

MISSOURI KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS
OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

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By

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MISSOURI KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS
OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Childcare has changed dramatically in the past several decades due to the increased number of families with both parents working and due to the increase of single parent families. This has caused a marked increase in the number of children attending childcare in the last twenty-five years. Most parents today are faced with the decision of what type of childcare will best prepare their children for school. With increased emphasis on student achievement, parents and educators need to know what skills students should have to start school ready to learn and what type of childcare is best in preparing children to start school ready to learn.

This descriptive and comparative study used a web-based survey that was sent to public school kindergarten teachers in the state of Missouri. The research questions investigated what early childhood setting kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of enthusiasm towards learning, academic skills, and social skills. The six settings studied include in home care by parent, in home care by nanny, cared for by relatives, home daycare, daycare center, and preschool. An analysis of data was performed to compare the six settings in ratings of enthusiasm towards learning, academic skills and social skills. The research questions also investigated teachers' perceptions of a standard expectation of skills that constitute

kindergarten readiness. Descriptive statistics were used to describe kindergarten teachers' perception of the most important skills children need in order to be ready to start kindergarten. Knowledge gained from this study will provide information to parents who want to know what type of care will better prepare children to enter school, both academically and socially.

The study found that kindergarten teachers perceive preschool to be the most beneficial setting in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of enthusiasm towards learning, academic skills, and social skills. This study also found academic skills; social skills; recognizing and writing name; sits still, listens, and follows directions; motor skills; and taking care of personal needs are what kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most important skills students need in order to be ready to start kindergarten.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Today, many parents are faced with the decision of whether they should send their child to preschool or center care, a baby sitter or stay at home with the child. Parents want to know which of these actions will be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten. Research suggests that students who make a smooth transition to school tend to have and maintain superior social and academic skills(Docket & Perry, 2003; Fantuzzo, Rouse, McDermott, Sekino, Childs, & Weiss, 2005; Ramey & Ramey, 2004). This decision becomes increasingly important with the increase in the number of families with both parents working and as kindergarten expectations increase.

Parents, educators, and researchers have differing opinions on what is the most beneficial setting to prepare children for kindergarten. Fontaine, Torre, and Grafwallner (2006) reported findings that participation in a quality childcare and education program enhances child performance. Cotton and Conklin (2001) reported that short-term benefits of children attending preschool programs included an increase in IQ and achievement scores, and children were able to stay on task and be more cooperative with their classmates. Furthermore, Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, and Dawson (2005) stated, “A series of well designed and implemented model preschool programs has shown significant short-term and some long term effects on young children’s cognitive growth” (p.1). Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, and Mann (2002) found that preschool participants have

higher school achievement, lower rates of criminal behavior, and increased high school graduation rates.

There is also a belief that preschool and structured daycare are not required to prepare a child for school. Some researchers have found that children taken care of by their mother in the home are not better prepared than children in childcare in their cognitive and language development. Instead it is the quality of the environment and the quality of the interaction with the child that influences the child's outcomes, in both maternal and non-maternal care (NICHD, 2000).

There are various ideas about what is the best setting for children during their early childhood to get them ready for entering school. Many parents do not have the resources available to stay home and take care of their own children. The number of children in childcare has increased over the past 25 years and over 80 percent of children experience regular childcare prior to starting school (Hill, Waldfogel, Brooks-Gunn, & Han, 2005; NICHD, 2000; Peisner-Feinberg, et al., 2001).

Today, parents are sending children to preschool or daycare in increasing numbers due to the increase in the number of parents in the work force (Hernandez, 1995).

According to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in *Early childhood education: Building a strong foundation for the future* (2002), "In 2000, nearly 75% of women with children between the ages of 3 and 5 worked outside the home" (p. 3). In 2006, the rate of unmarried women in the work force was 76.6 percent; the rate of married women in the work force was 68.8 percent; and the rate for all mothers was 70.9 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007).

The federal government has funded several programs to help provide opportunities for early childhood education. One example, Head Start, started in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty. Head Start is a public preschool for disadvantaged children and is designed to close the gaps between disadvantaged children and their peers (Graces, Thomas & Currie, 2002). In the Head Start program children receive health care, good nutrition, a developmentally appropriate curriculum, and their parents are involved in their programs. Zigler (1995) noted “The Head Start model of early intervention has now been recognized as an effective means of promoting school readiness” (p. 7). The Commissioner’s Office of Research and Evaluation and the Head Start Bureau noted that new findings “show that Head Start narrows the gap between disadvantaged students and all other children in key components of school readiness” (Progress Report, 2003 p.135).

Statement of the Problem

There are varying opinions on what is considered kindergarten readiness (Dockett & Perry, 2003; Protheroe, 2006). Protheroe (2006) noted some studies found that parents and kindergarten teachers frequently have different opinions of the competencies important for a child entering kindergarten. Parents are faced with several options when providing care for their children. These options include preschool, daycare or parental care. Consensus has not been reached through research on what setting is perceived to be the most beneficial for providing care for children so they are equipped with the skills necessary for kindergarten (Fantuzzo et al., 2005). Educators, in addition to parents, are faced with what setting will best serve future students.

According to research, in addition to parents and teachers, the government has shown concern for the concept of kindergarten readiness and the most beneficial early

childhood setting (Protheroe, 2006). The United States has provided funding for Head Start and other mandates with the intent to help prepare disadvantaged children and minority children with the same pre-kindergarten education as their peers.

Purpose of the Study

An important subject for government leaders, educators, and parents today is the long-term impact of childcare experiences on school readiness and school success (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). This study utilized data collected from surveys designed to identify what early childhood setting kindergarten teachers perceived to be beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten. The purpose of this study was to provide information to parents and educators regarding the setting that best prepares students for kindergarten and the skills that constitute kindergarten readiness.

Research Questions

To accomplish the purpose of the study the following research questions were addressed:

1. What early childhood setting do kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of enthusiasm towards learning?

2. What early childhood setting do kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of academic skills?

3. What early childhood setting do kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of social skills?

4. What are teachers' perceptions of a standard expectation of skills that constitute kindergarten readiness?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is its importance for parents, teachers, and policy makers in helping them understand the most advantageous early childhood setting for children. With the increase in number of parents accessing childcare outside of the home more parents are concerned about how the early childhood setting effects the transition into kindergarten (Hernandez, 1995; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). Knowledge of what teachers perceive to be beneficial settings will help parents decide what setting will be most beneficial to their child.

There is also an application for school practitioners and government policymakers who debate what should be done to help prepare students for school entry and what areas to target with local, state and federal money. As local, state, and federal policymakers develop early childhood programs, the information gained from this research can help determine what types of early childhood settings are most beneficial to children. School practitioners may use this information to help develop early childhood programs for their local school districts. Many districts and states are providing some type of early childhood program for their patrons (Gormley, 2005). Policymakers may use this research to develop statewide programs of early childhood education. School practitioners may also benefit from having a standard expectation from kindergarten teachers of what skills comprise school readiness in developing programs. Parents may benefit from having a standard expectation from kindergarten teachers of what skills comprise school readiness when working with their children at home and when choosing an early childhood setting for their children.

Early childhood researchers will benefit from the addition to the literature in regard to kindergarten teachers' perception of what early childhood setting best prepares students for school entry and their perception of the qualities that make up school readiness. Finally, this study provides a framework for future examination of kindergarten readiness and of early childhood settings.

Limitations of the Study

The focus of this research is to investigate what early childhood setting kindergarten teachers perceive to be beneficial in preparing children to enter kindergarten ready to learn. The study did not follow students over an extended period of time to see if effects of the early childhood setting predict cognitive and social achievement later in life. A database of building level administrators in Missouri and their email addresses was obtained by contacting the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and retrieving the information from <http://dese.mo.gov/directory/download.htm>. As the list of school administrators for the 2008-09 school year had not yet been compiled, the list's email addresses were for the 2007-08 school year. The survey request was sent out during the 2008-09 school year. Some school administrators may not have been contacted if they switched jobs or if their email addresses had changed. Socioeconomic status, education attainment of the parents, and family makeup are considered to have an impact on school readiness and school achievement. Another limitation of the study was that no attempt was made to mitigate the effects of these factors on the results of the study.

Definitions of Key Terms

Cared for by relatives: care by a relative in the child's own home or in the relative's home.

Center care: care provided outside the home by a daycare center.

Daycare home: care by a licensed or unlicensed babysitter or family care provider in their own home.

Early childhood: the time period from birth to age five.

In home by parent: care by a parent in the home.

In home by sitter: care by a sitter in the child's own home.

Parental care: care by a parent in the home.

Preschool: center-based care where their primary purpose is to provide early education experiences to three and four year olds (Magnuson et al., 2004).

Readiness to learn: the developmental concept that an individual is developmentally able to learn specific things (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Diamond et al., 2000; Kim, Murdock, & Choi, 2005).

Readiness for school: an individual's ability to be successful in the school environment (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Diamond et al.; Kim et al., 2005).

Summary

The type of early childhood care their children receive has become important to parents. The purpose of this study was to investigate what early childhood setting kindergarten teachers perceive to be beneficial in preparing children to enter kindergarten ready to learn. The study also examined the teachers' perception of what type of setting influences different areas of kindergarten readiness. The study also examined what the

kindergarten teachers perceived as the skills necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

This study will be divided into five chapters. Chapter One includes an introduction to the study and also includes a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, limitations of the study, significance of the study, and definitions of key terms. Chapter Two is a review of literature relating to childcare for three and four year olds, kindergarten readiness, and the transition to kindergarten. Chapter Three addresses research design and the methodology utilized in the study. Topics discussed include purpose and questions, population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, and statistical analysis. Chapter Four reports the results of data collection. The data for the study were acquired from a survey disseminated to kindergarten teachers in the public schools in Missouri. Chapter Five reports an overview of the study, as well as findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The debate about what early childhood setting best prepares children for kindergarten is important to parents. Parents want to know what type of setting will best prepare their children to enter school. An important question for government leaders, educators, researchers and parents today is the long-term impact of childcare experiences on school readiness and school success (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001).

Early childhood settings and experiences are also a popular area of study for researchers. Past studies have examined whether sending a child to preschool, daycare or parental care is the most beneficial (Fontaine, Torre, & Grafwallner, 2006; Cotton and Conklin, 2001). The amount and type of childcare children attend has evolved over the years. This review of related literature begins with an examination of the history of early childhood settings and how these settings have changed as our country and economy have evolved.

The review of literature addressed the current research about the types of childcare attended. Some early childhood programs discussed were Head Start, preschool and center-based care. Current research on the impact of the different types of childcare on a student's transition into the classroom was presented. The features of high quality childcare were discussed.

Current research on preschool curriculum and types of instructional programs was presented. As pre-kindergarten programs gain popularity more states are looking at providing universal pre-kindergarten on a statewide basis. The review of literature

provided current research on the number of states providing universal pre-kindergarten programs and how these programs impact children's performance.

The concept of school readiness has existed for decades. The review of literature addresses the topics of what constitutes school readiness and the techniques used to determine if a child is ready to start kindergarten. Corresponding topics of the transition to school, and kindergarten teachers' view of kindergarten readiness are also addressed.

Historical Perspective and Evolution

Childcare has changed dramatically over the past several decades (Belsky, 2001). Prior to the industrial revolution of the early 1900s, 70 percent of children lived on a two parent family farm where childcare was provided at home and the children also participated in the farming activities (Hernandez, 1995). In the urban areas, "day nurseries, which evolved into the childcare centers of today, began in Boston in the 1840s to care for the children of the widows and working wives of merchant seaman—then, as now, an economically disadvantaged group" (Scarr & Weinberg, 1986, p. 1142). In 1940, 87 percent of children had an unemployed parent at home who could provide full-time care (Hernandez, 1995).

During World War II a large number of women were employed in the war industries and daycare was necessary in order for the women to be able to work. Many of these women continued to work after the war was over and in 1950 the percentage of mothers with preschool age children working was 14% (Scarr & Weinberg, 1986). These changes have led to increasing numbers of children experiencing non-parental care. From 1940 to 1989 the percentage of children under six years who needed childcare outside of the home rose from 8 percent to 51 percent (Hernandez, 1995). In the late

1990s, 84 percent of preschool age children were in childcare an average of 28 hours per week (Vandell, & Wolfe, 2000).

In the last quarter century, the percentage of working mothers with children under the age of five has increased dramatically. One reason for this increase is economics; the price of living increased faster than the wages of one individual worker in a family and having two working family members could increase their economic status (Drummond & Seid, 2001; Hernandez, 1995). Another reason for the increase is the increased number of one parent families created by separation, divorce, or out-of-wedlock childbearing (Hernandez, 1995). These single parents must work to support the family (Drummond & Seid, 2001).

The percentage of children under age six with their mother working outside the home was “7 percent in 1940, 43 percent in 1980 and 51 percent in 1990” (Hernandez, 1995). Hill et al. (2005) noted, “in 1968, only 21% of mothers with a child less than 1 year old were in the labor force; in 2002, this number was close to 60%” (p. 833). According to the American Federation of Teachers (2002) “in 2000, nearly 75% of women with children between the ages of 3 and 5 worked outside the home” (p. 3). In 2006, the rate of unmarried women in the work force was 76.6 percent, the rate of married women in the work force was 68.6 percent and the rate for all mothers was 70.9 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007).

The United States has seen significant changes in the childrearing arrangements for young children in the past quarter century. The NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2003a) found “this transformation stems, in part, from increased maternal employment associated with changes in the role women play in society” (p. 976).

Maternal employment has not only affected the number of children in child care but also the types of care offered. In 1965, the percentage of three-year-olds attending preschool was 5 percent and the percentage of four-year-olds attending preschool was 16 percent; in 2003, more than 60 percent of all young children attended a formal center or preschool prior to enrolling in kindergarten (Miller, 2007). In summary, “it must be remembered that more and more children are spending more and more time at younger and younger ages in non-maternal care arrangements in the United States” (NICHD, 2003a, p.1002).

Types of Care

Childcare is typically characterized by diverse and complex arrangements. The most prevalent types of care settings are (a) 27 percent in the home by parents, (b) 27 percent being cared for by relatives, (c) 22 percent in childcare centers or preschools, (d) 17 percent in home settings, and (e) 6 percent in their own home by sitters and nannies (Drummond & Seid, 2001; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). Jacobson (2000) found similar percentages and indicated “of those preschoolers with employed mothers, 32 percent spend time in child-care centers. Another 24 percent are cared for by one of their parents, 23 percent are cared for by a relative, approximately 16 percent are in family child-care homes, and 6 percent are cared for by nannies or babysitters” (¶ 3). If only one parent is employed the most prevalent form of care is in the home by the other parent. If mothers are employed part-time, the children are likely to be cared for in their own home by their fathers (Scarr & Weinberg, 1986). When non-parental childcare takes place in the family residence, the care is usually provided by other relatives or sitters which may include nannies or housekeepers. Daycare homes are any licensed or unlicensed in-home care outside the families own home. Childcare centers are typically available during the

work week, 9 to 10 hours a day, and the facilities may serve children of all ages (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004).

High Quality Child Care

As it has become the norm for children to experience routine non-parental care, both parents and educators have questioned the impact of these childcare experiences on children's development. Although several factors such as the amount, stability, and type of childcare have an effect on the developmental outcomes of children, it is the quality of the childcare that has the most all-encompassing effect on the child's development (NICHD, 2000; NICHD, 2003b; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). The conventional view among childcare researchers is that childcare quality contributes to children's developmental outcomes; inferior quality care is associated with less positive results and superior care is associated with favorable developmental outcomes (Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). Research has indicated quality of the children's surroundings and experiences has an effect on their developing skills in attention and memory (Network, 2005). Burchinal and Clark-Stewart (2007) found "... children's cognitive scores were consistently higher when they experienced higher quality care or care in a child care center" (p. 1140). Studies have found poor quality care is associated with poorer performance during the early school years and later in life (Lunenburg, 2000). Drummond and Seid (2001) indicated that high quality childcare centers and high quality in-home daycare have positive short-term effects on children's performance.

While the quality of childcare appears to have an effect on all children, many experts believe that the effects of childcare quality have an even greater effect on children from disadvantaged backgrounds than on children from more affluent backgrounds

(NICHD, 2003b; NICHD, 2000; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000) Studies found approximately 20 percent of childcare centers in the United States fall below minimal thresholds of adequate care (Drummond & Seid, 2001; LoCasale-Crouch, Konold, Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant, et al., 2007). Peisner-Feinberg and Burchinal (1997) noted that the quality of services in center-based facilities in the United States was below standards recommended by early childhood professionals. Several barriers exist that keep children from receiving quality care. These barriers include a scarcity of well-trained childcare workers, inconsistent standards in licensing and regulations, and families not being able to afford higher quality care (Drummond & Seid, 2001).

The features of quality childcare are compassion and sensitivity to the child's requirements and indications of the child's needs, frequent spoken and group interaction, intellectual stimulation, and the facilitation of social, emotional, and motor development (NICHD, 2000). The American Federation of Teachers (2002) noted that high quality child care programs are characterized by the following practices:

1. Language-rich and responsive communication between adults and children;
2. Positive and appropriate reinforcement of skills and behavior;
3. Extensive rehearsal of old and new cognitive, academic and developmental skills;
4. Guidance in desirable social skills and facilitation of positive interactions between peers and adults;
5. Various structured and informal activities that encourage children to reflect, predict, question, and hypothesize;

6. Availability of numerous materials, resources, and toys that focus on language and literacy;
7. Activities that encourage the involvement of children's families and caretakers;
8. Incorporation of adequate nutrition and habits that support good health. (p. 2)

Drummond and Seid (2001) found quality childcare had the following characteristics: a physical environment that is secure and nurturing, meets the nutritional needs of the child, and protects the child's physical wellbeing; children must also be in an environment where they can build positive relationships with caregivers; additionally, children need settings that are thought provoking and allow for exploration and problem solving. In order to adequately provide several of the aforementioned characteristics the ratio of caregiver to children must be relatively low. For preschoolers the recommended ratio is six to eight preschoolers per caregiver (Scarr & Weinberg, 1986). In addition, quality daycare includes a cheerful, stimulating and safe physical environment (Scarr & Weinberg, 1986). Drummond and Seid (2001) found childcare that has small group sizes, a low ratio of children to caregiver, and competent employees enhances the healthy cognitive development of the child

All of these factors increase the cost of quality daycare compared to centers with a higher ratio of child to caregiver and a less than desirable physical environment. The families of poor or even middle-class children often cannot afford high-quality programs (American Federation of Teachers, 2002). Families spend from 10 percent to 36 percent of their income on childcare and poor families spend a higher percent of their income on childcare than families with higher incomes (Drummond & Seid, 2001).

Head Start

The federal government has funded several programs to help parents ensure that children receive an early education. During the 1900s, three nationwide initiatives were started that were designed to improve early childhood programs so that children are better prepared for school (Scarr & Weinberg, 1986). The Works Progress Administration nursery schools, the Lanham Act Child Care Centers, and Head Start were the three programs (Scarr & Weinberg, 1986). Head Start is the only one of these programs that is still serving children. Head Start is currently the largest publicly funded early childhood education program (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

Head Start is a comprehensive federally funded early intervention program designed for low-income parents and their three- and four-year-old children and is designed to close the gaps between low-income children and their peers from families with higher incomes (Garces, Thomas, & Currie, 2002). Head Start was developed in 1965 as part of Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty (Kantor, 2006; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). "Regulations require that a least 90 percent of the children enrolled by each Head Start grantee must come from families with income at or below the official federal poverty guidelines" (Head Start Overview, 2003, p. 130). Head Start regulations allow 10 percent of the attendees to have incomes above the poverty level and in addition a minimum of 10 percent of the slots must be available to children with disabilities (Head Start Overview, 2003; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

Beginning as a summer program in 1965 (Zigler, 1995), Head Start was one of the first federal interventions in early childhood education (Kantor, 2006). According to the Head Start Overview (2003) "Head Start has provided comprehensive early childhood

development services to low-income children since 1965. The program is administered by the Administration for Children and Families of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)” (p. 130).

Head Start was designed to help preschoolers prevail over the deficits typically associated with growing up in low-income homes (Cotton & Conklin, 2001). Ramey and Ramey (2004) stated “children from economically poor and undereducated families are at elevated risk for lack of school readiness due to lack of knowledge and skill” (p. 471). Head Start programs are intended to promote overall well-being and increase school readiness, so low-income preschoolers can take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to them (Cotton & Conklin, 2001; Head Start Overview, 2003; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). Head Start Overview (2003) noted, “Head Start provides comprehensive early childhood development, educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services to low-income preschool children and their families” (p. 130).

Pre-kindergarten programs are a powerful tool in addressing school readiness for children at-risk of school failure (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2007). Abbott-Shim and colleagues (2003) found 4-year-old children enrolled in Head Start do better on cognitive, language, social, and health measures than their counterparts. Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005) noted that public funding of Head Start and other preschool programs is reducing the ethnic and racial gaps in early childhood education. Progress Report (2003) found Head Start improves vocabulary and writing skills of low-income children. Head Start improves the social skills of children, and improves math skills (Abbott-Shim, Lambert, & McCarty, (2003).

Progress Report (2003) also noted the impact Head Start had on parents of children in the program. These findings included a feeling of support in raising their children, greater sense of control over their life, and increases in family activities with their children. Progress Report also found the Head Start classrooms to be a high quality learning environment, the teachers are highly qualified, and that a quality classroom improves child outcomes. Ackerman and Barnett (2005) noted that “a high-quality preschool program is one effective policy for improving readiness, especially for disadvantaged children” (p. 15). Head Start is considered by some to be one of the most successful social programs of the last 40 years (Abbott-Shim, Lambert, & McCarty, 2003).

Head Start involves parents and the communities to ensure the programs are responsive to their unique needs (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). Head Start Overview (2003) noted, “In general, Head Start operates a part-day program during the school year, although some local Head Start programs coordinate with other programs to provide all-day care” (p.130). Head Start Services are delivered in a wide variety of program platforms. Some programs are center-based; some are home-based; and some are sponsored by faith-based organizations (Head Start Overview). As of 2003, the Head Start Program provided programs that serviced over 800,000 preschoolers and their households each year (Progress Report, 2003). Local Head Start grantees received \$6.3 billion in 2002 and served approximately 65 percent of the eligible preschoolers (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

Preschool

In the past there has been a sharp distinction between childcare and preschool. Childcare was typically a full-day program of care for children whose parents were working and preschool was typically a half day program focused on children's social and academic learning (Freeman & King, 2003). The American Federation of Teachers noted, "Preschool programs differ in availability, quality, and affordability. Access is also significantly complicated by the lack of coordination among programs" (p. 3). Preschool programs are typically run by several different groups and organizations. These groups and organizations include state programs for social services, health, and education, school districts, and family support programs, (American Federation of Teachers, 2002). Many of these programs are part-day or part-week programs. More programs are providing full-day care because of the increasing number of parents working (Magnuson et al., 2004; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

As the percentage of mothers with young children in the work force has increased so has the percentage of preschool age children accessing childcare outside of the home (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). The American Federation of Teachers estimated "in 2000, nearly 75 percent of women with children between the ages of 3 and 5 worked outside the home" (2002, p. 3). As the number of parents working increases, the demand for quality preschool programs will increase (Magnuson et al., 2004). Currently over 50 percent of all 3-to 5-year-old children attended childcare centers prior to kindergarten (Fontaine, Torre, & Grafwallner, 2006; Magnuson et al., 2004; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). Hojnoski and Missall (2006) found in 1999 "almost 65% of all children ages 3-5 years participated in some type of center-based preschool, with

46% of 3-year-olds, 69% of 4-year-olds, and 76% of 5-year-olds enrolled in programs” (p. 603).

Quality of Preschools

The federal government does not regulate educational programs for preschool age children and there are wide variations in state regulations (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). A study conducted by Peisner-Feinberg and Burchinal (1997) found the overall quality of preschool care was generally mediocre and met the minimal needs of children. American Federation of Teachers (2002) noted, “Today, preschools are often of poor quality, in short supply, and prohibitively expensive for poor or even middle-class children. Few of the 8 million children in preschool attend programs that meet even basic standards of quality” (p. 3).

According to Protheroe (2006) preschool program quality can be rated in two ways: structural quality and process quality. Structural quality refers to factors such as class size, children to staff ratios, teacher and administrator training, length of day and year, use of a standard curriculum, and the availability of supplementary services (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005; Protheroe, 2006). Magnuson and Waldfogel stated, “Quality varies widely from one program to the next, but, on average, the quality of center care programs, as measured by structural indicators, is probably just ‘mediocre’”(p. 171). Process quality looks at the actual opportunities and experiences children have daily (Protheroe). These processes include the “warmth, responsiveness, and sensitivity of caregivers, physical environment and children’s activities” (Magnuson & Waldfogel, p. 171).

Preschool programs across the United States vary in their requirements for teacher preparation and certification (Hojnoski & Missall, 2006). The minimum requirement for kindergarten teachers in all fifty states is to have a bachelor's degree and a certificate, teacher qualifications for preschool programs vary from state to state and not all states require preschool teachers to have a bachelor's degree. In fact, only twenty states require preschool teachers in state funded preschools to have a bachelor's degree and a teaching certificate (Olson, 2002). Johns (2005) indicated "well-trained teachers are a critical component of a high quality preschool program" (p. 31). Clifford et al. (2005) and Magnuson et al. (2004) also found that caregiver education was one of the components associated with higher quality early childhood programs.

A study conducted by Clifford et al. (2005) of pre-kindergarten teachers found that only "51 percent held bachelor's degrees and state certification to teach four-year-olds" (p. 22). Research has found child outcomes are directly linked to teacher quality in preschool classrooms (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2007). Johns (2005) noted, "It is the teacher's ability to implement the curriculum and to use effective instructional approaches that result in a long-term difference in student learning" (p. 31). Vandell and Wolfe (2000) found better-trained caregivers give higher quality care. Highly skilled teachers are better equipped to monitor student's performance and provide additional explanation and ideas (Locasale-Crouch, 2007; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

Clifford et al. (2005) noted that the number of preschool teachers with bachelor's degrees is rising because research has shown a positive association between higher levels of teacher education and preschool quality. The percentage of public school preschool teachers with a bachelor's degree (81 percent) was higher than the percentage of non-

public school settings (57 percent) (Gormley, 2005). This percentage may be higher in public school preschools due to the propensity to compensate pre-kindergarten teachers in public schools at the same rate as other teachers, which helps public school pre-kindergarten programs hire and keep talented teachers with bachelor's degrees (Gormley et al., 2005, Jacobson, 2007b).

Because teachers in programs with higher numbers of low income students (Head Start, etc) have a propensity not to have degrees, the students that have a higher need for a quality preschool program may not be getting what they need (Clifford et al., 2005). Only 33 percent of Head Start teachers have bachelor's degrees which leads experts to be concerned that lower compensation and less training may effect program quality (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). While a variety of training programs are available, teachers in childcare centers in 30 states can begin work without any pre-service training (Olson, 2002). Ramey and Ramey (2004) found the lack of providing pre-service and in-service training to preschool teachers a factor in why some preschool programs fail to close the achievement gap in students.

Another factor that contributes to the quality of care is staff turnover. Preschool workers have a high rate of turnover due to low annual salaries. In 1996, 27 percent of preschool teachers and 39 percent of preschool assistants left their jobs. In addition, 20 percent of centers reported losing half or more of their staff (Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). In response to these concerns states are developing initiatives to help providers acquire more education and/or to supplement salaries (Quality Counts, 2002; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000).

The topic of whether preschool is necessary for academic success in kindergarten has been investigated by several researchers. Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005) “. . . found

that children who attend center care or preschool programs enter school more ready to learn” (p. 171). Studies show that the quality of preschool education that young children receive lays the groundwork for future academic success (Clothier & Poppe, 2007; Cotton & Conklin, 2001; Gormley et al., 2005; Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Reynolds et al., 2002). When a child attended a high quality preschool prior to kindergarten, research has shown higher scores on tests of pre-academic skills and language (NICHD, 2002). Research has shown high quality preschool programs help prepare children for their entry into kindergarten in the areas of receptive language abilities, pre-academic skills, and classrooms behaviors (Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997). LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2003) noted “children with high-quality preschool experience are typically identified as more school ready by their kindergarten teachers, as evidenced by ability to follow directions, interact with peers, and engage in the learning process” (p. 4).

Children from higher quality preschool programs demonstrate higher levels of cognitive, language, and social competencies. This was reflected both on standardized tests and reported by parents and teachers (Cotton & Conklin, 2001; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). Higher literacy and math have been manifested with children who have attended a center-based or preschool environment (Plevyak & Morris, 2002).

A strong and expanding body of research confirms the impact of children’s preschool experiences on their success in school. Reynolds et al. (2002) found “preschool participants had greater skills at kindergarten entry, higher school achievement leading to reductions in need for school remedial services, and ultimately lower rates of delinquency and higher rates of school completion” (p. 278). Early childhood programs have both

short-term and long-term benefits. The short-term benefits included an increase in IQ and achievement scores. Long-term benefits included better performance in higher grade levels, fewer retentions, greater social and emotional maturity, fewer referrals for special education, and greater academic motivation (Clothier & Poppe, 2007; Cotton & Conklin, 2001; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000).

These benefits also extend past secondary education into adulthood in the form of better jobs, a higher percent attending postsecondary schooling (36 percent vs. 12 percent), and completion of high school before having children (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Cotton and Conklin (2001) found that preschool graduates outperform non-participants in the following areas:

1. Fewer referrals for remedial classes or special education
2. Fewer retentions
3. Higher grades
4. Greater social and emotional maturity
5. More frequent high school graduation/GED completion
6. Greater academic motivation, on-task behavior, capacity for independent work, and time spent on homework
7. Lower incidence of absenteeism/detentions
8. Better attitudes toward school
9. Better self-esteem, greater internal locus of control
10. Lower incidence of illegitimate pregnancy, drug abuse, and delinquent acts
11. More sports participation
12. Higher future aspirations, more postsecondary education. (p. 6)

Students who had attended quality preschool programs showed higher levels of development over an extended period of time. (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). Fantuzzo et al. (2005) found “. . . children who participated in formal, center-based early childhood programs prior to public school entry performed at higher levels than their peers across all academic and social areas in kindergarten” (p. 583). In addition, the more hours spent in a preschool, childcare, or Head Start environment increased a children’s language skills as well as increasing their performance on memory tests (NICHD, 2002).

Children typically considered at greater risk for school failure typically show even higher cognitive and socio-emotional gains in high quality preschool programs than students not considered at risk (Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997). However, while research has demonstrated that quality preschool experiences can pay off in long-term financial as well as student achievement benefits (Clothier & Poppe, 2007; Cotton & Conklin, 2001; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000), the reality is that publicly provided preschool programs are not available for all children that need them (Protheroe, 2006).

Preschool Curriculum/Instructional Program

Preschools are not mandated on what type of curriculum and/or instruction program will be used. A well designed, research-based curriculum/instructional program can result in positive outcomes for children in preschool settings. Preschool teachers and administrators are faced with the challenge of how to integrate information about how preschool age children learn and the skills children already have when they enter preschool into a teaching approach that blends student interaction and direct instruction (Banks, 2001). Previous studies show that preschool age children learn most effectively when they are engaged in interaction rather than in direct instruction (Katz, 1999). In

addition, the curriculum/instruction program should incorporate the needs of the participants and include individual assessment, program evaluation, and professional development (Badgi & Vacca, 2005).

Educators know effective preschool programs have a research-based curriculum/instructional model that provides the framework for learning (Lunenburg, 2000). Badgi and Vacca (2005) found “an integrated curriculum geared towards the whole child and reflective of their abilities to handle transitions, manage their emotions, and develop meaningful relationships with others is key to promoting school success” (p. 146). Since the 1980s early childhood professionals have expressed concerns over the use of didactic teacher centered instruction for preschool aged children (Elkind, 1986; Zigler, 1987). Banks (2001) found preschool curriculum based on child centered activities instead of direct instruction by teachers has been found to have more positive long-term effects on students. When looking at the curriculum/instructional program for preschool age children Katz (1999) found:

The data on children's learning suggest that preschool and kindergarten experiences require an intellectually oriented approach in which children interact in small groups as they work together on projects that help them make increasing sense of their own experience. Thus, the curriculum should include group projects that are investigations of worthwhile topics. These projects should strengthen children's dispositions to observe, experiment, inquire, and examine more closely the worthwhile aspects of their environment. They usually include constructions and dramatic play as well as a variety of early literacy and numeracy activities that emerge from the work of the investigation and the tasks of summarizing findings and sharing the experiences of the work accomplished. (p. 2)

Schweinhart (1997) stated the preschool instructional model needs to be a balance of teacher-directed and child-initiated activities to support both academic, social, and emotional development. There are numerous early childhood curriculum models. Several of the more widely known curriculum models are Bank Street Developmental-Interaction

Approach, Creative Curriculum, High/Scope Curriculum, Kamii-DeVries Constructivist Perspective, Montessori Method, and Project Construct (Lunenburg, 2000).

Lucy Sprague Mitchell developed the Bank Street Developmental-Interaction Approach on the central theory of development of the well rounded student through child-initiated activities (Perryman & Fisher, 2000). The Creative Curriculum was developed by Diana Trustier-Dodge using her experience working with preschool teachers (Lunenburg, 2000). Using this model, the preschool classroom is arranged to support developmentally appropriate practices and children's active learning (Lunenburg, 2000). "Teachers arrange the learning environment into ten interest areas: art, blocks, cooking, computers, house corner, library, music and movement, the outdoors, sand and water, and table toys" (Lunenburg, 2000, p. 521).

The High/Scope Curriculum was created in the 1970s by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation staff under the direction of David P. Weikart (Schweinhart, 2008). This model was developed to help underprivileged preschool children using Piaget's constructivist theory of child development (Lunenburg, 2000). Today this model is used for all children across a wide range of preschool settings. Consistent experiences of active learning and classrooms with separate developmental appropriate interest areas supported by nurturing adults are mainstays of this approach (Schweinhart, 2008).

The Kamii-DeVries Constructivist Perspective was developed by Constance Kamii and Rheta DeVries. "The perspective is based on the Piagetian constructivist principle that children develop their knowledge, intelligence, morality, and personality from their interactions with the world within a logical-mathematical framework"

(Lunenburg, 2000 p. 522). This model uses physical activity and active learning to provide a child-centered approach to help children develop.

Maria Montessori, a doctor working with under privileged children in Europe in the early 1900s, developed the Montessori Method (Jacobson, 2007a). This method focuses on developing students' senses, skills, and character. The Montessori Method was the first early childhood instructional method developed and is still utilized worldwide (Lunenburg, 2000). Montessori schools strive to provide an environment that encourages children to learn on their own (Jacobson, 2007a).

Project Construct is a curriculum model used in many public school based preschools in Missouri that are funded by the Missouri Preschool Project. Curricula/Teaching Approaches for Early Care and Education (2006), published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Child Care Information Center, noted "Project Construct is derived from constructivism, the theoretical view that learners construct knowledge through interaction with physical and social environments. Through hands-on, minds-on experiences, students in Project Construct classrooms attain deep understandings in the core content areas, while they also learn to work collaboratively with adults and peers." The Curriculum/Instruction program used in preschool programs have an effect on the short term and long term cognitive achievement, emotional outlook and social skills (Schweinhart, 1997).

State Funded Preschool

Federal funding of preschool programs has been the norm for several decades, but state-funded preschools are a growing phenomenon. Historically, schools have played only a small role in providing services during children's early years between birth and

age five. But the public school's role in providing early childhood care in the form of pre-kindergarten programs is expanding. Children attending a state funded preschool program prior to entering kindergarten is becoming widespread (Gormley et al., 2005). Wohl (2001) noted, "Nearly all of today's pre-kindergarten programs permit schools, as well as community-based child-care centers, nursery schools, and Head Start, to receive state funding" (p. 23). In 1980, 10 states had publicly funded pre-school services. This number increased to 38 states in 2002 (Clothier & Poppe, 2007; Gormley et al., 2005).

Nearly three-quarters of a million children were served in state-funded preschools in the 2002-03 school year (Clifford, Bryant, & Early, 2005). Approximately \$1.9 million was spent on state funded preschools in 2002 and there has been a 250 percent increase in state funding for preschools since 1990 (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). States will spend roughly \$525 million in new money on public pre-school programs in the 2008 fiscal year, bringing the total annual amount to almost \$5 billion (Clothier & Poppe, 2007). In 2002, approximately 14 percent of four-year-olds attended public school-based pre-kindergarten programs (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

Universal Pre-Kindergarten

Nearly all of the local, state, and federally funded preschool programs target children based on their families' economic disadvantage, their risk of learning delays, or other recognized risk factors (Clifford, Bryant, & Early, 2005; Magnuson et al., 2004). A new trend is state-funded preschool programs provided for all children regardless of income or other risk factors (Gormley, 2005). This trend is called universal pre-kindergarten. In 1992, universal pre-kindergarten programs did not exist (Gormley). Georgia was a leader in the implementation of universal pre-kindergarten, having had its

public education system open to four-year-olds since 1995 (Whol, 2001). In 1998 Oklahoma started to provide educational services for 4-year-olds. Attendance in universal pre-kindergarten is not mandated by the states; instead the program is universally available, and parents have the option to enroll their children. Although school districts and parents are not required to participate, Oklahoma has the highest rate in the nation of four-year-olds participating in state-funded pre-kindergarten or Head Start at 73% (Gormley). In 2005, six states had universal pre-kindergarten programs: Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, New York, Oklahoma, and West Virginia (Gromley et al., 2005). Clothier and Poppe (2007) noted, “Illinois and West Virginia are joining Florida, Georgia and Oklahoma in making sure preschool is available to all children whose parents want it, not just for low-income families” (¶ 2). A new trend of thought is that preschool is a public good, not a luxury or a necessary evil (Gormley).

In a study conducted by Gormley and colleagues (2005) of Oklahoma’s universal pre-kindergarten program they found significant effects on children’s performance in several learning areas. Another study of Oklahoma’s universal pre-kindergarten program found students in the middle income category had some of the biggest gains in performance (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). In a study of the universal pre-kindergarten program in Georgia, students made significant gains on tests of cognitive development (Gormley, 2005). When looking at universal pre-kindergarten from a structural quality viewpoint it would appear that pre-kindergarten programs provide relatively high-quality care (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). Most state programs states adopt child-to-caregiver ratios recommended by early childhood researchers (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). Eighty-six percent of pre-kindergarten teachers have bachelor’s degrees and are more

likely to receive compensation equal to other public school teachers (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). Studies provide support for the benefits of universal pre-kindergarten programs for children of differing ethnic and racial groups and from differing socioeconomic backgrounds (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Gormley et al. 2005). Universal pre-kindergarten have several positive factors; these include availability, affordability, quality, and parental choice (Gormley, 2005).

Wohl (2001) recommended administrators interested in starting universal pre-kindergarten in their district do the following:

1. Get to know your district's early childhood coordinator and existing pre-kindergarten activity, including community-based and state funded programs.
2. Study and observe good, developmentally sound early childhood practices.
3. Join any local advisory board or interagency council that incorporates school readiness as part of its mission.
4. Become involved in any local and/or regional early childhood initiatives that are working toward more universal access to pre-kindergarten and accompanying support services for young children and families.
5. Initiate cross-training and professional development opportunities for pre-kindergarten and early elementary teachers, including community-based providers. (p. 24)

Universal preschool is not only a state initiative. The federal government also has proponents of universal preschool. In her bid for the 2008 presidential nomination, Hillary Clinton promised a government funded preschool education for all four-year-olds (Miller, 2007).

Not all experts agree that children should attend preschool. In *NEA Today*, Kevin Kramer stated, “The child does not have to attend preschool to be presented with a learning environment” (Kramer, 2006, p. 44). Researchers have found children that stayed at home with their mother performed on the same level in cognitive and language development as children that attended preschool. It was not the type of care provided but the quality of the care provided that influenced the outcomes (NICHD, 2000). Kramer noted the home should contain an environment loaded with “language and literacy interactions and opportunities to listen to and use language constantly” (p. 44). Miller (2007) noted an inferior preschool can be worse for children than what their parents can provide for them in their own homes.

School Readiness

Kindergarten teachers consistently report approximately one-third of children entering kindergarten are not ready to perform the work expected of them (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). The condition of children at school entry depends upon their early experiences. The relationships and experiences in children’s lives impact their school readiness. The theory of school readiness evolved in the 1800s when 4 year olds were included in whatever public school programs existed, tutored at home or sent to private schools (Bloch et al., 1989). Bloch et al. noted in the 1800s “At 4, most children were expected to learn rudimentary reading, moral character, values, and proper behavior” (p. 11).

School readiness is not a new initiative. As early as the 1930s the federal government became involved in school readiness and this involvement continues today (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). Early federal programs for preschool age children that

promoted school readiness included WPA nurseries, Lanham Act day nurseries, and Head Start (Bloch et al., 1998). Of these three federal programs only Head Start is currently serving children. School readiness is the driving force behind federal funding of preschool programs. In 1990, President George Bush was involved in passing a bill known as the National Education Goals 2000 (Goals 2000, section 102-1). Goals 2000 had an impact on school readiness and other programs for children (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Gormley et al., 2005; Lunenburg, 2000). Goals 2000 (section 102-1) declared that all kindergarten students in the United States would have the skills necessary to start school. Goals 2000 (section 102-1) also stated quality preschool programs would be available to all children to help develop the skills needed to start school. Goals 2000 has increased demands on preschools to have children ready to start school and has influenced the amount and type of skills children need when they start school (Fantuzzo, Greenfield, Doll, & Slaughter-Defoe, 1999). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, because it requires states and schools to be accountable for ensuring all students are proficient in communication arts and math, has also influenced early childhood programs and school readiness (Fantuzzo, Bulotsky-Shearer, McDermott, McWayne, Frye, & Perlman, 2007; Freeman & King, 2003). This emphasis on school readiness makes sense because research indicates that children who start school well-prepared tend to be more successful than those that are less ready (Protheroe, 2006).

Different states, districts, schools, and teachers may have varying definitions of what is considered readiness to start kindergarten (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Despite the influence of federal laws and programs, changes in early childhood practices, and modifications in the definition of school readiness, there is still debate as to what makes

up school readiness and what skills children need prior to entering kindergarten.

Readiness is sometimes viewed as two separate items: readiness to learn, and readiness for school (Diamond et al., 2000). Readiness to learn is the concept that a child is developmentally ready to learn certain skills (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Diamond et al., 2000; Kim, Murdock, & Choi, 2005). Readiness for school is the concept that a child has the ability to be successful in a school environment (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Diamond et al.; Kim et al., 2005). Kindergarten readiness is the combination of the two separate concepts into the single concept that the child is both developmentally ready for school and can become accustomed to the school environment (Carlton & Winsler, 1999).

Kim et al. (2005) noted, “‘Readiness for school’ refers to the belief that a child must have a certain level of mastery of pre-academic skills before entering kindergarten” (p. 4). Readiness to learn focuses on children’s developmental maturation or biological growth (Diamond et al., 2000). The readiness to learn model advocates that children have an internal biological clock that permits children to learn certain concepts when they are biologically ready (Carlton and Winsler, 1999; Diamond et al., 2000). A large percentage of teachers believe that parents and teachers cannot speed up the development of a child and there is not much they can do except give the child extra time to develop before placing them in the kindergarten classroom (Carlton & Winsler, 1999).

Lewit and Baker (1995) noted “the concept of school readiness tethers the notion of readiness for learning to a standard of physical, intellectual, and social development that enables children to fulfill school requirements and to assimilate a school’s curriculum” (p. 129). North Carolina has defined kindergarten readiness as “the condition of children when they enter school and the capacity to educate all children, whatever each

child's condition may be" (Maxwell, 2004, p.1). In North Carolina the following five areas are considered when assessing the condition of children as they enter school:

1. Health and physical development
2. Social and emotional development
3. Approaches toward learning
4. Language development and communication
5. Cognitive and general knowledge. (Maxwell, 2004, p.1)

Ramey and Ramey (2004) found that children need to have several different experiences in order to be ready for school. These experiences are encouraging exploration, mentoring basic skills, celebrating developmental advances, rehearsing and extending new skills, having protection from inappropriate disapproval, teasing and punishment, communication, and guiding/limiting of their conduct.

The state of Georgia constructed a similar list of readiness conditions for a child.

These readiness conditions include the following:

1. Possible health barriers that block learning have been detected
2. Suspected physical or mental or physical or mental disabilities have been addressed
3. Enthusiasm, curiosity, persistence toward learning is demonstrated
4. Feelings of both self and others are recognized
5. social and interpersonal skills are emerging
6. Communication with others is effective
7. Early literacy skills are evident

8. General knowledge of the world, things, places, events, and people has been acquired. (Mazarky, 2005, p.1)

Some researchers have found ensuring children are exposed to certain factors for several years prior to starting school is a better indicator of readiness for school than assessments. These factors include “exposure to consistent, stable adults who are emotionally invested in them, an environment that is safe and predictable, regular routines and rhythms of activity, competent peers, and materials that stimulate their exploration and enjoyment of the world” (Pianta & La Paro, 2003, p. 24).

Pianta and La Paro (2003) conducted research on readiness for kindergarten and surveyed teachers to find out what specific problems children who had difficulties adjusting to school demonstrated in their classrooms. They identified the following problems: difficulty following directions, lack of academic skills, disorganized home environment, difficulty working independently, lack of a formal preschool experience, difficulty working as part of a group, poor social skills, immaturity, and communication problems. Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox (2000) found kindergarten teachers rate learning-related social skills as vital to doing well in school and that a majority of children lack these skills.

There are numerous methods used in the United States to determine if a child is ready for school. The most widespread method is that of cut-off dates to insure a minimal maturity level in all kindergarten students. Cut-off dates require a child to reach a specific age before they are able to enter kindergarten. Cut-off dates are easy and impartial if school personnel follow the deadlines. The difficult part is determining what the date should be (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). Ackerman and Barnett (2005) found that “thirty-

nine states consider children eligible for kindergarten if they turn five no later than October 16. The remaining states have December or January cutoff dates, or allow school districts to choose the date” (p. 2). According to Missouri Revised Statutes Section 160.053 Missouri students must be five years old before August 1 of the school year he or she plans to enter kindergarten.

Another technique is the kindergarten readiness assessment. There are different types of readiness assessments. These assessments generally either measure if children have reached certain developmental milestones or if they have certain academic knowledge (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). According to Ackerman and Barnett (2005) “there are currently over 35 tests, the majority of which are standardized, that teachers or other school personnel might use to assess kindergarteners” (p. 5). Researchers found that the majority of readiness tests are poor predictors of school success and are incorrectly placing students almost 50 percent of the time (Ackerman & Barnett; Carlton and Winsler; Pianta & La Paro, 2003). These assessments measure just a small percentage of young children’s knowledge and skills and account for approximately 25 percent of the dissimilarity of children when they reach school (Pianta & La Paro). Because of the problems associated with placing students using readiness assessments, Ackerman and Barnett (2005) recommend considering the following points when using or choosing assessments:

1. Assessments should be used for their intended purpose and not considered interchangeable.
2. Good assessments that will provide reliable information that can inform teachers’ and school administrators’ decisions.

3. Assessments should have adequate reliability for predicting children's future school success (p. 6).

The third technique used is delaying entry into school. Parents sometimes wait an extra year or more before enrolling their child in kindergarten. This is called holding out, holding back, or red-shirting (Ackerman & Barnett; Carlton & Winsler). This philosophy follows the maturationist perspective that is based on developmental maturation or biological growth and asserts that giving students who lag behind an extra year before starting kindergarten can help keep them from having future academic problems (Ackerman & Barnett). According to Carlton and Winsler, less than 10 percent of parents postpone their child's entry into school for a year or more. Students that started kindergarten a year later than their peers had higher math and reading achievement scores during their kindergarten year. These trends also continue at least through grade six, but only in reading (Ackerman & Barnett; Carlton & Winsler). Other studies have found that children who spend an extra year at home are no better off than if they had attended kindergarten (Carlton & Winsler). Some question the practice of testing and placement as being exclusionary on the basis of ethnicity, background and IQ (Carlton & Winsler). Carlton and Winsler noted that the practices of using cut-off birthdates, delayed entry, and readiness testing is creating an older and more able group of children in the earlier grades.

Protheroe (2006) noted that all public schools should identify the skills important to a child's success in kindergarten. Complicating this approach are the studies that find parents and kindergarten teachers often have different views on the skills important to children as they begin kindergarten (Ackerman & Barnett; Protheroe). Parents typically

rate pre-academic skills such as counting, reading and writing as more important, while teachers rate enthusiasm, effective communication, and appropriate behaviors as more important to success in kindergarten (Ackerman & Barnett; Protheroe). Both parents and educators have emphasized the importance of children adjusting socially to the school environment. But each group emphasized different aspects of socialization. Educators emphasized children being able to work as part of a large group, sharing the teacher's attention, and following directions (Dockett & Perry, 2001). Ackerman and Barnett, in a study of teachers' perceptions of what is important for kindergarten readiness, emphasized the student should be healthy, rested, and well nourished, willing to try new activities, and able to communicate. Only ten percent of teachers considered counting or knowing their letters important for kindergarten readiness. Parents emphasized children being able to separate from the parent, adjusting to other adults, and responding appropriately to other adults (Dockett & Perry, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2003). Most parents believe a positive disposition about going to school and being able to adjust socially is important for school readiness.

Parents, in contrast to teachers, indicated the importance of being able to count and knowing their letters as factors in being ready to attend school (Ackerman & Barnett). It is important to look at what kindergarten teachers believe constitutes readiness because they are ones who receive the children first in school. Researchers usually find that the educator's assessment of what is important for school readiness, such as nonacademic goals, is supported by the research they conduct (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005).

In a 1996 study by the American Educational Research Association, parents, teachers and caregivers agreed upon the following three categories as important in preparing children for kindergarten. The first category was the child being healthy, well-fed and rested. The second category was that a child should be able to express his/her own thoughts, needs and wants. Third, a child needs to be enthusiastic and curious about new activities (Plevyak & Morris, 2002). Ackerman and Barnett (2005) noted students deemed ready for school in some districts, schools, or states may be considered not ready in another school or district.

Because of this difference between perceptions of school readiness, some states and districts are not only focusing on what constitutes student readiness but also what constitutes ready schools (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Ready schools have several characteristics in common. They include paying attention to transition issues, adjusting their instructional approaches to meet the needs of individual children, having a highly qualified staff, and an environment conducive to learning.

Transition to School

Transition to school has also become an important part of the early education process. Ramey and Ramey (1998) define transition as an ongoing process of mutual adaptations by children, families and schools to facilitate children moving successfully from home, child care and preschool into the early years of school. Today a model educational transition program would include quality experiences before kindergarten and a seamless transition into kindergarten (Hojnoski & Missall, 2006). Schools with good transition practices have three characteristics in common. These characteristics are they reach out, linking families, preschool settings, and communities with schools; they

make connections prior to the first day of school; and they reach with appropriate intensity (Early et al., 2001).

Researchers have found family-school interviews, family induction meetings, and orientation visits to school by groups of preschool children and families are key components of introductory practices (Petriwskyj, Thrope, & Tayler, 2005). Early et al. (2001) found in most schools transition activities take place after the school year has started instead of before the beginning of the school year and do not include preschools and the community. Transition activities before the beginning of the year require more work and planning on the part of the teacher and the school. Transition activities that involve preschools and the community or individual contact with the children and their parents also require more work on the part of the school and teachers (Early et al., 2001).

Parents as well as schools can do things to help smooth the transition. Church (2006) noted the following ways parents can help their child find comfort during the transition to kindergarten:

- Children this age have a need for approval and a dependence on authority. Simple and specific acknowledgments of positive behaviors and "good works" can make your 5- or 6-year-old feel supported.
- Encourage dramatic play. As your child's needs change throughout the year, you can de-emphasize this type of play.
- Create a consistent structure. Take photographs of each part of the day and display these so your child can use them as a "reference point" throughout the day.

- Provide flexibility within your daily structure. Give choices (always ones you can accept) so that your child has some sense of independence (p.72).

Early et al. (2001) noted it is important for all the stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and preschool providers, to have relationships established to help kindergarten students have a successful transition into kindergarten.

Summary

This review of literature provided information and various views about childcare for three and four year olds, kindergarten readiness, and the transition to kindergarten. The major areas addressed were history and evolution of childcare; the types of childcare; quality of childcare; Head Start, preschool, preschool curriculum and instructional programs; and universal pre-kindergarten. The review of literature also addressed the definitions of school readiness, teacher and parent perceptions of school readiness, and techniques for determining school readiness.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research design and methodology are presented in Chapter Three. This chapter included the purpose of the study, a definition of the sample population, data collection, statistical analysis techniques used on the study data, and a summary of the research design.

Purpose of the Study

An important question for parents, educators, and policy makers today involves the long-term impact of childcare experiences on the transition to and success in school (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). Parental interest is shifting from the question of whether early childcare or maternal employment harms children to the question of what types of early childcare can be the most helpful for what types of children (Waldfogel, 2002). This study utilized data collected from surveys designed to identify the perception of kindergarten teachers on what is the most beneficial setting to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn. Knowledge gained from this study will provide information to parents who want to know what type of care will better prepare children to enter school, both academically and socially.

Research Questions

To accomplish the purpose of the study the following research questions were addressed:

1. What early childhood setting do kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of enthusiasm towards learning?
2. What early childhood setting do kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of academic skills?
3. What early childhood setting do kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of social skills?
4. What are teachers' perceptions of a standard expectation of skills that constitute kindergarten readiness?

Population and Sample

This study's population consisted of current kindergarten teachers in all public school districts in Missouri. Kindergarten teachers have the first-hand experience and knowledge of what skills students need when they enter kindergarten. The data were collected from surveys conducted of current kindergarten teachers in the state of Missouri, via a web-based survey instrument. A database of building level administrators in Missouri and their email addresses was obtained by contacting the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and retrieving the information from <http://dese.mo.gov/directory/download.htm>. Kindergarten teachers were contacted by emailing all of the administrators listed with kindergarten classrooms in their buildings and requesting they forward the email to all of the current kindergarten teachers in their building. A total of 1,244 administrators were emailed.

Instrumentation

The data for this study were collected through a web-based survey. Fink (2003) defined a survey as, “A system for collecting information from or about people to describe, compare, or explain their knowledge, attitudes, and behavior” (p.1). This survey was developed by the researcher to answer the research questions. The survey was used to collect information about what early childhood setting kindergarten teachers perceive to be beneficial in preparing children for kindergarten. A 15 item Likert-type scale was used. The reliability of a survey is the degree to which results are stable and consistent (Trochim, 2006). Reliability assumes uniform administration of the survey instrument. The reliability of the survey used in this study has not been established. Lunsford and Lunsford (1996) noted that validity refers to the accuracy and truth of the data and findings that are produced. Ten pilot surveys were e-mailed to first grade teachers to test the validity of the survey instrument. The data from the pilot respondents were analyzed to ensure there were no confusing questions and to make sure the survey instrument was functioning correctly and could be completed in a reasonable amount of time. Once it was determined the survey instrument was valid, the reminder of the surveys were e-mailed to building administrators to be forwarded to the kindergarten teachers in their buildings. Survey items were devised to provide information regarding the research questions. The researcher attempted to gather individual responses to address the aforementioned topics. A copy of the survey, along with e-mail messages requesting kindergarten teachers’ participation in the study, can be found in Appendices A, B, and C.

Data Collection

The purpose of collecting data is to acquire information allowing inferences and conclusions to be drawn based on specific characteristics of certain large groups of subjects (Lunsford & Lunsford, 1996). This study gathered data to answer the aforementioned questions.

All public school districts in the state of Missouri were selected for this survey. All building administrators with kindergarten classrooms in their building were contacted by e-mail to explain the study. The administrators were then asked to forward the e-mail with the survey link to the current kindergarten teachers in their building asking them to complete the survey.

The e-mail message described the purpose of the study and assured confidentiality of the respondents. The kindergarten teachers were asked to complete the web-based survey. An additional e-mail message was sent to the building administrators one week after the distribution of the original message. This email again requested the administrators forward the e-mail with the survey link to the current kindergarten teachers in their building. This email asked the kindergarten teachers to complete the survey if they had not already done so or if the teacher had already taken the survey thanked them for participating. A similar message was sent out two weeks following the distribution of the original message. A total of 152 completed surveys were received from kindergarten teachers.

Statistical Analysis

Quantitative methodology was used for the data analysis. Quantitative statistical techniques were used because "...they allow researchers to analyze data sets where the

subjects have been ‘described’ by several demographic variables and have been measured on a variety of outcome variables” (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002, p.1). The survey data were used to describe the sample population, make comparisons across the six common early childhood settings, and to describe the skills kindergarten teachers indicated constituted kindergarten readiness. The analysis of data provided demographic data about the schools and kindergarten teachers who responded to the survey. Next, the responses to the question regarding kindergarten teachers’ perception of the most important skills children need in order to be ready to start kindergarten are compiled and presented. A One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA was performed to compare the six settings in ratings of each of the following areas: enthusiasm towards learning, academic skills, and social skills. The ANOVA was used because “One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests the significance of group differences between two or more means as it analyzes variation between and within each group” (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002, p. 15). Means and standard deviations across each area were presented.

Bonferroni comparisons were used to determine if there was a significant difference in each of the areas between the different settings. NIST/SEMATECH e-Handbook of Statistical Methods (2006) noted “The Bonferroni method is a simple method that allows many comparison statements to be made (or confidence intervals to be constructed) while still assuring an overall confidence coefficient is maintained. This method applies to an ANOVA situation when the analyst has picked out a particular set of pairwise comparisons or contrasts or linear combinations in advance” (p.1). Significant differences in each area across the six settings were noted. A two-way mixed ANOVA

was conducted to determine whether the differences in ratings across the six settings depended on the type of school district and the number of years in teaching.

Using data from survey questions 1-6, descriptive statistical techniques were used to describe the sample population. A One-way Repeated Measures ANOVA was used to make comparisons across the six common early childhood settings. This was accomplished using data from survey questions 7 – 14. A compilation of the skills that kindergarten teachers indicated were necessary for kindergarten readiness were listed and the frequencies of these responses were reported by using the data from questions 15 and 16.

Depending on sample size, additional analysis of the data was conducted using a Two-way Mixed Design ANOVA. The Two-way Mixed Design ANOVA was used to make comparisons across the six common childhood settings and the type of school district where the teachers teach. This was accomplished using data from survey questions 1 and 7-14. The Two-way Mixed Design ANOVA was also used to make comparisons across the six common childhood settings and the number of years the teachers had been teaching kindergarten. This was accomplished using data from survey questions 6 and 7-14.

Summary

This descriptive and comparative study used a web-based survey that was sent to all public school kindergarten teachers in the state of Missouri. The researcher gathered data to analyze what early childhood setting kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten and to determine if kindergarten teachers have a standard expectation of what skills constitute kindergarten readiness.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

This study utilized data collected from surveys designed to identify the perception of kindergarten teachers on what is the most beneficial setting to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn. Knowledge gained from this study will provide information to parents who want to know what type of care will better prepare children to enter school, both academically and socially.

This chapter includes the design of the study, the study sample, and source of data. The findings of the study are presented using both descriptive statistics and correlation analyses.

Design of the Study

The design of the study was developed to assess what early childhood setting kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten and to determine if kindergarten teachers have a standard expectation of what skills constitute kindergarten readiness. This study used a web-based survey that was sent to the principals in all public schools in Missouri that had kindergarten classrooms in their buildings. This was done with the intent to reach all public school kindergarten teachers in the state of Missouri. The descriptive statistics were gathered using the Results Item Summary Menu available on the FORMSITE electronic survey instrument. All inferential analyses were computed using SPSS GradPack 17.0 for Windows computer software.

Population and Sample

This study's population consisted of current kindergarten teachers in all public school districts in Missouri. A database of building level administrators in Missouri and their email addresses was obtained by contacting the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and retrieving the information from <http://dese.mo.gov/directory/download.htm>. Kindergarten teachers were contacted by emailing all of the administrators listed with kindergarten classrooms in their buildings and requesting they forward the email to all of the current kindergarten teachers in their building. A total of 1,244 administrators were emailed. Two follow up email requests were made in one week increments. A total of 152 surveys were completed by kindergarten teachers. Not all kindergarten teachers answered all the questions on the survey.

Analysis of Data

The analysis of data provided demographic data about the schools and kindergarten teachers who responded to the survey. Next, the responses to the question regarding kindergarten teachers' perception of the most important skills children need in order to be ready to start kindergarten are compiled and presented. A One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA was performed to compare the six settings in ratings of each of the following areas: enthusiasm towards learning, academic skills, and social skills. The ANOVA was used because "One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests the significance of group differences between two or more means as it analyzes variation between and within each group" (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002, p. 15). Means and standard deviations across each area were presented.

Bonferroni comparisons were used to determine if there was a significant difference in each of the areas between the different settings. NIST/SEMATECH e-Handbook of Statistical Methods (2006) noted “The Bonferroni method is a simple method that allows many comparison statements to be made (or confidence intervals to be constructed) while still assuring an overall confidence coefficient is maintained. This method applies to an ANOVA situation when the analyst has picked out a particular set of pairwise comparisons or contrasts or linear combinations in advance” (p.1). Significant differences in each area across the six settings were noted. A two-way mixed ANOVA was conducted to determine whether the differences in ratings across the six settings depended on the type of school district and the number of years in teaching.

Demographic Findings

The following statistics describe the data gathered on the type of school districts where the kindergarten teachers work. Total number of responses for this item was 151. Twenty-seven respondents worked in urban school districts. Thirty-eight respondents worked in suburban school districts. Eighty-six respondents worked in rural school districts.

Of the 152 surveys received, 150 responded to the question of school district size. According to the kindergarten teacher surveys 25 respondents worked in school districts with 500 or less students. Nineteen respondents worked in school districts with 501 to 1,000 students. Twenty-three respondents worked in school districts with 1,001 to 1,500 students. Eighty-three respondents worked in school districts with 1,501 or more students.

The data revealed twelve respondents worked in school buildings with 100 or less students. Nineteen respondents worked in school buildings with 101 to 200 students. Thirty-four respondents worked in school buildings with 201 to 300 students. Eighty-six respondents worked in school buildings with 301 or more students. Of the 152 surveys received, 151 responded to the question of the size of school buildings.

Of the 152 surveys received, 150 responded to the question regarding the enrollment in the kindergarten teacher's current classroom. Information gleaned from the surveys indicated six respondents had an enrollment of 10 or less students in their current classroom. Twenty respondents had an enrollment of 11 to 15 students in their current classroom. Fifty-three respondents had an enrollment of 16 to 20 students in their current classroom. Seventy-one respondents had an enrollment of 20 or more students in their current classroom.

Of the 152 surveys received, 150 responded to the question regarding how long the respondents had been teaching. According to the kindergarten teacher surveys 16 respondents had been teaching 0 to 3 years. Fifty respondents had been teaching 4 to 10 years. Forty-eight respondents had been teaching 11 to 20 years. Thirty-six respondents had been teaching 20 or more years.

Of the 152 surveys received, 150 responded to the question regarding how long the respondents had been teaching kindergarten. The data revealed 34 respondents had been teaching kindergarten 0 to 3 years. Sixty-five respondents had been teaching kindergarten 4 to 10 years. Thirty-six respondents had been teaching kindergarten 11 to 20 years. Fifteen respondents had been teaching kindergarten 20 or more years.

Readiness Skills

The following statistics describe kindergarten teachers' perception of the most important skills children need in order to be ready to start kindergarten. The web-based survey respondents were requested to list the five most important skills children need in order to be ready to start kindergarten. Respondents were asked to state their answers in their own words rather than choose from a list of skills. A total of 144 participants responded to all or part of this survey question for a total of 683 responses. In an effort to categorize a variety of responses to the question dealing with readiness skills, the data were compiled into several general categories. These categories included academic skills; social skills; recognizing and writing name; sits still, listens, and follows directions; motor skills; taking care of personal needs; enthusiasm; and other responses. Percentages of responses were calculated by dividing the number of responses in each area by the total number of responses to this question (683).

Academic skills included items such as knowing letters and letter sounds, counting and knowing numbers, and knowing shapes and colors. The total number of responses for academic skills was 235. Academic skill responses were 34.41% of the total responses.

Social skills included items such as sharing and following rules, able to take turns, being able to separate from parents, and having self control. The total number of responses for social skills was 130. Social skills responses were 19.03 % of the total responses.

In the category of sits still, listens and follows directions, the total number of responses was 97. Sits still, listens, and follows direction responses were 14.20% of the total responses.

The category of recognizing and writing name included items such as recognizing the letters in the students' name and being able to recognize and write their own name. The total number of responses for recognizing and writing name was 85. Recognizing and writing name responses were 12.45% of the total responses.

Motor skills included items such as holding a pencil, holding a book, holding and cutting with scissors, and gluing items. The total number of response was 48. Motor skills responses were 7.03% of the total responses.

The category of taking care of personal needs included items such as taking care of own toilet needs, physically dress themselves, and ability to tie their own shoes. The total number of responses for taking care of personal needs was 42. Taking care of personal needs responses were 6.15% of the total responses.

Enthusiasm included items such as enthusiasm towards learning, willingness to learn, and motivation. The total number of responses was 11. Enthusiasm responses were 1.61% of the total responses.

The category of "other responses" was made up of items that had less than 10 responses. This category included items such as parental support, communication skills, curiosity, and healthy diet. The total number of responses was 35. "Other responses" were 5.12% of the total responses.

Comparison for Enthusiasm Ratings

A One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA was performed to compare the six settings of in home care by parent, in home care by nanny, cared for by relatives, home daycare, daycare center, and preschool in ratings of enthusiasm towards learning by respondents to the survey. The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant difference in enthusiasm across the six settings, $F(5,620) = 51.25, p < .001$. Means and standard deviations for enthusiasm ratings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation for Enthusiasm

Type of Care	M	SD
In home care by parent	3.41	1.17
In home care by nanny	3.28	1.01
Cared for by relatives	3.11	1.08
Home daycare	3.35	0.97
Daycare Center	3.62	0.89
Preschool	4.42	0.66

Preschool was higher than all other settings in the area of enthusiasm. Bonferroni comparisons showed a significant difference in enthusiasm between the settings of preschool and in home care by parents with $p < .001$, between the settings of preschool and in home care by nanny with $p < .001$, between the settings of preschool and care by relatives with $p < .001$, between the settings of preschool and home daycare with $p < .001$, and between the settings of preschool and daycare center with $p < .001$.

Bonferroni comparisons showed a significant difference in enthusiasm between the settings of daycare center and in home care by nanny with $p = .010$, between the settings of daycare center and care by relatives with $p < .001$, and between the settings of daycare center and home daycare with $p = .007$. Bonferroni comparisons did not show a significant difference in enthusiasm between the settings of daycare center and in home by parents with $p = .84$.

Bonferroni comparisons showed a significant difference in enthusiasm between the settings of in home care by parents and care by relatives with $p = .001$. Bonferroni comparisons did not show a significant difference in enthusiasm between the settings of in home care by parents and in home care by nanny with $p = .08$, and between the settings of in home care by parents and home daycare with $p = 1.00$.

Bonferroni comparisons did not show a significant difference in enthusiasm between the settings of home daycare and in home care by nanny with $p = 1.00$, and between the settings of home daycare and care by relatives with $p = .06$. Bonferroni comparisons did not show a significant difference in enthusiasm between the settings of in home care by nanny and care by relatives with $p = .29$.

To determine whether the differences in enthusiasm ratings across the six settings depended on the type of school district, a two-way mixed ANOVA was conducted. The two-way mixed ANOVA showed a significant difference in enthusiasm ratings across the six settings $F(5,610) = 42.25, p < .001$. The two-way mixed ANOVA comparison did not show a significant interaction in enthusiasm ratings across the six settings and district types $F(10,610) = 0.70, p = .74$. The two-way mixed ANOVA comparison did not show a significant effect on enthusiasm ratings of type of school district $F(2,122) = .16, p =$

0.85. No analysis was conducted on the differences in enthusiasm ratings across the six settings depending on the number of years in teaching because the group size was not adequate.

Comparison for Academic Skills Ratings

A One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVA was performed to compare the six settings in ratings of academic skills. The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant difference in academic skills across the six settings, $F(5,620) = 110.500, p < .001$. Means and standard deviations for academic skills are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation for Academic Skills

Type of Care	M	SD
In home care by parent	2.92	1.10
In home care by nanny	2.92	0.88
Cared for by relatives	2.64	0.90
Home daycare	3.05	0.88
Daycare Center	3.49	0.80
Preschool	4.50	0.63

Preschool was higher than all other settings in the area of academic skills. Bonferroni comparisons showed a significant difference in academic skills between the settings of preschool and in home care by parents with $p < .001$, between the settings of preschool and in home care by nanny with $p < .001$, between the settings of preschool

and care by relatives with $p < .001$, between the settings of preschool and home daycare with $p < .001$, and between the settings of preschool and daycare center with $p < .001$.

Bonferroni comparisons showed a significant difference in academic skills between the settings of daycare center and in home by parents with $p < .001$, between the settings of daycare center and in home care by nanny with $p < .001$, between the settings of daycare center and care by relatives with $p < .001$, and between the settings of daycare center and home daycare with $p < .001$.

Bonferroni comparisons showed a significant difference in academic skills between the settings of home daycare and in home by relatives with $p < .001$. Bonferroni comparisons did not show a significant difference in academic skills between the settings of home daycare and in home care by parents with $p = 1.00$, and between the settings of home daycare and in home care by nanny with $p = 1.00$.

Bonferroni comparisons showed a significant difference in academic skills between the settings of in home care by parents and care by relatives with $p = .002$. Bonferroni comparisons did not show a significant difference in academic skills between the settings of in home care by parents and in home care by nanny with $p = 1.00$

Bonferroni comparisons showed a significant difference in academic skills between the settings of in home care by nanny and care by relatives with $p = .002$.

To determine whether the differences in academic skills ratings across the six settings depended on the type of school district, a two-way mixed ANOVA was conducted. The two-way mixed ANOVA showed a significant difference in academic skills ratings across the six settings $F(5,610) = 90.45, p < .001$. The two-way mixed ANOVA comparison did not show a significant interaction in academic skills ratings

across the six settings and district types $F(10,610) = .52, p = .87$. The two-way mixed ANOVA comparison did not show a significant effect on academic skills ratings of type of school district $F(2,122) = .634, p = 0.53$. No analysis was conducted on the differences in academic skills ratings across the six settings depending on the number of years in teaching because the group size was not adequate.

Comparison for Social Skills Ratings

A One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVAs was performed to compare the six settings in ratings of social skills. The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant difference in social skills across the six settings, $F(5,620) = 149.92, p < .001$. Means and standard deviations for social skills are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviation for social skills

Type of Care	M	SD
In home care by parent	2.48	1.17
In home care by nanny	2.73	0.95
Cared for by relatives	2.42	0.94
Home daycare	3.36	0.87
Daycare Center	3.70	0.80
Preschool	4.54	0.56

Preschool was higher than all other settings in the area of social skills. Bonferroni comparisons showed a significant difference in social skills between the settings of

preschool and in home care by parents with $p < .001$, between the settings of preschool and in home care by nanny with $p < .001$, between the settings of preschool and care by relatives with $p < .001$, between the settings of preschool and home daycare with $p < .001$, and between the settings of preschool and daycare center with $p < .001$.

Bonferroni comparisons showed a significant difference in social skills between the settings of daycare center and in home by parents with $p < .001$, between the settings of daycare center and in home care by nanny with $p < .001$, between the settings of daycare center and care by relatives with $p < .001$, and between the settings of daycare center and home daycare with $p = .001$. Bonferroni comparisons showed a significant difference in social skills between the settings of home daycare and in home care by parents with $p < .001$, between the settings of home daycare and in home by nanny with $p < .001$, and between the settings of home daycare and care by relatives with $p < .001$.

Bonferroni comparisons showed a significant difference in social skills between the settings of in home care by nanny and in home care by parents with $p = .04$, and between the settings of in home care by nanny and care by relatives with $p < .001$. Bonferroni comparisons did not show a significant difference in social skills between the settings of in home care by parents and care by relatives with $p = 1.00$

To determine whether the differences in social skills ratings across the six settings depended on the type of school district, a two-way mixed ANOVA was conducted. The two-way mixed ANOVA showed a significant difference in social skills ratings across the six settings $F(5,610) = 123.43, p < .001$. The two-way mixed ANOVA comparison did not show a significant interaction in social skills ratings across the six settings and district types $F(10,610) = 1.22, p = .27$. The two-way mixed ANOVA comparison did

not show a significant effect on social skills ratings of type of school district $F(2,122) = .489, p = 0.61$. No analysis was conducted on the differences in social skills ratings across the six settings depending on the number of years in teaching because the group size was not adequate.

Summary

This chapter presented results of the study using both descriptive statistics and ANOVA. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the demographic data gathered on the kindergarten teachers who responded to the survey. The following demographics were described: type of school districts where the kindergarten teachers work; the size of school districts where the kindergarten teachers work; the size of school buildings where the kindergarten teachers work; the enrollment in the kindergarten teacher's current classroom; how long the kindergarten teachers had been teaching; and how long the kindergarten teachers had been teaching kindergarten.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the most important skills children need in order to be ready to start kindergarten. The five most important skills kindergarten teachers perceive children need in order to be ready to start kindergarten were academic skills; social skills; recognizing and writing name; sitting still, listening, and following directions; and motor skills.

One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVAs showed significant difference in enthusiasm towards learning, academic skills, and social skills across the six settings. Bonferroni comparisons also showed significant difference in enthusiasm towards learning, academic skills, and social skills between the settings.

To determine whether the differences in ratings across the six settings depended on the type of school district and the number of years in teaching a two-way mixed ANOVA was conducted. The two-way mixed ANOVA comparison did not show a significant effect on enthusiasm, academic skills, or social skill ratings of type of school district. No analysis was conducted on the differences in enthusiasm, academic skills, or social skill ratings across the six settings depending on the number of years in teaching because the group size was not adequate. Chapter Five will provide a summary of findings and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Childcare has changed dramatically over the past several decades (Belsky, 2001). In the last quarter century, the percentage of working mothers with children under the age of five has increased dramatically. In 1965, the percentage of three-year-olds attending preschool was 5 percent and the percentage of four-year-olds attending preschool was 16 percent; in 2003, more than 60 percent of all young children attended a formal center or preschool prior to enrolling in kindergarten (Miller, 2007). Current and up to date information about what early childhood setting best prepares children for kindergarten is important to parents. Not only is this important to parents, but also government leaders, educators, and researchers who want to know what is the best setting to prepare students for school and what is the long-term impact of childcare experiences on school readiness and school success (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). This information can then be used to establish funding, develop appropriate programs and help educate parents.

Current research has heightened our awareness that the early childhood years are a critical period in a child's life (Drummond & Seid, 2001; Hill, Waldfogel, Brooks-Gunn, & Han, 2005). Quality care during this period is important to healthy development, school readiness and later success in life. Because many families rely on care outside of the home it is important that they understand what type of care is the most effective and what factors impact the quality of a program. Past studies have examined if the type of care has an impact on kindergarten readiness and whether sending a child to preschool, daycare, parental care, or other types of care is the most beneficial (Fontaine,

Torre, & Grafwallner, 2006; Cotton and Conklin, 2001). Researchers have also studied what factors have an impact on the quality of early childhood programs. Fontaine, Torre, and Grafwallner (2006) found “programs that have knowledgeable and skilled staff, offer a stimulating and supportive environment, provide individualized and developmentally appropriate activities for each child, reach out to parents to gain their involvement, collaborate with community resource partners and empower the families’ capacity to ensure optimal care for their children have shown much success” (p. 99).

Different states, districts, schools, and teachers may have varying definitions of what is considered readiness to start kindergarten (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Despite the influence of federal laws and programs, changes in early childhood practices, and modifications in the definition of school readiness, there continues to be debate as to what makes up school readiness and what skills children need prior to entering kindergarten. Kim et al. (2005) noted, “‘Readiness for school’ refers to the belief that a child must have a certain level of mastery of pre-academic skills before entering kindergarten” (p. 4). Protheroe (2006) noted that all public schools should identify the skills important to a child’s success in kindergarten. It is important to consider what kindergarten teachers believe constitutes readiness because they are ones who receive the children first in school.

The focus of this study was two-fold. This study utilized data collected from surveys designed to identify the perception of kindergarten teachers on what is the most beneficial setting to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and to determine if kindergarten teachers have a standard expectation of skills that constitute kindergarten

readiness. Knowledge gained from this study will provide information to parents who want to know what type of care will better prepare children to enter kindergarten.

The research questions in this study were designed to reveal data regarding what setting kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten and teachers' perceptions of skills that constitute kindergarten readiness.

The following four research questions guided this study.

1. What early childhood setting do kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of enthusiasm towards learning?
2. What early childhood setting do kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of academic skills?
3. What early childhood setting do kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of social skills?
4. What are teachers' perceptions of a standard expectation of skills that constitute kindergarten readiness?

Knowledge gained from this study will provide information to parents who want to know what type of care will better prepare children to enter school, both academically and socially. The study will also provide information to parents and early childhood educators about which skills to emphasize with their children so they will enter kindergarten ready to learn. This study used a web-based survey that was sent to the principals in all public schools in Missouri that had kindergarten classrooms in their buildings. This was done with the intent to reach all public school kindergarten teachers in the state of Missouri. The research questions investigated what early childhood setting

kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of enthusiasm towards learning, academic skills, and social skills. An analysis of data was performed to compare the six settings of in home care by parent, in home care by nanny, cared for by relatives, home daycare, daycare center, and preschool in ratings of enthusiasm towards learning, academic skills and social skills. The research questions also investigated teachers' perceptions of a standard expectation of skills that constitute kindergarten readiness. Descriptive statistics were used to describe kindergarten teachers' perception of the most important skills children need in order to be ready to start kindergarten.

Enthusiasm, Academic Skills, and Social Skills

In a 1996 study by the American Educational Research Association, parents, teachers and caregivers agreed upon three categories as important in preparing children for kindergarten. One of these categories was a child needs to be enthusiastic and curious about new activities (Plevyak & Morris, 2002). This section focused on the perception of current Missouri kindergarten teachers on which settings best prepare students for kindergarten in the area of enthusiasm towards learning. The six settings included in home care by parent, in home care by nanny, cared for by relatives, home daycare, daycare center, and preschool.

Research Question 1 asked what early childhood setting do kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of enthusiasm towards learning? The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant difference in enthusiasm across the six settings. Preschool was rated higher than all other settings in the area of enthusiasm. Daycare center was the second in the area of

enthusiasm. In home care by parents was the third in the area of enthusiasm. Home daycare was the fourth in the area of enthusiasm. In home care by nanny was the fifth in the area of enthusiasm. These findings are consistent with the findings of Cotton and Conklin, (2001) who found preschool graduates had greater academic motivation and better attitudes toward school and learning. In summary, the respondents to this survey indicated kindergarten teachers perceive preschool to be the most beneficial setting in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of enthusiasm towards learning.

Cotton and Conklin (2001) also reported one of the benefits of children attending preschool programs was an increase in academic skills. Research Question 2 asked what early childhood setting do kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of academic skills? The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant difference in academic skills across the six settings. Preschool was higher than all other settings in the area of academic skills. Daycare center was second in the area of academic skills. Home daycare was third in the area of academic skills. In home care by parents and in home care by nanny were fourth in the area of academic skills.

These findings are consistent with those of Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, and Dawson (2005) and Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, and Mann (2002). A study conducted by Magnuson et al. (2004) found that students in pre-kindergarten programs, preschools, and center-based day care have higher levels of academic skills than children that have been taken care of by their parents or relatives. In summary, the respondents to this survey indicated kindergarten teachers perceive preschool to be the most beneficial setting in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of academic skills.

In previous studies, (Cotton & Conklin, 2001; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000) children from quality preschool programs demonstrated higher social competencies. Research Question 2 asked what early childhood setting do kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of social skills? The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant difference in social skills across the six settings.

Preschool was higher than all other settings in the area of social skills. Daycare center was second in the area of social skills. Home daycare was third in the area of social skills. In home care by nanny was fourth in the area of social skills. In home care by parents was fifth in the area of social skills. Other studies in the area of what setting is most beneficial in preparing students for kindergarten include the findings of Reynolds et al. (2002) who noted preschool participants had greater social skills at kindergarten entry. Cotton and Conklin (2001) noted children who attended preschool were able to stay on task and be more cooperative with their classmates. In summary, the respondents to this survey indicated kindergarten teachers perceive preschool to be the most beneficial setting in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of social skills.

Skills that Constitute Kindergarten Readiness

Protheroe (2006) noted that all public schools should identify the skills important to a child's success in kindergarten. Parents typically rate pre-academic skills such as counting, reading and writing as more important, while teachers rate enthusiasm, effective communication, and appropriate behaviors as more important (Ackerman & Barnett; Protheroe). Both parents and educators have emphasized the importance of children adjusting socially to the school environment. Educators emphasized children

being able to work as part of a large group, sharing the teacher's attention, and following directions (Dockett & Perry, 2001). Most parents believe a positive disposition about going to school and being able to adjust socially is important for school readiness. It is important to consider what kindergarten teachers believe constitutes readiness because they are ones who receive the children first in school.

Research Question 4 asked what are teachers' perceptions of a standard expectation of skills that constitute kindergarten readiness? On the web-based survey respondents were requested to list the five most important skills children need in order to be ready to start kindergarten. Respondents were asked to put their answers in their own words rather than choose from a list of skills. A total of 144 participants responded to all or part of this survey question for a total of 683 responses. In an effort to categorize a variety of responses to the question dealing with readiness skills, the data were compiled into several general categories. These categories included academic skills; social skills; recognizing and writing name; sitting still, listening, and following directions; motor skills; taking care of personal needs; enthusiasm; and "other responses". Percentages of responses were calculated by dividing the number of responses in each area by the total number of responses to this question (683).

The category with the largest percentage of responses (34.41%) was academic skills. This category included items such as knowing letters and letter sounds, counting and knowing numbers, and knowing shapes and colors. The second highest category was social skills with 19.03 % of the total responses. This category included items such as sharing and following rules, able to take turns, being able to separate from parents, and having self control. The third highest category of sitting still, listening and following

directions had 14.20% of the total responses. The fourth highest category was recognizing and writing name with 12.45% of the total responses.

The fifth highest category was motor skills with 7.03% of the total responses. The category of motor skills included items such as holding a pencil, holding a book, holding and cutting with scissors, and gluing items. The sixth highest category was taking care of personal needs with 6.15% of the total response. This category included items such as take care of own toilet needs; physically dress themselves; and ability to tie their own shoes. The seventh highest category was enthusiasm with 1.61% of the total responses. This category included items such as enthusiasm towards learning, willingness to learn, and motivation. Items with less than a total of 10 responses were consolidated into a category labeled “other responses”. This category included items such as parental support and healthy diet and was 6.88% of the total responses.

The results of this study were consistent with the past research in this area. This study found academic skills; social skills; recognizing and writing name; sitting still, listening, and following directions; motor skills; and taking care of personal needs, were what kindergarten teachers perceive to be the most important skills students need in order to be ready to start kindergarten. While the overall ranking of the skills may not correspond exactly with past research the top five categories are consistent with findings from other studies (Ackerman & Barnett; Dockett & Perry; Protheroe). The category with the highest response rate was academic skills. If the research results are viewed from the perspective of the single most important skill indicated by the respondents, the results of this study conflict with the findings of Ackerman and Barnett (2005) who found teachers’ perceptions of the most important skills for kindergarten readiness was that the student

should be healthy, rested, and well nourished, willing to try new activities, and able to communicate. Ackerman and Barnett found only ten percent of teachers considered counting or knowing their letters important for kindergarten readiness. In summary, the respondents to this survey indicated kindergarten teachers perceive academic skills, social skills, recognizing and writing name, sitting still, listening, and following directions, motor skills, and taking care of personal needs as the most important skills that students need in order to start kindergarten ready to learn.

Implications for Practice

The findings discovered through this research have generated several implications impacting early childhood education. These implications include reconsidering current perceptions of kindergarten readiness, impact of preschool on school readiness, and types of skills students should be learning prior to entering kindergarten.

Policymakers and practitioners in education may need to reconsider current perceptions regarding early childhood education in the United States and in Missouri. Kindergarten teachers consistently report approximately one-third of children entering kindergarten are not ready to perform the work expected of them (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). In light of this information and the increased emphasis on student achievement brought in part by Goals 2000 and No Child Left Behind legislation it is imperative that parents and educators look at ways to better prepare students for the increased demands of kindergarten. Past research suggests that students who make a smooth transition to school tend to have and maintain superior social and academic skills (Docket & Perry, 2003; Fantuzzo, Rouse, McDermott, Sekino, Childs, & Weiss, 2005; Ramey & Ramey, 2004).

The data from this study supports the concept that students who attend preschool are more prepared for kindergarten in the areas of enthusiasm towards learning, academic skills, and social skills. This is supported by Reynolds et al. (2002) findings that “preschool participants had greater skills at kindergarten entry...” (p. 278). Cotton and Conklin (2001) also found preschool participants had greater social maturity, better attitudes toward school, and academic motivation. As per the findings of Reynolds et al. and Cotton and Conklin, this study found apparent differences between the early childhood settings of in home care by parent, in home care by nanny, cared for by relatives, home daycare, and daycare center in the areas of enthusiasm towards learning, academic skills, and social skills.

This study generated consistent evidence that preschool was significantly superior to all other settings in preparing students for kindergarten in all three areas therefore local, state, and federal governmental agencies need to look at ways to expand preschool availability so that all children have the opportunity to attend a quality preschool program.

Parents and preschool teachers have additional information regarding the areas they should focus on when preparing students for kindergarten. As perceived by kindergarten teachers the most important skills children need in order to be ready to start kindergarten are academic skills; social skills; recognizing and writing name; sitting still, listening, and following directions; motor skills; and taking care of personal needs. In light of this information parents and early childhood practitioners need to implement a research-based curriculum/instructional model that provides the framework for learning these concepts prior to entry into kindergarten. Parents as Teachers educators need to work with parents

on the areas kindergarten teachers see as important. School districts also need to look closely at the kindergarten readiness test they are using to ensure it accurately measures kindergarten readiness in these areas.

Finally, the data suggested there were significant differences between preschool and other early childhood settings on the preparation of students for kindergarten. Parents now have additional information when deciding what early childhood setting to choose for their children.

Recommendations for Further Study

Recommendations for future research include analyzing the effect of the quality of the childcare, studying the long term effect of preschool, and determining if kindergarten teachers' perceptions of skills necessary to start kindergarten have evolved. The conventional view among childcare researchers is that childcare quality contributes to children's developmental outcomes; inferior quality care is associated with less positive results and superior care is associated with favorable developmental outcomes (Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). Research has indicated quality of the children's surroundings and experiences has an effect on their developing skills in attention and memory (Network, 2005). Burchinal and Clark-Stewart (2007) found ". . . children's cognitive scores were consistently higher when they experienced higher quality care or care in a child care center" (p. 1140). Studies have found poor quality care is associated with poorer performance during the early school years and later in life (Lunenburg, 2000). Drummond and Seid (2001) indicated that high quality childcare centers and high quality in-home daycare have positive short-term effects on children's performance. While the quality of childcare appears to have an effect on all children, many experts believe that

the effects of childcare quality have an even greater effect on children from disadvantaged backgrounds than on children from more affluent backgrounds (NICHD, 2003b; NICHD, 2000; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000).

1. While this study provided evidence that kindergarten teachers perceive preschool as being the best setting for preparing students for kindergarten the effect of the quality of the care provided was not analyzed. Past research has found that although several factors such as the amount, stability, and type of childcare have an effect on the development outcomes of children, it is the quality of the childcare that has the most all-encompassing effect on the child's development (NICHD, 2000; NICHD, 2003b; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). Future studies could be conducted using a more sophisticated analysis to determine if quality of the early childhood setting has a substantial impact on kindergarten readiness.

2. While there have been several studies concerning the impact of the early childhood setting on kindergarten readiness there are a limited number of studies that track the impact of early childhood setting over an extended period of time. Future studies could be conducted that determine if early childhood education has an impact beyond the student's entry into kindergarten.

3. The findings concerning kindergarten teachers' perception of the most important skill children need in order to be ready to start kindergarten conflict with past research. This study's findings lead to the conclusion that kindergarten teachers perceive academic skills as the single most important skill children need in order to start kindergarten ready to learn. Past studies have found teachers rate enthusiasm, effective communication, and appropriate behaviors as more important than academic skills.

Future studies could be conducted to determine if the perception of kindergarten teacher has changed in this area or if this study found different findings from earlier research.

Discussion

The most effective early childhood setting in preparing children for kindergarten is a topic of interest to parents and school practitioners. While current research has identified that quality early childhood programs increase the chances of student success in kindergarten little research was available on what type of care kindergarten teachers perceive as the most beneficial. What skills are considered important to student success in kindergarten are also important to parents and school practitioners. To gain a deeper insight into these areas, Missouri kindergarten teachers were surveyed. This study utilized a web-based survey that was sent to all public school kindergarten teachers in the state of Missouri.

In summary, the respondents to this survey indicated kindergarten teachers perceive preschool to be the most beneficial setting in preparing students for kindergarten in the area of enthusiasm towards learning, academic skills, and social skills. The five most important skills kindergarten teachers perceive children need in order to be ready to start kindergarten were academic skills; social skills; recognizing and writing name; sitting still, listening, and following directions; and motor skills. It is imperative that parents and educators consider approaches to better prepare students for the increased demands of kindergarten. In light of this information parents and early childhood practitioners need to implement a research-based curriculum/instructional model that provides the framework for learning the identified concepts prior to entry into kindergarten.

Appendix A

Dear Administrator:

I am requesting your assistance in my study of kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the most beneficial setting to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and what kindergarten teachers perceive as the skills necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn. According to DESE records your building contains kindergarten classrooms, would you please forward this e-mail to the kindergarten teachers in your building. Please reply to this email to signify your district's permission for me to survey your kindergarten teachers. Your assistance in this study is greatly appreciated.

Dear Kindergarten Teacher:

My name is Marcus Stucker, I am doctoral student in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri, Columbia.

I am requesting your assistance in my study by taking a web-based survey of kindergarten teachers' perception of the most beneficial setting to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and what kindergarten teachers perceive as the skills necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the perception of kindergarten teachers on what is the most beneficial setting to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and what kindergarten teachers perceive as the skills necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn. Knowledge gained from this study will provide information to parents who want to know what type of care will better prepare children to enter school, both academically and socially.

If you would like to participate, please click on the link below for the survey.

<http://fs8.formsite.com/mstucker/form333642703/index.html>

Appendix B

Dear Administrator:

This is a follow up of my earlier request for your assistance in my study of kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the most beneficial setting to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and what kindergarten teachers perceive as the skills necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn. I am requesting you forward this e-mail to the kindergarten teachers in your building. Please reply to this email to signify your district's permission for me to survey your kindergarten teachers. Your assistance in this study is greatly appreciated.

Dear Kindergarten Teacher:

My name is Marcus Stucker, I am doctoral student in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri, Columbia.

If you have already taken the web-based survey of kindergarten teachers' perception of the most beneficial setting to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and what kindergarten teachers perceive as the skills necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn I would like to thank you for your help. If you have not taken the survey I am again requesting your assistance in my study by taking the web-based survey.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the perception of kindergarten teachers on what is the most beneficial setting to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and what kindergarten teachers perceived as the skills necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

If you would like to participate, please click on the link below for the survey.

<http://fs8.formsite.com/mstucker/form333642703/index.html>

Kindergarten Readiness Survey

Request for participation: You are invited to participate in a study on the perception of kindergarten teachers on what is the most beneficial setting to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and what kindergarten teachers perceived as the skills necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn. It is up to you whether you would like to participate. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized in any way. You can decide to stop at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions you may simply skip them.

Exclusions: You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Research Method: The research involves participating in a web-based survey. You will be asked demographic questions about yourself and your school district, about your perception of the most beneficial setting to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and what you perceive as the skills necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn. The study will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Privacy: All of the information I collect will be anonymous. I will not record your name or any information that could be used to identify you or your school. **Risks:** The risks associated with participating in this study are similar to the risks of everyday life.

Benefits: This study will inform parents and practitioners about kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the most beneficial setting to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and what kindergarten teachers perceive as the skills necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. Sandy Hutchinson. She can be reached at hutchinson@ucmo.edu or at (660) 543- 4720. If you have any questions about your right as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri, Columbia Institutional Review Board at (573) 882-9585. Your completion of this survey signifies your informed consent.

1. How would you classify your school district?

- a. Urban
- b. Suburban
- c. Rural

2. How large is your school district?

- a. 500 or less students
- b. 501 – 1000 students
- c. 1001 – 1500 students
- d. 1501+ students

3. How large is your building?

- a. 100 or less students
- b. 101 – 200 students
- c. 201 – 300 students
- d. 301+ students

4. How large is your own current kindergarten classroom enrollment?

- a. 10 or less students
- b. 11-15 students
- c. 16-20 students
- d. 20+ students

5. How long have you been teaching?

- a. 0 – 3 years
- b. 4 – 10 years
- c. 11 - 20 years
- d. 21+ years

6. How long have you taught kindergarten?

- a. 0 – 3 years
- b. 4 – 10 years
- c. 11 - 20 years
- d. 21+ years

As you answer the following questions please consider the early childhood setting as being for 3 and 4 year old children.

Definitions of types of care:

In home by parent: care by a parent in the home.

In home by sitter: care by a sitter in the child's own home.

Cared for by relatives: care by a relative in the child's own home or in the relative's home.

Daycare home: care by a licensed or unlicensed babysitter or family care provider in their own home.

Center care: care provided outside the home by a daycare center.

Preschool: center-based care where their primary purpose is to provide early education experiences to three and four year olds.

7. Rate the following types of early childhood experiences with 1 being not at all beneficial and 5 being extremely beneficial in preparing children for kindergarten.

	1	2	3	4	5
In home by parents					
In home by sitter					
Cared for by relatives					
Daycare home					
Center care					
PreSchool					

8. Of students that you know that have had only in home care by parents please rate on the average your observations of their readiness for kindergarten in the following areas with 1 being not at all ready for kindergarten and 5 being extremely ready for kindergarten.

	1	2	3	4	5
Enthusiasm towards learning					
Academic skills					
Social skills					

9. Of the students that you know that have had only in home care by nanny please rate on the average your observations of their readiness for kindergarten in the following areas with 1 being not at all ready for kindergarten and 5 being extremely ready for kindergarten.

	1	2	3	4	5
Enthusiasm towards learning					
Academic skills					
Social skills					

10. Of the students that you know that have had only care by relatives please rate on the average your observations of their readiness for kindergarten in the following areas with 1 being not at all ready for kindergarten and 5 being extremely ready for kindergarten.

	1	2	3	4	5
Enthusiasm towards learning					
Academic skills					
Social skills					

11. Of the students that you know that have had care in a daycare home please rate on the average your observations of their readiness for kindergarten in the following areas with 1 being not at all ready for kindergarten and 5 being extremely ready for kindergarten.

	1	2	3	4	5
Enthusiasm towards learning					
Academic skills					
Social skills					

12. Of the students that you know that have had care in a daycare center please rate on the average your observations of their readiness for kindergarten in the following areas with 1 being not at all ready for kindergarten and 5 being extremely ready for kindergarten.

	1	2	3	4	5
Enthusiasm towards learning					
Academic skills					
Social skills					

13. Of the students that you know that have had at least one year of care in a preschool please rate on the average your observations of their readiness for kindergarten in the following areas with 1 being not at all ready for kindergarten and 5 being extremely ready for kindergarten.

	1	2	3	4	5
Enthusiasm towards learning					
Academic skills					
Social skills					

14. From a readiness standpoint please rate the following settings in preparing 3 and 4 year old students for kindergarten with 1 being not at all ready for kindergarten and 5 being extremely ready for kindergarten.

	1	2	3	4	5
Half day preschool 2 or 3 days a week					
Half day preschool 5 days a week					
Full day preschool 2 or 3 days a week					
Full day preschool 5 days a week					
Public school based preschool 5 days a week					
Early Childhood Special Education					
Head Start					

15. What are the five most important skills children need in order to be ready to start kindergarten?

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

16. From a kindergarten teacher's perspective, what comments would you like to share about preparing 3 and 4 year olds to be successful in kindergarten?

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