transcripts of the interviewed graduates.
CHAPTER 2

Review of Related Literature

Introduction

In the fall of 2007, the child development faculty of a regional Midwestern University launched a revision of curriculum based on past and present students’ concerns and local child care employers’ frustrations with ill-prepared employees, mainly one of the child care centers linked to the University. Faculty discussed issues of disheartened students who had graduated from the program and quit a job quickly after accepting. Faculty brainstormed ideas of why students were not staying in their first job, why students were leaving the field of child development entirely, and what could be done for future students to better prepare them for the job market.

The fall of 2009 school year brought new concerns to the table. Local Head Start agency directors expressed a concern for lack of qualified job candidates. Local Head Start directors were unsure if college preparation was a key factor or if students were not interested in a child development degree when enrolling at the institution of study. Federal government mandates that 50% of lead teachers in a Head Start agency hold a child development degree or early childhood education degree. Head Start directors fear there may be fewer child development majors to employ since most early childhood education majors are employed by public school districts leaving a smaller pool of applicants to hire.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the problem of one Midwestern University’s students studying child development who will graduate without a teaching practicum in a low socio-economic environment. Head Start is a primary employer of
these graduates offering the best salary and benefit package to a non-certificated degree graduate. This researcher has noticed graduating majors who accept teaching positions in Head Start and other low socio-economic environments tend to quit their job in a short period and many leave the field indefinitely.

In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (Welfare Reform) legislation required more low socio-economic income families to find employment leaving young children under the age of five years requiring care outside the home (Li-Grining & Coley, 2006). This chapter will address issues and practices of preparing teachers to work in an early childhood educational environment, specifically low income with high diversity rates of children, through a review of related literature.

History of Child Development

In order to deeply understand the relationship between early childhood educators and meeting the needs of young children, one must look into how the study of child development has evolved. The notion of children developing or maturing at different stages is a relatively new concept studied within the last 200 years consisting of an interdisciplinary store of information. Historical artifacts, such as medieval paintings, depict children as childlike wearing loose clothing and playing games. Some written documentation has been discovered from the same medieval time period stating those under seven to eight years were children and not adults, yet it is not until the fourteenth century that guidebooks were written about children’s health, feeding, and games (Berk, 2005).

The Reformation period of thesixteenth century brought a new perspective of childhood based on Puritan beliefs. The Puritan doctrine stated children were born evil,
of the devil, and needed to be educated and refined (Shahar, 1990 referred in Berk, 2005). The Puritans believed their most important job was to raise children and thus developed the first printed reading materials for children teaching morals and religion (Berk, 2005).

Entering the seventeenth century, John Locke (1632-1704) completely opposed the Puritan ideas of “evil children” and believed children were born as blank slates or *tabula rasa* in Latin. Locke believed the role of parents should be more about molding their children into productive citizens rather than assuming they had to beat the devil out of the children through very harsh and restrictive practices. Locke opposed physical punishment and advocated parents praise their children as a reward system to increase positive behavior and actions. Locke was greatly ahead of his time. This method of rewards system and lesser punishment is a behavioral model of guiding children’s behavior used often today. In addition to viewing childrearing in a different manner, John Locke also noted children growing and developing in a continuous manner. As parents nurture their children, they grow consistently into the fruitful citizens valued by society (Berk, 2005).

Building on the knowledge of John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) coined the term “maturation” meaning children grow in stages that naturally unfolds. The difference is Rousseau deemed children as moving through the stages of development in more of a stair step method, opposite of Locke’s continuous development. Furthermore, Rousseau believed children were noble savages. According to Rousseau, children could not be born as evil or even blank slates, but rather, an intuitive sense of right from wrong. Rousseau believed parents should be receptive to each stage of development (Berk, 2005).
While Rousseau noted children grow and mature in stages, Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was a cognitive theorist providing a powerful explanation of humans organized thoughts. Piaget was highly criticized of cognitive-development theory because it contradicted behaviorism theories prevalent in the mid 20th century. It was not until the 1960’s that Piaget’s stages of cognitive development were embraced (Davidson Films, http://www.davidonfilmsstore.com and Berk, 2005).

Piaget believed children’s experiences allowed for brain growth. Without proper stimulation, the brain would not be able to develop and process logical thoughts. Piaget noted that children go through cognitive stages such as (a) sensorimotor from birth to two years of age. This stage of development is where infants and toddlers “think” with their senses. (b) Preoperational stage from two to seven years is when young children develop language and use symbols to represent their thoughts. It should be noted, however, that children’s thinking at this age level is still very literal rather than logical. (c) Concrete operations from seven to 11 years when children’s reasoning becomes logical. Children are able to understand physical property changes and work mathematical concepts, but are limited when it comes to abstract thought process of teens and adults. (d) Formal operations range from eleven years and older when abstract thinking and scientific reasoning are better understood by children and teens (Berk, 2005).

The field of child development is still not well defined in the 1930s and 1940s, rather an eclectic web of theorists and psychologists. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) cofounded the psychoanalytic perspective. Freud viewed personality of children and adults in three parts: id, ego, and superego and identified five psychosexual stages of development: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital. Freud noted children’s sexual
gratification was a normal part of development, but parents should walk a fine line of allowing children to fulfill basic needs without over indulging (Boeree, http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/erikson.html & Berk, 2005).

Erik Erikson (1902-1994) cofounder of the psychoanalytic perspective and Freudian ego-psychologist accepted Freud’s beliefs of children and teens as sexual beings. Erikson, however, expanded Freud’s personality stages into eight stages, rather than three and considered children more than sexual beings. Like Freud, Erikson agreed parents play a crucial role in children’s sexual development, but Erikson also believed children influence the development of their parents. Erikson is most noted for contributing to Freud’s psychosexual stages and able to intermesh more specific psychosocial stages of development (Boeree, http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/erikson.html).

Erikson’s psychosocial stage of trust v mistrust (birth-one year) and autonomy v shame and doubt (two-three years) corresponds with Freud’s oral stage of development. While Freud saw children as very oral, he believed they may develop poor habits later in life such as smoking and chewing if they were taken from the breast, bottle, or pacifier too soon. Erikson saw these as important, but believed children were able to build trusting relationships with adults who were not responsible for feeding. Each stage of Erikson notes a positive outcome (trust or autonomy) with positive family experiences or negative (mistrust or shame and doubt) relating from unreliable or inadequate care.

Initiative v guilt (three to six years) and industry v inferiority (seven to 12 years) corresponds with Freud’s Phallic and Latency stages. Freud communicated these stages as children transferring pleasure from genital stimulation to acquiring social values from
adults and same sex friends as to what is socially appropriate. Erikson saw this time of
development as a crucial opportunity to take initiative of challenges in the environment,
chances to learn new skills and take on responsibilities. Parents, again, can encourage and
offer experiences for a positive outcome or can instill guilt and helplessness in their

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) led a major theoretical movement of sociocultural
theory. This was the first highly publicized research addressing culture in children’s lives
between ethnic groups and varying environmental conditions. “According to Vygotsky,
*social interaction*—in particular, cooperative dialogues with more knowledgeable
members of society—is necessary for children to acquire the ways of thinking and
behaving that make up a community’s culture (Rowe & Wertsch, 2002 cited in Berk,
2005). Vygotsky’s theoretical framework is social interaction rather than sexual or
cognitive alone. Vygotsky agreed with Piaget’s theory that children can and do construct
their own knowledge, but believed children’s cognitive development was dependent on
adult experiences and opportunities provided (Berk, 2005). Vygotsky coined the term
“zone of proximal development (ZPD): a level of development attained when children
engage in social behavior. Full development of the ZPD depends upon full social
interaction” (http://tip.psychology.org/vygotsky.html). The array of children’s skills will
be based on collaborative experiences with children and adult guidance. It should be
stated, Vygotsky did not neglect the importance of heredity and brain growth, rather, he
placed less emphasis on previous theorists beliefs that children shape their own destiny
and more about the cultural strengths available to children.
The work and theories of Jean Piaget has contributed widely to the educational framework of how children learn, however, Piaget was not an educator. Erikson’s stages gives us a framework and offers insight to things we might not have otherwise noticed, but does not directly relate to educating young children. Vygotsky offers principles of cognitive development, but is limited to age ranges and social interaction. Educators of the 20th and 21st century have taken the eclectic and value laded views of children’s development and derived more specific teaching practices for young children. These developmental values of how children learn have changed tremendously across history and culture and will continue to do so. For now, some key educators that shape children’s educational experiences are as follows:

Maria Montessori, MD (1870-1952) was the first woman in Italy to receive a medical degree. “She believed that each child is born with a unique potential to be revealed, rather than as a blank slate waiting to be written upon” (http://www.montessori.edu/maria.html). In 1907, Maria was given a chance to study “normal” children in the slum outskirts of Rome attempting to prove and child had potential to learn. Maria understood the constructive nature of children long before Piaget and Vygotsky recorded their theories just by observing. From her observations, she developed materials and approaches to education still used today. She understood the power of intrinsic motivation, especially in children three to six years of age, and capitalized upon it. Maria was the first to change the paradigm of the classroom environment by incorporating play between the teacher and children requiring challenged thinking with components of their own environment (http://www.davidonfilmsstore.com).
As more 20th century educators studied developmental theories of Piaget and Vygotsky based on children constructing their own knowledge, and the Soviet Union successfully launching into space in 1957, American government became more interested in the educational system of the nation. People became concerned with not only what children learn, but how they learn best and who was given educational opportunities. Educators and policy makers became concerned with educational equality and began to study other alternatives for successful education of children (Wright, Stegelin, & Hartle, 2007).

David Weikart was the visionary behind the Perry School Project in the 1960’s. Weikart was a school administrator in Michigan noting the disparities of African American children in the public school educational system. Feeling hopeless about changing the current school system, Weikart invented a new kind of school. The radical idea of placing three and four year old children in school at desks seemed unheard of. Weikart advocated that people should abandon the old way of viewing children as vessels ready to be filled with knowledge and envision children as active participants with motivation to learn. The Perry School would focus on cognitive development by stimulating children’s brains, building curiosity, vocabulary, and teaching letters and numbers at a younger age. To prove if this theory would work, Weikart chose a group of poor, African American children with low IQ scores and put half of them in the Perry Preschool Project. After a few years, he would retest the children’s IQ and found a significant improvement (15 points) in IQ scores of children who participated in the Perry School Preschool Project (http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/preschool). This created a huge
amount of hope and later led to the signing by President Lyndon Johnson to enact Project Head Start.

Project Head Start began as a pilot program responding to equality of civil rights for children and families. Parents were required to work as volunteers in preschool age classrooms with their children, participate on advisory boards, and assist with educational activities involving health and guidance of children. The Head Start project allowed children of low socio-economic, primarily minority children, an opportunity for a free preschool education including parental support, academic guidance, language development, and academic aspirations and expectation (Wright, Stegelin, & Hartle, 2007). Head Start is still a thriving early learning program for low socio-economic children and children with disabilities today. Parents are still responsible for some volunteer hours, but not required to work in the classroom for their children to attend.

The momentum for early education of all children continues today. Even in an economic recession, many states are justifying and even expanding preschool programs. Law makers are impressed with the possibilities and have increased standards of teachers of young children. The Perry School Project had four teachers to 25 children and all teachers had bachelor level degrees. It was not until 2003 that Head Start required lead teachers to hold an associate’s degree. Most preschool age classrooms have two teachers with little to no college education and 20 children. Still educators advocate for young children and demand high quality educational practices.

Lillian Katz (1932-Present) is an immigrant from Eastern Europe educated in the public school system of America. Her senior year of high school, she was chosen to attend college on scholarship based on two written essays. During her first two years of
studying international politics, French, and German, she married her husband and moved from Los Angeles to San Francisco. Katz transferred to state college, but was unable to complete the degree after the birth of their first child in 1954, and two more children in 1956 and 1957. Having three preschool age children at one time, Lillian appreciated the dilemmas of parenthood. She enrolled her children in a cooperative nursery school where she worked one morning each week. This experience generated interest in early childhood education. Once her youngest child entered kindergarten, Lillian went back to college, but this time as an early childhood education major, frustrated with the early education her children had received (Rothenberg, [http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/pubs/katzsym/intro.pdf](http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/pubs/katzsym/intro.pdf)).

Katz met with the director of Stanford University Nursery School and had hoped to enroll in a teaching methods class of nursery school practices. Katz was then referred to a professor in the School of Education who encouraged Katz to complete a bachelor’s degree and later a Ph.D. at Stanford. From there, Katz was offered a position of Assistant Professor of Early-Childhood Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In 1970, as a junior faculty member, Katz was asked to “take over” ERIC Clearinghouse of Early Childhood Education which she continued to administer along with teaching for 32 years. During those years, Katz worked extensively with early childhood educators. She has researched groups of children and contributes frequently to early childhood literature, shaping and molding best practices for how young children learn. She has published and edited several books, but is best known for playing a major role in reviving interest in project work of young children. Projects are where children, usually the whole class, are engaged in an in-depth study of a particular topic for weeks.
The class will divide into small groups to investigate sub-topics and occasionally break into individual investigations to deeply understand, seek answers to questions, and formulate answers (Katz & Chard, 2000).

Lillian Katz has mentored and inspired many early childhood educators to challenge their pedagogy of educating young children and challenging children of all ages, income levels, and ethnicities to reach their fullest educational potential through developmentally appropriate practices. Katz “literally wrote the book on professionalism in early childhood education, and the first to write about ethical issues in the field” (Katz, 1977 cited in http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/pubs/katzsym/intro.pdf). Lillian Katz’ scholarly work has influenced parenting, teachers of young children, and substantially enriched the knowledge base of early childhood education. Few others have contributed so much, but many use her conventional wisdom to influence policy and create best practices for children. Yet, we still have holes in the educational system.

New teachers are leaving the educational field faster than replacement teachers can be hired putting children at a disadvantage in their crucial educational years (Wehling, 2007). This author will address the lack of teacher preparation during pre-service education, low compensation of teachers, and lack of diversity among faculty during college experience while attempting to close the gap of ill-prepared teachers. Researchers note many barriers to finding and keeping high-quality early childhood educators (Gallahger, Malone, Cleghorne, & Helms, 1997; Coffman & Lopez, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1997), but have failed to determine the University’s role for students and employers. This review of related literature will focus on how a regional Midwestern University can best prepare graduates.
Lack of teacher preparation

Efforts to improve early childhood education should begin with the teacher preparation system that addresses the population of children that are to be better served by the teachers (Lekies & Cochran, 2002). American children are entitled to learn with teachers who comprehend their students and deeply understand child development and learning styles (Hunt & Carroll, 2003 No Dream Denied). Over 10 million children under the age of five years need care outside the home and almost 4 million are children ages three and four years utilizing state and federal subsidy child care programs such as Head Start. This number has risen since the introduction of the 1996 welfare-to-work reform (Fuller et. al, 2004; Maryland Committee for Children, 2008).

A long-established method for preparing teachers is no longer sufficient. Rather than preparing teachers to work with young children by simply supplementing an elementary degree, more specific training must be incorporated. Hale-Jinks, Claudia, Knopf, Herman, Kemple, & Kristen (2006) found through a review of studies that high quality child care, “a bachelor’s degree and specialized early childhood education training at the college level are required” (p. 1) for high quality care of our children (referring to Blau, 2000; Howes, 1997; Howes, Phillips, & Whitebook, 1992; Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartnery, & Abbott-Shimm, 2000; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997; Whitebook, 2001). Pre-service teachers need to have direct experience with children in a variety of settings. Early childhood care is more than just meeting children’s needs physically (Kendall, 1993). Coffman and Lopez (2003) believe pre-service teachers must complete a supervised practical training program that “requires field-based clinical and practical experiences” (p. 5). The National Association for the Education of Young
Children (1993) states “practicum or work experience under qualified supervision is essential to gaining requisite professional knowledge and skills” (p. 6) working with a minimum of two of the three early childhood age groups [infants and toddlers, preschool children, early elementary age].

Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1997) states newly hired teachers without adequate training tend to be the ones placed with low-income and high minority groups of children. The least prepared teachers are educating the most at-risk children. The problem of ill-prepared teachers is reflected in elementary age children’s international assessments. Contrary to the typical U.S. model of “12 units of college level work in early childhood education” (Whitebrook & Bellm, 2004), this study considers extending clinical experience to a minimum of 30 weeks will improve traditional teacher education. California’s community colleges, participating in the Chancellor’s certificate to improve teacher education, are partaking in mentored field experiences. These experiences include laboratory schools as well as placements in Early Head Start and Head Start and special needs preschools (Kellegrew, Pacifico-Banta, & Stewart, 2008). A study completed by McDermott, Rothenberg, and Gormley (1999) revealed Sage College pre-service teachers were more able to meet children’s learning needs after completing a half-day, semester-long field experience in a low-income urban school and spending one semester working in a public housing project. Pretti-Frontczak, Giallourakis, Janas, and Hayes (2002) identified a need for pre-service teachers to demonstrate skills in supervised practicum placements including family centered opportunities. Skills confirmed included such issues as demonstration of cultural differences. The main goal was to prepare teachers to work with children and families...
with disabilities. To ensure quality, a state licensure was developed to guarantee graduates completed 300 clock hours of supervised practicum placement with young children ages three to eight years. In addition, each graduated had to complete nine college courses to support the licensure requirements. Students wanting additional certification with infants and toddlers had to include an additional practicum experience.

The issue becomes finding appropriate field placements for pre-service teachers (Kellegrew, Pacifico-Banta, & Stewart, 2008). The problem dates back many years. Earline Kendall (1993) reported the difficulty of locating enough relevant practicum sites for college students to train with professionally-prepared teachers. “Research shows generally that better educated professionals provide higher quality care and education. The same is not true for years of experience” (Torquati, Raikes, & Huddleston-Casas, 2007, p. 262 references Blau, 2000; Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, & Howes, 2002; Howes, Whitebook, & Phillips, 1992; Sachs, 2000; & Whitebook, 2003).

Earline Kendall (1993) concludes in her article “Reform and Early Childhood Education: Making Teacher Preparation Professional and Relevant,” early childhood students should work with health, special education, and social service agencies to “combat the effects of poverty and other risk factors” (p. 21). She goes on to state, pre-service teachers need to work in inclusive settings with professionals and help erase artificial barriers. The issue becomes lack of practicum placements for college students. Pretti-Frontczak, Giallourakis, Janas, & Hayes (2002) discovered in their mixed methods study that “practicum experiences provided fewer opportunities to gain family-centered competence” (p. 4).
For students who do not have an opportunity to participate in housing projects and other low income practicum experiences, the next best practice is to help college students understand future students’ backgrounds and family environments. Harriet Field (2002) and Bowman, Donovan, and Burns (2001) recommend students critically reflect on their practicum experiences. Fields bases her beliefs on Shon’s 1983 work suggesting the reflection practice will help students interpret what they observe as well as meet the challenges of new problems. Journal entries and onsite observations in low income environments will help students share their perceptions of specific episodes and supervising faculty can help students cognitively and critically evaluate and reflect on the situation.

*Low compensation and high turnover rate*

Since low compensation is a reality for child care employees, college students need every opportunity to prepare pre-service teachers for the best financial employment available. Head Start, a federal program serving low income children and families, offers one of the best salary and benefit packages for child development majors. To best prepare graduates for low income employment Edith Guyton (1994) stated, “Letting students choose to work in lower SES [Social Economic Status] schools may enhance chances for success.” She bases her judgment on the work of Haberman’s 1987 theories supporting quality hiring practices for urban teachers.

The issue of placing practicum college students is the lack of field placements. There appears to be widespread agreement that quality and knowledge lie in the hands of supervising teachers (Whitebrook & Bellm, 2004). University instructors attempt to place college students where field teachers have experience and a good model environment for
the students. Teachers are in shortage, and many reasons are the “extremely high turnover rate that stems from chronic, unaddressed conditions in schools” (No Dream Denied, 2003, p. 9). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008) only the fast food industry has a higher turnover rate among employees than child care workers. The United States has long faced the problem of attracting and maintaining a competent workforce in the early childhood education field. “The low wages associated with employment in centers are directly related to staff turnover” (Bailey, 2005). Many practitioners continue to leave the education career because they cannot “economically afford to stay” (Whitebrook & Bellm, 2004, p. 4).

The wages of child care workers is often below the federal poverty guidelines. Parent fees cover only half the expenses associated with caring for children while the rest of the financial burden is carried by early childhood professionals who earn less than they could elsewhere (Torquati et al, 2007). Whitebook and Sakai state “turnover in child care centers far exceeds that of other teaching settings” (2003, p. 274). Early and Winton (2001) discovered through survey data that low salaries and lack of benefits kept college students from even pursuing careers in early childhood education. Torquati et. al, studied first-year early education students and found majors perceived child care as a non-option for future employment based on low level of pay, length of work year, and workload in comparison to kindergartens (2007). Bailey (2005) found preschool teachers are paid even less than public school teachers. For example, Hart & Schumacher (2005) reported a Head Start teacher in 2003 earned an average salary of $23,564-$25,963, depending on state while a kindergarten teacher with the same B.A. degree averaged $43,530. The authors’ study reported 27 percent of Head Start teachers who left their current jobs were
due to the compensation package. Annual turnover rate, however, was reported to
decrease in North Carolina after more students graduated with an early childhood degree
(University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2004).

Schools scramble to find replacements and the children pay the highest price.
Whitbook and Sakai (2003) noted it often takes weeks or even months to replace a
teacher because of the lack of qualified applicants. *No Dream Denied* advocates that 21\textsuperscript{st}
Century teachers “must know their subject areas deeply. They must know how children
learn and be able to use that knowledge to teach diverse students as well” (p. 9). This is a
skill that takes time and experience to develop and nurture yet, “new teachers are leaving
the profession in alarming numbers; dropping out before they master the skills they need
to create a successful learning culture for their students” (Wehling, 2007, p. 52).

Turnover is costly not only for schools looking for trained care but the children who
encounter unbalanced care (Bailey, 2005; Pruissen, 2007). Even more alarming is the
issue of occupational job turnover where teachers are not only leaving their job, but the
field of child care altogether. A “high level of job turnover among staff can also place the
continued operation of a child care center in jeopardy or impede centers’ efforts to
improve quality” (Whitebook & Sakai, 2003, p. 275).

The vision of preparing teachers for genuine learning organizations “can only take
root if the seed is planted and nurtured during teacher preparation” (Wehling, 2007, p.
52). Now the argument begins of which comes first: placing practicum teachers in any
low income school and hope they can stay, learn, and create a successful learning culture,
or continue to look for the few teachers that stay in the educational system and place
practicum students with them? Wehling (2007) believes the days are gone where one
“teacher-hero can meet all of the individual learning needs of the diverse students in a classroom” (p. 49). No Dream Denied (2003) states the age of isolated classrooms and one solo teacher must come to a close. “To recruit and maintain a qualified early education and care workforce, the reports [by Wellesley Centers for Women] assert that it will be necessary to address issues of compensation and turnover” (Bailey, 2005).

Research (Hart & Shumacher, 2005; Kendall, 1993; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Coffman & Lopez, 2003) can support a clear connection between salary levels and quality of education. Clearly a change in the education system and teacher preparation needs a face lift. Ultimately, the goal is to reduce job turnover and raise compensation so teachers will remain in the child care workforce (Whitebook & Sakai, 2003).

Lack of diversity

University education programs cultivating early childhood teachers need to prepare students to “teach children with diverse cognitive, linguistic and cultural backgrounds” (Coffman and Lopez, 2003, p. 13). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) advocates “the early childhood profession… reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of our nation and its families” (p. 4). Yet, close to fifty percent of Hispanic and African American students will not earn a high school diploma, much less enter college. Of the minority students who enter their first-year of college, thirty percent will take remedial courses and only a few will complete their college degree (Jehl, 2007). Research supports low SES young children are already at a disadvantage scoring lower in intellectual and social and emotional development (Mistry et., al, 2008 referencing Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998). Mistry et. al states “as the U.S. population becomes increasingly diverse it is imperative that theories
of child development reflect the complexity and diversity of the contexts within which
children are developing” (2008, p. 194). The root issue is finding qualified teachers to
work with low SES and diverse children. Jehl advocates, “every child deserves good
teaching…poor and minority students get more under-qualified teachers” (p. 5).

Hart and Schumacher (2005) revealed “a study of pathways to effective teaching
within a group of primarily African-American and Latino child care teachers serving low-
income children found that teacher education levels were important in effective teaching
practices” (p. 2). Other important factors include “commitment to the community, being
mentored, and receiving reflective supervision” (Hart & Schumacher, 2005, p. 2). Carroll
(2003) developed criterion for “highly qualified beginning teachers” (p. 7). Some
characteristics beginning teachers should possess is (a) “evidence of firm understanding
of how students learn, (b) demonstrate the teaching skills necessary to help all students
achieve high standards, and (c) use a variety of assessment strategies to diagnose and
respond to individual learning needs” (p. 7). He advocates that American students
deserve knowledgeable teachers who understand what their students need and hold skills
to make learning possible for all. Since “weak links appear each time shortcuts to teacher
preparation are taken” (p. 7), Carroll believes teacher preparation and professional
development need to be reinvented. This should include all children regardless of income
level and ethnic background.

Hart and Schumacher (2005) reported “research shows that higher education can
better prepare teachers for the challenges of working with very disadvantaged and diverse
children” (p.9). Yet, their research found that only 60 percent of early childhood majors
spent even one course working with children with special needs. Part of the challenge is
that universities have a difficult time attracting and maintaining a diverse teaching faculty. One reason could be “standardized tests [such as Praxis] sharply limit the number of students who complete the requirements for teacher certification” (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001, p. 318 citing Meek 1998). This astounding result is perceived to be due to poor quality general education and the pre-service education program. “As a result, racial and cultural imbalance between the population of children in public schools and their teachers affects early childhood programs” (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001, p. 318 citing Meek 1998). Contrary to that statement, Burchinal and Cryer (2003) did not find a positive link between caregiver’s pro-social skills for children and their ethnic background nor was overall care giving demonstrated higher among ethnic teachers and diverse ethnicities of children.

Placing University pre-service teachers in a Head Start setting seems to be the most realistic answer. In 2003, Head Start employed 28 percent African American teachers, 24 percent Hispanic or Latino, three percent American Indian or Alaska Native, two percent Asian, one percent Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, one percent bi or multi-racial, and 36 percent white. “This diversity roughly reflects that of children served in the program” (Hart and Shumacher, 2005, p. 5).

Consequences

Typically in low income communities, adults expect modest amounts of academic achievement. A four-year old child will expect to hear about 45 million words living in a professional family compared to 13 million spoken words when living with a family receiving financial aid from the government (Jehl, 2007). Jehl (2007) states, “a child who has not had a high-quality preschool experience may find it difficult to focus attention on
learning in kindergarten, and a student who has not become a competent reader by the end of the third grade will struggle to complete more complex tasks in upper elementary and middle school” (p. 7). Teachers tend to expect less from low income children and the cycle continues.

It is imperative for low income children to have quality early childhood teachers. We want children to grow up to be capable members of society. One way to ensure that is “having at least some staff with strong educational backgrounds and appropriate training is key to program quality” (Bailey, 2005, p. 14). So, to come back to the original problem statement, teachers are not entering or staying in the early childhood field because of low compensation. College classes are expensive and it is difficult for working people to obtain release time to take the classes (Kendall, 1993). Future graduates would rather get a college degree in something that will provide better compensation during working years. Students, who do, however, choose a degree in child development should be prepared to work in the best setting financially. This researcher is interested in one regional Midwestern University’s child development majors leaving child care employment because of low compensation or because they are not prepared for higher paying employment such as Head Start and other low income child care settings.

To address this problem setting, chapter three will introduce the research and methodology of the mixed methods study. The following chapter will state quantitative and qualitative research questions and one hypothesis. The chapter will also outline the design for the study; define the parameters of the population and sample; and describe the data analysis that will be used for the study.
CHAPTER 3
Research and Methodology

Introduction

At a regional Midwestern University, students who are studying child development currently graduate without a planned practicum experience in a low socio-economic environment. Pretti-Frontczak, Giallourakis, Janas, and Hayes (2002) identified a need for pre-service teachers to demonstrate skills in supervised practicum placements including family centered opportunities. Skills confirmed include such issues as demonstration of cultural differences. The main goal was to prepare teachers to work with children and families with disabilities. To ensure quality, a state licensure was developed to guarantee graduates completed 300 clock hours of supervised practicum placement with young children ages three to eight years and nine college courses to support the licensure. Students wanting additional certification with infants and toddlers had to include an additional practicum experience. At this time, neither the state nor the Midwestern University has such requirements.

In an effort to thoroughly and comprehensively examine the research topic a mixed methods design was chosen for this study. A description of the method used for conducting the study is provided in this chapter, including the research problem, research questions and hypothesis, the population and sample, data collection and instrumentation, and data analysis. This study uses a brief survey designed to gain accurate data.

The child development alumni survey used by this Midwestern University is based on the work of the University of Florida. Currently, the survey is given to new child development graduates each year. Since the survey gathers more information than
was needed for this study and does not address practicum placement, this researcher revised the alumni survey with the help of the child development faculty and dissertation committee. The survey, in this study, was intended to explore the relationship between providing students with a low socio-economic practicum and their job preparation status as well as to ascertain students’ perceptions regarding why they are leaving jobs less than one year after their hire date.

**Research Problem**

This mixed methods study investigates the practice of a regional Midwestern University students studying in the child development program and graduating without a teaching practicum in a low socio-economic environment. The purpose of this research is to determine if there is a relationship between job preparation and job longevity. The raw data is provided by survey response. Perceptions of alumni of the child development program provide a qualitative component considering prior experience or lack of it.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

*Research Questions*

In order to determine if there were identifiable issues with the Midwestern University child development program of study and its graduates remaining in the practice of child care at the low socio-economic level, the following specific questions were considered.

1. Is there a significant relationship between the number of child development graduates at this institution of study who had an experience in a low socio-economic child care setting before completing the degree and those who have not had a low SES experience before graduation?
2. What perceptions do graduates have regarding leaving child care settings in less than one year?

3. What perceptions do graduates have for staying in a child care setting for more than one year?

Hypothesis

$H_0$: There is no significant relationship between the numbers of graduates who had a low SES experience before completing the child development degree and those who did not have a low SES experience before completing a child development degree.

Design for the Study

A mixed methods design was used to complete this study. A self-administered survey design was selected to obtain a numeric description of attitudes and opinions of alumni who graduated from the Child Development program on a Midwestern University. The self-administered survey (Appendix A) was designed to include questions and a table for alumni to complete. The alumni responses represent employment in child care settings and longevity of the job. The researcher conducted a more detailed look into respondents’ answers by completing a person-to-person (Merriam, 1998) follow-up interview with some of the respondents representing employees who have stayed in low income child care employment for less than one year and those who have stayed for more than one year. In addition, respondents who have stayed for more than one year and those who have stayed for less than one year in higher socio-economic child care settings were interviewed.
This researcher chose a structured interview format (see Appendix B). The structured interview is one of the more rigid forms of data collection due to its predetermined questions (Merriam, 1998), but it allowed the researcher to gather common data among the participants. This study endeavors to gain perceptions of people on a multi-faceted topic with no instrument available to measure multiple views (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The interviews provide perceptions of alumni regarding their education and work experience and thick, rich qualitative information regarding reasons for leaving or staying in a particular socio-economic job.

The qualitative aspect of the study includes follow-up interviews using a grounded theory method. Such interviews provide a rich description of the data and allow theories to emerge from the collected data. Although it is not the primary focus of the study, it will make the research much more substantive (Merriam, 1998). From the qualitative data, the researcher offers explanation and assess local knowledge and understand the meaning respondents have constructed (Merriam, 1998). The researcher will prevent bias while categorizing respondents’ answers by not forcing information into categories that do not naturally emerge. From the sample results, this researcher will generalize claims about the population to address future policy and program needs at the chosen Midwestern University (Creswell, 2003 & Fink, 2006).

Population and Sample

To reduce sampling errors, the researcher chose to survey a population of all Child Development graduates of one Midwestern University from 1999-2009 (Fink, 2006). By selecting every graduate from a 10 year time frame, the researcher was able to use a cross-sectional survey design to represent future graduates attending this institution.
The sample of responding graduates may aid faculty in curriculum revisions and practicum placement of future graduates.

This researcher obtained information about the population from the University Alumni Office and was able to place respondents in three groups to match with hypothesis and research questions. The participant groups that emerged from the study were graduates who had or did not have low SES experience before graduation. The second group was graduates who stayed employed in any child care setting for more than one year. The final group was those who were employed in a low SES setting after graduation.

The researcher further divided the respondents into six more specific areas of those who: (a) stayed more than one year in a low socio-economic child care setting, (b) stayed more than one year in a high socio-economic child care setting, (c) stayed less than one year in a low socio-economic child care setting, (d) stayed less than one year in a high socio-economic child care setting, (e) never got a job in child care, and (f) left the field of child care. Of the 223 graduates who were mailed surveys, a sample of 54 respondents were evaluated.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The population for study was obtained by gathering contact information from graduates of the program from 1999-2010 from the University Alumni Office. For the best efforts of obtaining a high response rate, graduates who had a valid email on record by the alumni office were sent an email introducing the study (see Appendix C) and asking graduates to look for a brief survey. Three days later, graduates were sent a hard copy survey using the U.S. postal system. The paper surveys were provided with a self-
addressed, postage-paid envelope. Graduates who had a valid email address on file at the University Alumni Office were sent an electronic email two weeks after receiving the first survey as a reminder to fill out the survey if they had not already (Creswell, 2003). The second email announcement (see Appendix D), graduates were given the researcher’s direct email address to ask for an electronic copy of the survey or any other questions they may have.

Validity and Reliability

As part of a rigorous data collection, the researcher modified the current child development alumni survey that was mailed to graduates. The researcher received consent for modifications and use of the survey from the department of Human Environmental Studies (Creswell, 2003). Since this is the first time the revised survey was presented, predictive validity had not been established. The instrument needs to be administered each year following graduation to gain a more predictive value (Fink, 2006).

To measure content validity of the survey instrument, the researcher began modifications of the survey under peer review during Ed.D. course work. Further content validity was established when child development faculty members were solicited to review the survey to determine if research questions could be answered by responding to the modified survey. Following revisions, the researcher solicited advice from the department chair and a former advisor. After feedback was reviewed, the researcher presented the survey to an elementary faculty. The same format of giving research questions to study along with the survey instrument was used with the elementary faculty.
To measure construct validity of the survey instrument, the researcher gave child
development faculty a copy of the survey along with the hypothesis and asked for feedback. The same procedure was followed with elementary faculty. Both faculties, department chair, and a former academic advisor were asked if survey results seemed to be useful and would have a positive consequence (Creswell, 2003). The department agreed with the survey instrument, but the researcher and her committee believed the survey would gather more information than needed for the researcher’s research questions and hypothesis. Upon much discussion the survey was further modified (see Appendix A) to help maintain validity and rigor.

Internal validity measures how the research question(s) and reality match. This researcher wishes to encapsulate what is really there and give meaning to alumni perspectives. Internal validity becomes priority with a qualitative study because what the researcher is actually measuring are people’s constructions of reality. For this research, the modified survey will stand alone as an accurate gauge for the survey questions. (Merriam, 1998).

Instrument

The survey for this research study (see Appendix A) consists of a cover letter, two demographics questions, and one yes/no question, and a table to determine child related employment opportunities of graduates. Respondents were asked to send the completed survey in the postage-paid return envelope provided for them and a request to send contact information if they desired to be contacted for more detailed discussion.

The sample for the study is based on the number of respondents who returned the completed survey. Of the respondents, a minimum of 10 percent were chosen for a
follow-up interview. Half of the interviewed population represented those working in a low SES environment for more than one year and some represented those who left a low SES child care environment in less than one year. Appendix C represents a list of questions that were asked in the structured person to person interview to gather the rich, thick qualitative data needed to understand the phenomenon. “The key to getting good data from interviewing is to ask good questions” (Merriam, 1998, p. 75).

Data Analysis

SPSS software was used for the quantitative section to test the hypothesis on the .05 level of significance using Pearson’s chi-square test. Pearson’s chi-square test determines if there is a relationship between variables (Field, 2005). The variables include employment less than one year and employment more than one year. Other variables include employment in a low SES child care environment and employment in middle to upper SES child care environments before graduation.

Internal validity for the qualitative section of the study was measured by attempting to determine the reality of respondents and find out if the researcher is measuring what is meant to be studied. Since numerical data do not always “speak for themselves” (Merriam, 1998, p. 201) the open-ended responses of the follow-up interview further validates respondents’ construction of reality (Merriam, 1998). An open-ended interview can be looked upon as a proper research technique (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

Personal interviews were audio taped and notes were taken by the researcher during the dialog. All interviews were transcribed within 24 hours of the interview. Merriam (1998) states “Ideally, verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews
provides the best database for analysis” (p. 88), but out of the seven personal interviews, one was not audio recorded due to a technical glitch. The researcher referred to hand written notes and interview log for details (Merriam, 1998; Krueger & Casey, 2000). Once all transcriptions were complete, a second researcher listened to audio sound bites and made corrections to the transcription errors on paper.

To further manage the data, the researcher coded the data looking for emerging themes stated by the respondents during the interview as well as written comments on the surveys. The researcher looked for patterns of college preparation, on the job training, professional development, family support and other topics that emerged which allowed or did not allow graduates to remain employed in a low SES child care environment. During the time when hand-recording data, the researcher recorded thoughts and hunches on paper while moving data into emerging themes Merriam, 1998).

Although this study is not meant to be global, it may be transferable (Krueger & Casey, 2000) to other situations. By offering a follow-up interview, the researcher allowed the opportunity for “rich, thick description,” and “typical or modal category” to emerge to further ensure external validity. This helped to give more perspective to the study than standard quantitative numbers (Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative research allows “researchers to seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Since the research finding could be replicated by using the same survey instrument, the study was reliable. The more likely the survey is repeated, the more reliable each study becomes. Through a mixed method of study using the survey instrument, the study should glean accurate information needed to answer the research questions and hypothesis.
Summary

In this chapter the researcher outlined the design of the study focusing on the broad areas of the sources of the data, the instruments and procedures of the data collection, and the statistical procedures used for the study. Chapter four will include the presentation and analysis of the data which will be collected through the process described in this chapter.
CHAPTER 4

Analysis of Data

Introduction

In the fall of 2007, the child development faculty of a regional Midwestern University launched a major revision of curriculum based upon two issues. These two issues were student and employer concerns. Past and present students were concerned regarding preparation for teaching positions, and some local child care employers also believed the students were ill-prepared as employees. One of the three University Laboratory Schools was voicing the most distress. The director of the full day preschool consistently faced high turnover rate of staff and stated her frustration of poorly prepared graduates of the University to work as a lead teacher in her center. Children who are served at this university child care center are primarily low socio-economic college students’.

Child development faculty members discussed issues of disheartened majors who had graduated from the program, obtained a job, and quit the job shortly after being hired. Looking at the practicum experience, it was evident that the students did not have experience in a low socio-economic environment during their college career. Review of related literature suggested lack of appropriate teacher training preparation, low compensation during employment, and lack of diversity among faculty members during teacher preparation being key reasons for leaving employment in the field of child care within one year or less. The problem studied in this research is whether there is a relationship between students having a practicum experience within a low socio-
economic environment and their tenure of employment in low socio-economic child care environments for majors obtaining a job in the Midwestern state.

This chapter presents an analysis of data, a review of the research questions and hypothesis, and data analysis organized by research question. It concludes with a summary of the results of the study.

**Conceptual Underpinnings for the Study**

Using 15 years of personal experience as an employee of a Midwestern regional University, this researcher noticed that child development graduates left job employment and even the field of child development. Graduating students ask for written letters of recommendations and shortly after obtaining a job, students are asking for another letter of reference. Concerns some of the students have are lack of preparation for a “real world” job or that they have just not found an appropriate job that meets their college preparation (Merriam, 1998, referencing McMillan & Schumacher, 1984). A curiosity of this phenomenon led to this research as an effort to find a reason for leaving good job opportunities and/or the field of child development (Merriam, 1998; Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2003).

Several reasons for leaving the field of child development emerged during a review of related literature. These included: (a) the lack of appropriate teacher preparation during pre-service education, (b) low compensation of early childhood teachers, and (c) the lack of diverse faculty offerings during college. All factors lead to a high rate of job turnover in the field of child care; leaving the fast food industry as the only employment organization who has a higher turnover rate than child care (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). One fact is that, “high rates of turnover contribute to a worsening
teacher shortage in early education which, in turn, is fueling a pervasive, nationwide
crisis in the quality of early care and education services that young children receive
(Whitebrook & Sakai, 2003 referenced Helburn, 1995; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000;

Although research supports one reason for high turnover rate in child care is
directly related to compensation and benefits package, this researcher desires the
opportunity to investigate whether graduating child development majors at a Midwestern
University are leaving employment after one year because they are not prepared for the
work environment. Students who graduate with a child development degree from this
Midwestern University spend three semesters training in one of the University laboratory
schools. Children and families in two of the lab schools are primarily middle to upper
socio-economic income level while one lab school serves children from the college
student population which represents a much lower socio-economic level. Ironically, this
preschool trains few or no child development majors in the University program of study.
Therefore, only majors who work in a low socio-economic setting prior to their college
career or work simultaneously with their degree will have experience in a low SES child
care environment when they leave the University of study.

Consistently, research has demonstrated a direct correlation between quality early
child care and school readiness for children entering kindergarten. Li-Grining & Coley
(2006) found in a review of background literature in “both experimental (Campbell,
Pungello, Miller-Johnson, Burchinal, & Ramey, 2001; IHDP, 1990; Lamb, 1997;
Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993; Yoshikawa, 1995) and nonexperimental studies
(e.g. NICHD, 1998, 2000b, 2003; Votruba-Drzal, Coley, & Chase-Lansdale, 2004)
positive associations between the developmental quality of child care and children’s social, cognitive, and language skills, particularly for economically disadvantaged children” (p. 126). Interactions between young children and adults fosters children’s development, therefore it is of particular interest to policy makers and parents to find quality early childhood education (Burchinal & Cryer, 2003). However, most research to identify high quality early childhood care reflects white, middle income children, and little research has specifically focused on low socio-economic status children or even immigrant children (Mistry et. al, 2008, Burchinal & Cryer, 2003).

Since the United States have a diverse population of families, it is important to consider children who are not directly related to white, middle income research. Specifically, Hernandez (2004) noted “one in five children living in the United States today is either foreign born or has at least one foreign-born parent (cited in Mistry et. al, 2008, p. 193). In 2001, Head Start preschools served over 800,000 three and four year old children while an additional 2 million children were in child care funded by state or federal low income programs for families (Fuller et. al, 2004). Head Start programs in the Midwest employs many graduates from this Midwestern University even when students are not required to have a planned practicum experience with Head Start or any other low income, high minority environment. This phenomenon led to the formulation of the problem statement and research questions of the study.

Organization of Data Analysis

Since the framework of the study was a mixed method research approach, instrumentation and analysis were developed in consultation with the child development faculty and dissertation committee for the express purpose of enhancing the revisions of
the child development program offered at a regional Midwestern University. The mixed methods methodology allows the researcher the ability to identify if a need exists, understand the relationship among the variables, and seek to explain the relationship (Creswell, 2003).

Since the research is not based on a current theory, the researcher used a grounded theory approach during the study. “The grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990 cited in Davidson, 2002). This researcher’s goal is to expand upon the explanation of job longevity of child care in the Midwestern University’s service area and explain the phenomenon of low socio-economic job preparation and job longevity. For the researcher to move from a general topic to specific, (Davidson, 2002) answers from a one page alumni survey and follow-up personal interviews were conducted to obtain more specific data from the emerging findings. Because qualitative research uses multiple methods and is emergent rather than rigidly shaped, a mixed methods approach to this research study helped mold and make sense of the data (Creswell, 2003).

Descriptive statistics, performed by SPSS 15.0 for Windows, were used to summarize quantitative responses for research question one. Qualitative data from survey and persons to person interviews were analyzed for themes, and coded for research questions two and three. For ease of comprehension, findings are organized by each of the three research questions and one hypothesis.
Research Questions and Hypothesis

1. Is there a significant relationship between the number of child development graduates at this institution of study who had an experience in a low socio-economic child care setting before completing the degree and those who have not had a low SES experience before graduation?

2. What perceptions do graduates have regarding leaving child care settings in less than one year?

3. What perceptions do graduates have for staying in a child care setting for more than one year?

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between the numbers of graduates who had a low SES experience before completing the child development degree and those who did not have a low SES experience before completing a child development degree.

Demographics and Data Collection

The actual population chosen for this study was two-year and four-year graduates of the Midwestern University, Child Development Option degree who graduated in a ten year time frame from 1999 to May 2010. The population was obtained from the University’s Alumni Office. To establish a sample, alumni who completed the survey and returned it to the researcher were chosen.

Sub-samples included those who were purposefully chosen by the researcher based on survey responses. “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a
sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). This researcher chose participants who listed additional contact information on the survey and who seemed to represent the emerging categories of graduates which includes: (a) stayed a long period of time in a low socio-economic child care environment, (b) stayed a long period of time in a high socio-economic child care environment, (c) stayed less than one year in a low socio-economic child care environment, (d) stayed less than one year in a high socio-economic child care environment, and (e) never got a job in the child care field.

The sub-sample was recorded by the researcher on a digital audio recorder in person or with a phone call. The place chosen for the audio recording was at the request of the participant. The researcher then transcribed the audio recordings within a 24 hour time period onto a Microsoft Word document. The participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix F) for audio recording and were offered a chance to review the paper copy once the transcripts were member checked by another researcher.

Analysis of Data

The respondents were all graduates of the child development program at a regional Midwestern University. They represented at least one graduate for each of the ten year time span targeted. The 54 participants embody 40 four-year degree graduates, 10 two-year degree graduates, and four who have both degrees. The respondents represent low economic status employment as well as high economic status employment. They were overwhelmingly female and represented employment directly in child care as well as other related areas of child employment.
Fifteen respondents, as represented in Table 1, were chosen by the researcher as a purposeful sample to conduct person-to-person interviews. The researcher noted graduates who were employed in a low socio-economic child care environment for more than one year and those who left employment in a low socio-economic environment in less than one year. The researcher also documented participants who were employed in a high socio-economic child care environment for more than one year and those who left employment in a high socio-economic child care environment in less than one year. Based on the lack of contact information supplied by participants, some of the respondents were not interviewed. Seven of the 15 respondents were willing to participate in the personal interview and their data is represented later when discussing research questions two and three.

Table 1

*People for possible follow up interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># assigned to participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stayed &gt;1 year in Low SES job</td>
<td>49, 4, 17, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed &gt;1 year in High SES job</td>
<td>18, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed &lt;1 year in Low SES job</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed &lt;1 year in High SES job</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never got a job in Child care</td>
<td>19, 2, 32, 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left child care field</td>
<td>10, 22, 28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research question 1 - Is there a significant relationship between the number of child development graduates at this institution of study who had an experience in a low socio-economic child care setting before completing the degree and those who have not had a low SES experience before graduation?

Of the 223 survey instruments mailed to the alumni, 54 completed the survey and returned to the researcher to represent 24.2% of the population. Based on the sample population, 46.2% (N=25) had experienced some sort of low socio-economic child care experience before graduation. Eleven or 44.0% were employed by Head Start before completing the degree, however, six or 54.6% of the previously employed Head Start teachers are no longer working in Head Start or even low income child care environments. Refer to Table 2 for the numbers representing those who had a low income experience in child care before or simultaneously while in college. Although not purposefully planned by the child development curriculum, nearly half of the sample population reports having some sort of low income experience in a child care environment before graduation.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating in a low SES setting before graduation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 outlines how many alumni participants had experience in a low income environment before graduation and how many stayed employed for one year or longer. It
should be noted that eight of the participants never received a job in child care following graduation.

Table 3

*Whether participants had low SES before graduation and stayed employed 1 year or more after graduation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stayed employed 1 year or more after graduation</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants had low SES Experience before grad</td>
<td>Count 23.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants did not have Low SES experience Before graduation</td>
<td>Count 23.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count 46.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H0: There is no significant relationship between the numbers of graduates who had a low SES experience before completing the child development degree than those who did not have a low SES experience before completing a child development degree.

Based on the sample, the null hypothesis is accepted. There is no significant association between prior experience in a low socio-economic child care environment before graduation and job tenure after graduation. $\chi^2(1) = .514, p > .05$. Using job longevity as the dependent variable and prior experience as the independent variable, Pearson’s Chi Square represents, a non-college base practicum in a low socio-economic child care setting does not prove to provide any better indicator of job longevity than
chance alone. Further research in a purposeful planned curriculum providing a low income practicum setting may prove differently.

Research question 2- What perceptions do graduates have regarding leaving child care settings in less than one year? Only eight of the responding participants or 14.8% left a child care position in less than one year. Of the eight, none of the respondents had ever worked in a low socio-economic environment before graduation. Six of the eight respondents never got a job in child care after graduation. One of the eight respondents works as a Para-professional in a public middle school after the child care center where she was employed went out of business, and the other respondent, participant 20, has not worked in child care since the family she served as a nanny left the country. There was one participant, 30, who reported working for the YMCA for four months following graduation.

Although participant 30 is only one subject and is not a representative sample, it can be a meaningful unit of data (Merriam, 1998). Participant 30 (Appendix F) gave the researcher contact information to conduct a follow-up interview about leaving a low socio-economic environment after only four months. When asked how long he had worked in child care and why he left to work in health insurance and fitness centers the response was,

“Oh, that’s been years, goodness, probably half of my life. I’m 32. But, the first job I got right out of college I interviewed for a different position and not getting that initial position and waiting I took an after school job working at the YMCA as an after school director of the YMCA program so I did go directly into the field, but for me graduating college and
making $7.50/hour wasn’t ideal. You know, for me, I had to pay the rent and I never looked back… As a male, I feel I would have probably had more opportunities as a male… So I followed the money trail instead of my heart, I guess you could say”.

When asked what kind of knowledge he had learned working in a low socio-economic environment he stated,

“I think the thing that captured me the most about it was the reality of the larger scale that I was not prepared for. I don’t think that most people are that aware of just how big it is.” He felt new employees should, probably [be] encouraged to go out and they need to volunteer in a setting so that they can get the tough reality of what it is. A lot of people, some people I think, choose to look away, not realizing how bad it is.”

Although this subject did not specifically state that child development majors should be required to complete a practicum in a low SES environment, he did note the importance of the experience. He also stated that he still spends time as a volunteer working with young children and is in the process of opening a home child care center with his wife to stay connected with children.

In addition, participant 50 wrote on her survey,

“I believe the child development program prepared me a great deal. The only improvement is in the hours required. Head Teacher position at Head Start is Minnesota required 2,000 or more hours by federal requirements. So if more hours in the field with the children would prepare graduates for federal guideline would be great.”
Of the remaining 46 respondents, several of them left a particular child care employment after more than one year. Some of the participants reported reasons for leaving such as “mission trip to Brazil for five months; going for ABA [applied behavior analysis] and better paying job now that all my kids are going to be in school; went back to school to get teaching certificate; moved; went back to school; new job had better pay and hours; left because [it] was suppose to be a center for children with disabilities and dev[elopmental] delays but just a day care & man[agement] did not really want children who were disabled or had dev[elopmental] delays; center practices were illegal; work closer to home; became a stay at home mom; got pregnant, moved to St. Louis and opened my own home day care; was only needed for the summer; and grant funding ended”.

Although the review of literature evidenced lack of pay as an indicator for high turnover rate in the child care, this researcher noted slight differences. Many of the participants left low paying child care jobs for better pay but remained in the child care field, while a few left the child care employment field indefinitely. It appears the major theme for changing employment was personal conditions such as bettering oneself through further education or increased pay, benefits, and job security.

Participant 22 (Appendix F) reported leaving child care after three years to start her own business not related to child care. She specifically stated when asked why she left child care, “I tell you what, the money and parents. I love the kids, but some of the parents!” She went on to say,

“I was getting my degree. I worked in Christian School for the Young Years while doing my internship there, I just stayed there. I liked the kids,
I liked the work and I just stayed and then another opportunity presented itself and I had to better myself, so I thought I would try for it and that’s why I stayed with it rather than child care.”

Many of the participants only left a current position to stay in the same institution as a promotion. Participant 54 bought the child care center where she used to teach. Participant 48 moved from a teacher to a director position in the child care center where she worked. Participant 27 advanced from a Head Start teacher of ten years to supervisor of the same Head Start Center. An additional Head Start employee, participant 49, moved from teacher to family advocate in Head Start, and one Head Start teacher, participant 4, moved from the classroom to a supervising position and back to the classroom.

Ten of the respondents worked in Head Start prior to graduation and stayed for a period of time after graduation. Only four of the ten are still working for Head Start. The other six left for “a new job that paid more.” Participant 28, in particular, currently works in an elementary school as a special education teacher’s assistant. She stated that she did not like the restructuring going on in Head Start and that the new job paid more. Participant 6 worked as an education specialist for Head Start for two years and wanted a shorter commute, and participant 3 left after nearly four years as an education specialist to be “closer to home” as well.

Participant 21, a different Head Start teacher of nine years went to be a public school aid to children because “I thought more security” referring to “soft” money during a recession in a federal Head Start program. She is currently a teacher’s assistant in a special education classroom in a public school. An added Head Start teacher of 12 years, participant 51, left to teach in a university laboratory school setting with better benefits.
Finally, participant 25 a Head Start teacher, left to be an Early Head Start teacher in another center to find out the job funding ended seven months later. She now works as an infant/toddler lead teacher in another university laboratory school.

Research question 3- What perceptions do graduates have for staying in a child care setting for more than one year? Forty-six of the respondents, or 85% of the sample population studied stayed in child care settings for more than one year. Review of literature states that a high turnover rate of employment in child care is less than one year, but the literature does not specify whether the child care setting is low income or high income. Mistry et. al, 2008, Burchinal & Cryer, 2003 report that most research reflects white, middle-income children. This researcher identified nearly half of the sample population as employed in low socio-economic child care environments. Of the eight remaining respondents who have not worked in child care for more than one year, six never accepted a job in child care after graduation. Participant 2 indicated the following:

“The flexibility” stated participant 2. “The flexibility that my children could be around while I’m working. Ah, I get paid decent but it is not great but, I just love the children actually. I mean, the younger age group, I would rather care for younger children than older children.”

A Head Start teacher, participant 4, responded as she answered the question why she enjoyed working with Head Start and what advise she would give to new employees she stated,

“just comfortable there, not wanting to move on (Laughs). And, then, I like kids, but I’m finding, ohh, that my patience is not like it should
be for kids right now. Get to know your parents and the persons you are working with. Then you apply that knowledge but then you have to sort of know when to act on it and when not to.”

One graduate, participant 17 had no experience in a low socio-economic child care setting before graduation and has now worked with Head Start for over eight years. She attributed that her degree gave her the ability to advance in her field and has allowed her to stay in child care.

“I had a sound understanding of child development [in college] and I believe in the philosophy and mission of Head Start and my degree allowed me to advance quickly.” She also stated that her Perkins student loan was forgiven for working in a low socio-economic setting. Another Head Start teacher, participant 49, stated the “desire and want to” has allowed her to stay in the field for 15 years. Finally, participant 28, a Head Start teacher of 26 years stated “the love of children” allowed her to work with young children. When participant 49 was asked what she would tell new employees working for Head Start she stated, “Jump in with both feet and just do your best and you’ll learn to adjust to their [children] needs and it just comes natural, or it should. I feel like that.”

The issue of child development teachers not given a planned curriculum experience in a low socio-economic child care setting before graduation was the subject of research. Review of related literature suggested lack of appropriate teacher preparation training, low compensation during employment and lack of diversity among faculty members during teacher preparation being key reasons for leaving employment in the field of child care within one year or less. The problem studied in this research is whether there is a relationship between students having a practicum experience within a low
socio-economic environment and their tenure of employment in low socio-economic (SES) child care environments for majors obtaining a job in the Midwestern region.

The researcher conducted a chi-square analysis to evaluate the hypothesis and research question one. Based on the sample, the null hypothesis is accepted. There is no significant association between prior experience in a low socio-economic child care environment before graduation and job tenure after graduation. $x^2 (1) = .514, p > .05$.

Using job longevity as the dependent variable and prior experience as the independent variable, Pearson’s Chi Square represents, a non-college base practicum in a low socio-economic child care setting does not prove to provide any better indicator of job longevity than chance alone. Further research in a purposeful planned curriculum providing a low income practicum setting may prove differently.

Graduate perceptions for leaving child care employment only partially supported the review of literature. Overwhelming, 81.4% of the sample population stayed in a job for more than one year. If participants left a job for better pay, it was in another child care employment opportunity. Only six (11.1%) left the field of child care for better paying jobs. Although the results varied from the review of literature and did find clear support for a low socio-economic child care experience before graduation, the results of this research can be utilized in further exploring curriculum changes at the University chosen for study. A discussion of implication of this study and possible avenues for future research follows in Chapter Five.
Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1997) states that newly hired teachers without adequate training are often placed with low-income and high minority groups of children. Pre-service teachers are graduating without the skills necessary to prepare them for educating all children. Therefore, the least prepared teachers may be educating the most at-risk children. These teachers may be ill trained in low socio-economic child care settings to provide quality learning experiences for at-risk children. The inadequate training of pre-service teachers may be indicated by changing jobs or leaving the field of child care.

Basing her work on Haberman’s 1987 theories of supporting quality hiring practices for urban teachers, Edith Guyton (1994) stated, “Letting students [future teachers] choose to work in lower SES schools may enhance chances for success.” Because teachers tend to expect less from low income children (Jehl, 2007), it needs to be noted “research shows that higher education can better prepare teachers for challenges of working with very disadvantaged and diverse children” (Hart & Shumacher, 2005, p. 9). This indicates there is a concern between providing pre-service teachers with a variety of educational settings, such as a low income, and preparation for employment when working with children after graduation.

At a Midwestern regional University students studying child development currently graduate without a practicum experience in a low socio-economic environment. Students who major in Human Environmental Studies, Child Development Option, spend
three semesters in a university laboratory school, which serves children six weeks to five years of age. Children and families who attend one of the three university early childhood programs represent various ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic levels, but only a small percentage of the children and families are considered low socio-economic status according to the federal poverty guidelines. Upon completing three semesters of training in one or more of the lab schools, students who earn a four-year degree spend one semester in a final practicum experience working in a child care setting. Although there is some flexibility with placement, most students train with one preschool that has secured a great amount of grant funding, thus making the preschool center a financially secure setting.

Pretti-Frontczak, Giallourakis, Janas, and Hayes (2002) identified a need for pre-service teachers at Kent State University to demonstrate skills in supervised practicum placements which include family centered opportunities. Skills confirmed included demonstration of cultural differences such as income levels, children with special needs, and various backgrounds. The main focus was to prepare teachers to work with children and families with disabilities. To ensure quality, Ohio state licensure was developed to guarantee graduates complete 300 clock hours of supervised practicum placement with young children ages three to eight years. Nine college courses support this certificate. Students wanting additional certification with infants and toddlers had to include an additional practicum experience. At this time, neither the state nor the Midwestern regional University has such requirement for non-certificated majors.

Although this research did not evidence a clear need between low income experience in a child care setting before graduation and job tenure, the study may
contribute to the information base for future revision of the child development curriculum state-wide. The study can be particularly helpful to those assessing a two-year (Child Care and Guidance A.A.S.) and four-year (Human Environmental Studies-Child Development Option, B.S) degree programs at the institution of study. This chapter begins with a summary of the mixed methods study.

Since the study was guided by an alumni survey, with an articulated goal of providing recommendations to improve curriculum for the two-year and four-year child development degree in Human Environmental Studies, the bulk of this final chapter will focus on the recommendations which were developed by the survey results and person-to-person follow-up interviews and the need for further research. Findings and conclusions which led to the recommendations will be imbedded within the discussion. Where appropriate, recommendations will be linked to the literature review. Following the recommendations for improving practicum experience in a low socio-economic setting to improve curriculum, recommendations for future research will be offered.

Summary of the study

Research questions “reflect the researcher’s thinking on the most significant factors to study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 60) and guide the curiosity of the investigator. Quantitative questions deduce how data will be collected, shape the study, and answer what the investigator seeks while the hypotheses are more specific to the analysis of the study (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative questions help deepen the study with descriptions of context. The problem to concentrate on in this study is to determine if there is a relationship between providing students with prior experience within a low SES
environment, and longer tenure of employment in low SES child care environments. To address this problem, the following specific questions were posed.

1. Is there a significant relationship between the number of child development graduates at this institution of study who had an experience in a low socio-economic child care setting before completing the degree and those who have not had a low SES experience before graduation?

2. What perceptions do graduates have regarding leaving child care settings in less than one year?

3. What perceptions do graduates have for staying in a child care setting for more than one year?

Hypothesis

$H_0$: There is no significant relationship between the numbers of graduates who had a low SES experience before completing the child development degree than those who did not have a low SES experience before completing a child development degree.

In order to answer these research questions, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. Data was collected through a brief survey and person-to-person interviews. The content of the survey instrument was influenced by the review of literature and faculty concerns at the Midwestern University. The survey was developed in consultation with the child development faculty and the dissertation committee. Nearly 25% of the child development graduates from the last ten years completed the survey.

The population, or the larger group to which the results of this mixed method study were generalized, was child development graduates who had graduated within Human Environmental Studies in the last ten years. The actual sample or subjects of the
study consisted of graduates who completed and returned the brief survey. Sub-samples were those who participated in a follow-up person to person interview. They represented at least one graduate for each of the ten year time span targeted. The 54 participants embody 40 four-year degree graduates, 10 two-year degree graduates, and four who have both degrees. The respondents speak for low economic status employment as well as high economic status employment. They were overwhelmingly female and represented employment directly in child care as well as other related areas of child employment.

Findings

Research question 1- Is there a significant relationship between the number of child development graduates at this institution of study who had an experience in a low socio-economic child care setting before completing the degree and those who have not had a low SES experience before graduation?

SPSS software was used for the quantitative section to test the hypothesis on the .05 level of significance using Pearson’s chi-square test. Pearson’s chi-square test determines if there is a relationship between variables (Field, 2005). The variables include employment less than one year and employment more than one year. Other variables include employment in a low SES child care environment and employment in middle to upper SES child care environments before graduation.

Of the 223 surveys mailed to alumni, 54 completed the survey and returned to the researcher to represent 24.2% of the population. Based on the sample population, 46.2% had experienced some sort of low socio-economic child care experience before graduation. Eleven or 44.0% were employed by Head Start before completing the degree,
however, six or 54.6% are no longer working in Head Start or even low income child care environments.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between the numbers of graduates who had a low SES experience before completing the child development degree than those who did not have a low SES experience before completing a child development degree.

Based on the sample, the null hypothesis is accepted. There is no difference between the graduates who have had a prior experience in a low socio-economic environment before graduation than those who have not and the longevity in child care. Using job longevity as the dependent variable and prior experience as the independent variable, Pearson’s Chi Square reported .514. Applying the .05 significance level, a non-college base experience in a low socio-economic child care setting, does not prove to provide any better indicator of job longevity than chance alone. Further research in a controlled setting may prove differently.

Research question 2- What perceptions do graduates have regarding leaving child care settings in less than one year? Only eight of the responding participants or 14.8% left a child care position in less than one year. Of the eight, none of the respondents had ever worked in a low socio-economic environment before graduation. Six of the eight respondents never got a job in child care after graduation. One of the eight respondents works as a Para-professional in a public middle school after the child care center she was employed with went out of business, and participant 20 has not worked in child care since the family she served as a nanny left the country. Only participant 30 reported working
for the YMCA for four months following graduation and then leaving the field of child care.

Although participant 30 cannot be a representative sample, it can be a meaningful unit of data (Merriam, 1998). Participant 30 gave the researcher contact information to conduct a follow-up interview about leaving a low socio-economic environment after only four months. When asked how long he had worked in child care and why he left to work in health insurance and fitness centers the response was,

“Oh, that’s been years, goodness, probably half of my life. I’m 32. But, the first job I got right out of college I interviewed for a different position and not getting that initial position and waiting I took an after school job working at the YMCA as an after school director of the YMCA program so I did go directly into the field, but for me graduating college and making $7.50/hour wasn’t ideal. You know, for me, I had to pay the rent and I never looked back… As a male, I feel I would have probably had more opportunities as a male… So I followed the money trail instead of my heart I guess you could say.”

When asked what kind of knowledge he had learned working in a low socio-economic environment participant 30 stated,

“I think the thing that captured me the most about it was the reality of the larger scale that I was not prepared for. I don’t think that most people are that aware of just how big it is.” He felt new employees should,” probably [be] encouraged to go out and they need to volunteer in
a setting so that they can get the tough reality of what it is. A lot of people, some people I think, choose to look away, not realizing how bad it is.”

Although this subject did not specifically state that child development majors should be required to complete a practicum in a low SES environment, he did note the importance of the experience. He also stated that he still spends time as a volunteer working with young children and is in the process of opening a home child care center with his wife to stay connected with children.

In addition, participant 50 wrote on her survey, “I believe the child development program prepared me a great deal. The only improvement is in the hours required. Head Teacher position at Head Start is Minnesota required 2,000 or more hours by federal requirements. So if more hours in the field with the children would prepare graduates for federal guidelines would be great”.

Of the remaining 46 respondents, several of them left a particular child care employment after more than one year. Some of the participants reported reasons for leaving such as “mission trip to Brazil for five months”, “going for ABA [applied behavior analysis] and better paying job now that all my kids are going to be in school”, “went back to school to get teaching certificate”, “moved”, “went back to school”, “new job had better pay and hours”, “left because [it] was suppose to be a center for children with disabilities and dev[elopmental] delays but just a day care & man[agement] did not really want children who were disabled or had dev[elopmental] delays”, “center practices were illegal”, “work closer to home”, “became a stay at home mom”, “got
pregnant, moved to St. Louis and opened my own home day care”, “was only needed for the summer”, and “grant funding ended.”

Although the review of literature evidenced lack of pay as an indicator for high turnover rate in the child care, this researcher noted slight differences. Many of the participants left low paying child care jobs for better pay but remained in the child care field, while a few left the child care employment field indefinitely. It appears the major theme for changing employment was personal conditions such as bettering oneself through further education or increased pay, benefits, and job security.

Specifically participant 22 reported leaving child care after three years to start her own business not related to child care. She specifically stated when asked why she left child care, “I tell you what, the money and parents. I love the kids, but some of the parents!” She went on to say,

“I was getting my degree. I worked in Christian School for the Young Years while doing my internship there, I just stayed there. I liked the kids, I liked the work and I just stayed and then another opportunity presented itself and I had to better myself so I thought I would try for it and that’s why I stayed with it rather than child care.”

Many of the participants only left a current position to stay in the same institution as a promotion. Participant 54 bought the child care center where she used to teach. Participant 48 moved from a teacher to a director position in the child care center where she worked. Participant 27 advanced from a Head Start teacher of ten years to supervisor of the same Head Start Center. An additional Head Start employee, participant 49, moved
from teacher to family advocate in Head Start, and one Head Start teacher, participant 4, moved from the classroom to a supervising position and back to the classroom.

Ten of the respondents worked in Head Start prior to graduation and stayed for a period of time after graduation. Only four of the ten are still working for Head Start. The other six left for “a new job that paid more.” One in particular currently works in an elementary school as a special education teacher’s aid. She stated that she did not like the restructuring going on in Head Start and that the new job paid more. Participant 3 worked as an education specialist for Head Start for nearly four years and left to be “closer to home”. An additional education specialist for Head Start Participant 6, changed jobs after 18 months to “work closer to home” as well.

Participant 21, a different Head Start teacher of nine years went to be a public school aid to children because “I thought more security” referring to “soft” money during a recession in a federal Head Start program. She is currently a teacher’s assistant in a special education classroom in a public school. An added Head Start teacher of 12 years, participant 51, left to teach in a university laboratory school setting with better benefits. Finally, participant 25 a Head Start teacher, left to be an Early Head Start teacher in another center to find out the job funding ended seven months later. She now works as an infant/toddler lead teacher in another university laboratory school.

Research question 3- What perceptions do graduates have for staying in a child care setting for more than one year? Forty-six of the respondents, or 85% of the sample population studied stayed in child care settings for more than one year. Review of literature states that a high turnover rate of employment in child care is less than one year, but the literature does not specify whether the child care setting is low income or
high income. Mistry et. al, 2008, Burchinal & Cryer, 2003 report that most research reflects white, middle-income children. This researcher identified nearly half of the sample population as employed in low socio-economic child care environments. Of the eight remaining respondents who have not worked in child care for more than one year, six never accepted a job in child care after graduation. Participant 2 indicated the following:

“The flexibility” one participant stated. “The flexibility that my children could be around while I’m working. Ah, I get paid decent but it is not great but, I just love the children actually. I mean, the younger age group, I would rather care for younger children than older children.”

A Head Start teacher responded “just comfortable there, not wanting to move on (Laughs). And, then, I like kids, but I’m finding, ohh, that my patience is not like it should be for kids right now.”

One graduate, participant 17 had no experience in a low socio-economic child care setting before graduation and has now worked with Head Start for over eight years. She attributed that her degree gave her the ability to advance in her field and has allowed her to stay in child care.

“I had a sound understanding of child development [in college] and I believe in the philosophy and mission of Head Start and my degree allowed me to advance quickly,” stated participant 17. She also stated that her Perkins student loan was forgiven for working in a low socio-economic setting. Another Head Start teacher, participant 49, stated the “desire and want to” has allowed her to stay in the field for 15 years. Finally, participant 28, a Head Start teacher of 26 years stated “the love of children” allowed her
to work with young children. When participant 49 was asked what she would tell new employees working for Head Start she stated, “Jump in with both feet and just do your best and you’ll learn to adjust to their [children] needs and it just comes natural, or it should. I feel like that.”

The issue of child development teachers not given a planned curriculum experience in a low socio-economic child care setting before graduation was the subject of research. Review of related literature suggested lack of appropriate teacher preparation training, low compensation during employment and lack of diversity among faculty members during teacher preparation being key reasons for leaving employment in the field of child care within one year or less. The problem studied in this research is whether there is a relationship between students having a practicum experience within a low socio-economic environment and their tenure of employment in low socio-economic (SES) child care environments for majors obtaining a job in the Midwestern region.

The researcher conducted a chi-square analysis to evaluate the hypothesis and research question one. There is no significant difference between graduates who had a low socio-economic experience before graduation and those who did not have a low SES experience and job tenure so the null hypothesis was found to be true.

Graduate perceptions for leaving child care employment only partially supported the review of literature. Overwhelming, 85.2% of the sample population stayed in a job for more than one year. If participants left a job for better pay, it was in another child care employment opportunity. Only six (11.1%) left the field of child care for better paying jobs. Although the results varied from the review of literature and did find clear support for a low socio-economic child care experience before graduation, the results of this
research can be utilized in further exploring curriculum changes at the Midwestern University chosen for study.

Implications for further research

No one specifically stated that all child development graduates should complete a practicum in a low socio-economic child care setting, however participant 49 responded, “I think everybody needs that [low socio-economic] experience working with children from different walks of life. It[is] entirely different from those who are advantaged children”. Participant 22 stated she would like more field experience before graduation, but not necessarily in any particular setting.

However, those interviewed who had worked in a low SES setting stated that they learned to individualize lesson plans for children and had more experience with varying attitudes. University education programs cultivating early childhood teachers need to prepare students to “teach children with diverse cognitive, linguistic and cultural backgrounds” (Coffman and Lopez, 2003, p. 13). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) advocates “the early childhood profession… reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of our nation and its families” (p. 4).Participant 17 specifically stated that she would like to see future graduates have an opportunity to experience a more diverse setting in other placements such as a hospital, and other types of programs like Head Start and non-for-profit agencies.

The vision of preparing teachers for genuine learning organizations “can only take root if the seed is planted and nurtured during teacher preparation” (Wehling, 2007, p. 52). Now the argument begins over which comes first: placing practicum teachers in any low income school and hope they can stay, learn, and create a successful learning culture,
or continue to look for the few teachers that stay in the educational system and place practicum students with them? Wehling (2007) believes the days are gone where one “teacher-hero can meet all of the individual learning needs of the diverse students in a classroom” (p. 49). This researcher still believes that students who graduate from a Midwestern University and want to stay local for employment will find the best salary and benefit package working in Head Start. Since this study did not find a significant link to low SES experience that “just happens” and job longevity, this researcher believes an action research study will further validate or disprove the need for formal practicum training in a low socio-economic child care environment before graduation.

Coghlan and Brannick (2005) quote Reason and Bradbury’s definition of action research as “participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview” (p. 3). Action research has received valuable feedback in the social sciences “gaining explanation to empirical facts and generalizations” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 28). It is an emergent inquiry based on “a collaborative problem-solving relationship between researcher and client which aims at both solving a problem and generating new knowledge” (Coglan & Brannic, 2005, p. 9). Typically action research is conducted in a cycle and often repeated following the steps; (a) diagnosing a problem, (b) planning action to solve the problem, (c) taking action, and finally (d) evaluating the action (Coglan & Brannic, 2005).

Since nearly 25% of the graduating population answered the survey, they might not know how a low SES setting may have benefited. It could be safe to say that another representative proportion of graduates may not agree with the responding sample.
Overwhelming, the respondents were quite positive of the program and others may not have answered due to ill feelings toward the program. The next logical step to take would be to purposefully assign all child development majors to a low SES setting and evaluate from there. Future researchers may want to consider programs like Kent State in Ohio to pattern a curriculum. One could use a pre/post attitudinal test or follow the graduates after the practicum experience and interview similar to this study. Because of time constraints and limited ability to current student population, this researcher was unable to complete an action research dissertation. Continued research into the factors involved in this study is certainly warranted.

Summary

The concept of low socio-economic child care environments, college preparation, and job longevity has been researched in many studies. While most research studies support lack of pay and benefits as the primary reason for high job turnover, this researcher attempted to find another variable for leaving child care employment.

*No Dream Denied* advocates that 21st Century teachers “must know their subject areas deeply. They must know how children learn and be able to use that knowledge to teach diverse students as well” (p. 9). This is a skill that takes time and experience to develop and nurture yet, “new teachers are leaving the profession in alarming numbers; dropping out before they master the skills they need to create a successful learning culture for their students” (Wehling, 2007, p. 52). Turnover is costly not only for schools looking for trained care but the children who encounter unbalanced care (Bailey, 2005; Pruissen, 2007). Even more alarming is the issue of occupational job turnover where teachers are not only leaving their job, but the field of child care altogether. A “high level
of job turnover among staff can also place the continued operation of a child care center in jeopardy or impede centers’ efforts to improve quality” (Whitebook & Sakai, 2003, p. 275).

In this study participants’ perceptions were varied as to why they stayed or left child care employment. Almost all of the subjects had stayed in child care employment opportunities for more than one year alluding to discrepancies in the review of literature. However, there was no significant correlation between an unplanned experience in a low socio-economic child care setting and job longevity. It is this researcher’s opinion that a more focused and purposefully study placing child development majors in such practicum experience would warrant different findings.
May 25, 2010

Dear Child Development Alumnus,

As a graduate of [Redacted] Child Development program, I would like to offer an opportunity for you to propose suggestions for future graduates of the program. To fulfill obligations of the University of Missouri Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis doctoral program, I am researching the relationship between college preparation and length of employment in the child care profession. Additionally, I am interested if practicum placement can improve child development graduates for the work force. As graduates of the [Redacted] Child Development program, you are key to bridge the gap. Your feedback is critical to the study. Only through your participation can I gain an accurate portrayal about the appropriateness of curriculum in the Department of [Redacted] child development program at [Redacted] University.

Enclosed is a short survey designed to glean an accurate portrayal of your practicum experiences at Southeast and may improve instruction for future graduates. If you choose to complete the short survey, you may benefit the curriculum of future [Redacted] students. Your responses will be kept completely confidential, and no information will be shared outside of this study. By providing your name and contact information, I may follow-up with a personal interview to gather more detailed responses. The survey should take no more than a few minutes to complete. The returned, completed survey will give consent of your participation in the study.

Please return your survey in the self-addressed, stamped envelope by June 5, 2010 to:

Sara Garner
Southeast Missouri State University
MS 9500
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701

Your participation is greatly appreciated. Feel free to contact me with any questions or follow up inquiries about the survey.

Sincerely,

Sara Garner, MA
Southeast Missouri State University Instructor
sgarner@semo.edu
The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the effectiveness of college training in preparing graduates for child related employment and to fulfill doctoral candidate requirements for research. Your response will be kept strictly confidential and will possibly help direct curriculum and field experiences for future graduates. Your participation is voluntary and greatly appreciated. Please return the survey in the postage paid envelope to Sara Garner MS 9500 University, One University Plaza, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701.

Please check the appropriate box for each statement.

Are you a graduate of Southeast Missouri State University Human Environmental Studies Child Development Program?  ____ Yes (continue)  ____ No (please return survey)

Date of graduation (if applicable) for A.A.S. Child Care and Guidance ________________

Date of graduation (if applicable) for B.S. Human Environmental Studies Child Development Option__________________________

1. Were you employed in a low socio-economic child care environment before or simultaneously while working toward your college degree in child development?  
   ____ Yes  ____ No

2. How was low socio-economic defined by your workforce agency?  
   ____ Federal Government Poverty Guidelines  ____ Free and Reduced Lunch Count  
   ____ Other Please specify_______________________________________

3. Please provide all your work history in child care. Use the back of the page if needed.  
   From Date To Date Employed by Position If left
   Reason for leaving

   Sept 2002 March 2003 Head start Teacher New job -better hours and paid more

Contact information (optional). You may be contacted personally to gain a more accurate portrayal of your experiences.

Name: ____________________________________________
Address: _________________________________________
Email: __________________________________________
Phone Number: ( )

Send the completed survey in the postage-paid return envelope. Thank you for your time. Your responses will help guide curriculum planning for future graduates.
Appendix B
QUESTIONS FOR PERSON-TO-PERSON FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

Experience in Low SES before graduation

Tell me your name and how long you have been working in child care.

Think back to when you first started working in a child care setting after graduation.

Do you believe your experience in a low SES child care setting before or simultaneously while you were in college had an impact on your employment following graduation?

Tell me how?

What knowledge did you gain by working in a low SES setting before graduation?

How did you use that knowledge in employment?

What was particularly helpful about the job training?

Is your employment any different because you received this training prior to graduation?

If you could give advice to new employees who had not worked in a low SES setting, what would it be?

Some graduates believe they would have benefited from a practicum in a low SES setting before graduation, what would you say to them?

What do you think an ideal child development program would look like?

How would you teach someone else to work in a low SES child care setting?
What obstacles, if any, have you encountered to prevent you from working in child care for more than one year?

What has allowed you to stay in a child care field for more than one year?

**QUESTIONS FOR PERSON-TO-PERSON FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW**

*No experience in Low SES before graduation*

Tell me your name and how long you have been working in child care.

Think back to your college studies.

If given an opportunity to complete your college degree again, what classes or opportunities would you like to have?

Tell me how these would help?

What do you think an ideal child development program would look like?

What was particularly helpful or frustrating for you during college?

How would you teach someone to work in child care?

Is your employment experience any different than someone who did not go to college?

Tell me how?

What obstacles have you encountered to prevent you from working in child care for more than one year?

What has allowed you to stay in a child care field for more than one year?
Appendix C

Child Development Survey

Dear Child Development Alumni,

I am conducting a short survey to evaluate the effectiveness of college training in preparing graduates for child-related employment. Your feedback is critical to the study and to the care of young children regionally. Only through your participation can I gain an accurate portrayal about the appropriateness of the curriculum in the Department of [Department Name] Child Development program at [University Name].

Look for your survey to arrive in the mail soon and please take a few minutes to help future [Department Name] Child Development graduates.

Thank you.

Sara Garner, MA
Southeast Missouri State University, Instructor
sgarner@semo.edu
Appendix D

Dear Child Development Alumni,

Recently you received a short survey to evaluate the effectiveness of college training in preparing graduates for child-related employment in the mail. Your feedback is critical to the study and to the care of young children regionally. **If you have not already completed the survey, please take a moment to fill it out and return in the postage paid envelope.** If you need another survey, I can email you one as an attachment. Only through your participation can I gain an accurate portrayal about the appropriateness of the curriculum in the Department of Child Development program at Southeast Missouri State University.

Please take a few minutes to help future Child Development graduates.

Thank you.

Sara Garner, MA
Instructor
sgarner@semo.edu
Appendix E

University of Missouri
Informed Consent Letter

Title: A STUDY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT ALUMNI PERCEPTIONS OF THE QUALITY OF PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION FOR EMPLOYMENT IN LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHILD CARE SETTINGS

Researcher: Sara Garner, Doctoral Student

Purpose: This is a mixed method study that may help determine where alumni are working and how long they have been employed in the field of child development. The study will also investigate why students have stayed or left the workforce in the area they were trained.

Information: Participants will receive an introductory announcement requesting their participation to fill out a brief survey. Based on the respondents, the researcher will purposefully select subjects to elaborate on their survey responses in a personal interview. Interview questions will be provided beforehand and the interview itself will be recorded and transcribed. The information from the interviews will be analyzed and coded into categories to be used in determining the study’s findings about alumni perceptions for staying employed or leaving the child care workforce. Pseudonyms will be used instead of names during the study.

Risks: There are no risks anticipated for any participant.

Benefits: Although participants will not be compensated for taking part, the researcher will offer to provide a copy of the study’s results. It is expected that this study may impact curriculum offering in the Child Development major at [University of Missouri].

Confidentiality: You have a right to privacy with your responses, and this right to privacy will not be violated.

Voluntary participation: Your involvement in the research is completely voluntary. Participants also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Informed consent: My signature below indicates that I have read the above information. I agree to participate in this study and have received a copy of this form.

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

Contact: If you have any questions regarding this study or the procedures you may contact:

Sara Garner
573-722-5211 (home)
573-225-0255 (cell)
e-mail: sgarner@semo.edu
Researcher (R): Alright #2, thanks for doing this. I know it is crazy during a busy day.

S: Yes

R: I’m just gonna ask you those questions I sent you that I mailed to you in the mail so the first one is

R: Tell me your name and how long you have been working in child care.

S: My name is #2 and I have been in child care almost nine years. Ummm, It will be 9 years on November of this year.

R: Alright: Thinking back to your college studies if you were given an opportunity to complete your college degree again, what classes or opportunities would you have liked to have had?

S: Um, I would have liked to have went into therapy so I can help children on a one-on-one basis. Um. There is no opportunities around here at this time to pursue that and oh that is what I would like to do.

R: Ok, so you would like your total degree to change a total direction.

S: Yes

R: Ok

S: But still work with pediatrics, the children.

R: Ok

S: You know I would like to work with them as a facilities, day care facilities actually

R: Ok, alright
R: What do you think an ideal child development program would look like and that would be from a university point of perspective educating child development majors?
S: Um, well, I don’t know (laughs) Ahhh, say that question again, let me think about that.
R: Ok, What do you think an ideal child development program would look like?
S: Well, it would have all the material that you need accessible to you at all times. You would have aids available and probably the setting, you do not get anything like that but I think in university settings you do. That would be, I would like more one-on-one with the children so maybe the ratios would be smaller?
R: Ok
S: That would be great
R: What was particularly frustrating for you during college?
S: Um, raising a family (Laughs) and trying to go to school.
R: I got it.
S: Laughs, and work and so that’s the stress, the trio, it’s kind of stressful
R: That’s right. How would you teach someone to work in child care?
S: Uh, I would make sure that they would work underneath me for a week of training Um, and I would like them to have training themself where they can go in and learn more about I mean take child development classes, I think that helps a lot.
R: Ok, that leads into my next question. Do you think your employment experience is any different than someone who did not go to college?
S: I do. I feel like I have more knowledge about it and I have other people working with me that have CDA [child development associate] that they have knowledge, but I still think they would benefit from having a college education.

R: Ok, and what has allowed you to stay in the child care field for so long.

S: Um, the flexibility, uh my children being around when I’m working. Ah, I get paid descent but it is not great but ah, I just love the children, actually. I mean, I like the younger age group I would rather keep caring for younger children than older children.

R: Ok,

S: That’s what’s kept me here.

R: Ok, well that’s all my questions but just kind of off the record, I’ll share a couple of things with you. First of all, with your child development degree you have the ability to be a First Steps [government program for 0-3 years] developmental therapist. I’m not sure if you are aware of that.

S: I didn’t know if I could or not, I thought maybe I had to have a 4 year degree.

R: Uh, I don’t, you know, maybe I had better double check. If you have had classes with Nancy Hale, she is the one that schedules them.

S: Ok

R: I mean it is not physical therapy; it’s more like a play, developmental type therapy

S: Yeah, that’s fine. I actually wanted to do OT [occupational therapy] but they canceled my program.

R: Oh, shoot

S: I know, when I saw you in the hallway
R: yeah

S: And they sent me a letter like right after that and said that they were sorry for the inconvenience and the classes that I took, but it’s not, they cancelled the program.

R: Ahh, I’m so sorry to hear that.

S: So am I. Back to square one. Then I thought maybe I should go into social work or something but then I get discouraged from that too because you know the system is kind of crazy and what should I do with my life? (laughs)

R: The other thing, um, our department also now offers an ABA [applied behavioral analysis] therapy degree. It’s only three more college classes and it’s partnered with education. Now I don’t know how or what your calling is for children with autism but their pay scale is pretty good so that might be something you want to check into as well.

S: I have a child here that has autism

R: Ok

S: I’ve got, we’ve been I think it’s really good for autistic children to be around typical children

R: Right

S: Without disabilities

S: I know that some people disagree with that, but like I said, I think they need to be with them you know, unless they are real severe

R: Right, absolutely, but that is something you might want to look into as well because it is a growing program. It runs in a cohort. The newest cohort just started in May, so it will probably be May next year before you could actually get into it.
S: What is it called?

R: It’s ABA therapy. It is just a certificate and it’s three college classes, nine hours it’s got a practicum with it and stuff but then once you complete them then you are allowed to sit for the national exam. It’s just like anything else, you have to pass your exam and

S: Yeah

R: To be a therapist.

S: Do you think that will work out for me?

R: Yeah, I think you have to have your four year degree if I am right, but it is something you can work on simultaneously while your doing it

S: While I’m doing it?

R: Umhuh,

S: TEACH [funding source] sent me something the other day and I said you know I might as well probably just go back. I mean

R: Well, yeah

S: I mean I’ve got three boys now and I’m like, you know, if I can get it paid for then I might as well go back and do it.

R: I hear you because in today’s economic times, I don’t know if or how much longer that will last. You know our Child Care Resource and Referral got moved, don’t you?

S: No

R: Yeah, we lost it in Cape the end of June and Springfield [MO] inherited all of the records here so that is going to be interesting the governor cut four R&R programs
S: UM, I know it’s bad everywhere. You know Stephanie [boss] I really don’t think if this building was paid off she wouldn’t be there I don’t think. This is off the record you know, but she just, she finds it stressful, doesn’t enjoy it and she said she’d rather go back to teaching.

R: It’s tough

S: Well, you know that, you’ve done that

R: Yeah

S: You’ve done something different and I think she’s at that point where she’s ready to move on and a, you know

R: I understand that

S: Yeah I’m like I’ve gotta do something before she decides to quit one day

(laughs) Me: Yeah

S: Do something now so I can get a job somewhere

R: If you need to come and see me, we’ll get you enrolled for the fall.

S: OK, I will

R: Thanks a lot. Keep up the good work. I appreciate it.

S: alright

R: Thank you
R: Ok, what I’ll do is ask you the questions. I’ve got your release form. It’s being audio taped so I that I can transcribe it but it’s a qualitative survey so I am trying to find out a little bit more detail than what came in the survey.

B: Ok

R: After I transcribe it word for word, if you want me to email it to you, you can look over it. You definitely have that option and if you want to find out anything about it afterwards

B: Ok

R: I can tell you that too. Alright, so tell me your name and how long you have been working in child care.

B: Umm, #4 ah, 22 years, it will be 23 in October.

R: So think back 23 years ago almost you gotta kind of think about this two fold from before your degree and then after your degree

B: umhum

R: Ah, do you believe that your experience working in the low SES child care setting while you were doing your education had an impact on your employment now?

B: Uh, yes

R: Tell me how that worked

B: Uh, a lot of things that were taught in class were which I could not have learnt from just the agency that was there.

R: Ok
B: Uh, like a lot of English classes, even the child care classes and also like the, what was that? I’ve had a lot of good classes through the years psychology, all of those because you are dealing with people and those helped me in that area.

R: What do you think you gained outside of the college by working in a low income environment, what did you gain?

B: Um, I guess just be ‘in around people that uh, let’s say their attitude towards things Um, well, a lot of things that you are taught in college as far as child care, you know people don’t actually do a lot of those at home and so you’re gonna have two sides to, you know, the story. You know the way they’re actually doing their child rearing vs actually, the book.

R: Ok, that’s a good example

B: (laughs)

R: So, now that you know that they’re not just text book cases, how do you use that information in your teaching practices now?

B: Uh, now I’m like a, as far as, I work around a lot of people that want to do things the ole fashion way and I’m not, you know, you can’t do things that old fashion way anymore. Ah, those new methods, even though like at work they called it, you know like they have different names, people who have come up with their own method but in all they still basically what we were taught in college.

R: Ok

B: So, it’s what do you call it? Ummmm what do you call it? Redirecting, like positive redirecting

R: Ok
B: So you’ve got to be able to think and get on their level and then, well like that past two years, they’ve got this method now where you’ve been talkin that you can praise kids now they don’t want you doin that anymore. So um so now I don’t know.

R: So which do you think conflicts what you learned in college or primarily what you’ve learning working with low economic children?

B: Uh, what I learned in college mostly works because that we were doing this past two years is not working. People are lying if they say it is working. But about you know, keep their jobs.

R: Ok.

B: Or they would pretend they be doin somethin else and behind closed doors, you know?

R: Yes I do.

B: (laughs)

R: So do you think your employment is any different because you received the training. I mean when you are talking about people doing things behind closed doors do they know better because they have had the college education or are you seeing it differently because you have been educated?

B: I think I see it different because I have been educated and I know there’s a better way. A lot of people don’t want to shake off those old ways.

R: If you could give advice to a new employee who has never worked in low socioeconomic like Head Start?

B: UmHum.

R: What would it be?
B: It would be to basically get to know your people and the persons you are working with. Then you have to apply that knowledge but then you have to sort of ummm you’re gonna use that knowledge but you’ve got to know when to act on it and when not to.

R: ok

B: laughs

R: Some graduates feel they would have benefited from having a practicum in a low socioeconomic setting before they graduated, what do you say to that?

B: I would say that um, um, um there is a difference when we were out working at your center there is a difference in that setting and the setting like, you know where I work [Head Start] A whole lot of difference so um cause I still think back on those unisex bathrooms where they just go in there use the bathroom and where I work it’s a big deal if a boy goes in there with a girl but you suggest out there, they didn’t pay any attention to that because they were never told to notice that so that is one little thing that I noticed

R: What do you think an ideal child development program would look like and that is from a university setting? If you were doing it all over again, what would you want to see?

B: Oh, basically a lot of the, the people working in the setting using a lot of hands on games and techniques and it’s gonna require them really getting to know that child on a psychological level not just doin things by the book, because they were told to do it, just because but really try to teach the child.

R: And how would you teach someone else to work in a low socioeconomic setting?
B: How would I teach ‘em to work? Um, I guess I would just go back to they have to be aware of who they are working with and that their values and beliefs are makin them a bit different then what they might have learned and studied

R: Ok, what has allowed you to stay in child care for so long?

B: Um, just comfortable there, not wanting to move on (Laughs) And then, I like kids, but I’m finding, ohh, that my patience is not like it should be for kids right now.

R: Alright, any other comments you want to add?

B: Nope, not unless you’ve got some questions. (Laughs)

R: Thank you for your time.
R: Tell me your name and how long you have worked in child care.
C: ok, my name is #22 and I have worked in child care for about five years.
R: And, thinking back to your college studies, if you were given an opportunity to complete your college degree again, what classes or opportunities would you like to have?
C: Oh, um I guess just more in field experience you know essentially before completely finishing that degree.
R: Just curiosity, since you left the field do you think you might have changed your major if that would have happened?
C: Definately
R: Ok, alright that’s good to know, so that kind of tells me how that would help. As a child development program from a college, if you would do this degree again, what do you think an ideal child development program would look like?
C: Uh, exactly like the one they have there at the child enrichment center.
R: Ok
C: I thought it was an excellent program.
R: And what was particularly helpful or frustrating for you during the degree?
C: What was frustrating was probably UI 100 courses
R: Ok
C: I’m sure that is not the first time you have heard that
R: Yeah,
C: I guess that would probably be about it. Uh, I was always able to get along with all my instructors. I had ample time for finals and such so really I guess that was about the only thing.

R: Well, what would you do to teach someone to work in child care?

C: I’m not sure quite what you mean

R: If, let’s say, you were going to mentor someone that was going to be working in child care. What would you do with them?

C: Hand on in the classroom working for everything (laughs) Arrival, lunch, nap time, all of it, pick-ups Everything

R: Ok that’s good to know. Do you think your employment experience while you were working in child care was any different than someone who didn’t have a college degree?

C: Yeah, because I was educated on, you know, different stages of what they go through and how they learn how to deal with certain obstacles, you know with parents so definitely yeah

R: And since you have opened your own business and have not done that, what obstacles have you encountered to prevent you from working in child care?

C: I tell you what, the money and parents

R: Money and parents?

C: Yeah I love the kids, but some of the parents

R: I understand. Well, what allowed you to stay in it for five years?

C: I was getting my degree and I had preferred to work in Christian School for the Young years while doing my internship there, I just stayed there. I liked the kids, and
I just stayed and then another opportunity presented itself and I had to better myself so I thought I would try for it and that’s why I stayed with rather than child care.

R: Ok Well, kind of to tell you what I am doing is, I work for extended learning. I have done our whole child development program but primarily through extended learning so what I see is that a lot of our graduates tend to get jobs at Head Start because it’s a better paying job and then they don’t stay there and I am wondering if that has to do with preparation that we are or not doing. My thought is a low income practicum, similar to what you just mentioned so that is what I am trying to find out kind of my question for my research and I’m wanting to know if I have any facts to back that or not.

C: That is why I the whole thing that
My kids were going to Head Start and that’s what got me started.

R: Ok

C: I got on board over there and really got involved and then Illinois basically changed

R: Right

C: A lot of them left I know because they had families
12 hours right?

R: Yeah

C: So I know that is a far

R: Yeah

C: So I wasn’t that impressed.

R: Yeah
C: and the in the IL program

R: It is very interesting because it is a federal program and I have worked with students in Arkansas, in Missouri, and now talking to you with IL there are a lot of differences between states when it’s all federally directed.

C: Yeah I’m gonna tell you, IL site, the one I just went for at was state of the art. I mean everything was top, teachers were excellent where SEMO I would also witness where one particular teacher had someone sign her in and she wouldn’t actually be in class.

R: Oh, Wow

C: So I was just like ok that is so wrong on so many levels

R: Yes I agree

C: It just wasn’t that, but I love it and I don’t think the ones who work in MO thinks it needs an overhaul.

R: Yeah, they’ve made some changes, but I don’t know, I’m not as connected with it as I once was but you’re going onto something.

C: Yeah,

R: Well I thank you for the time you spent with young children and maybe sometime in your life you’ll get back around to what you originally enjoyed but meanwhile you gotta feed the kids.

C: Yeah absolutely (laughs) yeah, that’s for sure

R: Ok, I’m looking at your email address, no I don’t have one. Do you have an email address? Do you want me to send you a transcript?

C: No that’s ok. You don’t have to.
R: Ok, alright, well, I sure appreciate it and you can call me at any time if you want to
know anything about how the survey turned out.

C: Ok

R: alright, thank you

C: Bye Bye
Audio recording was not available

R: Tell me your name and how long you have been working in child care.
M: 8 years + 5 years

R: If given an opportunity to complete your college degree again, what classes or opportunities would you have liked to have had?
M: don’t know, SEMO was great fundamentally, had direct classroom experience but would like more lesson planning and implementing with children.

R: What do you think an ideal child development program would look like?
M: More diverse settings, even field placement in hospitals. I did some of my practicum in St. Louis, so I was given that experience.

R: How would you teach someone to work in child care?
M: more diversity, several types of programs such as Head Start, nonprofit centers, for-profit centers, more “real world” settings.

R: Is your employment experience any different than someone who did not go to college?
M: Yes, my college degree allowed me to fast track my employment. I had a sound understanding of child development

R: What has allowed you to stay in a child care field for more than one year?
M: the ability to advance. I believe in the philosophy and mission of Head Start and my degree allowed me to advance quickly. I also believe students should know that the Perkins loan can be forgiven if you work in Head Start. They may entice more students to pursue the degree.
R: Ok, #49, tell me how long you’ve been working in child care.

S: 15 years

R: 15 years, ok, so think back when you first started working in child care setting after graduation, so I know you have worked during, but after, do you believe the experience in low socioeconomic child care setting that you had while you were working on your degree had an impact on your employment after graduation?

S: Uh, yes, because at that point I realized how much more I could accomplish and had learned different techniques and tactics and things along the way that helped a lot in the classroom and with the kids.

R: Ok and you stayed at the same job you were working through graduation and after?

S: Yes I did

R: Uh, what knowledge did you gain by working in a low socioeconomic environment?

S: the variety in the children, the different levels of development from each child, learning how to meet the needs of each different level for those children to try and prepare them for where they needed to be.

R: Ok, so what was particularly helpful when it came to the job, when you were talking about a variety of the children’s levels how did you learn that and how did you word that and how did you put it into a classroom?
S: I put it into the classroom by adjusting the lesson plans to each child and having to do a lot of times one-on-one work with children over at the side at different times to work on different things as opposed to integrating into groups sometimes.

R: Ok, so when you say “adjusting” you are referring to their academic level, social level?

S: Really both. All of the above because some of them have to learn socially, the social skills with the other children to mingle in both things academically as well because they are all at different levels of learning.

R: Ok Do you think, other than the techniques that you were talking about, what would have happened if you hadn’t had been working in Head Start all that time if you got this job now after graduation?

S: I wouldn’t have been near as prepared. I wouldn’t have known at lot of time what to do, how to plan, how to work on lesson plans and how to address the curriculum and to improvise and things like that.

R: So that’s what you learned from your college skills or that’s more what you learned before college? The making lesson plans and adjusting

S: Well, I did that before but after all the college classes and all I was more adept at it and I feel like I gained enough knowledge that I was able to better and be more appropriate.

R: If you could give advice to a new employee who had not worked in a low socioeconomic setting, what would it be?

S: I think everybody needs that experience working with children from different walks of life. It’s entirely different from those who are advantaged children.
R: Ok, so if you were hiring a co-teacher to work with you right now what would be the best advice to be given?

S: Jump in with both feet and just do your best and you’ll learn to love each and every kid and learn to adjust to their needs and it just comes natural, or it should. I feel like it.

R: Ok, ok, Do you think that graduates would benefit from having this low socioeconomic experience?

S: definitely

R: How would that help?

S: Well, for instance if they would go into a setting where it is more like a private type school, you don’t get the diversity sometimes but you would get a good setting.

R: And explain diversity

S: Um different Uh well these kids come from all different, I don’t want to say income levels but in a way that what it is. Some of them are less advantaged than the others and some of them don’t have the opportunities at home, they are not taught at home, some of them at all and then you have others that families are able to work with them at home and gets them everything but I have seen some that parents do not have the time or care to.

R: What do you think, excuse me (clears throat) what do you think an ideal child development program would look like?

S: I have yet to see an ideal child development program (laughs) but it would have to be one that meet the needs of each individual child developmentally.
R: And is there any, from a child development program, putting out a child development program. What could we do to help future teachers mold low socioeconomic children?

S: I think you would need a lot, put them in that situation for a practicum or training in those types of classrooms

R: And what obstacles, if any, have you encountered to prevent you from working in child care?

S: I haven’t really

R: What has allowed you to stay in child care?

S: Well it came that individuals had to have degrees and so all of us had to work on that and that, that made it more possible to keep going and of course the desire to have the want to

R: Ok, thank you is there any other questions you have for me.

S: No, not really (laughs)
R: What I’m going to do is ask you those same questions that I mailed you when you filled out that consent form.

A: Oh

R: So tell me your name and how long you have been working in child care.

A: My name is #28 and I have been workin in child care for 27 years.

R: 27 years- Think back to when you first started working in child care, do you believe your experience in a low socio-economic child care setting before graduation had an impact on your employment or what you did after graduation?

A: Yes

R: And tell me how that benefited

A: understand development about children and functioning and development differences and how to plan for them and for individuals.

R: Ok, function as how?

A: function in the ways of learnin, individualizing them and being able to teach them in a way that they need to be taught.

( Pause) R: I’m writing too because the connection is not that great.

A: OK

R: What knowledge did you gain by working in a low socio-economic setting before graduation?
A: Oh, Hum, basically gain knowledge of how each family functions, how to deal with children comfort and level of families development in particular to be able to get along and learn more caring

R: caring, family caring?
A: Yeah,

R: How did you use that knowledge at the job you are working at now or even Head Start after you graduated?
A: I used it to the point that to better understand development of the children and how to best plan for them together and lab work that helps get on the children’s level.

R: Ok and is your employment any different because you received this training prior to graduation?
A: No, older children [referring change of employment from 3-5 year olds to elementary age]

R: If you could give advice to new employees who had not worked in a low socio-economic setting- I said that wrong IF you could give advise to new employees who had not worked in a low socio-economic status, what would it be?
A: That they need it because even though regardless they teach different grades, like the job I have now, teachers

R: Uh, huh
A: They teach you how to function- more better, you understand them better because you deal with younger age first setting. And then we when they get into upper grade school where they went straight into education elementary and not ever getting that
from then on, it’s better to get, I mean it helped me to understand it more better for the job, they understand the children better. They get that first setting in public school

R: Ok

A: and so they need that

R: I got it. Some graduates feel they would have benefited from a practicum in a low SES setting before graduation, what would you say to them?

A: (not audible)

R: Like what?

A: Repeat the question

R: Some graduates feel they would have benefited from a practicum in a low socio-economic status before graduation, what would you say to them?

A: you mean like the lab?

R: Yeah, because you had that opportunity to work in Head Start whereas a typical graduate would not have that. Do you think it is important for them to work in low socio-economic status or not?

A: Yeah, when we took lab I mean they had some but what do you call it- at risk. I think they need to understand it and deal with it on a base level

R: Ok If you were going to teach someone to work in a low socio-economic child care setting, how would you do that?

A: I’d put them in the classroom and give them the instructions on what we do, how we go about, and everything with the children and on their own basis. You are in the room, but they need to work with the child and then be with them, be involved, and get down with them on their level.
R: Ok and what has allowed you to stay in child care for so long?

A: Love of the children

R: Alright- Now why did you leave after so many years of Head Start? Why did you leave and go to another job?

A: the reconstruction part about it and try new

R: Ok

A: About the child care?

R: Yes

A: Mainly just have them do the kids in a Head Start setting and in the labs

R: Ok, so actually getting away from the lab school

A: Yeah, make them get out into the field like we had to do with Schafaie [former instructor] and in different fields even though you are in child learn different things about different people like Head Start or like maybe they could go into another child care program like Head Start or something like that.

R: Ok

A: Dealing with Head Start, I thought the lab was good but, there’s a difference there and just let them get their feet wet out in the field out on the job

R: (laughs) Well, ah thank you (recording stopped)
R: Thank you for being patient with me as we try to schedule a time for your interview. I was curious to interview you because you left a low socio-economic environment and the best I can tell, you are the only male who responded so the survey so you get to represent all malehood for the study. (Laughs)

E: Wow

R: No pressure or anything.

E: (Laughs) no, none at all

R: Part of what I am going to talk about are the questions I sent to you in the mail. I am interested in your work in a low socio-economic child care environment. Looking at your survey, did you count Easter Seals as your low socio-economic experience?

E: Yes, and I worked at the Christian School for the Young Years and I worked in the Child Studies Center up there oh shoot, what’s the name of that called?

R: At Southeast?

E: Yeah, Southeast. Is it still called Scully building?

R: Yes some things never change

R: Ok The Center for Child Studies. Tell me your name, how long you have worked in child care or have been.

E: Oh, that’s been years, probably, probably, half of my life. I’m 32. I only volunteer now but. (He talks about his wife starting her own child care center, but it is not audible).

R: Ok, what are you doing right now?

E: Excuse me?

R: What are you doing right now?
E: I sell health insurance benefits and I also own two gyms.

R: Oh, wow, great

E: So I followed the money trail instead of my heart I guess you could say.

R: Well, that’s part of the study too. At least you will have that child connection with your wife’s business.

E: You know, I do, I do a program right now called CASA [court appointed]. Are you familiar with that?

R: Oh, definitely where you are an advocate for children in court

E: Yeah, and I have been doing that for three years.

R: Oh, good. I know they have a difficult time getting people to do that so

E: Yeah

R: Alright, well this first question is gonna be worded a little bit differently because you are not working in child care full time but do you believe your experience in a low socio-economic child care setting before graduation had an impact on your employment following graduation?

E: Um, the direction I was originally headed was social work and while I was waiting for a job, I was offered a position in insurance and they told me there wouldn’t be a position for a few weeks so when they called me back I had already gotten the job in insurance so I didn’t leave. I guess the big change, originally when I was working for Easter Seals I was a special ed[ucation] major.

R: ok

E: and then with the push of inclusion

R: Right
E: so, sure

R: I’m writing notes while this is recording

E: ok

R: What knowledge did you gain by working in a low socio-economic environment?

E: Say that again, I’m sorry.

R: What knowledge did you gain by working in a low socio-economic environment?

E: Um, I think the thing that captured me the most about it was the reality of the larger scale that I was not prepared for is what I’d have to do. I don’t think that most people are that aware of just how big it is.

R: Ok

E: I do what I can, when I can like with my wife’s child care when I can help. Plus my connection with the gym. Over the years I’ve got to mentor a few young men. They were pre-teen 13, 12 or 13 year old boys and I try to mentor them in different settings more like a big brother kind of thing. To me I always felt like my heart really is working with kids especially my wife and I, our goal was to have our own center so

R: ok, good If you could give advice to new employees who have NOT worked in a low socio-economic setting, what would it be?

E: Um, Probably to I would encourage to go out and they need to volunteer in a setting so that they can get the tough reality of what it is. A lot of people, some people I think choose to look away, not realizing how bad it is.

R: Ok

E: I firmly believe if someone’s heart is there and you care to work with kids, at whatever level, I think they need to see the bigger picture. There are truly issues out there. I feel
like you are just one voice like I tell my wife the right to voting. You [referring to his wife as a teacher] of all people have a right, you have to go out there and see it every day. I think people, they underestimate. They think that some people, you know, education especially people… they think it is easy in their career and I think they look at it like that. But once they realize that it’s hard work and it’s a career, you do it because it’s your passion. That’s more my opinion is.

R: Oh, I like that. So if you were going through the program again, what do you think an ideal child development program would look like? That is in a university setting, not what you and your wife are thinking about.

E: Um, I think that it needs to be, oh, it seems like we had a lot of free for all when it came to more, especially when it came to, you know what I mean, the preparedness of lesson planning?

R: Uh, huh

E: You know, like there wasn’t a lot, a lot of hand holding there, very common, more of that aspect you know working together with other students you might have a little more imagination. I think working in more group settings I know we did some of that but a little more handholding there. I want more examples with the teachers. Me, I felt like we worked for the child studies and were just an extra hand.

R: ok

E: You know changing diapers, preparing meals, snacks, they really did not go into very much learning.

R: Ok
E: I really felt like we had a, we really did have a great-like supplies. Seemed like there was a lot of stuff and the ability to use the cut-outs [Ellison machine] I don’t remember anything drastic but we utilized the supplies – compliment

R: Well, you cut out for just a second, what did you say about the supplies?

E: I just said that I felt like as a poor student I didn’t feel like I had to spend a lot of my own money. I felt like I was still able to get an A. Maybe more creative materials? But, I know I guess you work with what you’ve got.

R: Well this is a little bit different, what obstacles, other than the money you mentioned earlier, have you encountered to prevent you from working in child care?

E: I would say it was monetary, totally monetary for me, but the first job I got right out of college I interviewed for a different position and not getting that initial position and waiting I took an after school job working at the YMCA as an after school director of the YMCA program so I did go directly into the field, but for me graduating college with a bachelor’s degree and making $7.50/hour wasn’t ideal. You know, for me, mainly I had to pay the rent and I never looked back because the insurance was a family business. As a male, I feel I would have probably had more opportunities as a male. As you mentioned, I am the only one who responded. There aren’t many in teaching, and those who are go into administration once again on the account of the money issue.

R: Right

E: Yep I just don’t see anyone in my opinion that see it as a career for whatever reasons and to me it seems like that there is a lot of kids out there, an abundance who do not have fathers and they probably need more fatherly figures in their life and that means school teachers and the mothers do not get that guidance at home, and you know. If they have a
role model as a male because they do not have that parental model then a community
center will help. I think that male school teachers are few, they just can’t.
R: I agree, my husband is an elementary principal. It’s just amazing what you see.
E: Now is he in Advance?
R: Yes
E: How long has he been there?
R: He’s been there three years now.
E: I did one of my, maybe my first or second teachings out there in a kindergarten class.
R: really, I didn’t know
E: Yeah and one of the teachers out there. We had issues, I had issues about the way she
talked about children so I talked to the principal after school and he said, well sir, you are
barking up the wrong tree because she has tenure.
R: Uh, that’s a tough call but you know if you really want to get rid of a teacher, it really
is easier to fire a tenured teacher than a non-tenured but people don’t want to do the extra
paperwork and documentation
R: So did you start out in education, you started in special education and then change to
child development, right?
E: Yes
R: And then what caused you to make that decision, just so you could get out of school
faster?
E: Sure
R: Ok
E: Um Firstly, I had already been there four years, but actually my passion was to work for social work but after talking and the other program where you work in another setting?

R: Uh, huh

E: And from there, is when I said it was ok to finish here or run a daycare or something along the lines of social work because I realized I did not want to teach anywhere

R: Ok well, I think that is all the questions I have. I know that we had emailed and I think you have some questions for me so I’m gonna try to help you out since you helped me out and let me take you off the speaker for this.
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VITA

Sara Lynne Payne Garner was born on August 31, 1972 to the parents of Gerald and Kathy Payne; graduates of Zalma High School. Sara graduated from Advance R-IV school district in 1990 as the salutatorian. She entered Southeast Missouri State University (Southeast) the fall of 1990, married Shannon Garner in 1991, and graduated in May of 1994 with a Bachelor of Science in Home Economics Education. In an effort to increase her skill level, Sara accepted a teaching assistant position at Southeast from August 1994 to May 1996. During that time she gave birth to her first child and graduated with a Master of Arts degree in Home Economics Education. She continued to work at Southeast part-time as a child development instructor and interim Lab School Director at the Center for Child Studies. She later gave birth to her second child, worked as a Parent Educator and state trainer for Missouri Parents As Teachers and the Bell City school district and owned and directed her own child care center in Advance, MO. August 2000, Sara accepted a full-time teaching position at Southeast teaching child development, family financial management, and housing development primarily for the regional campus. December 2010, Sara will complete her degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, EdD at the University of Missouri Columbia while she continues to work full-time for Southeast Missouri State University.