

THE PERCEPTIONS OF AT-RISK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REGARDING
THEIR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

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July, 2010

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

THE PERCEPTIONS OF AT-RISK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REGARDING
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The educational journey which I chose to embark was not taken alone. Even though the degree is mine to keep, it is the people who stood behind me who made my dream a reality. I am thankful for this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude.

I wish to thank my superintendent, Dr. Kent Medlin, who pushed me and told me to keep the faith. I am appreciative of the flexibility and the time he allowed me to take so I could pursue this educational opportunity. I also wish to thank the wonderful people in my district who helped me along the way. To my staff at Willard Orchard Hills Elementary, they do not realize how much their love, support, and prayers have motivated me to keep going. They all have shown true WOHE pride!

My dissertation committee was chosen because I respect the knowledge base they brought to the table. Dr. Robert Watson is one of the most encouraging people I have ever encountered. His pride in this process and the Ed.D program is obvious. I thank him for the time he dedicated to me and my education. I also wish to show appreciation to Dr. Kim Finch. I have admired her leadership style for many years, and she has been an educator whose opinion I have greatly valued. Thank you for taking the time to help with this process. Dr. Beth Hurst and I go back many years when we worked on our Master's Degree together. Beth, has been such an encouragement to me through this process so I thank her so much! To my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Cynthia MacGregor, I thank her for the large amounts of time she has dedicated to this project and to me. She made sure I never lost sight of the end goal and held that sticky note out in front of me like a carrot. I thank her for staying calm when I couldn't and for always finding the silver lining. I appreciate her for never losing faith that I could make it.

Finally, I wish to thank my family for their constant support of my goals. My husband Mark has been my rock and hero for many years, but during this long, three year process, he has shown me what unconditional love looks like. To my children Dylann and Matthew, I thank them for understanding when I had to study, to write, and go to class. I missed my time with all my guys. I love them so much; it's great to be back!

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THE PERCEPTIONS OF AT-RISK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REGARDING THEIR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Rhonda L. Bishop

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ABSTRACT

Research shows students who are at-risk of academic failure become a long-term liability on society. There is a large body of quantitative research which points at increased educational success for students who attend preschool. However, there is a disconnect in the research between at-risk high school students and whether they attended a preschool program. This study brings to light the personal testimonies of at-risk high school students in regards to their early childhood educational experiences. Students were classified into three groups based upon the setting in which they were currently being educated: a traditional high school setting, a mixture of high school with minimal support from the district alternative school, or a total or almost exclusive placement in the alternative school.

This qualitative instrumental case study took place in a southwest Missouri school district. Interviews with 23 at-risk high school students along with observations and reviews of permanent records were conducted. The open themes which emerged from the study included Home is Where You Lay Your Head; Box of Chocolates; Seems Normal to Me; I Like You; You Like Me, or Do You? and finally Listen to Your Heart.

The open themes were then compiled into three focused themes: Positive Early Childhood Experiences; Damaging Early Childhood Experiences; and a Means to an End.

Implications for leaders were discussed. The findings indicated the students who attended preschool were scattered throughout the three groups, and one group did not stand out as having more preschool experience. Students who had participated in preschool education were able to remember more details about their learning than other students who had stayed at home or attended daycare. Relationships with adults, both personal and academic, were mentioned by the participants in both positive and negative examples.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

As America's culture changes, its citizens in turn have changing needs. Public school systems struggle to adapt to the current generation's transforming and diverse needs, thus causing one of the greatest challenges educational institutions face--educating all students (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). Students enter high schools across this nation with different levels of experiences, educational foundations, backgrounds, and not to mention, emotional baggage they bring from their homes (Lehr & Lange, 2003). Two-parent households where both parents are present to help raise children have become the exception and not the norm (D' Angelo & Zemanick). The methods educators should use to effectively reach this unique generation should be relevant to the students' prior knowledge. Unfortunately, as D'Angelo and Zemanick stated, this is not the case. Instead, they pointed out the following:

in many ways, the way children are educated is reflective of the way things used to be and not the way they currently are. Schools still have a tendency to operate in the mode of 'one size fits all' and [t]his is how we do things, you either get it or you don't. (p. 211)

While a majority of students are still successful within these traditional structures, the pursuit of lowering drop-out rates and increasing persistence to graduation still exists. Achieving a 90% graduation rate has become difficult for many schools (Lehr & Lange, 2003). Administrators and teachers within secondary institutions are faced with providing education, across a variety of settings, to students with differentiated needs (D'Angelo &

Zemanick, 2009), yet they do not have the resources to foster student success for their at-risk population (Lehr & Lange).

Reaching the at-risk population is necessary for more than the sake of a school's success rate. Children who are at-risk of academic failure become a long-term liability on society. According to Cooper, Chavira, and Mena (2005), many communities tout equitable access to education at all levels, but as students move through the school systems, the numbers of students of ethnic origin, immigrants, and low socio-economic status decrease. According to Lynch (2005), statistics in 2003 show nearly 20% of children under the age of six lived in poverty. This equates to one in every six children. He further asserted:

[c]hildren raised in poverty grow up more likely to engage in crime, use alcohol and other drugs, neglect and abuse their children, and suffer from poor health.

Poor children who fail in school are more likely to endure adulthood without the skills necessary to develop into highly productive members of society able to compete effectively in a global labor market. (p. 1)

Statistics show impoverished children are at-risk. Because so many of them are likely to struggle to find success as adults, they are obviously not being educated effectively.

Ramey and Ramey (2004) supported Lynch's statements by saying the United States supports a society where each member is "literate, proficient in basic math, and facile with means of acquiring and using new knowledge" (p. 471). They further posited as more low-skilled jobs such as factory and service employment are outsourced to countries overseas, the need to become an "academically accomplished society" (p. 472) increases.

In an attempt to meet the needs of the growing league of diverse learners, schools are implementing alternative school education programs. Alternative school education at the secondary level has been on the rise for the past three decades (Lehr & Lange, 2003). These programs have been initiated and implemented to assist school districts in producing students who will be successful, productive citizens. Because these programs serve as an “adjunct to a regular school” (Lehr & Lange, p. 59), alternative schools come with an excessive financial price tag as compared to a normal placement in traditional high school. Alternative school placements provide a lower student to teacher ratio and use specialized curriculum and other resources to support the students. Because of the success at the secondary education level, alternative programs have been developed and are on the rise for younger age students who simply cannot be successful in the traditional school setting.

There is no set definition of alternative school, and its delivery is not systemic. Raywid (1994) grouped alternative school placements into three categories. The first category includes assignment, such as magnet or charter schools where the curriculum is based around certain topics and themes. The second category focuses on educational placement, which is “a last step before expulsion” (Lehr & Lange, 2003, p. 60). Finally, the last category encompasses programs where educational remediation is the focus along with strategies to help students be more successful. The placement in the third type of program can be short or long-term based upon student need. Typically, the last category is the one where many diverse learners, including students with special needs, are being educated (Lehr & Lange).

Many authors and researchers suggest the time for intervention for children comes long before they become candidates for alternative schools or before they become a drop-out statistic (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). The time for involvement arises before they enter primary, middle, or high school. Preschool education is being touted as “[t]he most important grade” (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003, p. 54). While research has not shown consistent growth in intelligence quotients over time (Barnett & Hustedt), evidence exists indicating attendance in high-quality preschool programs can have societal implications long after students leave the K-12 school setting (Lynch, 2005). In addition to increased high school graduation rates, students’ participation in preschool education correlates with lower rates of crime, decreased welfare use, and higher rates of post-secondary education (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). According to Barnett (2007), there is “evidence of significant economic returns from investing in early care and education” (p. 9). While economic returns from preschool education occur at every socio-economic level, Barnett further stated the highest rate of returns come from children of low socio-economic status. Lynch purported participants of high quality preschool and their families reap many long-term benefits such as higher salaries, but it is the government and society itself who gather the highest amount of benefits that “outweigh the costs of these programs” (p. 3).

With evidence pointing to increased educational success for students who attend preschool, why is there disparity in program deliveries in the United States? Why over the past two decades have kindergarten teachers judged 33% of their students have entered school less than ready to learn (Ramey & Ramey, 2004)? How can educators prevent some of their children from entering their schools already equipped with

educational disparities as compared to their peers (Barnett & Belfield, 2006)? What early interventions do students feel support them as learners and make the most difference academically for them?

Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study

In this study, three main concepts will be reviewed: the ratio of growing popularity of preschool in America to the scope of preschool research, thus necessitating the second concept, which involves an appraisal of available research regarding student educational success during their school years, therefore, requiring a look at longitudinal student success.

First, since preschool education is a topic discussed in several different arenas, it is pertinent to bring to light the scope of preschool research and findings that have surfaced in the past four decades. Since preschool attendance grew in the sixties as a part of President Lyndon Johnson's platform to eliminate poverty (Barnett, 2005), the popularity has only increased. After the 1960s, the United States has augmented the attendance of four-year-old children in preschool to over 65% (Magnuson, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2007). In the beginning, preschool intervention was targeted for students who lived in low socio-economic households and was thought to be the silver bullet to even the educational playing field when students entered school (Zigler, 2003).

Changing dynamics in American households have also impacted the popularity for preschool education (Ferrandino, 2001). More mothers entering the workforce brought on a growing need of appropriate early childhood programs (Ferrandino). In addition, as brain research has become renowned, it is evident children who engage in

learning experiences in their preschool years are doing so during a time where “their minds are rapidly developing” (Greene, 2006, p. 556).

Preschool programming over the past decades has shown a disparity in service given to children. Students whose parents have the ability to pay tuition are attending a variety of preschools including those run by private, religious, and school entities. There are still a number of students who fit neither of the above described categories. Children, whose parents do not meet the criteria for “free preschool,” such as Head Start, and are unable to pay tuition, are caught in the proverbial “catch 22” where they do not receive preschool education prior to entering school (Barnett, 2005).

Preschool has also become a political platform on the national, state, and local level. Universal preschool is endorsed by several influential groups including the National School Board Association (Ashford, 2007) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 2008). This platform found its way into many state legislative sessions (Pianta, 2007) and was a hot topic during the 2008 presidential election. Ashford posited 41 states provide some degree of preschool education to their children. While these numbers look extremely positive, there is no consistency in types of services given. The spectrum ranges from a handful of pro-active states providing preschool for every child, while other states provide minimal compliance for targeted populations.

The second concept addressed in this study is to conduct an appraisal of the research available in regards to student educational success. Success can be measured upon entering school (Barnett, 2008), upon high school graduation (Lynch, 2005), or by the completion of a program designed to meet the needs of differentiated learners (Lehr

& Lange, 2003). Many quantitative studies have been conducted on both a short and long-term basis. After spending a considerable amount of time probing for valid research, the researcher has noted there is a sizeable lack of qualitative research in the area of student educational success at every level. It is assumed the reason for the significant amount of quantitative data available is tied to funding and the ability to “support or refute” (Creswell, 2003, p. 7) programs or theories.

While educators appreciate the large body of quantitative research, the void of socially constructed knowledge prevents the body of literature as a whole from being complete (Creswell, 2003). Specifically in the area of preschool, there is a lack of qualitative research. The marginalized voices who can assist educators in understanding these early childhood experiences, or lack of them, in a more detailed manner (Creswell, 2007) can well be the students participating in alternative school situations “who are most disenfranchised from the traditional high school experience” (Lehr & Lange, 2003, p. 60). Educators can use qualitative research to “follow up quantitative research and help explain the mechanisms or linkages in causal theories or models” (Creswell, p. 40) and “empower individuals to share their stories...” (Creswell, p. 40).

Finally, it is imperative to examine student educational success from a longitudinal perspective. Student success has to be viewed in much broader terms than educational attainment even though lower rates of special education placement and student retention are a cost benefit to K-12 programs (Nores, Belfield, Barnett, & Schweinhart, 2005). In today’s nation, education is the springboard and catalyst to improve the nation’s productivity which in turn can increase its citizen’s income levels as well as their ability to become socially mobile (Barnett & Belfield, 2006). Lynch (2005)

stated low skilled workers will be less productive, and long-term consequences of these scenarios will result in fewer contributions into Social Security while possibly being a higher drain on the welfare system. Psacharopoulos (2006) stated in the *Human Capital Theory* that workers who invest in becoming more educated will sacrifice earnings early in their careers, but after a short period of time will recoup their training costs and exceed less trained workers in salary. He further stated this is not just an individual investment, but a societal one as well. According to Nores et al., observing cost-benefit analysis of results of studies conducted over time can lead to answers about “if there is a high rate of return to the general public, there should be political support for preschool” (p. 254). By bringing a synthesis of this literature together, it is possible to link preschool education with long-term economic benefits.

The past four decades have shown an increase in the desire and need to provide preschool education. The concepts reviewed in this study illustrated reasons why preschool education has increased as people’s needs have changed. Many quantitative research studies are available that validate the positive impact preschool can have on students, their learning, as well as the benefit of long-term societal returns. There is, however, a lack of qualitative research, which leaves a void in presenting a full inclusive view of the extent of influence preschool education.

Statement of the Problem

Children’s early years in education can determine their success as students as well as in their chosen careers (MacDonell, 2006). Preschool education is one of the most rapidly growing sectors of education today (Barnett, 2007). The level of importance of preschool varies in each state depending upon the commitment of their legislatures, the

constituents they serve, and the amount of financial backing they are willing to give. Because of the high levels of diversity in program implementation across the United States (Barnett, 2007), the task of providing evidence preschool makes a difference becomes more difficult. Some successful longitudinal studies show a positive impact of preschool at the short, intermediate, and long-term levels (Barnett, 2007; Campbell & Ramey, 1995; Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Temple & Reynolds, 2007). The research is limited to a small number of studies with specific targeted populations. The intent of mentioning the undersized body of longitudinal research in preschool education is not to dissuade its results or to imply their findings are less than worthy. The conclusions obtained from these studies have shown from several different perspectives the value of high-quality preschool on children entering school as well as the long-term impacts on these individuals and society as well (Lynch, 2005).

While evidence exists that these targeted population preschool programs have shown success for their participants, there are disconnects and voids in the research overall between preschool attendance and students who fail to succeed in a traditional high school setting and ultimately are educated in alternative school settings (Lehr & Lange, 2003), or students who drop out of school and are unable to find work in a society where low-skilled jobs are becoming less available (Dugger & Dugger, 1998).

The research fields of preschool education, alternative school education, and at-risk students show an abundance of quantitative studies. However, all three areas are deficient in qualitative research, specifically the stories students can tell about their educational experiences, which Merriam (1998) stated helps clarify an understanding of participant perspective. She further stated:

In contrast to quantitative research, which takes apart a phenomenon to examine component parts (which become the variables of the study), qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole. It is assumed that meaning is embedded in people's experiences and that this meaning is mediated through the investigator's own perceptions. (p. 6)

This qualitative study is being conducted because the link between preschool education, alternative school students, and at-risk students raises questions that need clarification (Merriam, 1998). This study will offer "richly descriptive" (Merriam, p. 8) details from the viewpoint of high school students with the purpose of finding commonalities and threads of information that generate understanding of the role of educational interventions in early childhood.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if southwest Missouri high school students in a regular high school setting, or an alternative education setting, felt their early educational experiences impacted their current educational placements. The primary research questions were as follows:

1. What early childhood experiences, including relationships with teachers and peers, were viewed as assisting them in being successful in an academic setting, from the perspectives of:
 - a. at-risk students in a regular high school setting,
 - b. at-risk students who spent less than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes, and

- c. at-risk students who spent more than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes?
2. What early childhood experiences, including relationships with teachers and peers, were viewed as inhibiting in regards to being successful in an academic setting, from the perspectives of:
 - a. at-risk students in a regular high school setting,
 - b. at-risk students who spent less than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes, and
 - c. at-risk students who spent more than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes?
3. What early childhood educational experiences were reported most frequently by:
 - a. at-risk students in a regular high school setting,
 - b. at-risk students who spent less than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes, and
 - c. at-risk students who spent more than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes?

Limitations, Assumptions, and Design Controls

The procedures used in qualitative research differ extensively when compared to quantitative research. Creswell (2003) stated:

Qualitative procedures stand in stark contrast to the methods of quantitative research. Qualitative inquiry employs different knowledge claims, strategies of inquiry, and methods of data collection and analysis. Although the processes are

similar, qualitative procedures rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse strategies of inquiry. (p. 179)

Because this study presents an instrumental case study, which explored and collected data about early childhood experiences of students within one educational institution (Creswell, 2007), the researcher has limited the findings of this study, which prevents it from being generalized to similar situations. The scope of this study simply reports what participants revealed about their early childhood experiences. The study was further limited by selecting a sample of participants only from one southwest Missouri high school.

A further limitation of qualitative research is that the steps in the process are not standardized, and the procedures undertaken depend upon the researcher's philosophical assumptions. Merriam (1998) brought to light four characteristics of qualitative research of which researchers must be mindful. In the following paragraphs, each of these traits is discussed and the means by which the design of the study controls for these are brought to light. The first characteristic includes making sure the study focuses on the participants' perspective and not the researcher's (Merriam). Because it is impossible to separate the researcher's personal views and values in a qualitative research project (Creswell, 2003), it was imperative to collect multiple sources of data so information could be triangulated (Merriam) in order to add credibility to the study (Creswell). Interviews with three different samples of students, observations in their educational settings (prior to interviews being conducted), and document reviews of their cumulative educational records (conducted after interviewing students to prevent any assumptions being made), were used in order to increase the accuracy of the findings in this study.

The second characteristic Merriam (1998) discussed is knowing the researcher is the primary means of collecting data for the study and is “responsive to the context” (p. 7). Creswell (2003) acknowledged that researchers interpret data collected and frame this information from a personal perspective. As discussed in the previous paragraph, collecting a variety of sources of data helps strengthen the validity of this study. In addition, divulging the personal biases of the researcher helps the “audience [to]...better understand the topic, the setting, or the participants” (Creswell, p. 184). The researcher is an elementary principal in the southwest Missouri school district where this research project occurred. The researcher’s experiences in education span 24 years in a variety of settings including Pre-K-12 education, special education, and administration. The researcher’s background includes being trained in a variety of standardized assessments, and the researcher is qualified to administer cognitive tests. The researcher has been the director of the district preschool for the past six years, and concerns exist in regards to the wide disparity of interventions available to students prior to entering kindergarten. Research indicates there is a connection between how prepared students are when they enter primary school and the later paths they take in education--including traditional high school, alternative school placements, or becoming a high school drop-out (Barnett & Belfield, 2006). The researcher acknowledges the concerns of conducting research within the organization; however, in a district with over 4,000 students spread over eight campuses, where the researcher’s primary focus is with students in pre-K through fourth grade, it is believed appropriate distance from the high school programs and students has been established.

The third characteristic stated the study usually involved going into the natural setting to observe what occurs normally (Merriam, 1998). This research project took place at the selected high school and alternative school in southwest Missouri. The data collection was conducted on campus in settings familiar to the participants. In order to increase the trustworthiness of the study, observations in the school setting occurred prior to personal interviews being conducted. In addition, reviews of written documents were conducted as the final act of gathering information. In addition to the designated order of how the data were collected, field notes, questioning guides with open-ended questions (Weiss, 1994), notes during the interviews, as well as tape recorded interviews were used to strengthen the design of the study.

Finally, Merriam's (1998) qualitative research "primarily employs an inductive research strategy" (p. 7), where hypotheses and questions are raised rather than testing existing theories. The purpose of this study was never intended to demonstrate a causal relationship. This study was developed to gain "intuitive understandings" (Merriam, p. 7) of the perceptions of high school students in regard to their early childhood experiences and to share how these participants made meaning of these individual and collective experiences (Seidman, 2006).

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms were defined to add clarity and direction to the study.

Academic success. This term described more than measurements of cognitive ability. It is also determined by reductions in grade repetition, lower rates of placements in special education, and higher rates of high school graduation (Barnett & Belfield, 2006).

Alternative education. A public school program which addresses diverse needs of students who are not successful in a traditional school setting. This programming is remedial in nature and focuses on issues such as academics and social-emotional to assist students in achieving their educational goals (Lehr & Lange, 2003). In this study, the format of the alternative school classes had students enrolled for their entire school day or for certain periods during the day.

At-risk students in a regular high school setting. The students in this category meet the district's criteria to be considered at-risk but participated in a traditional high school setting for all their classes (District Alternative School Handbook, 2008).

At-risk students who spend less than 50% of their day in an alternative education setting. These students meet criteria to be considered at-risk but participate in a blend of traditional high school classes and alternative education programs. The student is placed in the alternative education program for no more than three class periods a day (District Alternative School Handbook, 2008).

At-risk students who spend more than 50% of their day in an alternative education setting. Students placed in this category spend a majority of their school day in alternative education programs with little or minimal class participation in the traditional high school setting (District Alternative School Handbook, 2008).

Early childhood programs. These programs are designed for children "during their first five years of life" (Barnett, 2008, p. 4). They can consist of federally funded programs such as Head Start, state funded pre-k programs, and private programs.

Educational attainment. The highest level of education one achieves (Nores, et al., 2005).

Social Mobility. Refers to one's ability to move out of the social class in which they are born. This causes a reduction in 'income-related' disparities" (Barnett & Belfield, 2006).

Traditional high school. An educational setting, which most teenage students attend, during their final years in K-12 education. Students are grouped according to grade, follow a prescriptive schedule, attend classes organized by departments or subject area, and earn credits toward graduation by attending those classes (Hoffman, 2002/2003). In this study, students enrolled in the high school participated in a seven hour class day. Most classes were housed in the high school building, but other classes, such as vocational classes, were off-campus and students were transported to those locations.

Summary

The task of educating all students is a concern for school districts across the United States (Lehr & Lange, 2003). With many students failing in traditional high school settings, there has been an increased demand for alternative school programs in order to meet the diverse needs of students as well as increasing high school graduation rates (Lehr & Lange). Many researchers and educators feel the time to intervene to increase student educational success and attainment should come long before a student fails in a regular education setting (Barnett, 2007). Well-designed preschool programs have been shown to have long term impacts on student achievement as well as societal benefits for many years (Barnett).

The purpose of this study was to explore the early childhood experiences of high school age students in three different educational settings including a traditional high

school setting, an alternative high school setting for less than 50% of the school day and an alternative high school setting for more than 50% of the school day all within the same high school. The researcher was looking for early childhood experiences the participants viewed as supportive or inhibitive in their educational journey. The researcher was also interested in knowing if participants felt these experiences influenced their current placements. This instrumental case study gathered data by observation, interviews, and document review. This research will provide important data about early childhood education and will add more qualitative studies to the field of education.

A background of the study, conceptual underpinnings, limitations, and definition of terms were presented in chapter one. In chapter two, a review of current literature concerning preschool education, alternative education, and societal impacts of preschool are presented. The method of research is discussed in chapter three. In chapter four, the results of the research are presented. Finally, in chapter five, a discussion of the research results is provided.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Becoming a productive United States citizen is not a short-term goal. Ramey and Ramey (2004) proclaimed, “a well-educated citizenry is vital to our country’s future as a democracy and as a productive and economically strong nation” (p. 472). Perhaps there is truth to the adage about the future of the world weighing upon its youngest learners when they enter school. A report from the United States General Accounting Office (GAO) in 2000 where testimony was given to the Subcommittee on Children and Families, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, U.S. Senate stated, “[r]esearch shows... to be prepared for school, children need early childhood experiences that foster their physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development” (p. 2).

Concerns arise when children, in most cases those in low-socio economic circumstances, begin their educational careers behind more privileged children (Barnett & Belfield, 2006). These disparities are not isolated in certain parts of the country nor are they specifically a rural or urban concern (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). These students often have difficulty overcoming the gaps in achievement that began before they entered school. They are also at higher risk for entering special education, alternative school programs, or dropping out of school altogether (Lehr & Lange, 2003). According to Ramey and Ramey, “waiting until these children ‘fail’ in school and then providing remedial, pull-out, or compensatory programs or requiring them to repeat grades typically does not sufficiently help these children to catch up and then achieve at grade level” (p. 473).

It has become more important than ever to provide society with educated individuals. In November 2009, The United States Department of Labor reported the unemployment rate in October 2009 had risen to 10.2 %, the highest in the United States in over a quarter of century, which impacted 558,000 workers. The United States Department of Labor further reported the largest job losses were in construction, manufacturing, and retail trades. With more low-skilled employment opportunities being out-sourced to foreign markets (Ramey & Ramey, 2004), it is imperative to begin educating children early. Heckman (1999) stated:

[w]e cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age-a time when it may be too late to intervene. Learning is a dynamic process and is most effective when it begins at a young age and continues through adulthood. (p. 2)

In this instrumental case study, a framework of relevant literature was developed and is presented in the following subsections: a historical perspective of preschool and early childhood education, the impacts of preschool education on students in the K-12 setting, and the long-term societal impacts of attending preschool. The historical portion of the literature encompasses the early beginnings of preschool including the availability prior to the 1960s. The literature also covers President Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty and the founding of the Head Start Program. In order to understand the increase in children attending early childhood programs, it is necessary to discuss how changing family dynamics and government interventions at the federal and state level have impacted the availability of preschool education. It is also important to review successful longitudinal studies that have been under constant examination for the past four decades.

The second subsection focuses on relevant literature about how preschool education impacts students as they progress through the K-12 educational setting. Specific aspects discussed include the impacts early childhood can have on the cognitive, achievement, and social/emotional levels of students. Because growing numbers of students are being educated in alternative delivery systems, it is also necessary to discuss these remedial placements alongside early childhood programs. The final subsection surrounds discussion of literature about the longitudinal impacts preschool and early education can have on society-including post-secondary education, job placements, salaries and wages, crime rates, and social mobility.

Historical Perspectives of Preschool and Early Childhood Education

Early childhood advocate, W. Steven Barnett (2007) stated, “early childhood education is one of the most rapidly growing sectors in American education” (p. 7). Preschool is not a new concept or trend; it has been in existence since the days of the one room schoolhouse. Young students under the age of five were allowed to attend school with their older siblings (Barnett, 2005). At some point in education, a shift emerged where in most cases, only older students attended school. The first official kindergarten in the United States was established in 1873 for young learners (Barnett, 2005). Even though the biggest educational platforms and discussions today revolve around preschool education, in some states even today, kindergarten is not a requirement (Barnett, 2005). Preschool has changed and evolved over the past four decades in its presentation, purpose, and the audience it serves.

Taking a look at the historical educational timeline and major influences of preschool education is an important foundation for understanding its importance today.

America's current stance on preschool education, which began with three programs incepted during the 1960s and 1970s, really originated at the beginning of the 20th century and has evolved with society's demands and culture changing, through the turbulence of the 1960s, leading into the rise in federal government intervention and change of home dynamics of the present. This foundation leads educators into discussing the wide variety of preschool education programming in each state, which varies from little or no service to universal preschool for all four-year-olds.

Early Beginnings Prior to the 1960s

Even though the biggest surge of interest in preschool and early childhood education was yet to come, research in this area did exist for young children prior to the 1960s. Bonney and Nicholson (1958) posited, “[e]ducators, psychologists, and sociologists have generally agreed upon the importance of early childhood in the formation of personality and character” (p. 125). Nursery school was the most common terminology used for early childhood programs. Bradbury and Skeels (1935), who compiled a nursery school bibliography, listed about 840 references to nursery school education. Of the articles listed, only a handful was published prior to 1922. While a portion of early education literature during these years focused around kindergarten, Reavis and Shanner (1937) reported nursery schools were available in 47 states and Puerto Rico. A majority of these programs were “emergency nursery schools” (p. 387), funded by the federal government, and designed to take care of children in disadvantaged situations. They further noted:

[w]ith respect to the social-economic condition of the families cared for by the schools, about 45 percent of the children came from homes with four or more

children, over 46 percent from homes of four rooms or less, and 30 percent from homes with neither toys nor books. The health of the children attending these emergency nursery schools was poor; 43 percent of the children suffered from bad tonsils, 26 percent had defective adenoids, and 20 percent had poor teeth. The data introduced show clearly the need for some type of agency to care for the young underprivileged child. (p. 387)

Reavis and Shanner (1937) reported there were other needs for nursery school programs besides just emergency programs designed to keep children safe and healthy. Other programs included those sponsored by colleges and universities and those run as a business by charging tuition. The university programs were developed “to furnish laboratories for the study of normal young children” (Landreth, 1942, p. 7). Many of the children who were placed in nursery schools were from underprivileged or working families. However, wealthy families also sent their children to nursery school for socialization (Landreth). Foster and Mattson (1939) stated:

The nursery school is one of today’s answers to the search for a good environment for very young children. It is not the only answer. No nursery school can hope to . . . take the place of the home or the church. To some extent, it can take the place of the neighborhood, but in general its function is not to supersede but to supplement the other agencies in the child’s environment. (p. 3)

The purpose behind most of these programs was not academic but social in nature (Koch, 1933). Bonney and Nicholson (1958) supported these program goals when they reviewed studies to determine if “personal social-adjustment” (p. 131) was reached. Koch further supported the social aspects of nursery school when she stated:

One index of the success with which an individual has taken his place in a social group is the degree to which he is enjoyed by the group, the extent to which his associates like to work and play with him. (p. 164)

Landreth posited the purpose behind nursery school is to encourage the social development of young children. She also added “no one, child or adult, is likely to put forth much effort in trying to understand and conform to the wishes and interests of a group of people whom he does not enjoy being with” (p. 116).

In 1950, Hymes reported, “a new term has appeared on the educational scene: Early Childhood Education” (p. 266). He stated the public has an incorrect tendency to use early childhood education synonymously with nursery school, when in actuality; early childhood education encompasses the education and programs from prenatal to the point where children begin to attend school. He further noted the “past half-century has been a time of discovery of the significance of the early years of life” (p. 267) where many professionals, including educators, psychologists, sociologists, and members of the medical field, have a wealth of information about the early childhood years, but each field has acted in isolation rather than communicating and collaborating with each other. He stressed how important it is for the early childhood teacher to develop “... an acquaintance with cultural anthropology and with sociology” (p. 268) since they are working with children who are experiencing their first cultural occurrences.

While the research prior to 1960 indicated an increased interest in early childhood, especially from the 1930s on, Hymes (1950) noted, “the field is still too young for the impact on school practice to be assayed” (p. 269).

A Changing Society and Culture

The early 1960s was a time of hopefulness and prosperity, and because of the baby boom, more children were entering American schools (Kagan, 2002). The Sputnik incident never left anyone's mind as a nation feared the Soviet Union would surpass the United States in educating its youth (Kagan). This was also the time when the government felt it "could solve deep-rooted social problems, such as racism and poverty" (Kagan, p. 520). The Kennedy administration only gave surface endorsement to programs for the underprivileged, but after Kennedy's death in 1963, President Johnson made these issues the cornerstone of his domestic platform (Kagan) thus signaling the beginning of programs supported at the federal level.

Federal government intervention. As part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, the Head Start preschool program was initiated. Head Start is a targeted program for children in low-socio economic settings and was designed to reduce the educational discrepancies children in poverty face upon entering school (Barnett, 2005). Head Start began as an eight week summer intervention program (Kagan, 2002). Both President Johnson and his advisor, Sargent Shriver, brother-in-law to the late President Kennedy, had roots in education (Kagan). They believed education was power and that Head Start was one program that could fight poverty (Kagan). The areas Head Start is targeted to improve are "children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, as well as to support their parents in a variety of ways" (Barnett & Belfield, 2006, p. 81). In addition to education, the program provides comprehensive services in "medical, dental, mental health and nutrition services" (Greene, 2006, p. 560) and transportation is provided for the students to encourage and support participation. Head

Start requirements are based on family income (Barnett, 2008). While some research has shown the Head Start Program improves children's social skills, writing, and word and letter recognition, other studies have not found significant differences (Abbott-Shim, Lambert & McCarty, 2003). Peebles-Wilkins (2007) supported these findings when she stated:

numerous evaluations of the long-standing Head Start program have shown that early interventions improves socialization skills in the long term, but by third grade children who attend Head Start are intellectually no different from their counterparts who did not attend Head Start. (p. 45)

Even though the research reports mixed results, the federal government continues to fund the initiative and has even recommended increases in funding. In 2003, Head Start cost the federal and state governments nearly six billion dollars (Greene, 2006). The program serves approximately 900,000 three and four year old children, which is representative of 12% of children in the nation (Barnett & Belfield, 2006), and employs one in five preschool teachers (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003).

Another response to the War on Poverty was the inception of Title One. This entitlement, enacted into law under the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was the first time the federal government had given financial support to elementary education, which assisted schools in helping children living in poverty by providing extra resources and instruction (Spraggins, 1968). Preschool has been an acceptable use of Title One funds since the inception of the 1965 Act (United States Department of Education, 2004a). In the 2007 school year, these funds were used to support more than 17 million children across the United States. While a majority of these monies were used

in elementary school, approximately 3% of these funds were used to serve three and four year old children in preschool (United States Department of Education, n.d.). Preschools using Title One funds use those funds to target students in poverty, are limited in English speaking, or often to students with disabilities (United States Department of Education, 2009). A parent component is also included in the criteria.

One of the purposes of Title One is to decrease the gap in achievement between students of poverty and their more affluent counter-parts (United States Department of Education, 2004 a). By providing high quality preschool with proven approaches, children can enter the public school arena ready to meet the challenges of successful learning, which combats school failure (United States Department of Education, 2004, a). The Chicago Child-Parent Center Program, a long-term preschool program, was one of the first school districts to utilize Title One funds to support programming for preschool children (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002).

In the seventies, PL 94-142 was landmark legislation for educating students with disabilities. This legislation evolved into the Individual's with Disabilities Act (IDEA), serving children from birth to high school (United States Department of Education, 2004 b.). Early Childhood Special Education- Part B, section 619 of IDEA speaks specifically to children ages 3-5 with disabilities. This is a targeted program where students must qualify to receive services. Also available under IDEA is Part C. This part of the federal law provides intervention for children between the ages of birth to three years (United States Department of Education, 2004b). Many students who participate in Part C services transition to Part B on their third birthday (United States Department of Education, n.d.). The range of services provided includes specific related services, such

as speech therapy, to center-based preschool programs (United States Department of Education, n.d.). Funding is based on the fiscal amount each state received in 1997 along with the general state population and a formula for figuring how many children live in poverty.

Most states serve as the fiscal agent to distribute monies to local education agencies (United States Department of Education, n.d.). The program focuses on early literacy and preparing children to successfully transition into school. Each state is required under IDEA to have guidelines and procedures in place to find children with disabilities and children suspected of having disabilities and upon meeting criteria, provide them with appropriate service (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, n.d.).

Changes in Home Dynamics

The role of the family and the woman's role as the homemaker have changed significantly in the past few decades (Boschee & Jacobs, 1998). A child of two working parents is a reality for most families and is not tied to social class (Hertz & Ferguson, 1996). The following portion of literature reviews how changes in the home and family dynamics have also increased the need for outside child-care and preschool education. Lewin (2005) reported in the *New York Times* that families with two parents working have now surpassed one parent working in homes with children and increased since the seventies by more than 20%. Ferrandino (2001) also supported these findings by stating the changing dynamics in American households, with two parent working households, have stimulated the need for high quality childcare and preschool education (Ferrandino, 2001). Daycare provisions for children outside the home can be traced back to the turn of

the century (Boschee & Jacobs). Even though ideological dilemmas still exist about who should raise young children, their mother or a caretaker (Boschee & Jacobs), working mothers outside the home have become more commonplace as “couple[s] come to terms with integrating two jobs and the presence of young children in the household” (Hertz & Ferguson, p. 249).

Single parent homes have also risen in the past forty years. The percentage of unmarried mothers rose almost 30% in this time period (Child Trends Data Bank, 2003). Goldstein (1999) reported the past few decades have shown an increase in a “long-term trend of rising marital instability” (p. 409). These statistics are important because they show these children are more likely to grow up in a home with only one parent (Child Trends Data Bank).

Changing home environments for children, including single parent homes and two working parent homes, have increased the need for daycare and preschool. This past decade it was reported 70% of mothers in the workforce have preschool children, a number which has grown increasingly over the last half century (Ryan, 2006). According to Pianta (2007), 70% of three and four year old students attend some type of early education programming prior to entering school. While it is logical to assume preschool attendance for children of working mothers has increased, the non-working sector of students attending programs has increased as well (Barnett, 2007). While more prosperous families have access and can pay for private high quality preschool (Greene, 2006), other families are limited in their choices and many times must sacrifice quality because of cost (Barnett, 2008). Targeted preschool programs, however, appear to not only support children in increasing their school readiness, but also allow opportunity for

parents, in the cases of the availability of full day programs, to “increase low-income families’ reliance on work rather than welfare” (United States General Accounting Office, 2000, p. 2).

Review of Three Preschool Programs

The following longitudinal preschool studies have served as a springboard for preschool research over the past four decades. While there are many more large-scale projects, these studies have followed their subjects through adulthood and have been able to provide longitudinal data in regards to the long-term impacts of preschool education. These three preschool programs are the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, the Abecedarian Study, and the Chicago Child-Parent Center Program.

High/Scope Perry Preschool Program (PPP). This study was conducted in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in the 1960s. The impact experimental study, consisting of a treatment and control group, was compiled of 123 three and four year old African American children from low socio-economic backgrounds (Belfield, Nores, Barnett, & Schweinhart, 2006). Children in the control group were in regular home daycare prior to entering school (Temple & Reynolds, 2007). The children in the treatment group were accepted into a preschool program that used a “child-initiated learning approach” (Temple & Reynolds, p. 130). The program was implemented as a half-day program and was connected with the public school system (Temple & Reynolds). Teachers made weekly home visits to each family (Temple & Reynolds). The program hosted a 1:5 teacher to student ratio (Belfield, et al.) and the mean class size was 22 (Temple & Reynolds). The expenditures per student for participation in the two year program exceeded \$15,000.00 per student (Belfield et al.). Follow-up studies, conducted at ages

27 and 40, show students who participated in the PPP had higher rates of educational attainment and later in life had a greater likelihood to return to school to obtain higher education degrees than students who did not participate (Belfield et al.).

The Carolina Abecedarian Project (ABC). This university project took place during a thirteen year period in the 1970s and 1980s (Barnett, 1995). The purpose of implementing the ABC project was to “test the degree to which continual, consistent enrichment of the early environment might alter the negative trend toward developmental retardation and also reduce academic failure in such children” (Campbell & Ramey, 1995, p. 746). The African-American subjects were members of a small underprivileged town in the south (Campbell & Ramey). The 111 children participating in the randomized trial were assigned to either a control group or an experimental group where they received full time, year-round educational care until the children entered kindergarten (Barnett, 2008). Follow-up studies at different benchmarks have shown gains in student achievement and short-term improvements in I.Q. (Barnett).

The Chicago Child-Parent Center Program (CPC). According to Barnett (2008), the CPC is “the most rigorous long-term, large-scale study of pre-K” (p. 11). The program was incepted in the late 1960s and was a program implemented by the public school system. The program obtained funding from Title I, and according to Reynolds et al. (2002) is “after Head Start, the nation’s oldest federally funded preschool program” (p. 270). A targeted half-day program for low-income students, educational intervention began at age three (Barnett). The program consisted of certified teachers with teachers aides for each classroom. A strong parent component was also included. The CPC was unique because it operated in multiple sites in Chicago, and it has maintained its sample

size over the years (Barnett). Many studies have been conducted, and all have found the educational benefits to be positive (Barnett).

State Government Intervention

Some states have provided preschool interventions since the 1960s (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2008). Although this was rare, most state interventions for targeted populations began in the 1990s. Barnett and Robin (2006) noted an increase of 100,000 children attending preschool in the first part of this decade. Today, all but 12 states provide some type of intervention to their youngest learners (NIEER).

Differentiated levels of programming. The quality of preschool service as well as the financial support offered in each state varies greatly. NIEER (2008) offers ten quality standards to be considered a high-quality preschool. These indicators include using comprehensive learning standards, teachers with an education degree with emphasis in early childhood, assistants to the teacher have at least 60 hours of higher education, at least 15 hours a year are allowed for professional development, class sizes are 20 students or lower with a teacher/staff ratio of 1:10 or better. There are vision, hearing, health, and one support service, and finally at least one meal a day served. Only two states, Alabama and North Carolina, meet all ten of the standards for their preschool programs.

Spending for preschool also varies from state to state. New Jersey and Oregon spend the most state dollars on their state preschool initiatives (NIEER, 2008). Funding discussions occur nationwide for the benefit and the detriment of preschool programs. In 2004, Jacobson reported 35% of governors mentioned preschool in their state of the state address, and it was on their political platform as a priority. Of the 16 states mentioned,

only 11 of those states actually proposed an increase in monies for early childhood education. Four states not included in the above percentages actually recommended decreases in funding (Jacobson, 2004). When President Bush was in office, he worked for the reauthorization of Head Start by proposing to “allow up to eight states to have more control over Head Start money” (Jacobson, p. 2). This symbolizes a paradigm shift from where early childhood education historically has focused primarily on federal funds to implement public preschool to seeking a means of channeling multiple sources of funding to provide early childhood intervention (Johns, 2005). Barnett and Hustedt (2003) supported this by stating high quality programming can be accomplished by using a combination of federal, state, and local monies (Barnett & Hustedt). Using resources collaboratively increases the likelihood of merging existing programs, which will provide consistent preschool implementation with uniform standards (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003).

Universal preschool. As noted earlier, public funding for early childhood programs has existed for the past several decades to assist children from low-income, in hardship, and of working families. Greene (2006) reported, “there are currently two sectors of children who receive a preschool education; those who can afford a private education and those who are beneath the poverty line and qualify for federally funded programs” (p. 555). Because targeted programs such as Head Start use income as a criteria, families whose incomes sit right above the threshold of the poverty line or dip back and forth above it and under it are not given access to free preschool (Barnett & Belfield, 2006). Universal preschool provides free education to all four year old students (Greene). Several states including Oklahoma, Georgia, New York, New Jersey, and Florida already have adopted the universal initiative, and a number of other states are

seriously considering adoption (Barnett, 2005). There are big endorsements from educational organizations such as the National School Board Association (Ashford, 2007), The American Federation of Teachers (MacDonell, 2006), and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (Ferrandino, 2001) as long as funding does not take away from current programs (Ashford).

Implementation of universal preschool varies from state to state. The program in Oklahoma is implemented through the public school systems and through the Head Start Program (Gormley, Phillips, & Gayer, 2008). Even though the federal guidelines for Head Start do not require teachers to have a degree, in Oklahoma, in order to teach preschool, lead teachers must have a degree and certification in early childhood (Gormley et al.). In Georgia, preschool is implemented through a variety of sources including the public schools, private vendors, and Head Start (NIEER, 2008).

The biggest obstacle in the adoption of universal preschool is cost. Greene (2006) states, “it would be undeniably expensive to build, staff, and maintain public education at a more expansive level” (p. 560). Lynch (2005) stated the beginning outlay of capital would reach in the billions of dollars. It would be worth the cost as he noted the following:

The annual deficit due to the ECD program would shrink for the next 14 years. In 2021, the deficit would turn into a surplus that would grow every year thereafter culminating in a net budgetary surplus of \$167 billion in 2050...the reason for this fiscal pattern is fairly obvious. Program costs will grow fairly steadily for the first decade and a half... [after] 15 years, we will see increased earnings as the first and subsequent groups of children [who were enrolled in a high-quality ECD

program] enter the workforce and thus government budgets will benefit from higher tax revenues and lower welfare expenditures. (p. 5)

Another area to address when considering universal preschool is the differences in programming. Approximately 75% of the nation's four year olds and 50% of three year olds attend some type of preschool programming (Barnett, 2008). Programming is widely varied based on income, standards, enrollment, design, and quality (Barnett).

One concern that arises when discussing differences in preschool education and implementation revolves around the teacher. Johns (2005) posited, "well-trained teachers are a critical component of a high quality preschool program" (p. 31). In the Head Start Program, under federal guidelines, preschool teachers who work with students are not required to have a four year education degree (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003; Gormley et al., 2008). Barnett and Hustedt also stated many programs hire under-qualified teachers for their programs, and in many cases, these teachers are paid about half what a teacher makes in the public schools. By applying consistently what has been learned from successful long-term preschool programs such as the High/Scope Perry School Program and the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention program, it is known that investing in highly-qualified early childhood instructors and providing them with low student to teacher ratios can improve student achievement over a lifetime (Barnett & Hustedt). By offering better pay, the pool of competent teachers will increase, which ultimately impacts student learning (Barnett & Hustedt).

The previous portion of literature was designed to provide a review of early childhood programming available from the mid-20th century to the present, as well as view reasons why these programs became prevalent. In the following section, the impacts

of preschool education will be discussed at the primary, middle, and high school levels. Cognitive, social, and academic achievement will be discussed, as well as differentiated learning opportunities that support non-traditional learners.

The Impact of Preschool Education on Students in the K-12 Setting

Successful early childhood programs reach beyond the first few years of a child's life. Studies have shown short-term, intermediate, and long-term results are achieved when children are provided with appropriate interventions. The following subsection reviewed preschool literature impacting students at crucial points in their educational careers including entering school, going beyond the primary grades, and completing a high school education.

The Influence of Preschool on Students Entering School

Every child enters America's public school systems with differentiating levels of educational experiences, cultural backgrounds, and skills (Margetts, 2002). Gorey (2001) reported, "conventional wisdom certainly seems to support the notion that educational experiences early in childhood are beneficial" (p. 9). Schippers (2007) added her support of this line of thinking when she said, "anyone who works with youngsters from low-income backgrounds notices that they often begin school far behind their middle-class peers" (p. 1). Goldsmith and Rees (2007) argued this same point and said the "insurmountable development gaps" (p. 42) cannot be overcome without high quality early education programs.

There are many pieces of research that support the impact of preschool on children who are entering school. Sammons, Elliot, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, and Taggart (2004) conducted an extensive study in England and analyzed cognitive

attainment of children entering primary school. Their findings suggest that preschool experiences can reduce the cognitive gap and prepare students to be more successful upon entering school. Cognitive areas are not the only ones influenced by being in a preschool environment. Magnuson, Lahaie and Waldfogel (2006) maintained children who attend preschool programs enter kindergarten more academically ready in math and reading than their counterparts who attend less academically focused environments. Margetts (2002) posited the transition into the first year of schooling is one of the major factors children have to overcome in their early years and that attendance in preschool helps make this shift more successful. Hustedt, Barnett, Jung, and Figueras (2008), after analyzing the performance of 924 students who attended the New Mexico PreK initiative, found this program to impact students' math, vocabulary, and literacy skills upon entering kindergarten.

Early research in the areas of preschool focused primarily on cognitive development gains in children. Lynch (2005) reported children who attended high-quality preschool programs tended to perform higher on IQ tests upon entering primary school. Similar results were found in a study conducted by Magnuson et al. (2006) where early childhood programming for three and four year old children showed improvement in their performance at the onset of their educational careers. Focusing only on cognitive improvements in the early years of education is misleading and limiting. Lynch (2005) stated data show there are other benefits to garner. He said:

...long-term studies of ECD participants have found that exclusive attention on IQ test scores is misplaced and significant benefits to well-designed and well-executed ECD programs do in fact exist. Such programs enable children to enter

school “ready to learn,” helping them to succeed in school and throughout their lives. (p. 2)

Ramey and Ramey (2004) supported this line of thinking by stating research has substantiated “positive early transitions to school” (p. 473), can prevent school failure, and help reduce the occurrences of negative learning characteristics, which can lead to dropping out of school before graduation.

If early childhood programs did not exist, some children would begin school at a disadvantage, which not only impacts their learning in school, but their lives as a whole (Carter, 2002). Lewis (2005) put forward, “if regular schooling is going to be successful with all children, the playing field should be as level as possible from the beginning” (p. 179). Carter (2002) stated low income children in our country begin school scoring 20 points lower than their more affluent peers on vocabulary assessments. This is due to the fact that low-income students are afforded less real-life opportunities, which can increase their vocabulary skills. He further noted, “children who attended preschools in which no more than 20 percent of the students are from low-income families made the greatest gains” (p. 1). After six months of preschool, the vocabulary scores of the low-income students were at the same level as their peers (Carter).

Waldfoegel and Zhai (2008) conducted a study of the effects of public preschool expenditures on math and science scores across several different countries. They found “there are small but significant positive effects ...on the math and science scores of fourth graders” (p. 25). They also found preschool intervention prevented students from scoring at low levels of proficiency and “an increase in preschool expenditures of \$100 per child would lift children’s math scores by .07 to .13 of a standard deviation and

would raise their science scores by .03 to .07 of a standard deviation” (p. 25). Several researchers have concluded the biggest gains for achievement are for students who are from low socio-economic backgrounds (Barnett, 2007; Carter; Waldfogel & Zhai).

Margetts (2002) posited the transition into school is one of the major life events children must face. These changes are not only academic, but social and behavioral adjustments are also important (Margetts). Brooks-Gunn (2003) supported this by stating “kindergarten teachers are concerned with children’s emotional regulation and impulse control in the classroom (taking turns, ability to sit and pay attention) just as much as they are with children’s ability to count and to associate letters with sounds” (p. 4). Johns (2005), who reported on California’s investment in early childhood education, agreed when she stated “evidence continues to indicate the powerful effects of high quality preschool programs on children’s later academic success” (p. 30). She further noted educators, specifically principals and kindergarten teachers, are endorsing early interventions because they “clearly see the increased readiness of the incoming kinder[gartener]s who have attended preschool” (p. 30).

There is research to support the type of programming a child receives in early childhood education also impacts their later school success. Magnuson, Ruhm, and Waldfogel (2007) purported center-based programs for children offer the highest rates of outcome when children enter school. Barnett and Belfield (2006) concurred with these findings but qualified this thinking by stating there are many programs available and results will vary “with the frequency and duration of the intervention provided” (p. 80). They also claimed the programs which have the highest rate of success are those that are:

systematically, regularly, and frequently engaged in a mix of teacher-led and child-initiated activities that enhance the development of language, knowledge of concepts and skills, problem-solving abilities, self-regulation and other socio-emotional skills, attitudes, values, and disposition. In the worst programs, where little is planned, children wander aimlessly with few interesting and thought-provoking interactions, activities, or materials and teachers are unresponsive to their interests or needs. To the surprise of no one, the better programs have the better outcomes. (p. 81)

Barnett and Belfield further stated there is clear evidence indicating child-directed interventions have higher return rates in regards to student academic when compared to programs which focus solely on parent interventions. High quality interventions for children are not as low cost as programs that focus only on training parents and are accompanied by a more expensive price tag (Barnett & Belfield).

In summary, there is a vast amount of literature in regards to the impacts of preschool intervention on children entering school. While there are studies that have produced varied results, a significant amount have shown positive impacts for children. Barnett and Belfield (2006) reported many of these studies have been compiled and reviewed through quantitative analysis. They stated:

[a]cross these studies, the average initial effect on cognitive abilities is . . . roughly equivalent to 7 or 8 points on an IQ test with a 100-point scale and a standard deviation of 15. Average effects on self-esteem, motivation, and social behavior are also positive, though somewhat smaller. (p. 80)

While a great deal of literature exists where the focus is upon students entering school, there are many questions regarding how long preschool impacts a student's education. In the section that follows, the impact preschool plays on students beyond the first few years of school will be examined. Literature will be reviewed comparing student success rates in regards to special education, remedial placements, and high school graduation rates.

Educational Persistence Beyond the Primary Grades

While educators generally agree early childhood interventions do provide positive effects on children entering school, research has found in many cases the results tend to fade over time and are not sustained at higher levels throughout a child's educational career (Barnett & Belfield, 2006; Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Lynch, 2005). Brooks-Gunn surmised it is impractical to think the results of short-term interventions such as preschool will have "indefinite" results. She further stated, "it is magical thinking to expect that if we intervene in the early years, no further help will be needed by children in the elementary school years and beyond" (p. 1).

Sustaining results accomplished in preschool also depends on K-12 education students receive after attending preschool. Students who entered good quality schools where the environment provided for lower class sizes, additional support, and a focus on parent involvement saw gains made in early childhood continued (Barnett, 1995). Ramey and Ramey (2004) acknowledged good schools do support students who have developmental delays upon entering school. They further noted these students can make the same amount of progress as other students do during the nine month period they are in school. Concerns exist when students enter school already delayed and are expected to

make more progress than what is reasonable to expect (Ramey & Ramey). Brooks-Gunn (2003) supported this by offering a realistic perspective when she stated:

expect[ing] effects to be sustained throughout childhood and adolescence, at their initial high levels, in the absence of continued high quality schooling, however, is to believe in magic. Indeed, the fact that effects are sustained, albeit at more modest levels, through adolescence in some cases, highlights the potential power of such initiatives. (p. 3)

In order to determine if cognitive and achievement scores could be sustained over long periods of time, Campbell and Ramey (1995) did a 15-year follow-up of children who participated in the Abecedarian Preschool Program. Students were given cognitive and achievement tests. While there were positive differences in the cognitive areas, they did not reach a level of significance. The biggest and most noteworthy gains were in the achievement areas of both reading and math (Campbell & Ramey). For over a decade, the students who had participated in the Abecedarian Project scored higher in these areas than the control group (Ramey, Campbell, Burchinal, Skinner, Gardner, & Ramey, 2000). These scores were significant at the .05 level in both subject areas (Campbell & Ramey). Since the subjects were placed in treatment and control groups by random assignment, the results can be attributed to the early interventions given (Campbell & Ramey). Ou and Reynolds (2006) found that early intervention programs in the Chicago Preschool Program directly impacted high school graduation rates by significant rates.

More than achievement and cognitive skills are impacted by preschool intervention. Barnett and Belfield (2006) reviewed data from various studies. They found children who attend preschool programs, specifically Head Start and public school programs, have

fewer incidents of grade retention and placement in special education or remedial programs and high school graduation rates increased up to 20% (Barnett & Belfield, 2006). High school graduation rates are important as it “has become a basic requirement for economic success” (Ou & Reynolds, 2006, p. 191). In addition, Barnett and Belfield, 2006 stated high school graduation rates impact the next generation’s educational attainment. They posited “[b]oth mother’s and father’s education are statistically significant influences on a child’s graduation and years of schooling” (p. 89). Significant differences existed for males who participated in the Chicago Preschool Project by having higher high school graduation rates when compared to the control group (Ou & Reynolds, 2006). Ironically, even studies that did not find any significant cognitive and academic gains found fewer placements in special education and remedial programs, results similar to those mentioned above (Barnett & Belfield). These findings are important as those programs cost up to two and half times that of regular education (Ramey & Ramey, 2004) and public education will spend less if fewer children spend time in these programs (Lynch, 2005). These programs are more expensive because they tend to have lower student-teacher ratios, less students, flexible scheduling, and curriculum individually formulated for each student’s needs (Lehr & Lange, 2003). Even if placements occur, necessity outweighs cost because these programs are essential due to the fact that students who are diagnosed with disabilities or are at risk of school failure have difficulty finding success in a traditional school setting. D’Angelo and Zemanick (2009) reported the reasons for this are:

[these students have] been falling behind, failing multiple grades, becoming disruptive in the classroom when they actually showed up for school, and

dropping out. These students were not experiencing success in the classroom because they were square pegs being forced into a round hole of education that did not work for them. (p. 212)

Ultimately, while these programs carry increased expenditures to school districts, it is still more cost effective than long-term societal costs (Lehr & Lange, 2003).

The three longitudinal preschool programs, the Perry Preschool Project, The Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention, and the Chicago Child-Parent Center Program, discussed earlier in this paper, are the backbone and baseline for early childhood intervention. These studies have been analyzed and replicated over and over from different perspectives and by different researchers (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Using different lenses allows the studies to shed more information to other areas. Looking beyond the benefits already mentioned previously in this paper, Lynch (2005) noted children who attended these noteworthy programs have lower high school drop-out rates, continued their education post-secondary more often than the control group, experienced better nutrition, experienced less child abuse, and had fewer teenage pregnancies (Lynch, 2005). In addition, Ramey et al. (2000) found unintended benefits to preschool education. The mothers of children who attended the Abecedarian Project, most specifically teenage mothers, made personal gains in their own education and secured more employment opportunities when compared to the parents of children in the control group.

The previous part reviewed literature regarding the impacts preschool education has on students beyond the primary grades. The studies investigated as well as other information provided has shown preschool can have strong and positive influences

throughout a child's educational career. This is clearly only one point of reference that reviewed the impact of preschool education. The third and final section of this literature review focuses on the researcher's examination in regards to the impact preschool has on society.

The Long-Term Societal Impacts of Attending Preschool

Studies have shown investing in high-quality preschool education has long-term impacts beyond a child's school years (Lynch, 2005). Barnett (2007) brought to light, "since 1960, approximately forty long-term studies provide evidence of significant economic returns from investing in early care and education" (p. 9). By providing high quality early childhood education, society invests in human capital where the monetary return over time far outweighs the initial investment (Barnett & Belfield, 2006). These influences go beyond personal gain and create a domino effect on society by effecting families, tax payers, social programs, and the government (Lynch).

Upon looking at all of the evidence presented in this section, one can only conclude the initial investment in students by providing preschool education goes beyond their individual success at a young age, but in reality is outlay or investment on society. The researcher initially reviewed the impacts preschool education had on attendance at the post-secondary level as well as students' ability of attaining jobs and higher wages. Finally, the researcher highlighted how preschool education can reduce cost related to crime and its impact on social mobility.

Post Secondary Education

There is mixed information on determining if preschool education impacts students' opportunities to attend and obtain higher education degrees (Barnett & Belfield,

2006). Most analysis of early childhood programs found modest, not significant, impacts on students attending higher education. Ou and Reynolds (2006) found that even without levels of significance, all programs found higher rates of college attendance, and students who continued their education past high school had a 28.5% improvement over the students in the control group who did not receive the preschool treatment.

There are some exceptions to the overall results. By looking at subgroup information, Ou and Reynolds (2006) reported that a significant level of females who attended the Chicago Preschool Project also attended post-secondary education. The Abecedarian Project, who reported 99% of their participants who were followed through adulthood showed students who received services in the project were “three times more likely to attend a four-year college than were control-group children: 36% versus 12%” (Ramey & Ramey, 2004, p. 486). The Perry-Preschool Program, when analyzed by Nores et al.. (2005), found some interesting results. They stated:

Across all individuals, [educational] attainment is low, indicative of very difficult early life circumstances. The program group has higher education attainment: the difference is discernible at age 27, and at least maintained or even accentuated by age 40. The difference is slight for program males, who are more likely to graduate from high school. And in two cases, progress to college after age 27, for females, the differences are more striking: by age 27, the program group is one-third as likely to be a high school drop-out, with further educational attainment-of associate, bachelor’s or masters’ degrees- by age 40. (p. 247)

Even though obtaining a college education at a public university does carry some cost to society, the increase in wages and compensation because of educational

attainment provide a higher benefit to society (Reynolds et al., 2002). Taking advantage of higher education can also be viewed from an economic perspective. Psacharopoulos (2006) reported, “expenditures on education...are treated as investment in human capital. The value of such investment is measured by the returns it yields over the lifetime of a more educated person relative to a less educated one...over and above the investment costs” (p. 114). This leaves a need to address how preschool impacts job placement and the impacts on the salaries of students who participated in preschool.

Job Placement and the Impact on Wages and Salaries

Barnett and Belfield (2006) reported there is a direct correlation to preschool attendance and the impact this has on the participants’ employment and earnings. Four different areas have been noted as being impacted. First, the participants and their immediate families benefit because of higher wage earnings (Lynch, 2005). Individuals who participate in preschool programs are more likely to graduate from high school. This directly impacts their ability not only to earn income but to do so at a higher rate. Psacharopoulos (2006) revealed high school graduates will generate \$260,000 more in salary than those who drop out of high school. Lewis (2005) reported results from the Perry Preschool Project and noted participants had “higher incomes [and] were more likely to be employed” (p. 179). Barnett and Belfield also noted “reasonable earnings advantages [of higher salaries] of approximately \$30,000” (p. 87) over students who drop out of high school. Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, and Miller-Johnson (2002) found the participants in the Abecedarian Project did not differ significantly from the control group on how many of the participants were employed, but a significant number of the children who were involved in the program held higher numbers of skilled jobs. In

addition, immediate benefits for the parents of the participants of children who participated in the Abecedarian Project also existed. Ramey et al. (2000) found one benefit for parents was the opportunity to return to the work force because their children were in preschool. Lynch (2005) stated the most important impact early childhood education plays is the “higher future earnings result from higher productivity of as much as a fifth of our future workforce and will translate into higher Gross Domestic Product (GDP) levels” (p. 5).

A second monetary area impacted by higher rates of earnings by preschool participants is government tax revenues at the local, state, and federal level (Lynch, 2005; Reynolds et al., 2002). Lynch substantiated the effects preschool has on participants and their families by stating “[they] will have higher incomes and pay more taxes than non-participants” (p. 4). Reynolds et al. (2002) and Nores et al. (2005) found higher measured and projected earnings of the Perry Preschool Program added to tax revenues. In addition, when analyzing the Chicago Child-Parent Center Program, they used conservative figures including “15% federal tax, 3% state income tax, and 15.3% FICA tax” (p. 276). The value of the projected revenues is “projected to be \$64, 673 per participant” (p. 276). Psacharopoulos (2006) states workers who fail to complete high school will generate approximately \$60,000 less in tax revenue than those who do and “the United States loses \$192 billion (1.6% of GDP) in combined income and tax revenue with each cohort of 18-year-olds who never complete high school. Increasing the educational attainment of that cohort by one year, would recoup nearly half those losses” (p. 132).

A third factor indicated children who attend preschool are more likely to be employed and not to receive welfare benefits (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003; Lynch, 2005). Barnett and Belfield (2006) stated children who live in poverty are more likely to use welfare. Many situations have generational dependency upon public support mainly because of low employment rates and because there is heightened awareness that public assistance exists as a primary option (Barnett & Belfield). Barnett and Belfield further noted, “there is more scope for preschool to break the link between family behaviors and child outcomes” (p. 88).

The fourth and final area where preschool can be viewed as having a positive impact fiscally is on the current social security system. Higher wage earnings by preschool participants will help support those individuals who currently partake of America’s national retirement system (Lynch, 2005). After 2018, there is “a growing gap between benefits paid out and tax revenues” (Lynch, p. 8). Lynch posited the impact high quality preschool can have cross generational lines, support the future solvency of the program, as well as provide immediate positive effects. He further stated:

The current generation of children will benefit from higher earnings, higher material standards of living, and an enhanced quality of life. Future generations will benefit because they will be less likely to grow up in families living in poverty. And earlier generations of children who are now in retirement or nearing retirement, will benefit by being supported by higher earning workers who will be better able to financially sustain our public retirement benefits program such as Social Security. (p. 6)

Effects of Education on Crime

Research indicates children who attend high-quality preschool programs are more likely to graduate from high school and have lower rates of illegal activity (Lynch, 2005). Children who grow up in poverty without educational support are more likely to engage in illegal activities which can lead to unlawful acts as adults (Barnett & Belfield, 2006). Reynolds et al. (2002) stated, “the strongest predictor of adult crime is juvenile crime” (p. 277). According to Barnett and Belfield, there is a strong “heritability of criminal activity, particularly for men” (p. 88). They also noted children who live in poverty are more likely to live in houses where domestic violence exists and later to be engaged in abusing their own partners. Nores et al. (2005) reported findings from reports of participants of the Perry Preschool Project at age 40. These findings indicated while there was criminal activity from misdemeanors to felonies reported for the treatment and control group, there was overall less illegal activity by the treatment group. Reynolds et al. (2002) also noted lower incarceration rates for program participants. Psacharopoulos (2006) stressed education is the solution to reduce crime rates. He asserted raising high school graduation rates by only 1% among males between the ages of 20 and 60 would reduce crime-related costs by 1.4 billion dollars a year.

Social Mobility and Preschool Education

Barnett and Belfield (2006) posited, “preschool may enhance social mobility” (p. 87). This occurs by changing children’s socio-economic status and the behaviors associated with that standing and allowing them “greater socio-economic success than did their parents” (p. 74). Psacharopoulos (2006) supported the position of Barnett and Belfield by stating education is the key in boosting social mobility. He stated, “equity can

be manifested in many different ways, such as the opportunity to progress to a higher level of education regardless of one's socioeconomic background or the enjoyment of education outcomes...by the poorer groups in the population" (p. 118).

By providing high quality education, a means has been afforded to allow a person the opportunity to raise their income thus moving themselves out of the lowest income brackets and gaining social mobility (Barnett & Belfield, 2006). This also impacts the second generation of preschool participants. Brooks-Gunn (2003) surmised higher incomes, especially in a child's early years, are related to higher high school graduation rates and these families are more capable of providing learning opportunities to their children. In addition, the financial investment returns its dividends at a much higher rate. Lynch (2005) affirmed this when he reported on the yields of the Perry Preschool Project. He stated:

[the] annual real rates of return on public investments in the Perry Preschool Project were 12% for the non-participating public and government and 4% for participants, so that total returns equaled 16%. Thus, it is advantageous even for non-participating taxpayers to pay for these programs. To comprehend how extraordinarily high these rates of return on ECD investments are, consider that the highly touted annual real rate of return on the stock market that prevailed between 1871 and 1998 was just 6.3%. (p. 3)

Barnett and Belfield (2006) further stated there is a direct link to family income and intellectual and social skills. These both increase as family income does (Barnett & Belfield). It is difficult to measure every benefit of preschool education. Every positive aspect does not carry a monetary price tag. Barnett and Hustedt (2003) asserted, "that

preschool education is a sound investment-academically, socially, and economically” (p. 2). Reynolds et al.. (2002) supported preschool because “cost-benefit analysis show promising evidence that ...early childhood interventions can be an efficient use of public resources” (p. 268). If programming can encompass more children, specifically Hispanic children and those who live in the Western United States, the financial outlay for preschool can raise social mobility (Barnett & Belfield). While there is still a question of whether targeted programs or universal programs provide the most impact, Barnett and Belfield maintained regardless of the how the programming is implemented, high quality preschool for all children will be a positive gain for society and for the lives of the participants.

Summary

Preschool education has evolved over the past century. Regardless of the reasons for children attending, whether it is socialization, societal returns, or social mobility, all have played an important role in educating children. Preschool has been viewed and analyzed from many different perspectives including education, economics, and equity. It has been a platform for social justice as well as a campaign promise by many politicians. Preschool is not waning but gaining in popularity in America as well as other countries.

The first subsection, the historical perspective of preschool, gave the background necessary to see why preschool education has evolved, the reasons why preschool gained increasing popularity as each decade passed, and why it has become an important political and educational argument today. It also brought to light three important longitudinal preschool studies: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program, the Carolina

Abecedarian Study, and the Chicago Child-Parent Center Program, all of which have provided a strong foundation of research in the impacts of preschool education.

The second subsection, the Impact of Preschool Education on Students in the K-12 Setting, reviewed research on the effects of preschool on students entering school and the bearing it has on educational persistence through high school. The third and final subsection contained the long-term societal impacts of preschool. These included post-secondary education, impacts on jobs and wages, crime rates, and social mobility.

In chapter three, the research design and methodology utilized in this study will be described. Included in this description will be a discussion of the population and sample, data collection and instrumentation, and data analysis. Chapter four will describe the data collected.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Researchers have studied preschool education from different perspectives and viewpoints. As chapter two reveals, there are significant amounts of quantitative research that examines early education's impact on children entering school. Barnett (2007) stated "early childhood education has become the norm" (p. 7). MacDonell (2006) asserted "the early years are crucial to future success in school and career" (p. 24), and Lynch (2005) maintained it is impossible to put a dollar figure on every benefit gained when a child attends preschool. Research has been conducted on the effects of preschool at different benchmarks in students' educational careers (Nores et al., 2005; Ramey et al., 2000; Reynolds et al., 2002). The results of longitudinal studies provided evidence of societal cost savings by providing early education interventions (Nores et al., 2005).

Many questions need answers when discussing preschool education. Does high quality early education intervention play a role in the educational careers of students? If these programs are lacking or non-existent, do low-achieving high school students fail, or does the lack of intervention influence the different paths students take in their educational journeys? The qualitative research in this study, presented as an instrumental case study (Creswell, 2007), involved exploring a specific issue in a particular situation (Creswell). Merriam supported this further with her definition of particularistic case studies. She stated:

Particularistic means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the

phenomenon and for what it might represent. This specificity of focus makes it an especially good design for practical problems-for questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice. (p. 29)

In this study, multiple sources of information needed to be considered when searching for answers, including developing research questions that conveyed an “open and emerging design” (Creswell, 2003, p. 106). Qualitative research was chosen because the researcher was “interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed... [and] how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6).

Using an instrumental case study (Creswell, 2007) was appropriate because the intention of this study was to focus on one specific school system when gathering information regarding early childhood education. While a significant amount of quantitative research exists on the topic of preschool education, this compilation of research focuses on “identifying factors that influence an outcome, the utility of an intervention, or understanding the best predictors of outcomes...It is also the best approach to use to test a theory or explanation” (Creswell, 2003, pp. 21-22). By using a qualitative approach for this study, the researcher was able to provide a “complex, deeper understanding of the issue” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). By conversing, observing, and collecting information from participants, the researcher empowered them to “share their stories [and provided opportunity to] hear their voices” (Creswell, 2007. p. 40). This study provided “rich, thick descriptions” (Merriam, p. 29) and added personal

perspectives that supported pre-existing quantitative research in the field of early childhood education.

Research Questions

In order to understand the early childhood educational experiences of certain targeted populations, the researcher developed the following research questions. These three questions focused the study and served as the starting point for data collection through interviews, observations, and the collection of archival data (Creswell, 2003).

1. What early childhood experiences, including relationships with teachers and peers, were viewed as assisting them in being successful in an academic setting, from the perspectives of:
 - a. at-risk students in a regular high school setting,
 - b. at-risk students who spent less than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes, and
 - c. at-risk students who spent more than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes?

2. What early childhood experiences, including relationships with teachers and peers, were viewed as inhibiting in regards to being successful in an academic setting, from the perspective of:
 - a. at-risk students in a regular high school setting,
 - b. at-risk students who spent less than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes, and
 - c. at-risk students who spent more than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes?

3. What early childhood educational experiences were reported most frequently by:
 - a. at-risk students in a regular high school setting,
 - b. at-risk students who spent less than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes, and
 - c. at-risk students who spent more than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes?

Design for the Study

Although various research approaches were considered to conduct this study, a qualitative method was chosen. The researcher, who was interested in gathering information regarding high school students' perceptions about their early childhood experiences, took a constructivist approach because she wanted to develop an understanding of "the participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2003 p. 8). This approach also provided the best means to gather information from the participants about their early childhood experiences, both in formal and informal settings. The specific method the researcher used was an instrumental case study (Creswell, 2007) because it elicited the information needed to answer the research questions. The researcher was not interested in gathering numeric evidence that could be statistically analyzed (Creswell, 2003), but preferred to focus on a deeper understanding of information from high school students in order to "...learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perception" (Weiss, 1994, p. 1). The use of a case study format included using "in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information*...and report[ed] a case *description* and case-based themes" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73).

After the design was determined, the researcher used the research questions as the framework for the study. These questions created the basis to develop an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to illicit responses from the participants. The researcher chose to interview specific high school students because they were “people who have some common characteristic, people who are, in this respect, in the same boat” (Weiss, 1994, p. 17). The sample of high school students “together represent the population of concern” (p. 17).

The interview questions addressed the participants’ early education memories, which included types of education placements, aspects that could be considered positive including events and people as well as negative occurrences that possibly impacted the educational direction of these students. The interview format consisted of a semi-structured protocol including questions designed to allow open-ended responses.

The researcher also used added prompts to draw out clarifying and additional information. The researcher also conducted observations of the participants prior to meeting them or carrying out interviews. An observation protocol (see Appendix B) was developed to assist in collecting observational data. This information was collected to assist in understanding participants’ interactions within their current educational settings. This allowed the researcher to “directly and forcibly experience for herself both the ordinary routines and conditions under which people conduct their lives, and the constraints and pressures to which such living is subject” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 2).

Finally, a review of students’ permanent records was conducted to gather data including grades given from kindergarten to present, assessments conducted, and

comments made by teachers, as well as information from documents parents completed upon registering their child for school. A review of permanent records protocol was used to assist in gathering information in the records and can be found in Appendix C. This component was the final piece of collecting data as to provide the researcher an unbiased observation and interview of each participant. After gathering this information, the researcher related it to the research questions and used it to support findings in the interviews and observation process (Merriam, 1998).

Population and Sample

Purposeful sampling along with convenience sampling was used in this study. According to Creswell (2007), purposeful sampling is used when “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). It is also appropriate to use this approach because the results of the study directly impacted learning and instruction within the district (Seidman, 2006). The size of the school district afforded the availability of different educational delivery systems, such as alternative school, which provided the researcher with acceptable numbers of students within each category to support the study.

The researcher divided the participants into three groups. These groups were chosen because of the diversity within the same educational system they provided for the study. The students in each of these groups were considered by the principal and the alternative school director as meeting criteria for at-risk students. The first student group was involved in regular programming at the high school. These students made low to average grades and had done so most of their educational career. Because of the size of

this targeted population, a sample of students was selected that matched the number of students selected for the following two groups. The second group of students was identified as at-risk and was participating in limited (less than 50% of their day or no more than four class periods) alternative programming for instruction. The third group of students received a majority of their instruction (more than 50% or five or more periods a day) in an alternative setting provided by the district, or the group's members were participating in, or had completed, a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) program. Each group consisted of eight to ten students. Any students who were known to the researcher on a personal basis or that attended her elementary school were eliminated from the study.

The researcher chose the specific high school students in this study because they met criteria needed to develop comparison groups. Even though the researcher is employed in this southwest Missouri district as an elementary principal, which is home to over 4,000 students in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade, it was determined there was, as Seidman (2006) stated "enough distance [between the interviewer and participants] that they take nothing for granted" (p. 42). The high school students in the study were not under the direct supervision of the researcher/principal and many were not known to the researcher on a personal basis.

The southwest Missouri high school is home to more than 1,200 students in grades 9-12. The population is predominately White with minority students making up less than 5% of the population. The free and reduced lunch rate of students is 35%. The graduation rate is high with over 92% of students graduating. The drop-out rate hovers at around 1%, with most of the students making up this statistic being from a minority background. The mobility rate of high school students ranges from 25-30%.

After receiving district permission from the appropriate gatekeepers (Seidman, 2006), the high school principal and the director of alternative schools (see Appendix D), the researcher obtained parental permission to allow observations, interviews, and reviews of educational documents of the participants (see Appendix E). Students who were asked to participate in the study also signed permission (see Appendix F). In order to protect the anonymity of the school involved in the study, the researcher used the pseudonym Midwest High School. The researcher also protected anonymity of the participants by assigning pseudonym names and numbers to each.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Merriam (1998) stated, “the burden of producing a study that has been conducted and disseminated in an ethical manner lies with the individual investigator” (p. 219). Participants were apprised of their rights in this study, including possible harmful outcomes. They were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at anytime. The University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) (2008) stated “It is imperative that the Campus IRB ensure that all subject participants are *informed about* and *voluntarily consent* to research participation” (p. 2). The researcher must take adequate consideration to providing anonymity, being confidential with the information provided, and have a sense of responsibility to advocate for the participants well-being. Merriam further affirms the researcher must continuously be aware of the ethical issues involved in research and to “examine his or her own philosophical orientation vis-à-vis these issues” (p. 219).

Each student in this study signed an informed consent along with their parent or guardian. The form included the purpose of the study, the approval by the University of

Missouri Internal Review Board to conduct the study, their rights as a participant including the ability to withdraw from the study at any time, and the possible uses of the data being generated. In the following subsections, each method of data collection is addressed.

Observation

One part of the study included conducting observations of students “in their natural setting” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 50). The researcher observed each participant a minimum of two times in their current educational classes and settings. The situations observed were classified into three categories: core classes such as math, English, social studies and science; elective classes such as art, music, consumer and family sciences; and social situations such as lunch and free time. All observations were conducted prior to being interviewed by the researcher. The researcher wanted to gather observational data on how the participants function in their assigned educational settings without the knowledge that the researcher was observing them. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) speculated, the purpose of observing participants in familiar settings is for researchers to see for themselves the interactions in context and how those situations provide meaning. The observation protocol was used to collect field notes and jottings (Emerson et al.). The researcher then transcribed the field notes, and they were used to add information to other data collection methods.

Interviews.

The researcher also conducted individual interviews with each of the students. The interviews were conducted at the high school and the alternative school. The researcher used a semi-structured format that asked each participant the same open-ended

questions (Seidman, 2006). The questions were piloted with a group of students not participating in the study. This procedure helped to ensure reliability or as Merriam (1998) states, “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (p. 206). After completing the piloting procedure, adjustments were made to the interview guide (Weiss, 1994) were made. All interviews were videotaped and audio taped to ensure the information was correctly transcribed.

Document Review

Finally, the researcher gained permission to view the students’ permanent records. The researcher documented information available including information available since the participant entered kindergarten. Grades were noted, along with teacher comments, incidents of retention, parent comments, standardized test scores, and other relevant information. The review of permanent records protocol assisted the researcher in organizing the data from the files. The researcher collected this information last to add more objectivity to the observations and interview processes.

By viewing this data, the researcher looked for information to triangulate the other sources of data collected (Merriam, 1998). In order to ensure internal validity, member-checking (Merriam, 1998) was utilized. Each participant in the study received a copy of the transcribed interviews to review. They were encouraged to make comments, add additional information, and correct any information before the researcher used it in the study.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) stated “[q]ualitative researchers strive for ‘understanding,’ that deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with participants,

spending extensive time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meanings” (p. 201). The researcher’s intent by conducting this research study was to understand the perceptions the at-risk high school students had in regards to their early childhood educational experiences. It is important the situations in this research project be recounted in a manner that is credible, and that measures were taken to portray accuracy and truthfulness (Creswell). Merriam (1998) supported this when she stated “validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented” (pp. 199-200). In the following sections, reliability, validity, as well as researcher bias are discussed and how the researcher addressed these important issues in this research study.

Reliability

A conscious effort was made by the researcher to enhance the reliability of the results of this study. According to Merriam (1998), reliability is “the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (p. 205). Reliability for all three sources of data collected in this study, observations, interviews, and document review, were enhanced by pre-collection measures to ensure clarity and to increase the possibility of obtaining similar results with each individual participant and the information collected. The observation protocol as well as the review of permanent records protocol was used in field testing situations to determine if protocols provided the appropriate structures to collect the information needed. The interview questions were field tested prior to using them in the study and changed and revisions were made based on the information

gathered from the field test. In addition, all interviews were taped and transcribed to enhance the reliability of the study (Creswell, 2007).

Validity

Creswell (2007) stated validity to be “an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (p. 206). In order to address validity in this study, the researcher gathered multiple sources of data on three different groups of high school students within the same school system to obtain differentiated supporting evidence. This information included “detailed descriptions of the case and its setting” (Creswell, p. 163). The data collected from interviews, observations and document review were condensed by the researcher into categories or themes (Creswell). These occurrences focused on students’ early education experiences. After identifying these themes, the researcher was able to identify emergent issues or make sense of the data (Creswell) which included variations and commonalities (Merriam).

Not only does multiple sources of data strengthen a study’s validity, but it also increases the trustworthiness as well as the possibilities of being able to generalize the results to others circumstances (Merriam,1998). In this research project, the researcher was able to triangulate (Merriam) the data from the three data sources collected. Merriam, Creswell (2007), as well as Herr and Anderson (2005), all noted how using “rich, thick, descriptions” (Merriam, p. 211) provides the readers with sufficient information to determine commonalities with their own situations thus being able to generalize to more than just the situation in the study. Member checking was also used in

the interview process to make sure information was correct and the results are “plausible” (Merriam, p. 204).

Researcher Bias.

Merriam (1998) stressed the importance of “clarifying the researcher’s assumptions, worldviews, and theoretical orientation” (p. 205). The researcher chose to conduct this study because of her interest in preschool education. Early in her career as a special education teacher in grades 7-12, it became apparent to her how some students lacked the foundations of early education and had spent their entire school careers trying to catch up academically to other students. The researcher recognizes her bias that preschool education is important, it is prescriptive, and it possibly could change the educational paths of students who participate. The researcher acknowledges preconceived assumptions regarding preschool education and believes if it existed for every student there would be fewer students identified at-risk later in their educational careers and fewer placements in alternative school situations, thus lowering the need and financial outlay for these programs.

In order to address these biases, the researcher will rely on the theoretical knowledge claim of constructivism which focuses on understanding as well as obtaining the views of multiple contributors (Creswell, 2003). By focusing on the participants, viewing the data from their perspective, and “mak[ing] sense of the meanings others have about the world” (p. 9), the researcher will generate meaning from the data and look for varied and multiple meanings before narrowing these into themes and categories.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to focus on understanding early education experiences from the perspective of high school students and what events have influenced the different paths they have taken in their education journey. Since this study surrounded students within one educational system, a southwest Missouri school district, the researcher chose to use an instrumental case study (Creswell, 2007). This study employed the use of observations, interviews, and the document review to answer the research questions that guided this study. The researcher assigned all participants to three different groups based on the educational setting in which they were most successful. Group one consisted of students who spent their entire day receiving instruction in the high school setting and who made average to low grade and had done so most of their educational career: the second group contained at-risk students who were participating in limited (less than 50% of their day, or no more than two class periods) alternative programming for instruction; finally, the third group of student received a majority of their instruction (more than 50%, or 5 or more periods a day) in an alternative setting provided by the district, or they were participating in or had completed a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) program.

All participants and their guardians gave permission to participate in the study after discussing the IRB guidelines and reading and signing the informed consent. The researcher also took care to ensure reliability by field testing research protocols, video-taping interviews, and recording interview. Validity was also ensured by utilizing member-checking, triangulation of the data, and addressing researcher bias at the outset

of the study (Merriam, 1998). All of these measures helped increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the research study.

In chapter four, the results of the observations, interviews and review of archival data will be discussed. In chapter five, a discussion of the findings as well as a summary of the study will be provided. In addition, recommendations for future studies will also be presented.

CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if students from both a regular and an alternative high school setting in a southwest Missouri high school felt their early educational experiences impacted their current educational placements. The study took place in a southwest Missouri school district where participants were students in grades nine through twelve. More specifically, all students considered and asked to participate in this study met district-created criteria to be considered a student at-risk of academic failure.

This chapter will provide a detailed description of results obtained from the data collected through interviews, observations, and the review of student records. The protocols for the data collection are found in Appendices A, B, and C. An in-depth review of the information was conducted using the process of open coding (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). This procedure entails reviewing all information collected comprehensively, considering any threads, commonalities, and connections (Seidman, 2006) into the development of themes, regardless of how disparate the data may seem. Focused coding (Emerson, et al.) was also used as a secondary data gathering method to document specific information needed to answer the research questions.

All data collected were handled in a very sensitive manner in order to protect the anonymity of the participants. The information was kept confidential, and the researcher served as an advocate for each participant (Merriam, 1998). Each participant was assigned a number label and given a pseudonym to protect his or her actual identity.

In order to organize and describe the information collected, four main sections of this chapter were developed. The first section is composed of background knowledge, including a narrative of the setting as well as a compilation of the demographics of the participants. This information leads into the researcher's next topic, which presents an in-depth reflection of the data collection procedures. The next section offers the open themes that emerged from the information collected. The final segment discusses the focused themes that assisted in answering the research questions.

Description of the Setting and Its Participants

Midwest High School (a pseudonym) was located in a suburban district close to a major Missouri city. The district itself provides education to over 4,000 students on eight campuses. There is one high school in the district that is home to more than 1,200 students. The high school, according to national standards, has a high graduation rate with over 92% of the students completing their high school requirements. The demographics of the high school consisted of primarily of Caucasian students with minority students making up approximately 5% of the population. Participants in the study were garnered from three different educational placements within the same school system. Initially, all students in the high school, who met district at-risk criteria, were considered for this study. The following section describes in detail the process used to populate the study.

Selection and Participation in the Study

In Appendix G, a flowchart of student recruitment illustrates participant selection for the study. Permission letters were mailed to parents of students, soliciting permission to allow their child to participate in the study. After two rounds of invitations to

participate were sent out, the study was populated with the appropriate number of students. Initially, permissions were sought from the parents as the first and primary level of permission. After parent consent was obtained, permissions from the students were acquired. Students who were 18 years of age or older were allowed to sign their own permission to participate. Students were then classified into one of the three educational placement categories for the study. Group A participants were educated completely in the traditional high school setting. The second group of students, Group B, split their time being educated at the traditional high school setting as well as spending less than 50% of their day at the district alternative school. Finally, Group C students spent over 50% of their day in the alternative school setting. For the most part, most students in Group C spent more than 80% in the alternative school setting.

Demographics of Participants

Twenty-four students were selected to participate in the study. Of the students selected, 21 of the students were of Caucasian background. Two students participating were Hispanic, and one was African-American. Of the students selected for the study, 23 completed all parts of the process, including the interview and member-checking of their interview. Group A and B had 8 participants, while Group C, the group spending more than 50% of their day in the alternative school setting, finished the study with seven participants.

Only one student declined to participate in all parts of the study after permissions were obtained from parents as well as the student. The female student dropped out of the study after the classroom observations and prior to individual interviews being conducted. It was determined at this point not to allow another participant in the study for

a couple of reasons. First, each participant in the study was at a different point in the study depending on his or her educational placements. Some students were still being observed prior to their interviews, while others had finished the entire process.

Additionally, the subgroup from which the student left was the self-contained group from the alternative school. It was felt in best interest of the study not to add anyone to this group because the small, personal environment of the alternative school might alter participants' answers.

While this study did not set parameters in regards to specific demographic information, it is informative to possess some background information about the participants. The following table conveys basic demographic information about the entire group who participated in the study.

Table 1

Demographic Information-All Participants (N=23)

Gender	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	K-12	Preschool
Male	4	3	1	7	4	11
Females	1	1	2	4		4
Total	5	4	3	11	4	15

Note. The K-12 column refers to students who have attended in the district since kindergarten. The preschool column indicates students who attended preschool.

This study consists of 23 student participants. There is representation from each grade level in high school with the most participants being seniors. The 15 males in the study represented approximately 65% of the entire participants. According to student records, less than 20% of the total group had attended school in the Midwest District

consistently since kindergarten. Sixty-five percent of the participants as a whole group attended some form of preschool before entering school. Eleven of the 15 male participants attended preschool, which represents 73% of the group. The number of males attending preschool was over double the number of females. Four of the participants indicated in their interviews they had been retained in elementary school. Of the four retained students, two of those attended the Midwest District when the retentions occurred. Gender was equitable in the retentions with two of the students being male and two female.

The tables that follow disaggregate the demographic data by the three group categories in the study. The participants in Group A consisted of students who were educated in the traditional high school setting for the entire school day. The following table conveys demographic information about this subgroup.

Table 2

Group A Demographics-Educated All Day in the Regular High School Setting (N=8)

Gender	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	K-12	Preschool
Male	1		1	3	2	5
Females	1		2			1
Total	2		3	3	2	6

Note. The K-12 column refers to students who have attended in the district since kindergarten. The preschool column indicates students who attended preschool.

As can be seen in the above table, there were eight students selected who met the criteria for Group A. Of these students, there was representation from all high school classes with the exception of sophomores. The majority of the students in this category

were upper classmen. There were more males than females in the group and 75% of the students in this category attended preschool. In addition, one fourth of the students, all male, had been in the district since kindergarten. Once again, more males had participated in preschool than females. In this subgroup, 80% of the males attended preschool as compared to 20% of the females. Three of the retained students, two females and one male, were included in this subgroup.

Students classified into Group B were educated in the traditional high school setting but were also supported by the district alternative school for less than 50% of their school day. Table 3 denotes demographic information of this group.

Table 3

Group B Demographics-Students in the Alternative School Less than 50% of day (N=8)

Gender	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	K-12	Preschool
Male		3		2	2	4
Females		1		2		1
Total		4		4	2	5

Note. The K-12 column refers to students who have attended in the district since kindergarten. The preschool column indicates students who attended preschool.

Participants in subgroup B were comprised equitably of sophomores and seniors. As with Group A, there were more male than female students in this subgroup. The majority of students participated in some type of preschool with 75% of the participants being male. Two of the students had attended the Midwest School District since

kindergarten. One student, a male, indicated he had been retained in elementary school and was included in this subgroup.

The participants in Group C spent a significant part of their school day in the alternative education setting. As indicated earlier, the study’s criteria defined Group C as spending more than 50% of their school day in the alternative school setting. The group of students participating in this study spent more than 80% of their school day in this placement. This group is the only one of the three subgroups that experienced attrition after the study began, with one female student dropping out of the study. Table 4 refers to the demographic information of students in Group C.

Table 4

Group C Demographics-Students In Alternative School More Than 50% of Day (N=8)

Gender	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	K-12	Preschool
Male	3			2		3
Females				2		1
Total	3			4		4

Note. The K-12 column refers to students who have attended in the district since kindergarten. The preschool column indicates students who attended preschool.

This subgroup consisted of only two grade levels, seniors and freshman. All female participants in this study were seniors, with no female freshman. All of the participants in the study had transferred into the Midwest School District at some point in their educational careers with the earliest in elementary school. Four of the seven students

participated in preschool with similar results to the other subgroups of males attending preschool more often than females.

In the next section of the chapter, the researcher provides an in-depth narrative of the three data collection methods in the order of which they occurred. Specific examples are cited in regards to the participants. In the first part, observations of the students in two different educational settings are presented. The personal interviews, conducted with each participant, are reflected upon in the second portion. Last, the task of reviewing student permanent records is discussed.

The Data Collection Procedures

This study evoked an overwhelming feeling of responsibility on the part of the researcher. The task of conducting and reviewing each of the 23 interviews allowed the researcher to interact not only with the students, but their thoughts, memories, successes, and failures. Armed with the knowledge that describing and reporting the information gained in this study was an interaction between the researcher and the text (Seidman, 2006), it was with sincere intent the researcher searched for connections between the participants. The researcher's desire was to make this study an accurate accounting of important details as well as making certain this study served as the medium where participant voices were heard. The following subsections speak to the data collection procedures in the order of which they were conducted.

Observations, Interviews, and Document Review

Information for the study was gathered in three different manners. While the personal interviews with each participant served as the primary source of information, the observations of the students as well as the review of the students' permanent records

provided supporting data to the details revealed in the interviews. The following subsections contain the researcher's personal reflections of each of the three procedures used in the study.

Observations. After permission to participate in the study was collected for all students, the study began. The researcher spent a total of four days at Midwest High School conducting student observations. Two observations per participant were conducted. Most observations lasted 25-40 minutes. Two different educational settings were chosen to see if the researcher would note differences in student behavior. For students who spent their entire day at the high school, the researcher chose to observe a core class and an elective. Students who split their time between the alternative school and high school were observed in both of those settings. For the students who were self-contained at the alternative school, observations with two different teachers were conducted to show some level of difference.

Observations of the students who were educated exclusively in the traditional high school setting did not reveal any remarkable information. It was difficult to see any differences when the students in the study were compared to the students in the classes who were not. Most of the participants in Group A were relatively social in these settings and did comply most of the time with the teacher's requests.

In the researcher's opinion, Group B participants, those educated in both the traditional high school setting and the alternative school setting, demonstrated the largest variation of personal behavior in the classrooms. For example, Quinn (B7) (a pseudonym) was quite vocal and interactive in an English class at the alternative school. He interjected on a regular basis, asked questions of the teacher, and engaged in sidebar

discussions with classmates. When observed in a Physical Science class in the regular high school setting, he was withdrawn and did not pay attention to the lesson or the video that was shown for a portion of the class. He did not interact with any student or the teacher the entire period. Sammie (B5), a female student, on the other hand was consistent in her behaviors in both situations at the high school and alternative school. She was loud, boisterous, and borderline belligerent. In fact, the researcher had a difficult time finding a time where both her schedule and Sammie's (B5) coincided due to the fact Sammie (B5) spent several days in in-school suspension because of inappropriate language. It was understandable to the researcher how Sammie's (B5) behavior was perceived differently in both situations and why the consequences, such as discipline, would vary.

Group C participants' observations were all conducted at the alternative school but in two different settings whether it be at different times of the day and different subjects or in situations where students interacted with a different group of students and teacher. The students at the alternative school were, for the most part, thriving in the smaller setting. They were lively, engaged, and talkative. They still had to be re-directed to complete assignments and stay on-task, but the respect they showed their teachers was noticeable. The alternative school teachers also reported student "meltdowns" in their classrooms. The researcher did not observe any of the participants in the study exhibiting these behaviors during visits.

Other interesting pieces of information revealed themselves as well. The researcher noticed during observations at least four of the participants were avid readers. Three students were observed reading during classes at the high school. One of the

students was reading when he should have been doing other assignments. One student attempted to sleep during a psychology class, but she was awakened by the teacher.

While the observations did not reveal much information about the early education years of the participants' lives, it did provide a snapshot of their personalities as children. For example, an observation of Hensley (A5), a freshman who should have been a sophomore, demonstrated he worked better in small group situations. He was observed in a freshman English class. Hensley (A5) paid more attention to another student who was interrupting the class than he did to the class instruction. The researcher observed him acting out and not paying attention to the teacher or the lesson. When he was observed in small class situation, he was much more attentive to the lesson and the teacher. The teacher would ask Hensley (A5) to do certain tasks, and he willing did so.

While the observations provided some beneficial information, the interview component of the study provided a large portion of the data collected in the study. The next part of this section discusses this portion of the study.

Interviews. The personal interviews with each of the participants served as a significant data source in the study. The researcher spent four complete days conducting interviews with the 23 participants. Interviews were conducted in a small conference room at the high school, and if the student attended the alternative school, the interviews took place in a quiet room in that facility. In addition, after the interviews were completed and transcribed, the interviewer met again with each participant to member-check the interview. Corrections, if any, were made at that time by the participants to ensure the accuracy of the information.

All participants' identities were protected and assigned a letter and a number. For example, if the student met the criteria to be in Group A and he or she was the first participant, his or her code was A1. During the interview process, each student was given a pseudonym with which to be identified during the interview. The researcher used the Interview Protocol (Appendix A) as a guide to facilitate questions from the participants. All interviews were tape recorded with the exception of three participants. Those interviews were scribed during the interview by the researcher. The researcher concurred with Seidman's (2006) opinion in regards to tape recording interviews as well as participant behavior when a tape recorder was present. He noted, "By preserving the words of the participants, researchers have their original data" (p. 114). He further stated, "it may seem that the tape recorder could inhibit participants, but my experience is that they soon forget the device" (p. 114). The researcher found once the conversations began; the tape recorder was not a focal point or an item of interest to the participant.

Most of the interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. Rapport was established easily and conversation flowed in a relaxed manner with most of the participants. Most of the participants claimed they could not remember back as far as the researcher was asking. But with prompts and visualizations, most were able to remember some details. For instance, Luis (B1) stated, "I can't remember really good about my preschool...but I know I did preschool in Texas" (Luis, B1). After discussing a few more things about elementary school, the researcher returned to the subject of preschool. Luis (B1) was then able to remember several things including he ate oatmeal at school, rode a little bus, the teachers spoke both in English and Spanish, and the teacher read to them while they sat on the floor with "the little carpets for each individual" (Luis, B1).

Document review. The next and final part of the data collection process was reviewing each student's permanent school record. This last component occurred after all observations and interviews were complete. The researcher did this intentionally so personal perceptions would not bias the observations or interviews. A good example of this would be found in Sammie's (B5) permanent record. Her previous school had sent a complete three year discipline record that was several pages long when she had transferred to Midwest High School. Reviewing this record prior to observations and interviews would, by the researcher's own admittance, have set the stage for an interview with a student who had behavior concerns. What actually occurred was a 30 minute conversation full of animation, laughter, and a wealth of knowledge with a bright, intelligent girl who provided this study a wonderful view of her preschool and elementary school years.

Most of the student records did not produce a significant amount of information about the students' early years. The records, for the most part, had been downsized over time and many did not contain elementary information. The exceptions to this were students who had attended elementary school in the Midwest District. Their grades and attendance were in each of their permanent records. Some of this information provided another piece of supporting data of the memories students had. Brad (B6), a senior student, had attended the Midwest District since kindergarten. In his interview, he gave a clear picture of his elementary school years. When asked about his favorite grade in school and why it was his favorite, he gave the researcher a lot of details to support the question and more. He stated,

[Kindergarten] was kind of my, it was a fun class to be in. She [the teacher] made class fun when like most teachers would be like, ‘Okay, we’re going to do this.’ She always found a way to make, you know, an interesting day. [I] didn’t really have a whole lot of time between third and fourth grade ‘cause at the end of second grade I found out I had leukemia, so I was homeschooled...fourth grade I was in the hospital, third grade, I was in the hospital the whole time.

The researcher was able to clarify and validate some of the information Brad (B6) gave during his interview. His permanent records showed during his second grade school year he missed 95 out of 174 school days. Third and fourth grade also showed high absent rates. Grades were available during his third and fourth grade school years along with attendance records. This led the researcher to conclude Brad (B6) was not homeschooled but a student who was on homebound instruction while he was in the hospital receiving treatment and when it was not medically safe for him to attend school. When the leukemia went into remission and his health improved, he returned to public school where his attendance increased significantly in fifth grade.

The methods used to obtain information during the study were key in understanding the results and the researcher’s conclusions. Observations of the students were conducted as the first piece of data gathering. Each student participated in a personal interview that lasted from 20-30 minutes. The last portion of data collecting consisted of reviewing each student’s permanent school record. The compilation of observations, interviews, and review of records led to five overarching themes emerging, which are discussed in the next section.

Themes Emerging from the Study

After the data collection procedures concluded, the researcher was left with the task of piecing the information together to present a vivid, detailed picture of the study. Each portion of the data was analyzed, including going line by line in each interview. The purpose was for the researcher to “make sense of the data” (Creswell, 2007, p. 154). Sticky notes were used to record small snippets of information the researcher felt significant because they stood out in the study, were mentioned by more than one participant, or just gave the researcher a hunch. These small bits of information were used to consolidate the information into the following open themes.

The first theme, *Home is Where You Lay Your Head*, encapsulates the variety of living arrangements the participants experienced during their younger years. These settings are described under the subtitles *Traditional Living*, *Unconventional Living*, and *Working for a Living*. The next theme, *Box of Chocolates*, brings forth the unexpected occurrences and situations that impacted some of the participants’ lives. These are discussed in more detail under the following three subheadings. *Why Me? Serious Illness*, which described events dealing with short and long-term illness that affected the participants. *We Are Not in Kansas Anymore*, the next subheading, talks about how traveling a wrong path can impact a child’s education. Finally, *Go Back to the Beginning* deals with the topic of grade retention.

Seems Normal to Me is the third open theme of this study. This theme encompasses participant responses about the locations or settings in which they spent their early childhood days and the learning that took place in these settings. The subheading, *Pre-K All the Way*, refers to the participants who attended preschool. *Home*

School describes participant situations that involved the student staying at home with a parent or other guardian. The circumstances of the students who attended daycare are described in *A Safe Place to Stay*. The final subgroup, *Life's Lessons Are Not Always in Books*, describes the less than ordinary types of learning the participants experienced.

The fourth theme that emerged is titled *I Like You, You Like Me. Or Do You?* This theme refers to relationships and is addressed under the subheadings of *Positive Role Models* and *Negative Authority*. The fifth and final theme is labeled *Listen to Your Heart*. This theme reflects on participant responses about their learning and academic success. The subgroups in this theme are titled *My Generation*, which refers to participant responses in regards to their current learning, and *The Next Generation*, which conveys how the students in the study would educationally support a young child.

Home Is Where You Lay Your Head

During the interviews, it became evident to the researcher the 23 participants lived in a variety of different home situations during their early childhood years. As the students talked, their home situations unfolded. To most of the students, these experiences seemed ordinary. This theme attempts to join these various circumstances into three subsections.

Traditional Living. Several of the participants spoke of living with both their parents in the same household and one of their parents, most often their mothers, staying home with them. One student, Gabrielle (A2), spoke of living in another state in her early childhood years and, “my mom was always home with us” (Gabrielle, A2). She also remembered her father being visible because his work schedule allowed him to be home early in the afternoon, and he was available to read and play with her.

Ashleigh (A1), who was in Group B, also remembered her mom and dad supporting her in her early years. In her interview, she spoke of her mom pursuing the more educational tasks such as cutting, using flash cards, and working on her alphabet. She recalled her father working more on non-educational skills such as riding her bike and tying her shoes. Smurfy (C6), a freshman student in Group C, told of living with both his parents. The one aspect that stood out in his interview was he mentioned and felt he had to explain the fact that his natural parents were still married to each other. He stated, “Yea, my parents like have never been divorced. It is hard to say ‘cause most of my friends’ parents are divorced, but my parents were always together” (Smurfy, C6). It was obvious from his statement Smurfy (C6) felt divorce, rather than marriage, was normal.

Patience (B2), a senior in Group B, spoke of her family with a loving tone. It was obvious in the interview she enjoyed revisiting the memories of those who had shaped her life. She told of living with her parents, visiting and staying with her grandmother, and receiving support from not only the adults in her life, but she additionally expressed how influential her older siblings were to her as well.

Unconventional living. Other participants in the study spoke of the challenges they faced as a child and how this impacted where they lived. Kimbirlyne (A4) spoke of being placed in foster care with her grandparents during her kindergarten year. James (A3) was much younger when he was taken from his mother. He spoke of his home life and the events that led him to living with his grandmother and step-grandfather. He stated,

I got taken away from my mom, and I was like two years old or a year old, or something like that, I don’t remember. Anyways, they had to get a lot of support

because I almost drowned, or I guess I did die, I don't remember because I was so small. But anyways, I drowned in the tub because she took her medicine and passed out. And then child services took me away from them, and then I went to live with grandma.

While this might have been a traumatic event, James (A3) disclosed in his interview the positive, stable home life his grandparents provided him made him believe this was the best time of his life and recalled this as one of the most normal periods in his eighteen years.

At times, unconventional describes the location where someone lives as opposed to with whom they lived. Milo (C5), a senior, lived with his mother, two brothers and sister and remembered leaving an abusive home and moving around to several different shelters before staying at one for a long period of time. He recalled the shelter as a happy place and remembered some of the nuns who worked there fondly. He said,

The nuns loved us so much that my mom could get us in our little walkers and we were just little babies at the time, me and my twin brother and we would just dart down the halls and the people would...they would actually have people who would work the elevators and they would hold the elevator open while we dashed into the elevator.

Milo (C5) mentioned in his interview his mother was the primary source of his information about the time period where his family had lived in the shelter. He stated, "it was a lot of...my mom said us kids had a lot of fun...I don't fully remember everything, but my mom said us kids had a blast there" (Milo, C5).

Working for a living. Several of the participants remembered having both their parents work, or in some cases, they lived in a single-parent home where their parent worked. Hensley (A5) remembered going to daycare because his parents, “worked until 5:30 every day” (Hensley, A5). Angus (A6) reported his mother worked, and he and his brother went to a sitter during the day. He alluded to the fact that he did not remember his mother or father spending much time working with him and his brother on academic skills prior to going to kindergarten. For Angus (A6) the explanation was simple, his parents worked hard, and when they got home they had to keep the resources, such as their automobiles, in working order so they could work each day. When asked by the researcher if his mother read to him when he was little, he spoke frankly when he said, “they did a little bit, but from their standpoint and I can see [it] too, both of my parents worked and my dad, we’ve always worked on old cars and stuff so we were just trying to keep our cars running and working” (Angus, A6).

Dominic (B8) recalled, while his mother worked, he went to a babysitter’s house. Quinn (B7) remembered attending a faith-based preschool that had a daycare for working parents. When Faith (C4), a senior, was asked about the places she attended prior to entering kindergarten, she replied,

Most of the time [prior to entering kindergarten] I was with babysitters, but for a short period I was in preschool. Not very long, I couldn’t even tell you how long it was, a very short time before I started kindergarten...It was just me and my mom pretty much for a long time growing up. But she didn’t really have a lot of time to work with me on things because she was always working, trying to support us.

Faith (C4) used plural terms when referring to her daycare providers. She also said, with the exception of the short stint in preschool, she attended private, home daycares.

Donnie (C8) remembered staying with an older sibling who served as his caregiver while his parents worked. He remembered disliking her authority, stating he thought she was “picking on him” (Donnie, C8), but since has determined she was trying to help. He spoke of his mother working, coming home, and being able to do multiple things at once. He also mentioned his dad working at times when they didn’t get to see him. He stated “dad wasn’t around too much, he worked a lot. He would come home... [at] 2 in the morning from work. He is a hard worker, always has been. He is old; he just turned 35” (Donnie, C8).

While there were a variety of living arrangements among the participants, none of the students seemed to point to this area as one where they felt inhibited on their educational paths. The researcher focused on points at times about not what the participants reported, but what they did not. For example, Faith (C4) mentioned babysitters in plural; this led the researcher to believe there was not a stable daycare provider in her life. Angus (A6) speaking of his parents working hard and spending little time on academics could have been indicative of a family struggling to fulfill basic needs such as food and shelter. In the case of James (A3), his living in an unconventional arrangement with his grandparents provided the best situation for him as it became a haven for a small boy to be cared for, as well as leaving him with a feeling of being safe and loved.

Box of Chocolates

In the movie *Forrest Gump*, Tom Hanks, who portrayed Gump, sat on a park bench and talked to a stranger about life. One of the most famous quotes from this movie, referred to a box of chocolates. This theme was chosen because it represents the unexpected and how the best laid plans can go astray. This analogy perfectly describes a few of the challenges some of the students who participated in this study faced during their early years.

Why me? Serious illness. Two students remembered illnesses in elementary school as standing out as times that impacted their academic success. Ashleigh (A1) was in third grade when she was diagnosed with meningitis and spent about three weeks in the hospital. This illness occurred in the middle of the year. She indicated she had a homebound teacher and that her classroom teacher helped her get caught up with her work. She remembered being frustrated socially and academically during this time.

As mentioned earlier, Brad's (B6) battle with leukemia began in second grade. Already a student who had been retained in kindergarten, he missed 95 out of 174 school days during the year he was diagnosed. During that three year span, Brad (B6) was in and out of the hospital fighting the cancer and receiving treatment. Doctors were fighting to save his life; while at the same time, Brad (B6) was trying to maintain his education. When he was able, he returned to school, but he was additionally supported with homebound instruction. He remembered third grade being the most frustrating because this was the time directly following the leukemia being discovered. In his interview, Brad (B6) recalled the social aspects. He recollects,

it was like, oh, you can't go to school now, and being seven years old it was like 'why not?' I didn't know why so I just knew I was out of school. I mean, I knew I had cancer, I just didn't realize what it was at the time, so I was like 'well, why I can't go to school?

Not in Kansas anymore. Life's events do not always go as planned as Dorothy discovered in the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, nor do they always resemble what would be considered normal to most people. Some of the situations mentioned in the next portion could have been controlled by the participants and others could not. Leroy (C3) reported moving many times not only in his childhood but during his lifetime. He stated,

I went to a couple of different schools. I can't remember all of them. Kindergarten through second grade, I went to [first elementary school in another New Mexico], third and half of fourth grade I went to [second elementary school in New Mexico], the second half of fourth grade I went to [third elementary school in New Mexico], I don't remember the name of the school. In fifth grade I went to a [elementary school in Missouri], sixth grade I went to school in Arizona. I don't remember the name of that school either. Uh, seventh grade I went to [another Missouri school], seventh grade I went to [another Missouri school]. Then my first ninth grade year I went to [High school A]. My second nine grade year, I went to [High school B], and then from tenth grade on, I've been here at [Midwest High School].

Moving made it hard for Leroy (C3) to keep up with the curriculums in each district. He talked about moving to new schools and at times having to learn concepts he already knew or coming in the middle of concepts he had no prior knowledge of. This

only added to Leroy (C3) being further behind. He remembered fourth grade being his worst year. The interview evoked this memory,

I stopped like halfway, like not even halfway, a quarter into the year, and then I moved. I was getting to know everybody. I finally got friends and then all of a sudden, I moved, and I didn't feel, I left all my friends [behind] and so I didn't feel right.

By the time he reached high school, his attendance became a concern as he reported only attending "60 or 90 days out of the year" (Leroy, C3).

Milo (C5)'s reports of school differed somewhat from the information in his permanent school record. His record was one that had not been purged along the way. In fact, all information from kindergarten was still contained within his file. He stated,

I just loved learning and my family could not keep me out of school. Whenever I was sick, my mom would have to go out and stop the bus and drag me off the bus because I would be running out and jumping on the bus. Anytime when me and my sister and my brother were little and before we hit [a town], nothing would keep us from going to school...not even if we were sick and throwing up, we would try and hide it and go to school.

What permanent records actually showed was Milo (C5) missed many days of school his entire school career. There was also official letters about truancy included in the record. It was not just at a time when he attended a school he did not like and one he felt attacked his family by threatening to "fail all of them" (Milo, C5), it was consistent throughout his educational years.

Flower's (C2) life began normally. Her parents enrolled her in the faith-based preschool they had attended as children, and she stayed in that setting until third grade when she came to Midwest District. She stated, "I was a really good girl in elementary and I mean I got really good grades" (Flower, C2). She remembered fifth grade being her favorite; she loved her language teacher and the social aspects of school. In middle school, she noticed the curriculum getting hard, and it was at this time she began her spiral downward when she began using drugs. By the time she was sixteen, she was a high school drop-out and a recovering methamphetamine addict. She recalled,

I've definitely not had a normal teenage childhood, but I believe after realizing my own mistakes and coming back [to school] and now working really hard and I can be really proud that I'm clean [and] going back to school, I got my cap and gown and I cried. I haven't been able to wear it yet, but I cried.

This section has shown situations have long lasting impacts on student success. Some students do start out with the right tools and situations. The fall can begin gradually and build over time such as Leroy's (C3) mobility, or it can begin suddenly as Flower's (C2) drug use began in middle school. The next section addresses student recollections of the experience of grade retention.

Go back to the beginning. The researcher had knowledge of at least four of the 23 participants being retained. Three of those students were from Group A and were being educated all day in the traditional high school setting. One other student, Brad (B6), a student in Group B, was also retained in kindergarten. All four students mentioned retention in their interviews. Two of the students attended the Midwest District when the retentions occurred, and this was validated when the researcher reviewed the students'

permanent school records. Most of the records did not contain information going back to their elementary years, so there could have possibly been more students within the study with a retention experience who did not mention it, and it was not a question asked during the interview process. The participants who disclosed the fact they had been retained were truthful and honest about the event. Ashleigh (A1), a junior student, began her interview speaking about kindergarten and being retained. The interview began by the researcher asking her favorite grade in elementary school, Ashleigh (A1) responded kindergarten and that "...I did kindergarten twice" (Ashleigh, A1). She remembered her second kindergarten teacher and the memories related to that experience. When the researcher probed for more details by asking if she remembered her kindergarten teacher's name, she responded "Miss K andsomebody, I don't know" (Ashleigh, A1). When describing details of why kindergarten was her favorite, Ashleigh (A1) referred to her time with Miss K. The memories of her first kindergarten experience were not discussed at all. Ashleigh (A1) also did not remember any details about attending preschool which could have been a reason for being retained in kindergarten.

At times, a participant did have some stability in early childhood and then circumstances occurred which changed the educational path a student took. Kimbirlyne (A4), a freshman, spoke fondly during the interview of her preschool experiences at Head Start. She discussed the physical aspects of the preschool, activities they accomplished, and the friendships she made during that time. Her voice carried a happy tone as she recalled the details of her experience. In kindergarten, she was retained. Her accounting of the events took a more serious tone when she told of being taken out of her home and placed in foster care with her grandparents. While Kimbirlyne (A4) did not elaborate on

the details of why she was removed from her home, her report of educational mobility during this year helped paint the picture of not only why she struggled educationally but also how her family life changed at each of these points. She reported,

Well, I guess I didn't do so good because they held me back in kindergarten. I moved to [school 1] to [school 2] and from [school 2], I moved to [school 3]. I was in foster care when I was in kindergarten. I lived with my grandparents.

When my mom got us back I was in kindergarten, so we moved where she was living. Then her and my dad got together and we moved over by [school 3].

Similar to Leroy's (C3) frustrations when he was moved multiple times in elementary school, Kimbirlyne (A4) expanded on why she thought she was retained in kindergarten. She logically put forth her reasons by stating,

We were at one place at [school 1] and when we moved to [school 3] they were at a different place. At [school 3] they were WAY ahead of both [school 3] and [school 1]. Everywhere we went we were at a different spot.

During one of the interviews, the subject of retention came up accidentally. When interviewing Brad (B6), the researcher was prompting answers about preschool, and Brad (B6) mentioned having friends who went to elementary school with him and they had graduated the year before he did. When the researcher reviewed Brad (B6)'s permanent record, she found the retention had occurred in kindergarten, three years before they discovered Brad (B6) had leukemia. Even years later, Brad (B6) still recalled fond memories of his classmates and referred to them as such even when they graduated a year

before him. The next theme presents the different perspectives of the participants in regards to the places they learned prior to attending kindergarten.

Seems normal to me

The impression left with the researcher after interviewing the participants about their early childhood experiences was the students, with the exceptions of those who were placed in foster care, felt their early childhood situations were the norm. The following subsections look at how the participants' perspectives varied depending upon their experiences. The following sections discuss the various situations students reported learning in prior to attending kindergarten as well as some of the unconventional lessons they learned.

Pre-K All the Way. The participants who attended a preschool program remembered their experiences positively. Some of the students recalled attending federally funded programs such as Head Start, several others such as Flower (C2) attended faith-based programs, and a few others recalled attending programs where parents paid for preschool or a combination of daycare and preschool.

The students who attended Head Start had positive memories of the program. Sammie (B5), Kimbirlynne (A4), and Donnie (C8) all attended preschool at Head Start. All three of these participants spoke fondly of their experiences and could describe the preschool environment vividly. They spoke of singing, learning, riding the bus, playing on the playground, going on field trips, and acting out dramatic play. Sammie did not associate learning with the activities they did in the Head Start, because they were fun. She said, "Kindergarten was kind of more, you got to work, kind of. It wasn't like we were bad, but you've gotta work more. Not playing 24/7.

Even though Luis (B1) did not call the preschool he attended Head Start, many of the aspects were similar. He talked about riding a bus to school, eating both breakfast and lunch, learning personal hygiene skills such as brushing his teeth, the different learning areas in the classroom, doing “lots of crafts” (Luis, B1), having “the little carpets for each individual” (Luis, B1), and being supported by teachers who “spoke to me in Spanish” (Luis, B1). He further remembered, “I caught up with English real fast...[but] that was when I got to school, In my house, I would just talk Spanish” (Luis, B1) The researcher assumed it was an all day program because Luis spoke of disliking naptime because “I wasn’t a sleeper” (Luis, B1).

While a few of the students attended faith-based preschool programs, they did not report the religious content of these programs. The participants mostly recalled the activities they did such as doing alphabet work, playing games, finger painting, and playing on the playground. Flower (C2) remembered a “lot of take-home things. Like, that parents could help with. Like cards and stuff. There was a lot of flash cards, they loved those stupid flash cards, and they had them for like everything you could imagine” (Flower, C2).

Hensley (A5) remembered his preschool and daycare being one and the same. He recalled learning “basic stuff, ABC’s and counting to 100” (Hensley, A5). He was also excited when he recalled this time period because “in daycare I did have a buddy. We wouldn’t leave each other’s side. We laid down by each other at naptime and we went everywhere together. We got in trouble too; we did all the stuff together” (Hensley, A5). Julianna (B4) also recalled the friendships made in preschool. Three of her friends,

including her best friend Katie, who attended preschool with her, were also in her kindergarten classroom the next year.

Home school. Even though James (A3) did not go to preschool, he did participate in many learning activities. His grandparents saw his physical abilities and enrolled him in sports programs such as basketball and soccer. At home, his grandma taught him how to do the “simple stuff” (James, A3). She made sure he was read to and taught him small words. His step-grandfather taught him math, and he remembered a neighbor having a huge library with many books. James (A3) stated learning occurred at his grandparents “all the time, like 24/7” (James, A3).

Ashleigh (A1) recounted sitting at the table doing activities with her mom. She remembers coloring and working on flash cards. Gabrielle (A2) remembers both her parents reading to her and practicing what her older brother did at school. Milo (C5) recalled the nuns at the homeless shelter playing games and reading to his family during their extended stay. Patience (B2) remembers her grandmother’s house as a place where she learned to get ready for school. She said “[grandma] would buy those books, paperback books that taught you how to read and simple math. She helped me a lot before I started kindergarten” (Faith, C4). Smurfy (C6), a freshman, remembered staying at his grandmother’s house. He recalled her teaching him to count to the thousands and learning about coins.

A safe place to stay. Several of the participants remember attending private home daycare before entering school. All of the participants reported they went because their parents were working and needed a place for their children to stay. Angus (A6) grew up in a two-parent household. He remembered going to a babysitter’s house because both his

parents worked during the day. When asked if the baby sitter worked on any learning skills to prepare to go to kindergarten, he said “no, she just made sure we were fed and then we’d play all day” (Angus, A6). He went on to state,

I don’t remember her ever sitting us down. I remember we used to watch videos like, kind of learning videos, like now days they have Dora the Explorer, you know I don’t remember what they had back then...but it was learning shows like that. I don’t think she ever sat us down and had us do any like learned stuff.

Dominic (B8) also went to a babysitter’s house and stayed there until his mother got off work. He remembers playing basketball and watching educational shows such as Barney, Teletubbies, and Sesame Street. He did not recall any structured learning activities but “she read to us sometimes to put us to sleep” (Dominic, B8). Faith (C4) had a short stint in preschool, but she spent the most of her life prior to entering school in a variety of babysitting situations.

Life’s lessons are not always in books. The participants mentioned several things their parents felt were important for them to learn academically including their alphabet, writing their name, and working in published workbooks to practice reading and mathematical skills. In addition to those activities, several other talents emerged and were remembered by the participants.

As the students recalled activities they did prior to going to kindergarten, they did not differentiate academic skills from other skills learned. Several students expressed their concern about beginning kindergarten without knowing how to tie their shoes. They remembered the method such as “loop, swoop, and pull” (Ashleigh, A1) and feeling

successful and helpful knowing they could accomplish the task because “there were a couple of kids that couldn’t...so I would show them” (Angus, A6).

Learning to ride a bike was also a skill mentioned by the participants. Ashleigh (A1) mentioned this skill as well as Gabrielle (A2). Ashleigh (A1) remembers being frustrated when trying to learn to ride her bike without training wheels. She reported being happy with her wheels on, but her dad had other ideas. She said, “My dad told me he had taken them [the training wheels] off, if I wanted to ride my bike, I would learn how to do it” (Ashleigh A1). Faith (C4) remembers getting angry at her stepfather when he attempted to help her learn to tie her shoes and ride a bike. She said “Like I’d get mad, throw my bike and go inside and say ‘I’m done, I’m not trying to learn how to do it anymore, I’m done” (Faith, C4).

Angus (A6) mentioned working on cars with his dad as a fond memory where he learned a skill prior to going to kindergarten. He said, “My dad helped [with learning]... now that I am older and stuff, I always [remembered] helping him work on cars...he would try and show me this is a 14 millimeter [wrench] whether I comprehended it or not...over time it helped because after that I could (Angus, A6).

It was also noticed by the researcher that specific skills were designated based on the gender of their parents and guardians. Participants remembered their mothers and grandmothers helping with the academic skills such writing their names, learning their alphabets, reading, and writing. Fathers and male figures were mentioned more often when the students were learning the more non-academic skills such as learning to tie their shoes, riding a bike, or working on cars. The next theme addresses relationships, both negative and positive, experienced by the participants in study.

I like you, You like me. Or do you?

The relationships experienced by the participants emerged as an important theme in the study. Students spoke of these connections from both positive and negative perspectives. At times during the interviews, it was not what was reported, but the surprising lack of details, air of indifference, or expressions of hurt which told the deeper story.

Good times, Good people. Most of the students recalled influential people in their lives. Many times it was a mother, father, or grandparents. James (A3) recalled his life when he lived with his grandparents prior to moving in with his dad in second grade. He remembered everything being good during his time with his grandparents, including his home life and school. He attributes it to the stability his grandparents provided. He stated, "...everything was good. I was like a good little church boy, I guess. I would go [to church] Sunday mornings, nights, and Wednesdays" (James, A3). He further revealed his appreciation for his grandma who provided material things as well as spiritual opportunities for him when he was young. He showed sorrow at her current physical state when he noted,

She has Alzheimer's now. She's 83, 83 years old, but she was really active until two or three years ago...now her mind is gone, and now when I go up to see her, well, me and my dad, our physical traits, we are almost identical...she thinks I'm my dad...it's just kind of bad.

Angus (A6) recalled spending quality time with his dad doing what he loved, working on cars. Gabrielle (A2), a junior, talked about a loving supportive family with parents who read to her and, in her opinion, prepared her to go to kindergarten. Julianna

(B4) recalled her mother “always being there for her” (Julianna, B4). Smurfy (C6), a freshman, remembered being loved by his grandmother and physical contact such as hugging meant a lot to him. He stated, “That is one of the things I miss about being a little kid, ‘cause now my grandma can hardly stand me. She still loves me, it’s just I kind of annoy her sometimes” (Smurfy, C6). Clark (A8) also remembered spending quality time with his grandmother. She would pick him up from preschool each day, and he would stay with her until his parents picked him up in the evening. While Patience (B2) reported her mother was supportive, it was her grandmother who “kind of always pushed me more” (Patience, B2).

Students also recalled favorite teachers and the reasons they had inspired them. Flower (C2), a senior, remembered her fifth grade teacher Mrs. P. as her favorite because she motivated her to read. Angus (A6) similarly remembered his fourth grade teacher who fostered his passion of reading when she read *Where the Red Fern Grows* to the class. Leroy (C3) loved his second grade teacher’s personality. Faith (C4) remembered her third grade teacher as being “concerned about each student. It wasn’t that she just picked her favorites. I remember her always being concerned with how I was doing and she was always keeping up, she was good at that stuff” (Faith, C4).

Clark (A8) remembered his third grade teacher as his favorite. As a child, Clark (A8) was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. He described Ms. T as someone who “it was easy to learn with her and she was nice” (Clark, A8). He remembered projects including an ice cream incentive to learn multiplication tables. He remembered getting “the whole thing” (Clark, A8). Luis (B1), who was born in Mexico, went to preschool through second grade in Texas. In third grade, he moved to Missouri and attended school

in a district near Midwest District. He remembered his favorite teacher being his English as Second Language teacher because “she was pretty nice. She helped me in a lot of stuff” (Luis, B1). Julianna’s (B4) favorite was her kindergarten teacher. She described her as “really great, she was very nice and loving” (Julianna, B4). Sammie (B5) appreciated her second grade teacher because she reprimanded in private. She stated, “She wouldn’t call you down in front of the class if you were doing something. She wouldn’t make you feel embarrassed, she wouldn’t embarrass you” (Sammie, B5).

Negative authority. Participants in the study also remembered negative encounters with people who impacted their young lives. James (A3) remembered after first grade he was sent to live with his father. He left the stability of his grandparents’ home and moved to another town and a new school. He stated, “When I got to second grade, I went from being on top to just totally going down and down, and it’s been that way ever since” (James, A3). James (A3) was adamant that if he had been able to stay with his grandparents, his life and education would have been different. He said,

I know it would have been different. There ain’t no thinking about it. I’ve known what I would’ve been doing. I don’t know everything I would’ve been doing or what I would’ve done, but I know my attitude, I would have made it through high school making straight A’s.

When asked about his impending high school graduation, James (A3) did not feel the need to participate in the ceremonies. When asked why he felt that way, he said, “Who would I invite? My dad is a piece of sh—and my grandmother is so sick she can’t leave the house” (James, A3).

Faith (C4) (C4) recalled a memory of a situation with one of her babysitters. Even as an 18 year old student, her feelings of how this individual hurt her verbally showed through in the interview. She remembered,

[I] got in trouble, a lot of not so happy memories happened there...all I remember from my babysitter are like little things you learn growing up that people are supposed to be supportive with. Like I was trying to tie my shoe and she was just screaming at me, like in my face. I was trying to do it and she was just screaming at me 'no you're doing it wrong.' I didn't really learn much with her.

Just as participants remembered the positive memories of their teachers, a few students remembered times in their elementary careers where a teacher left a negative impression upon them. Donovan (B3), a sophomore, recalled this incident,

About fourth grade I started not doing so well because of what a teacher said to me. She told me that... she called me stupid, and told me that I'm not capable of learning, that I won't turn out to be anything, so after all that, I like shut down. Let's say a teacher and I don't like each other, or if I don't like a teacher, I really....I don't do so good.

Donnie's (C8) perception of his third grade teacher also stands out in his mind even years later. By his own admittance, he was getting into trouble and even thought he would fail third grade. He remembered, "Mrs. B, she didn't like me...I remember I thought I was going to fail that class because I thought she hated me, yeah" (Donnie, C8). After being prompted about class work including grammar, spelling, and math, Donnie (C8) returned to the relationship with his teacher. He reiterated, "Yeah...I thought she hated me. When I went to other grades, when I walked by her room she would give me

kind of...not an evil look...but I knew she hated me...a weird 'I don't like you' look (Donnie, C8).

The final example in this section deals with an interview that seemed to hold little surface information. Quinn (B7), a sophomore, was in his alternative school teacher's opinion, one of the brightest students they had. Quinn (B7) had been in the Midwest District since kindergarten. During his elementary years, he had attended one of the elementary schools and when a new school was opened, he was transferred to that campus. Quinn (B7) was passive during the interview and approached it with a careless and indifferent attitude. He answered many of the questions with "I don't remember" and when he did give an answer it was short and did not contain many details. He spoke of kindergarten being his favorite grade because "it allowed a lot of freedom" (Quinn, B7). He never mentioned a favorite teacher. One thread of information was clear to the researcher from his answers; he was gifted and according to his report, had been denied the opportunity to attend the district program by a classroom teacher. In one of the most detailed answers he gave, he talked about a year in school where he struggled and the teacher he remembered. He stated,

[It was] Mrs. R. Yeah, kindergarten or first grade, they were wanting me to go to the gifted program or whatever, and then I goofed off a lot in Mrs. R's class, so she said there's no way or something like that. I don't really remember details.

The refusal to send Quinn (B7) to a program which challenged him could have been the educational turning point where a bright student began to spiral downward. His lackadaisical answers to the researcher left the impression this was not a time period he particularly enjoyed reliving. By his own admittance, it was at this time period where he

was bored in the classroom, “discovered goofing off” (Quinn, B7), and became the class clown as a distraction.

The insights gained by the researcher about the students’ early childhood relationships, whether they were encouraging or negative, were not only moving, but valuable in gaining a better understanding of the strong impact relationships have on a child’s development. These relationships work closely with the theme discussed in the following section, *Listen to Your Heart*, where the participants discuss their perspectives about learning.

Listen to your heart

The participants in this study all met Midwest School District’s criteria to be considered at-risk of academic failure. While the students were classified into three different subgroups based on the setting in which they were being educated, being successful and gaining high school credits were still the primary focus of the district as well as most of the students. In the following section, *My Generation*, students revealed their personal definitions of academic success. The next subheading, *The Next Generation*, the participants were asked to live vicariously through the life of a small child and to contemplate how they would help that child educationally succeed.

My generation. It was of interest to the researcher how the participants in the study would define academic success. The researcher drew information from the students’ permanent school records. It was obvious by their grades and for some, by the high school credits they had accumulated thus far, this was not always the measurement by which they would wish to be defined. The researcher asked each participant how he or

she would define academic success. After the students answered the question, they were then asked to apply the definition to their own situation.

Several of the students defined academic success as trying one's hardest and doing one's best. Gabrielle (A2) defined it this way: "Well, I don't think academically successful means you are going to get straight A's your whole life. I think it means you try your hardest no matter" (Gabrielle, A2). Kimbirlyne's (A4) definition was similar when she stated, "Try your hardest even if it not like the perfect grade".

James (A3) defined academically successful as going through an experience and the learning you gained from those encounters. He further stated, "The person who makes D's or F's is more academically successful than the person who makes A's and B's because you are only as smart as the experiences you have been through" (James, A3). Clark (A8) defined the term as, "if you get enough education to complete your goals" (Clark, A8). Angus (A6) related academic success with having gained the skills to get a good job.

Julianna (B4) was one participant who felt she was finally on the right track. She expressed during her interview she did not feel she was a successful learner when she was younger. When asked to expand on this, she revealed only in the past year she had been placed on medication for Attention Deficit Disorder. Since that time her grades had improved and she was doing much better. But as a junior, who had not shown much success academically, she was still coming from behind. Sammie (B5), who provided the researcher one of the most colorful and interesting interviews in the study, expressed her frustration when she stated,

I think that if you're going to school, you're trying your hardest, I mean, I hate grades. I bust my butt as hard as I can and I still don't get what I think I should get. I think if you're working your best, and you can tell you're working hard at it, and that you're gonna... that you should succeed in it. [But] that's not how grades and stuff work .

Sadly, because the ultimate goal of the students was to graduate from high school, their point of reference led them back to grades and high school credits, some of the students felt they were not meeting the criteria they had the freedom to create. Several students listed specific skills such as turning in your homework, getting C's or above, or working hard as part of their criteria. Luis' (B1) definition read like a textbook answer and may have not reflected his definition of academic success but perhaps his parents'. He stated a person who was academically successful "would be a person who has straight A's. At least the B's here and there...that is just doing good at school...does their homework, doesn't skip school, you know, is a good kid you know?" (Luis, B1). Stephen (A7), a senior, defined academically successful as "tak[ing] the knowledge the teachers give you and apply it to the assignments given by them" (Stephen, A7). When asked by the researcher if he was personally academically successful by his definition, Stephen (A7) replied,

I've slacked a lot, I don't apply myself...I've never failed a grade, so I do think I'm successful academically. I could have been more successful, I could be at the top of my class with C's and B's, I just really haven't been motivated to do that.

Flower's (C2) responses to the questions about being academically successful were honest, insightful, and heartfelt. After experiencing large setbacks in her life,

including a drug addiction in her early teenage years, her definition expressed her reflections rather than her ideals of academic success. She said,

I would have to say it [academically successful] would mean getting good grades. You know, not failing a grade because you are held back. Graduating. And I would have to say, you know, focus. I think that would be a big part of that too. 'Cause if, you know, you're not there and you don't want to learn, you are not going to learn anything.

Most of the students expressed in honest terms their failures and the responsibility they held in their academic situations. For example, Gabrielle (A2), who at the end of the school year was choosing to drop-out and be homeschooled, stated she lacked the motivation to meet the standards. The majority of the participants felt they could give more effort and be more successful.

The next generation. During the interview process, the students were asked about how they would proceed to help a young child get ready to be successful in kindergarten. Most of the students focused mostly on skills they felt were important for children to know before entering kindergarten such as writing their names, knowing their alphabet, and counting. Several of the students specifically mentioned reading to children as being important. While some participants broached the subject of preschool without prompting, others did not and were asked how important they felt preschool was to children.

Some of the participants felt preschool was for children who needed extra help. Ashleigh (A1) and Gabrielle (A2) both did not attend preschool programs. Ashleigh (A1) felt preschool was for "kids that don't know as much as they should ...some kids need it more than others" (Ashleigh, A1). Gabrielle (A2) stated, " Well, if you are not gonna

teach your kids the basic stuff they need to know, then I think it is important, but, I didn't go to preschool and I think I'd be in the same situation where I am at now" (Gabrielle, A2). Donovan (B3) stated preschool did not teach the right kind of things. He did not relate some activities to learning. He said,

They like teach you, like they sing, they teach you how to tie your shoes, and like with letters and stuff, but most of the time you take a nap and play outside. Which in my mind doesn't help much; it just teaches you what your parents, you know, would teach you.

Other participants felt differently about children having preschool experiences. Clark (A8) and Hensley (A5) noted it would help with social skills; Angus (A6), felt the routines such as riding the bus and being away from parents would help children adjust when it came time to go to kindergarten. Luis (B1) felt his preschool experience helped him begin to learn English since he came from a family who spoke only Spanish. Sammie (B5) loved preschool. It was obvious in her voice when she recalled details of attending Head Start. She also recommended her preschool brother should attend "to get him prepared" (Sammie, B5).

While exploring all of the details surrounding the first theme, *Home is Where You Lay Your Head*, the researcher was able to glean a wealth of knowledge about the impact living arrangements had on the participants during their younger years. These settings, as they were described under the subtitles, *Traditional Living*, *Unconventional Living*, and *Working for a Living*, laid a foundation for how the participants currently view life. The next theme, *Box of Chocolates*, brought forth the unexpected occurrences and situations that impacted some of the participants' lives as they were discussed in more detail under

the following subheadings: *Why Me? Serious Illness*, which described events dealing with short and long-term illness; *Not in Kansas Anymore*, discussed how traveling a wrong path can impact a child's education; and finally, *Go Back to the Beginning*, which dealt with the topic of grade retention.

The third open theme of this study was *Seems Normal to Me*. This theme encompassed participant responses about the locations or settings in which they spent their early childhood days and the learning that took place in these. The subheading, *Pre-K All the Way*, referred to the participants who attended preschool. *Home School* described participant situations that stayed at home with a parent or other guardian. The students' circumstances that went to daycare are described in *A Safe Place to Stay*. The final subgroup, *Life's Lessons Are Not Always in Books*, described the less than ordinary types of learning the participants experienced.

The fourth theme that emerged is titled *I Like You. You Like Me. Or Do You?* This theme referred to relationships and is addressed under the subheadings of *Good Times*, *Good People*, and *Negative Authority*. The fifth and final theme is labeled *Listen to Your Heart*. This theme reflects on participant responses about their learning and academic success. The subgroups in this theme were titled *My Generation*, which refers to participant responses in regards to their current learning, and *The Next Generation*, which conveyed how the students in the study would educationally support a young child.

Focused Themes

The overarching goal of this study was to determine if students who were considered at-risk revealed their thoughts in regards to their early educational experiences and if those experiences impacted their current educational placements. After reviewing

the open themes that emerged from the observations, interviews with participants, and review of student records, the researcher developed three key concepts to discuss the aspects of the participants' early childhood experiences. The first concept, *Positive Early Childhood Experiences*, includes *Advocates*, *Asylum*, and *Affiliations*. The next concept, *Damaging Early Childhood Experiences*, encompassed *Inappropriate Role Models* and *Inadequate Opportunities*. Finally, the last focused theme, *A Means to an End*, addresses *Familiar Practices* and *Future Prospects*.

Positive Early Childhood Experiences

Most of the participants spoke positively about their early childhood years prior to entering kindergarten. While some felt at the beginning of the interviews they could not remember back that far, when prompted with specific examples such as describing some of the physical attributes of a classroom or naming someone they remembered spending time with, their voices would lighten and their expressions would become less guarded and many times their memories would come out in short, excited, spurts. The following subsections discuss the positive influences noted by the participants.

Advocates. Most of the participants remembered an influential person during their early childhood years. For some of the students, their parents stood out as giving them the encouragement they needed. Flower (C2) mentioned her mother reading to her before bedtime as a young child. Brad (B6) mentioned the same type of memory in regards to his step-father. Ashleigh (A1) recalled her mother working on projects with her. Luis (B1) remembered his mother making sure he had the opportunity to go preschool. She knew he would need the skills she could not provide for him, i.e., the ability to speak English fluently.

Some of the students, such as Clark (A8), remembered going to his grandmother's house each day after attending preschool. He recalled specific books she read and how he felt he already knew information they were learning in preschool because of her influence. James (A3) spoke positively about his grandmother and showed appreciation for her sacrifice of raising him in those early years. Smurfy's (C6) grandmother was one to show physical love. He remembered her giving "lots of hugs" (Smurfy, C6). Patience (B2) remembered her visits to her grandmother's house as fun and educational.

Other participants remembered influential people besides parents or grandparents. Patience (B2) added her brothers and sisters to her list of influential people. While her grandmother and mother focused on making her stronger academically, her siblings, who were several years older than she, gave her real-life experiences like doing "outdoor stuff together...we would play tug of war or ride bikes and stuff outside" (Patience, B2). Stephen (A7) remembered attending preschool with his older brother and his mother being the teacher. He remembered this arrangement made him feel special. He recalled his brother reading to him and working with him on spelling words.

While few of the participants could remember their teacher's names from preschool, they remembered their influence. Luis (B1) remembered his preschool teachers helping him learn to speak English and how they would work with him daily on this skill. Sammie (B5) remembered her teacher having story time each day while Hensley's (A5) teachers taught him all the "basic stuff" (Hensley, A5).

Asylums. Preschool was a positive experience for most of the participants. The students who attended preschool were able to remember more vivid details about their

experiences. They could, with prompting, describe physical aspects of the classrooms, the playground, and activities they accomplished. The researcher made certain assumptions about how time was spent in the setting. For example, it appears from Kimbirlyne's (A4) memories of the Head Start she attended that they engaged in center time. Her memories were "we had a platform kind of thing that had rails upstairs. We had a dress up closet, and a kid kitchen, and a place where kids could go act like doctors, and we all took turns being someone different during dress up" (Kimbirlyne, A4). Sammie (B5) and Donnie (C8), who also attended Head Start, gave accounts that supported Kimbirlyne's (A4) memories. Clark (A8), who attended private preschool, remembered doing "ABC's and learning numbers and stuff, but we played a lot, too" (Clark, A8).

Even though Luis (B1) stated he could not remember anything about preschool, some of his recollections returned to him in bits and pieces. For example, he remembered they ate oatmeal. After probing for more details, Luis (B1) remembered other things such as having to go to time out, the facility was not a school or attached to other buildings, they rode a bus to school, and they worked on basic skills such as brushing their teeth. These thoughts assisted the researcher in determining the preschool was a program designed to prepare students to enter kindergarten, not just a private preschool and daycare.

Some students who did not attend preschool also remembered their situations as being encouraging as well as a learning environment. Several, including Ashleigh (A1) and Gabrielle (A2), remember sitting at the kitchen table working with their mothers. Ashleigh (A1) recalled doing flash cards, reading books, and making a Santa Claus out of a paper plate. Gabrielle's (A2) family read to her a lot, and she mimicked her older

brother who was already in school. She stated, “my brother was a grade older than me, so anything he’d bring home, I would kind of learn it as well, so I was a little ahead there” (Gabrielle, A2). As noted before, Patience (B2) remembered both her mother and grandmother reading and doing activities with her. James (A3) recalled living in his grandmother’s house as “everything was good” (James, A3). He remembered his grandmother and step-grandfather providing a wealth of opportunities for him including academic, social, and athletic.

Affiliations. Regardless of attending preschool, daycare, or staying home with family, most students spoke of social situations with other children. They remembered establishing first friendships, playing with neighbors outside, being with family, and learning with siblings. Several of the participants spoke in plural. For example, Dominic (B8) when speaking of going to daycare, he spoke of activities ‘we’ did such as playing basketball and watching T.V. Hensley (A5) also did this when he described the daycare he attended and the friends he had there. Julianna (B4) remembered her three best friends in preschool who then attended kindergarten with her.

Some of the students recalled attending church and having social relationships there as well. James (A3) remembered being “a good little church boy...I would go to Sunday mornings, nights, and Wednesdays” (James, A3). He also recalled being in a youth program called AWANA and having a good relationship with his team leader who spent time with him outside of church. Gabrielle (A2) also spoke of attending church when she was young. She said,

I loved Sunday school, like I went, when we moved back to Missouri, we went to [church name] and we went there for awhile, up until second or third grade. I

loved Sunday school, I liked reading, liked helping read the book, playing games, interacting. When I was a kid I loved that stuff...it was kind of like preschool, just with Jesus.

Donovan (B3) remembered going to preschool and staying for church on Wednesdays. Dominic (B8) attended church on a regular basis, and Brad (B6) has attended church his whole life. Sammie (B5) remembered attending church on Wednesdays “and we sometimes went on Sundays, but usually that was when Dad came home [off the truck], so we didn’t always go” (Sammie, B5). Patience (B2) recollected her church experiences being a social time. She did not elaborate on the religious teachings, but she stated they did a lot with memory verses and reading the Bible. In her retellings, she chose to concentrate on the relationships with other children and the family gatherings such as picnics.

Damaging Early Childhood Experiences

While most participants spoke positively of their early childhood experiences prior to entering school, few of the participants revealed that during this time period negative experiences were occurring. However, the researcher found some indications of this time period being possible onsets of academic failure. The following subsections look at the information in regards to unconstructive relationships as well as the lack of opportunities.

Inappropriate role models. Only one student spoke out about a negative relationship during their preschool years. Faith (C4) remembered one of her babysitter’s screaming at her when she was not grasping the concept of tying her shoes. Another relationship, the one with her mother, did not provide an avenue to increase her

educational skills. When asked about certain events and activities, Faith (C4) (C4), spoke uncertainly of her preschool years. When asked the question about people who stand out as helping her learn, Faith (C4) could not think of any person. She reflected on her relationship with her mother during these early childhood years. She said,

Well it was just me and my mom pretty much for a long time growing up. But she didn't really have a lot of time to work with me on things. That's why I can't make that connection. She was always working trying to support us and I just can't remember.

She recalled one day prior to kindergarten just "knowing" how to read and how surprised her mother was that she had learned that skill.

Hensley (A5) painted a picture of life revolving around his daycare and preschool. He did not give his parents any credit for the things he learned prior to going to kindergarten, but he felt the daycare provided all the skills he needed to know to enter school. He stated, "Well, I went to daycare, my parents worked until 5:30 every day" (Hensley, A5). Sammie (B5) and Flower (C2) both talked about their fathers being gone all the time, Sammie's (B5) dad drove a semi-truck and Flower (C2) just talked about her father being "absent" during those years.

James (A3) and Kimbirlynne (A4) both talked about being in foster care during their early years. Kimbirlynne (A4) was taken into care during her kindergarten year and was sent to live with her grandmother. This situation made the researcher wonder if there were other incidents, prior to her attending school, which were reported and the removal was the result of ongoing concerns. Regardless, the agency felt the placement with her

grandmother, which was short-term according to Kimbirlynné's (A4) memories, was a safe place for her to be.

Even though James (A3) was content with his placement with his grandmother, the events leading to this were traumatic regardless of his age. James' (A3) mother took medication, fell asleep, and left him in an unsafe situation. He nearly drowned in the bathtub where he was barely resuscitated. James (A3) never mentioned his father during his early childhood, only stating "I got taken away from my mom" (James, A3). Being placed with his grandmother was not temporary or short lived because according to James (A3), "I was like two years old or a year old" (James, A3). He was not sent to live with his father until the beginning of second grade where he probably was seven or eight years old. This describes at least a five year period where he lived with someone other than a natural parent.

Inadequate opportunities. In some of the participants' situations, it seemed the settings did not further the students' opportunities for academic learning. Milo (C5) reported when he was small, his mother had left an abusive relationship. He noted staying in several shelters until coming to stay at one shelter for an extended period of time. Even though he has been told by his mother that this was a happy time for the family, one must consider the circumstances surrounding living in a shelter. Moving to and from shelters could be indicative of no financial support and possibly fear of the abusive partner finding their location. Perhaps Milo's (C5) mom painted the happy picture in order to reduce the stigma of living in refuge. Regardless of the reasons, it appears from Milo's (C5) interview his mother, with the support of the nuns at the shelter, were trying to provide basic needs. He said,

They [the nuns] helped us get into our first house. Gave us everything needed, food, dishes, things for our rooms, toys... everything we needed. Someone had just donated a washer and dryer, they [the nuns] said they were not even taking it to their warehouse area...they took it right to our place and they gave it to us.

Another setting also did nothing to promote educational learning in early childhood. Dominic (B8), Angus (A6), and Faith (C4) all reported being cared for in private homes while their parents worked. While it was apparent their basic needs were met, it was obvious from these participants' reports the academic focus was lacking in these situations. The students gave the least amount of information in the interviews about structured activities. The only two things Dominic (B8) remembered were playing basketball and watching TV. Angus (A6) reported having his basic needs met, such as being fed and supervised, but there was a lack of information about educational activities. Both boys recalled the TV shows they watched such as *Sesame Street*, *Teletubbies*, and *Barney*. Since these shows were on Public Television channels, which are free, it could be indicative of a home not able to afford cable television. From the participants' reports, there was minimal time spent doing activities that would have been considered academic. Two of the students, Faith (C4) and Angus (A6), indicated short periods of time in a preschool setting. This information might hint at preschool being cost prohibitive to the parents and of them taking the more economical approach of home daycare for the care of their children.

A Means to an End

Even though the types of academic activities as well as the situations where the learning took place before entering kindergarten varied from participant to participant, an

abundance of information can be gleaned from the participants' recollections. The following subsection, *Familiar Practices*, recapitulates the various settings and activities reported by the participants. *Future Prospects* examines participants' views of preschool education and its importance.

Familiar practices. The researcher grouped the participants into three different groups based on the setting they attended during their early childhood years. The first group of students stayed at home prior to entering kindergarten. Some had stayed with parents and others with grandparents. All of these participants conveyed they had done learning activities. The most commonly reported were learning to write their names, using flash cards, counting, coloring, and doing crafts. They also reported the most incidents of non-academic learning such as tying their shoes and learning to ride a bike.

The second group of students reported they stayed in a home daycare setting. This faction of students reported the least amount of educational activities. TV watching in this group was high, and only one student reported his babysitter read to them "sometimes."

The final group of students attended some type of preschool. Most students in this group of participants recalled vivid details about their preschool locations as well as the activities they did while they were there. They recounted doing learning such as learning their alphabet, counting, and completing paper/pencil activities. They also remembered learning centers in their classrooms and described activities where they were learning as they played. This group remembered more relationships with other children and the social aspects of the preschool situations.

It was evident to the researcher that the participants in the study felt the opportunities provided to them by their parents or guardians sufficed and prepared them to enter kindergarten. The researcher found the students who attended preschool were more specific and elaborated on more details in their recollections of their early childhood experiences. The participants who stayed at home were limited in their recollections of their experiences. Almost no details of learning opportunities were recalled by the group that went to home daycare. The next subsection looks at the participants' views of the importance of preschool.

Future prospects. The main premise that revealed itself when the participants were asked what they would do to prepare a student educationally to attend school was children need to be supported. Where disagreement entered was deciding the best situation in which to do this. At this point, it appeared the participants fell back on their own early childhood experiences. Those who attended preschool agreed being in that setting was best to prepare children to go to kindergarten. Students who had stayed at home felt their situations were appropriate as well.

Two things surfaced when this question was asked. First, the participants who had attended home daycare realized their preparation prior to school was lacking. This was evident in their responses in the second part. The students who attended home daycares listed more activities they felt would prepare children, significantly more than what they had received as children. They reported children needed to be read to, they needed to learn their colors, to count and write, and to attend preschool.

Conclusion

In Chapter Four, the researcher compiled the data and conclusions reached from the study. The researcher believes an overall demographic view of the participants of the study by total group and by each subgroup was an important foundation in understanding the participants better before looking deeper into their interviews. The overview and personal reflection presented in the second part of the chapter gave a closer look at each data collection procedure, observations of students, personal interviews, and review of student permanent records. The five primary themes that emerged as the researcher compiled and processed the data resulted in the sections, *Home is Where You Lay Your Head*, *Box of Chocolates*, *Seems Normal to Me*, *I Like You. You Like Me. Or Do You?* and *Listen to Your Heart*. The final section discussed the focused themes generated in this study including *Positive Early Childhood Experiences*, *Damaging Early Childhood Experiences*, and *A Means to an End*.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if southwest Missouri high school students in a regular high school setting or an alternative education setting felt their early educational experiences impacted their current educational placements. While research existed that showed preschool impacted short-term, intermediate, and long-term levels of education (Barnett, 2007; Campbell & Ramey, 1995; Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Temple & Reynolds, 2007), there was a noticeable void of research connecting preschool to at-risk students as well as a lack of qualitative studies to review (Creswell, 2007).

An instrumental case study (Creswell, 2007) was chosen as the means to collect data about early childhood experiences of students within one educational institution. The setting of Midwest High School was chosen because it provided the researcher a large enough student population to draw a sample from three subgroups meeting specific criteria. All students invited to participate in the study meet district criteria to be considered at-risk of academic failure. The primary criterion distinguishing each of the three groups was the location where the students were educated. Students who met criteria for Group A were educated completely in the traditional high school setting, Group B students were educated in the traditional high school setting but received instruction from the district alternative school for up to 50% of their school day. The final group, C, was students who spent more than 50% of their school day in the district alternative school setting. Twenty-three students from Midwest High School participated

in the study. Only one group, C, had a participant withdraw from the study after permissions from both the parent and the student were obtained.

There were three types of data collected. First, observations of the students were conducted in two educational settings within the school day (Emerson et al., 1995). After the observations were completed, personal interviews with each participant were conducted (Seidman, 2006). Finally, a review of the students' permanent school records was reviewed to add any additional supporting documents to the study which served to triangulate the data collected (Merriam, 1998).

Summary of the Findings

In this study, three research questions were used to guide the research being conducted. The questions were:

1. What early childhood experiences, including relationships with teachers and peers, were viewed as assisting them in being successful in an academic setting, from the perspectives of:
 - a. at-risk students in a regular high school setting,
 - b. at-risk students who spent less than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes, and
 - c. at-risk students who spent more than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes?
2. What early childhood experiences, including relationships with teachers and peers, were viewed as inhibiting in regards to being successful in an academic setting, from the perspective of:
 - a. at-risk students in a regular high school setting,

- b. at-risk students who spent less than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes, and
 - c. at-risk students who spent more than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes?
3. What early childhood educational experiences were reported most frequently by:
- a. at-risk students in a regular high school setting,
 - b. at-risk students who spent less than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes, and
 - c. at-risk students who spent more than 50% of their school day in alternative education classes?

Of the 24 students selected to participate in this study, complete data were collected on 23 students. For each participant, two observations, one personal interview, and the review of the student's permanent record were conducted. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using open coding and focused coding (Emerson et al., 1995; Seidman, 2006). The themes that emerged during the open coding of the interviews revealed five areas where the researcher was able to place information. The data from the study was then analyzed further develop focused themes. Figure one presents a visual depiction of the themes, both open and coded, from the study.

The first theme, *Home is Where You Lay Your Head*, drew upon the participants' answers about circumstances surrounding their home environments. The following three subsections; *Traditional Living*, *Unconventional Living*, and *Working For a Living*, were used to describe specific living arrangements. The second theme, *Box of Chocolates*,

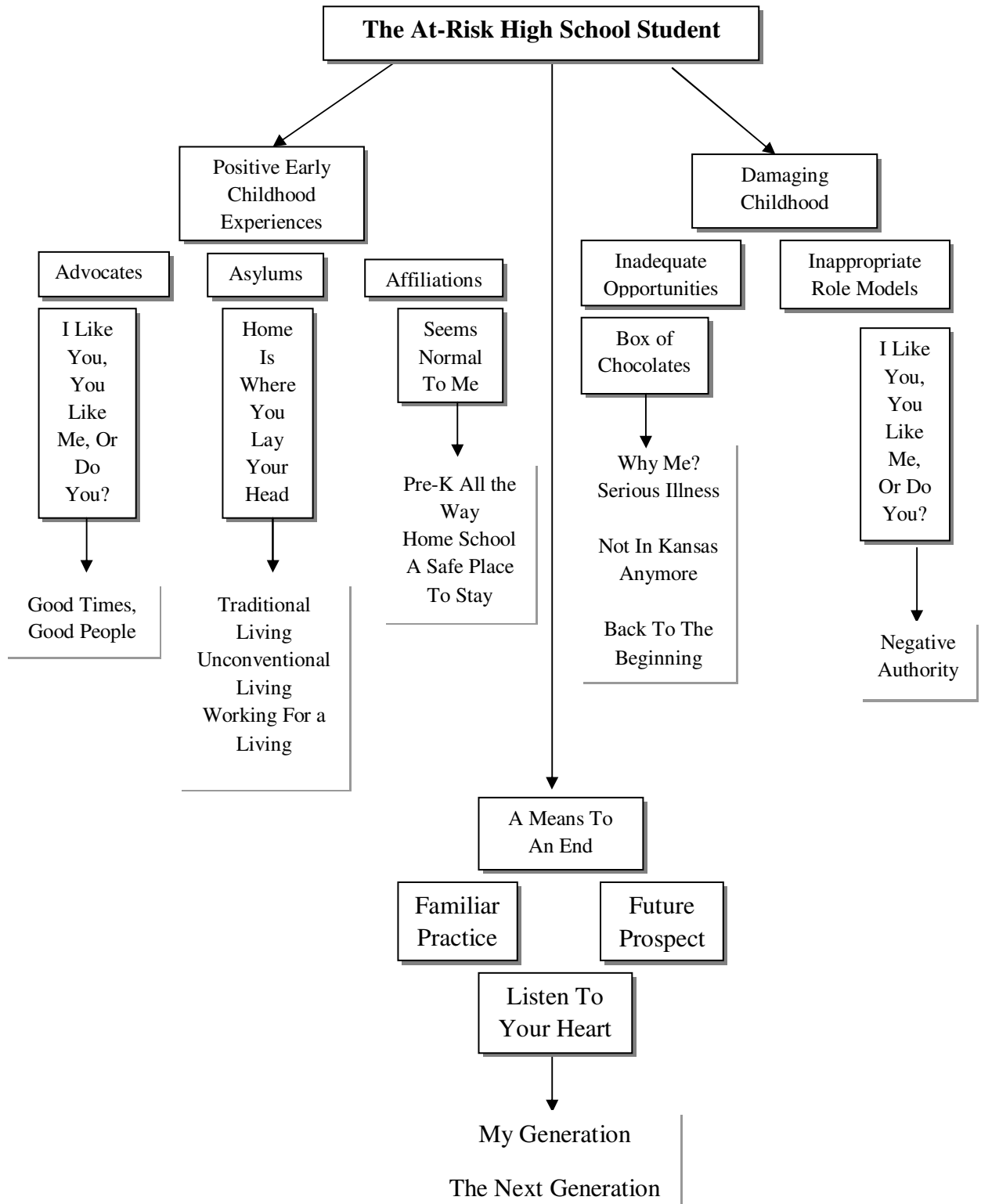


Figure 1. The development of open and focused themes

encompasses the unexpected events that happen in life and the reaction the participants had toward these. The subgroups under this theme include: *Why Me? Serious Illness*, described a few of the participants' battle with ill health; *Not in Kansas Anymore* illustrated how some participants' situations took them down the wrong road; finally, the last subsection, *Back to the Beginning*, talked about some of the participants and their experience with grade retention.

The next broad theme that emerged was titled *Seems Normal to Me*. In this section, participants' views on their early childhood experiences were recorded. *Pre-K All the Way* referred to students who attended preschool. *Home School* expressed the views of participants who stayed at home to learn. *A Safe Place to Stay* portrayed the perspectives of the participants who attended home daycares while their parents worked. The fourth subheading under this theme is called *Life's Lessons Are Not Always in Books*. This section addressed some of the non-academic ways students in the study reported in which they learned.

The fourth open theme which emerged was titled *I Like You, You Like Me, or Do You?* This theme discussed relationships, both positive and negative under the subsections of *Good Times*, *Good People* and *Negative Authority*. The fifth and final open theme was labeled, *Listen to Your Heart*. This theme examined the participants' perspectives on learning. This theme is broken down into two subsections titled *My Generation*, where students self-evaluated their learning, and *The Next Generation* where participants were asked to describe how they would prepare a child academically to enter kindergarten.

The focused coding (Emerson et al., 1995) conducted in this study arranged data into predetermined categories. The three groups used to encompass the data in this study were: *Positive Early Childhood Experiences*, which discussed the aspects helpful to the students in the study. These were categorized in the following subgroups: *Advocates*, *Asylums*, and *Affiliations*. The next focused theme was titled *Damaging Early Childhood Experiences*. This topic addressed the flip side to the first coded theme, the negative impacts which influenced the participants' lives. The information was grouped into the following subheadings: *Inappropriate Role Models* and *Inadequate Opportunities*. Last, *A Means to an End* took a focused approach to the participants' learning at the present and future. The subgroups for this focused theme were *Familiar Practices* and *Future Prospects*.

The participants in the study were distinguished by one of three groups, depending upon the setting they were being educated in high school. The researcher found there was no difference in the information gathered based upon the setting in which the students were educated. For the most part, the data collected were equitably distributed between all three of the groups.

Discussion of the Findings

The interviews in this study provided the means for gathering the majority of the information provided by the participants. Most of the data fit easily into the themes chosen, and rich, thick descriptions (Merriam, 1995) were extracted to describe situations.

A great deal of the information supplied by the participants came from their memories of occurrences from elementary school. These were in response to questions

from the interview designed to help the participants scaffold their thoughts and to assist them in remembering past happenings. This information gathered was insightful, and in some cases, vividly telling, because it provided a time frame or instance where the participant began the decline to being considered at risk of academic failure and became the students “who [had] difficulty adjusting to the regular classroom environment” (Lehr & Lange, 2003, p.61). These narratives were important to the study as they provided timelines where the early childhood years were isolated prior to entering school to answer the research questions.

The demographic information in this study in regards to preschool attendance was consistent with other studies presented while reviewing current literature. Most of the students, over 65%, who participated in the study, attended some form of preschool and while fewer students attended home daycare, the figures in this study also supported the research (Barnett, 2006). There was no visible difference in any of the study’s subgroups where preschool or any other factor was concerned. Preschool was attended equitably in all three groups, students staying in home daycares were equally distributed, as were students who stayed at home with their parents.

One interesting concept that emerged from the data that supports the first research question in this study was the clarity of the memories of the students. While most of the participants claimed to have had positive experiences in early childhood, some of the data suggested differently. Those who attended home daycares remembered few details of the activities they encountered in that setting, which aligns with research showing children placed in regular childcare make the least amount of academic gains (Barnett, 2008). The students who stayed home with a parent or another guardian remembered taking part in

basic activities such as flash cards, learning their alphabet, counting, and having someone who read to them. Most of the participants who attended a preschool program remembered more details and could vividly describe the settings they learned in even though they could not remember their teacher's name. The students spoke to academic and social aspects of attending preschool when they recounted details such as learning activities and friends they made (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003, Pianta, 2007). Most of the participants who attended preschool felt it benefited them both academically and socially (Carter, 2002, Barnett & Hustedt, 2003, Ramey & Ramey, 2004, Peebles-Wilkins, 2007). Sammie (B5), who attended Head Start, remembered these details about her preschool experience,

We had little mats and circles, and we had little tables we all go to sit at. We had like, they were laminated to the tables, and it had like a plate, and a fork, and a knife, and a spoon, and like kind of etiquette. Kind of teaching us that already. And we'd always eat lunch there, and then we'd go play on our mats, and we always had story time and naptime. This one time we built a big space ship, and we'd go stand in it and pretend we were flying in space and stuff.

From Sammie's (B5) description, it was obvious the preschool was designed as a center-based program, and she was "engaged in a mix of teacher-led and child initiated activities" (Barnett & Belfield, 2006, p. 80).

Another area that emerged from the data was in regards to relationships. The information gathered addressed both the first and second research questions. Most of the students remembered someone influencing them positively during their early childhood years. For some it was their caregivers who provided for their basic needs including

positive interactions (Swick, 2008). Participants also noted their teachers as being a positive influence who taught them many skills (Johns, 2005, Pianta, 2007). Kindergarten was a favorite grade of many of the participants. On the other hand, some students in the study remembered times where they had experienced a negative encounter with a caregiver or teacher. Most of these situations remembered occurred during their elementary school years; however, at least one participant reported a negative encounter in their early childhood years. In some of the participants' early childhood experiences, the researcher found what was *not* reported as a negative relationship actually had its origin in a damaging situation (Swick, 2008). For example, Milo (C5) spoke positively about living in the shelter, when in actuality, his mother had left an abusive relationship. James (A3) is another example of an underlying negative relationship; as he was living with his grandmother because of being taken into foster care.

The third research question in the study related to finding out the different types of programs and activities participants were exposed to during their early childhood years. This information was gathered during the interview process. The participants reported spending their preschool years in a variety of different settings including private preschool, Head Start, daycare, or staying with a parent or grandparent (Pianta, 2007). These locations are representative of the same places Barnett (2007) discussed when he said, "early childhood care and education have become the norm, [and] the results are far from uniform with respect to either quality or quantity" (p. 7). This point was apparent in this study. While a majority of the students in the study indicated they went to preschool, and this number would be higher if we included the participants who also went to daycare, the program deliveries varied extensively. It truly represented the "complex

patchwork of public and private programs that go by a variety of names, including preschool, pre-kindergarten (pre-K), four year-old kindergarten (4K), Head Start, childcare, daycare, and nursery school” (Barnett, 2006, p. 76). Once again, as in other areas of the study, it is beneficial to look at the pieces that were missing. While a high percentage of participants reported attending some type of preschool setting, none of the participants’ descriptions match a preschool program run by a school district. While school-sponsored preschools were not the norm at the time of the participant’s preschool years, they were in existence. It would have been interesting to see how students who had participated in those preschool programs were fairing in school.

A variety of activities were reported by the participants during the interview sessions. Most of the participants, who were stay at home children, remembered focusing on more traditional academic pursuits. They reported doing flash cards, writing their name, completing workbooks, and coloring pages. Those who attended preschool reflected primarily on centers in the room such as kitchens, spaceships, blocks, teacher read aloud, and dramatic play (Pianta, 2007). In fact, Sammie (B5) felt in preschool there was too much time dedicated to play and not enough academic rigor to get ready for kindergarten. One activity which surfaced many times, specifically with the children who stayed at home, was the ability to tie their shoes. Once again, as with the other two research questions, there was no difference between the subgroups in regards to their answers.

When considering the information from the findings, the researcher found some of the themes were more prevalent than others. One of the most common themes to emerge was *Positive Early Childhood Experiences*. Most students recalled people, living

arrangements, or other situations which had positively impacted their lives. Sometimes they mentioned family, and other times, it was an educator mentioned or for many of the students both. Students also recalled their living situations as well as other more unique locations, such as church, as being positive and happy memories.

For the most part, students in the study remembered their early childhood experiences as being appropriate and helping them prepare for school. These opinions were addressed in the theme *Means to An End*. With this in mind, it was not surprising when most of the participants were asked how they would educationally prepare a child to go to school, they listed familiar situations and activities based upon their own past experiences.

Even though *Damaging Early Childhood Experiences* revealed itself as the least prevalent theme in the study, impacting less than half of the participants, its effects possibly carried the sharpest memories and the most distressing details. Students recalled major setbacks in their lives caused by sickness, abuse, mobility, addiction, and most disturbingly, by the people they loved and trusted. In the next portion of this chapter, the information revealed in this study is presented as it pertains to the education of students as well as suggestions for educational leaders.

Implications For Educational Leaders

After considering all the data collected in this study, the researcher identified the common thread that weaved throughout the study as *Differentiated*. The assumption of the researcher when undertaking this project was participants in this study, who had experienced preschool education, would be predominately classified into Group A, the at-risk students who were being educated entirely in the traditional high school setting.

What was actually revealed was students who attended the preschool were scattered throughout the three groups, and one group did not stand out as having more of those experiences. In fact, there were no differences on any of the research questions based upon the students' group distinction. Every student told a different story and like snowflakes was unique to each one. When each piece was interlaced to tell the story, the differences became startling clear but were not bound to the grouping developed for this study.

Some of the circumstances experienced by the participants and reported in this study could have attributed to some degree to the student being considered at-risk. The causes of long-term illness, foster care, and mobility, lay outside the realms of a school's control. The symptoms of these incidents, which can be short or long-term, do surface and schools must be cognizant of that fact. These can transform from one type of problem to being an underlying concern in another.

Administrators must be aware that some of the information which surfaced during the study did lie within the school's boundaries. Negative relationships with teachers surfaced on more than one occasion. For example, the researcher wondered whether penalizing a student from attending a program for the gifted and talented might have led to a bright child becoming bored and whose potential was not realized. Several students remembered callous statements and body language which sent a strong negative message to them. Educators, regardless of position, must be aware that a moment of frustration can lead to a lifetime of remembrance for a child.

One interesting fact that surfaced, even years later, was the degree to which the participants remembered their early childhood settings. While students who attended

home daycares or stayed at home with their parents and guardians remembered basic details, the participants who attended preschool programs recalled more vivid descriptions and situations. The students who attended preschools organized as center-based programs, with a mixture of teacher led and student initiated activities, recalled more details than any other participants. They had been given the opportunity to learn in an environment that supported their developmental needs. The researcher also noted there were no students in this study who had participated in a public school-run preschool program. This would be an area for administrators to consider reviewing.

While the data gathered in this study did not lead in one consistent direction, several strong points surfaced that could be of a support to school leaders. By being aware of outside stressors such as illness and mobility on students can help them become more successful. Being aware of the messages sent to students, both verbal and non-verbal, can have a long-term impact on their academic success, and students remembered vivid details of their preschool experiences.

This study provided valuable information for the researcher. Listening to the voices of the participants has provided an awareness of not only listening to the details which are presented but also where there might be a void. Since the researcher is an elementary principal, it reinforced how lasting the impact can be either positive or negative, on a student and their academic success.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited in that it only gathered a sampling of at-risk students from one southwest Missouri high school. It is questionable whether the findings of this study could be generalized to other school districts of like size and demographics or to other schools in areas such as rural and metropolitan settings. Another limitation of the study would be only allowing students who met the criteria to be considered at-risk into the study. A different perspective to offer would be designing a study where all student viewpoints, not just those of the at-risk students, are heard.

Limitations also occurred in the data collection methods. The researcher only met with the participants twice during the study. The first time was to conduct the interview, and the second to member-check the transcript. It would have been beneficial to have conducted more than one interview to follow-up on key points from the initial meeting. While the personal interviews allowed the participants to expand on their own experiences, using a focus group as a collection tool might generate conversations between the students and offer a more rounded perspective of their early childhood experiences. The classroom observations on each participant only generated a minute amount of data for this study. In future studies, another data collection instrument might be considered.

The final limitation in this study surrounds the type of preschool programming. While none of the participants in this study indicated attending a school-sponsored preschool, in the past decade, it has become a popular concept. Future studies could include students who have been to district preschools where students are taught by certified teachers. It would be interesting to interview and collect data on participants

who had experienced this type of early childhood intervention. The students in this study all attended private preschools, faith-based preschools, and Head Starts. The difference in teacher qualifications could be yet another avenue to explore in future studies.

Conclusion

This study focused on the early childhood experiences of 23 high school students who were considered at-risk by their school district. The participants provided an abundance of information based on their memories of their young years, which were categorized as positive or negative. While no differences were noted between the three groups developed for this study, other indicators emerged as being important to this study. One area was students who attended preschool were able to remember in great detail their experiences as well as activities from this time period, while others who had stayed at home or went to home daycare were limited in their recollections. The next important finding dealt with relationships, both on a personal and educational level. These were reported by the participants as being either a negative or positive influence. This study provided a personal and informative snapshot into the lives of at-risk students and the areas they felt impacted them in their early childhood years.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. I am interested in knowing about your early childhood experiences. To start today I want you to tell me a little about yourself when you went to elementary school. Which grade was your favorite? Why?
2. Now that I know what your favorite grade was, I want to ask you about the times that maybe were not your favorite. Please tell me about a time in elementary school, when you felt did not feel successful. Give me as many details as you can remember.
3. Now, I want to go back a little farther than kindergarten. Tell me about some of the places you learned to get ready for school.
4. Can you list some of the learning activities you did as a preschooler?
5. In your memories, what people stand out as helping you learn the things you needed to know for kindergarten? Why? Anyone else?
6. Tell me about the times you learned with other children before entering kindergarten?
7. Tell me some things you wish you would have learned to get ready for kindergarten.
8. In your early memories of learning, before kindergarten, are there times when you did not feel successful learning? Why or why not?
9. What does it mean to you to be academically successful?

10. If you knew a young child and you wanted to prepare them to be successful in kindergarten, what opportunities and situations would you provide for them?
11. Do you feel the learning opportunities you had prior to entering kindergarten helped you or hindered you in becoming a better learner in school? Please explain to me.
12. What else would you like to tell me about your learning before you entered kindergarten that I did not ask you or do you have questions for me?

Appendix B

Observation Protocol

Student Number	Group 1 2 3	Male/Female	Date of Observation: / /2010	Time Begin: Time End:
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<p style="margin: 0;">Key</p> <p style="margin: 0;">S= social situation</p> <p style="margin: 0;">C= educational core class</p> <p style="margin: 0;">E=Elective Class</p>
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Time	Class	What Others Are Doing	What Student Is Doing

Additional Information:

Appendix C

Review of Permanent Records Document

Participant _____ **GRADE:** 9 10 11 12 **GENDER:** M/F **DATE:**

Grade	Information Standing Out	Comments	Grades or marks

Additional Comments:

Appendix D

January 11, 2010

Mr. Principal
Midwest High School
1234 Anywhere, MO

Mr. Principal,

As you know, I am a doctoral student at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I had spoken with you previously about the opportunity to conduct research at Midwest High School for my doctoral project. My dissertation topic, *The Perceptions of At-Risk High School Students Regarding Their Early Childhood Educational Experiences*, consists of selecting a sample of students who meet the criteria for three comparable groups in the study. After students are selected, parents will be contacted to gain permission for their children to participate. I have attached a copy of the parent permission I will use to obtain this information.

Access to students and their information consists of three areas. First, I would like to gain permission to view the selected students' permanent records. In addition, I will observe the selected students in several settings at Midwest High School. Finally, I will conduct a face-to-face interview with each student regarding their early education experiences. Neither the students nor Midwest High School will be personally identifiable in the study. The results will be compiled as a group and pseudonyms will be used rather than actual names. This research is important and can be used to support existing data on preschool education, as well as information about students who are at-risk. It is my hope this study will assist educators in better serving the educational needs of students. Gaining your permission allows me appropriate access to the information needed for this study. I assure you, I will uphold the strictest confidentiality in regards to student information. Mr. [teacher], Midwest High School Program Administrator has also agreed to assist me in working with parents and students.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me via e-mail at rbishop@willard.k12.mo.us or by phone at 417-869-0600. Dr. Cynthia Macgregor, my dissertation advisor for this research project, can be contacted by e-mail at cmacgregor@missouristate.edu, or by phone at 417-836-6046.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Rhonda L. Bishop
Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri-Columbia
Principal-Willard Orchard Hills Elementary

Administrator Informed Consent

I, _____, Principal, Midwest High School, agree to allow Rhonda Bishop to conduct research within this school building. I understand that:

- Student information will be kept confidential
- Parents of students must grant permission
- Participation is voluntary
- Students may stop participating at any point without penalty
- Risks encountered in this study are no greater than ones encountered in everyday life.

I have read the material above, and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to allow Rhonda Bishop to conduct this activity within the building at Midwest High School.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Signature of Principal

Appendix E

February 5, 2010

Dear [parent],

My name is Rhonda Bishop. I am the principal of Willard Orchard Hills Elementary. I am participating in a doctoral program at the University of Missouri. As part of this program, I am conducting a research project focused on a student's early academic experiences. Your child was selected to participate because they have met the criteria at Midwest High School to be considered a student who is at-risk academically. The purpose of this study is to determine if southwest Missouri high school students in a regular high school setting, or an alternative education setting, feel their early educational experiences impact their current educational placement.

I would like your child _____ to participate in this study and it will require your permission. This study consists of three parts which in total should take no more than 3 hours of time. I would like to note that only one hour is face-to face contact with your child.

1. Review your child's record focusing on their early childhood experiences. This part is expected to take no more than one hour of time.
2. Observe your child in two different educational settings at Midwest High School. The observations, which are indirect contact with your child, should also take no more than one hour of time. The observations will take place in two different educational settings at Midwest High School. One will be in a class that is required for graduation, the other class or time will be an elective or a non-curricular time such as TNT or lunch.
3. Interview your child regarding their early childhood experiences. This part is the only face-to-face contact with your student, is expected to last about 1 hour and will take place in the school setting or one of your choosing.

Your child is one of thirty students selected to participate in this study. The data collected will remain confidential and your child will not be known on an individual basis. If your child helps with this research project, the information could be used to support existing data on preschool education as well as help us better serve the needs of our students. Risks encountered in this study are no greater than ones encountered in everyday life. Giving your permission allows me to ask your child to help with the study. Mr. [teacher], Midwest High Schools Program Administrator and/or your child's counselor will help as well. If you would please take time to sign the attached form. This project is voluntary and your child may withdraw at any point without penalty. All information will remain confidential and no school or individual will be identified in reporting results. Upon request, I will provide you a copy of the findings of this study. Again, I stress the confidentiality of individual responses being protected. Your signature on the attached form indicates your informed consent to allow your child to participate in the study.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact me at 417-869-0600 or via email at rbishop@willard.k12.mo.us. Dr. Cynthia MacGregor, my dissertation advisor for this project can also be contacted by email at cmacgregor@missouristate.edu or by phone at 417-836-6046. You may also contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board by phone at 573-882-9585 or by email at umcresearch@missouri.edu.

If you grant permission for me to contact your child, please return this form to Mr. [teacher] at the School Building or to the office of Midwest High School. You may also fax the form to me at Willard Orchard Hills Elementary School. The fax number is 417-869-0606. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rhonda L. Bishop, Doctoral Candidate, University of Missouri

Campus IRB Approved Date, March 8, 2010

Parent Informed Consent

I, _____, Parent or Guardian of _____,
(parent or guardian name) (student name)

agree to allow my child to participate in the study The Perceptions of At-Risk High School Students Regarding Their Early Childhood Educational Experiences conducted by Rhonda L. Bishop. I understand that:

- My child’s answers will be used for dissertation research
- Participation is voluntary
- My child may stop participation at any point without penalty
- My child’s answers and identity will be kept confidential
- Risks encountered in this study are no greater than ones encountered in everyday life.

I have read the material above, and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand the interview will be audio taped by the researcher and will be destroyed at the end of this study. I agree to allow participation of _____ in this activity, realizing that they may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
(parent or guardian signature)

I have read the material the material above, and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I do not wish the interview to be audio taped, but will consent to the interview otherwise. I agree to allow the participation of _____ in this activity, realizing they may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

Signed _____ Date: _____
(Parent signature)

please check this box if participant is emancipated and is signing permission for themselves.

Campus IRB Approved Date, March 8, 2010

Appendix F

February 5, 2010

Dear (student name),

My name is Rhonda Bishop. I am the principal of Willard Orchard Hills Elementary. I am participating in a doctoral program at the University of Missouri. As part of this program, I am conducting a research project focused on a student's early academic experiences and I would like you to participate. I am asking you to participate because you have met the criteria at Midwest High School to be considered an at-risk student. I want you to participate because I think your input will benefit this study.

This study consists of three parts.

1. Reviewing your permanent record focusing on your early childhood experiences.
2. Observe you in two different educational settings at Midwest High School. One will be in a class that is required for graduation, the other class or time will be an elective or a non-curricular time such as TNT or lunch.
3. Interview you about your early childhood experiences.

We will only meet face to face two times. One will be when I interview you which will take no longer than one hour. I will audiotape the interview to ensure accuracy. After the interview, I will bring you a written copy of everything we talked about during the time we spent together. You are one of thirty students selected to participate in this study. The data collected will remain confidential and your name will not be used. If you help with this project, the information can be used to support existing data on preschool education as well as help us better serve the needs of our students. Risks encountered in this study are no greater than ones encountered in everyday life.

Giving your permission allows you to help with the study. If you would please take time to sign the attached form. This project is voluntary and you may withdraw at any point without penalty. All information will remain confidential and no school or individual information will be identified in reporting results. If you like, I will provide you a copy of the findings of this study. Again, I stress the confidentiality of individual responses being protected. Your signature on the attached form indicates you are willing to help with the study.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact me at 417-869-0600 or via email at rbishop@willard.k12.mo.us. Dr. Cynthia MacGregor, my dissertation advisor for this project can also be contacted by email at cmacgregor@missouristate.edu or by phone at 417-836-6046. You may also contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board by phone at 573-882-9585 or by email at umcresearch@missouri.edu.

If you agree to participate, please return this form to Mr. [teacher] at the [school] Building or to the office of /Midwest High School. You may also fax the form to me at Willard Orchard Hills Elementary School. The fax number is 417-869-0606. You may also grant permission via e-mail.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Rhonda L. Bishop, Doctoral Candidate, University of Missouri-Columbia

Campus IRB Approved Date, March 8, 2010

Please return this page

Youth Assent Form

I, _____,
(student name)

agree to participate in the study The Perceptions of At-Risk High School Students Regarding Their Early Childhood Educational Experiences conducted by Rhonda L. Bishop. I understand that:

- My answers will be used for dissertation research
- Participation is voluntary
- I may stop participation at any point without penalty
- My answers and identity will be kept confidential
- Risks encountered in this study are no greater than ones encountered in everyday life.

I have read the material above, and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand the interview will be audio taped by the researcher and will be destroyed at the end of this study. I agree to participate in this activity, realizing I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
(student signature)

I have read the material the material above, and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I do not wish the interview to be audio taped, but will consent to the interview otherwise. I agree to participate in this activity, realizing I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

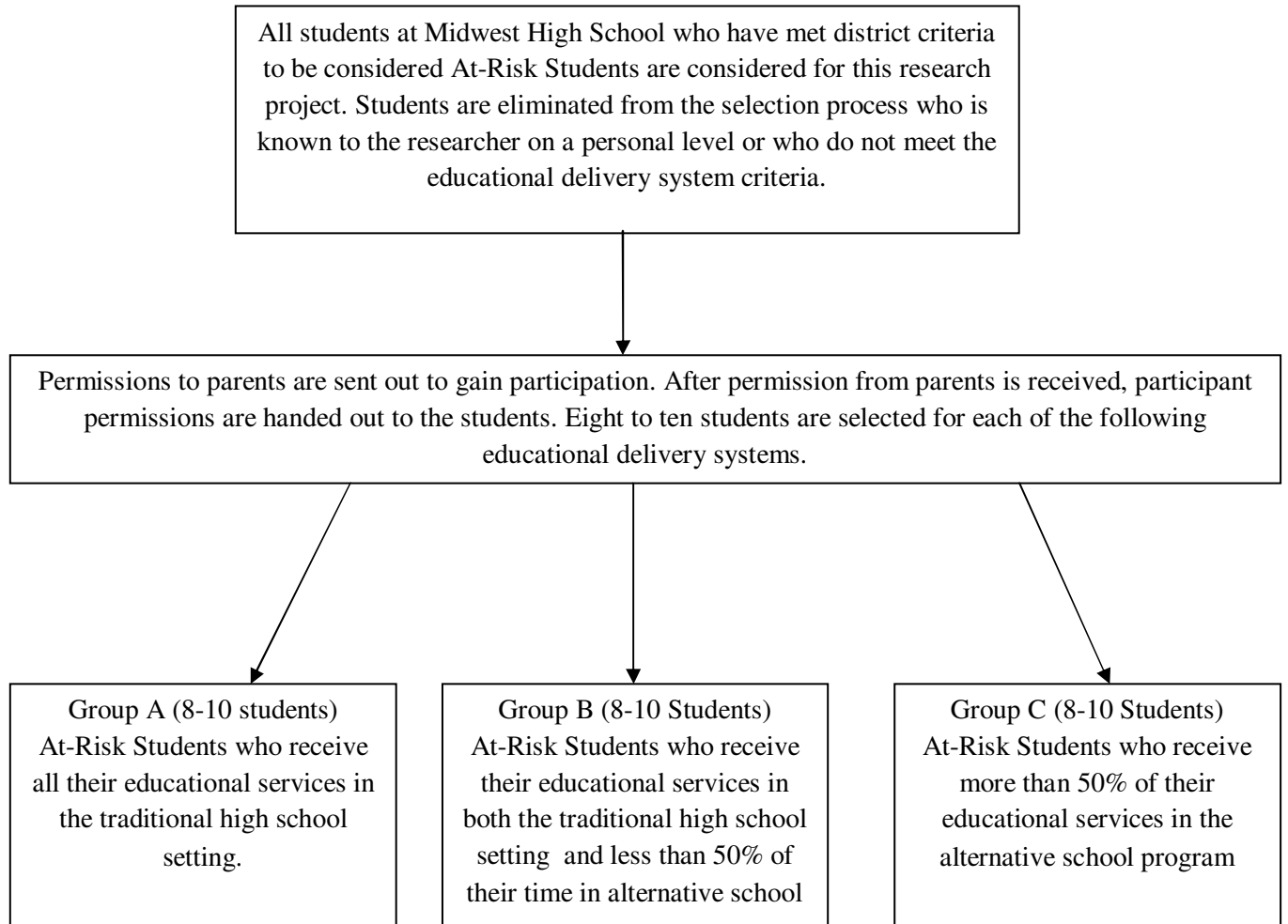
Signed _____ Date: _____
(student signature)

Campus IRB Approved Date, March 8, 2010

Appendix G

Selection Process of Students Participating in the Study

The Perceptions of At-Risk High School Students Regarding Their Early Childhood Experiences



VITA

Rhonda L. Bishop was born in Salinas, California, in 1963. Her family moved to Missouri when she was 15 years old. She graduated from Marion C. Early High School in Morrisville, MO, and then attended Southwest Missouri State University now known as Missouri State University. Rhonda majored in Elementary Education and Special Education. Her first position, teaching special education, was in the Miller R-II School District in Miller, MO. She spent 14 years in the district moving from being a first year teacher to finally becoming the elementary principal.

Rhonda then moved to the Willard R-II District in Willard, MO, where she served as the principal of Willard North Elementary for nine years. Last year she had the opportunity to open the district's newest elementary school, Willard Orchard Hills Elementary. This adventure has been a highlight in her 24 year educational career.

Rhonda has been married to her husband Mark for 21 years. They have two wonderful sons, Dylann who is 17 and is a senior at Willard High School. Matthew is eight years old and a third grader at Willard Orchard Hills Elementary.