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An Exemplary Early Childhood Program: Program Directors' Perspectives

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An Exemplary Early Childhood Program:

Program Directors' Perspectives

(TITLE)

BY

Anita K. Pond

A Field Experience

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Abstract

The purpose of this field experience was to develop exemplary guidelines for the implementation of an early childhood program. A survey of 78 early childhood programs in Southern Illinois was conducted. Participants surveyed were asked to respond to questions relating to the early childhood staff, screening and assessment procedures, the policy manual, meeting the needs of each child, parental involvement and the program director. In addition, a review of current literature associated with early childhood programs was presented. Included in the review of literature were books and articles related to the multiple components necessary to create an exemplary early childhood program. An analysis of the survey results is presented in tables. The findings and conclusions from this study emphasized that the early childhood programs in Southern Illinois appear to be exemplary in nature and model programs. Recommendations included the importance of a policy manual, the purpose of the early childhood program and parental involvement.

Chapter 1

Overview

Introduction and Background

In the mid 1980's, a great deal of attention was focused
on the quality of our nation's educational system. School
districts found themselves in the midst of a major education
reform movement, and an effort to build a new system for serving
preschool children and their parents was also evaluated,
scrutinized and underway.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children,
the nation's largest professional association of early childhood
educators, believed that high quality, developmentally appropriate
programs should be made available for preschool children. The
need to create a comprehensive system of early childhood services
that included an appropriate curriculum, parent education, family
support programs, health, social and mental health services was
recognized and developed into a new vision for early childhood
education.

During this time, our public education system began to search
for models and strategies to develop a comprehensive program
that would include the components of effective services for young
children and their families. Recommendations from the National
Association for the Education of Young Children Task Force
concluded that high quality programs for young children would

contribute to our nation's future economic growth and social welfare.

The recommendations required changes in school practices, in local policies and in state-level regulations and resources. It was determined that parents, classroom staff, superintendents, principals, school boards and state policy makers needed to exert leadership and collaborate in order to give our young children optimum support on their road to success.

Statement of the Problem

It is the opinion of the researcher that an exemplary early childhood program provides a safe and nurturing environment that promotes social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of young children as well as responds to the needs of the families involved. An additional determinant of the quality of an early childhood program is the degree to which the program is developmentally appropriate.

The purpose of this study was to develop exemplary guidelines for the implementation of an early childhood program. The study was designed to report on the examination of existing programs in order to determine the components that are most significant to meet the multiple needs of early childhood-aged children.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. The participants in the study were familiar with the theory that deals with the fact that when a single teaching method is used for a diverse group of young children, a significant portion of these children are likely to fail.

2. The participants in the study realized that introducing academic work to young children who cannot relate to the required tasks is likely to cause those children to feel incompetent.

3. The participants in the study realized that when students consider themselves inadequate, they behave accordingly.

Limitations

The study was restricted by the following limitations:

1. The data for this study were obtained from a sample of early childhood programs in the Illinois Educational Service Centers, Number 16, 17 and 18 that serve 32 counties in Southern Illinois. Therefore, prudence must be employed when generalizing the results of this study to other early childhood education programs in different locations.

2. The participants were comprised of a select group of educators who were asked to give their perceptions of existing early childhood programs. Reasons why other educators who were surveyed declined to respond were impossible to ascertain.

Operational Definitions

Key terms were vital for this study. For the purpose of continuity with other research the following definitions were employed:

Screening. A brief evaluation procedure used with large groups of children for the purpose of identifying those who should be studied further.

Assessment. The in-depth evaluation procedure used with children identified by the screening process as possibly having special learning needs.

Evaluation. The ongoing appraisal of pupil progress that is incorporated into the intervention program.

Staff Development. Segment of an early childhood program designed to promote the professional growth of individual staff members.

Training. One facet of staff development in which staff are participants in sessions or seminars aimed at providing them with specific skills and knowledge.

Physical Development. Involves the bodily change and growth as well as refinement of skills in gross motor and fine motor areas.

Prosocial Behavior. Behavior intended to help or benefit someone else.

Goals. Long-term desires for the early childhood program.

Objectives. Short-term desires for the early childhood program.

Formative Evaluation. Process approach that tends to be
an ongoing system of data gathering designed to upgrade a program.

Summative Evaluation. Process designed to look at the
overall success of a program.

Chapter II

Rationale, Significance of the Study
Related Literature and Research

Rationale

Administering any educational program is a complex
undertaking. In order to bestow leadership and assistance in
an early childhood program, the superintendent or program director
must obtain knowledge concerning early childhood development
and information about how young children learn.

Program administrators must comprehend how to assist early
childhood teachers to foster learning in children who present
challenging or atypical development and learning needs.
Administrators must also convey to the teachers the importance
of educating the young children's parents.

Children are the key to the future, therefore, it is
important that the focus is placed on early childhood education

programs. As a result of exemplary early childhood programs, investments must be made in the children at the root of our educational system in order to break the chain of failure in the nation's future.

Significance of the Study

This study explored the multiple components necessary to create an exemplary early childhood program. Research indicated that not only do children, but parents as well, count on the early childhood program and teachers for ideas, suggestions, support and comfort.

Once the teachers and support staff are in place, the laborious process of devising an appropriate curriculum must be considered in order to meet the numerous needs of early childhood-aged children and their parents. A number of research studies have indicated that an exemplary early childhood curriculum promotes emotional, social, physical and cognitive development.

This study contains not only pertinent information relating to the roles of superintendent or program director, the teacher, families and the curriculum, but offers an explanation of the evaluation process of the early childhood program as well.

Review of Literature and Research

In recent years, increasing attention has been directed
to changes in public education. Consideration of proposed reforms
have included the provisions for early childhood-aged children.

According to Eliason and Jenkins (1986), "The perspective
of early childhood education dates back to the 17th century, when
children were considered neither valuable or useful" (p. 1).
Over the years, the opinions of early philosophers that children
and their childhoods were important and should be considered
as basic contributing factors of society found support among
numerous educators.

As a result of those early opinions, nursery schools and
kindergartens were designed to allow exploration and
experimentation in free-play, thus providing for the expression
of individual differences. Theories relating to cognition, age
characteristics and personality stages began to expand the
understanding of educators and early childhood planners. A new
era of early childhood programs was on the horizon.

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) relayed the following information
concerning early childhood programs:

"Longitudinal research studying the effects of quality
preschool education supplies further evidence of its broadening
acceptance and support. Programs involving concerned parents,
progressive teachers, adequate play and quality care have
demonstrated long-term positive effects" (p. 5).

One of the many responsibilities of the administration of an early childhood program is the selection of appropriate staff. The role of early childhood staff members is a multifaceted component of the program.

Watkins and Durant (1987) believed that the impact of the early childhood program is not limited to the effect on participating children; also affected are the parents, siblings, and extended families of the young children who receive the early childhood services. Parents rely on their child's teacher to provide developmental information, advice regarding child-rearing problems and reassurance and support that families often require to cope during their child's early years.

The role of the individual members of an early childhood staff has also taken on unexpected dimensions. Watkins and Durant (1987) indicated that the programs are now complicated by the tasks of developing program components and preparing staff members to address goals that involve children, parents and the community.

Once the appropriate staff selection has been determined, staff development and training must also be taken into consideration. It is the program director's responsibility to ensure that staff development and training take place.

There exists a wide variety of topics for staff development and training for an early childhood program, therefore, it is prudent for the program director to spend time observing and seeking advice from professionals with an established early childhood

program. Hillman (1989) stated, "The teacher has many roles in creating and stimulating a learning environment in the classroom, beginning with an attitude of respect for each child's interests, abilities, maturation level, and learning style" (p. 13).

Watkins and Durant (1987) pointed out that staff development is a series of written plans describing professional goals set by and for each staff member, including those playing nonteaching roles. Successful programs involve staff members who are actively involved in the growing and learning process.

According to Watkins and Durant (1987), "Most plans for staff development include some indication of the need for training" (p. 8). New information is constantly becoming available to persons involved in the field of early childhood education. Seminars and workshops dealing with child development topics and parenting issues are made available through local and national early childhood organizations. Staff members, including teachers, support staff and bus drivers make significant contributions to the early childhood program. The training component can make the difference between job satisfaction and stress, creativity and stagnation.

The expansion of early childhood programs is inevitable in today's society. Warger (1988) indicated that the successful expansion of early childhood programs will require a delivery system that addresses curriculum and a comprehensive process for ongoing program analysis, evaluation and revision. These

challenges can be expected to involve policy makers in extended debates. She also felt that the accumulation of research and experiences in early childhood education should be used to resolve issues, create policies and build programs of the highest quality.

Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) recommended that the program director should be aware of legislation being presented before local and state legislators that could affect the lives of young children and their families. Legislators provide complete copies of all bills concerning children, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children also publishes policy alerts in each issue of their journal.

Once an early childhood program is initiated, the superintendent or program director and the board of education are required to establish school-based and program-based policies and procedures. A policy manual or handbook should be developed. Miller and McDowelle (1993) stated, "A policy manual provides a picture of the program and delineates specific standards or philosophical principles, and can be given to parents, visitors, or other administrators" (p. 64).

Screening of students and assessment of their individual needs are primary components of an early childhood program. Screening procedures are designed to assist in determining special learning needs of children. Assessment is necessary to determine whether special needs exist, to describe the nature and degree of the needs and to ascertain appropriate methods of intervention.

According to Keogh and Daley (1983), "Several different approaches to assessment may be employed for the early childhood population, including curriculum-based assessment, teacher and parent consultation, test-based assessment, and observation" (p. 15).

Warger (1988) stated, "The validity of using tests with young children and of the tests themselves has been a long-standing issue" (p. 102). The best possible solution to the question of screening and assessment of preschool children provided for individual testing of each child, acceptable administration and scoring practices, knowledge of the child's growth and development and caution in interpreting results. With this process, no one test is adequate to diagnose the needs of a young child or to determine eligibility for placement in the early childhood program.

Warger (1988) felt that test results, observation, parent-provided information and data from other professionals, such as medical history, should be combined to create a profile in determining how best to meet a child's needs. She also suggested that caution must be applied in interpreting the results of diagnosis, assessment and evaluation. Parents and teachers must use a realistic approach to determine the needs of each child and not expect a child to achieve at a level far beyond his or her capacity.

A critical issue in establishing and expanding an early childhood program is how it will be funded. Warger (1988) stated, "It costs a significant amount of money to educate and nurture young children, yet it costs much more to remediate later and even more to address the problems of crime, undereducation, abuse, dropouts, welfare and other social ills" (p. 103). She went on to state that current funding is provided through Head Start program, the Social Services Block Grant ($2.7 billion) and through Public Law 99-457 for early intervention with handicapped infants and toddlers ($67 million). This available funding is targeted exclusively for at-risk groups of preschool children. Although finding for early childhood programs vary from state to state, she also indicated that our nation's early childhood programs are far from meeting the needs of the children.

Developing a curriculum plan to accommodate early childhood students is a process of considering individual needs of each child who will participate in the program. Since the purpose of education is to foster competence in all aspects of life, the early childhood program should provide opportunities for total learning. When planning curriculum, the five aspects of the child's personality should be considered. According to Hendrick (1986), "The aspects that should be attended to in the total learning process include the social, emotional, physical, creative, and cognitive selves" (p. 10).

Warger (1988) added, "Determining appropriate goals, content, structure and instructional strategies is a critical issue in the field of early childhood" (p. 105). Early childhood education programs are generally characterized as developmental or academic, and an exemplary program supports the growth of academic skills as an integrated portion of a child's total development.

A vital component of the early childhood program is to create a positive self-image if the child is to develop in a healthy manner. Essa and Rogers (1992) stated, "Children who feel good about their identities are much more able to learn and to tackle challenges" (p. 14).

Essentially everything that the early childhood program teacher plans has an impact on the young child's self-concept. The children should feel free to explore, interact and learn with peers, adults, materials and activities in the classroom. Essa and Rogers (1992) felt that activities that enhance children's images of themselves such as singing songs using the children's names and displaying photographs of the children in the classroom contribute to building a positive self-concept. The children need a constant reminder that they are important, loved and safe.

Not only is the responsibility of the early childhood teacher to enhance the child's self-esteem, but the parents' self-esteem as well. Many pressures face today's parents as they try to balance their daily workload with their roles as parents.

Although children master certain physical skills at different times, it is generally agreed that children progress through a predictable sequence of developmental stages. Early childhood teachers must be able to recognize these stages of physical development and adjust the curriculum to meet the needs of the students.

Hendrick (1992) suggested that the school should furnish a large assortment of big, sturdy, durable equipment that provided many opportunities for all types of physical activity. It is the early childhood teacher's responsibility to provide vigorous large muscle play and to encourage the children to participate freely in the activities. Equipment for crawling through, climbing up, balancing on and hanging from should be provided for large muscle activities. Hendrick also encouraged the physical program to include items that the children can lift, haul and shove in order to test their strength and make discoveries about the physical properties that equipment possesses. The more durable and versatile the equipment, the more stimulating it will remain for the children.

In addition to providing a curriculum that promotes physical development, the early childhood teacher must also maintain a safe environment for the activities. Hendrick (1992) recommended that a periodic check of the equipment and environment was essential to eliminate injury.

Fine motor (hand-eye) skills require refinement as well. Hendrick (1992) stated, "Fine muscle activities should be of reasonable short duration" (p. 94). It is difficult for young children to remain still for long periods of time, much less concentrate on fine motor tasks that require reasonable control.

Essa and Rogers (1992) suggested such manipulative tasks as assembling puzzles, turning knobs, stringing large beads, scribbling with crayons, sewing lace cards and cutting shapes as forms of fine motor activities. Gradually, fine motor skills develop with maturation and practice. It is imperative that the early childhood program offers ongoing opportunities for children to practice emerging skills and apply these skills in many ways.

Once the elements of the physical program are established, the arrangements for the setting must be taken into consideration. Hendrick (1992) relayed the following thoughts:

"Everything related to the careful arrangement of the setting contributes in substantial ways to the overall effect, the ambiance, of the school. These arrangements and materials all contribute to the personal concern, and beauty that careful planning and sound room arrangement convey" (p. 61).

The early childhood years are a time that can be abundant in social learnings, and an exemplary program can be a valuable

contribution to social development. Early childhood teachers
must be aware of developmental theories of social development
in order to know what to expect from early childhood-aged
children.

Hendrick (1992) supported the theory that prosocial behavior,
behavior intended to help or benefit someone else, begins at
an early age. Other longitudinal studies have also revealed
that children who are prosocially inclined during the early years
tend to continue that behavior as they become older. She also
mentioned the theory that maintains that social development occurs
as a result of interaction between people. Since children learn
as a result of positive reinforcement and identify with role
models, early childhood teachers must provide an abundance of
pleasant comments and expressions of affection.

Hendrick (1992) went on to state that children's needs are
classified as immediate, intense and personal. Their reactions
to having to wait or to consider the rights of others can be
very strong, therefore it takes patient teaching to help children
to develop a control of their feelings. She also felt that with
proper training, children become more sensitive to other people's
feelings, and that providing opportunities for dramatic and
imaginative play not only exercises a child's imagination, but
tends to make young children more aware of others' feelings.

Teaching a specific aspect of generosity such as sharing requires something more than nurturing and setting a good example. Hendrick (1992) maintained that it is the teacher's responsibility to observe situations and take advantage of them by perhaps saying, "John, when you're finished with the swing, remember to tell Tommy."

Hendrick (1992) felt that children should be encouraged and expected to help each other. She also noted that it is necessary to handle each situation carefully in order to avoid comparing children with each other. This impartiality of rule enforcement will help children to gradually understand that everyone is respected as having equal rights.

According to Eliason and Jenkins (1986), curriculum may be defined as what happens in the classroom. It is the manner in which the teacher provides for the needs of the early childhood-aged children and achieves desired goals. When developing plans for the curriculum, they also suggested, "Experiences for young children should be created and developed to help them increase the skills of problem solving, thinking, reasoning, and creating, not just the skill of memorizing" (p. 52).

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) pointed out that curriculum planning in the early childhood years does not mean planning a rigid time schedule. Young children often become bored,

restless and uninterested in school because they are tired of daily routines and schedules.

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) felt that the abilities and needs of the early childhood children, both individually and collectively, should be assessed by the teacher. Without this preassessment, desired goals and objectives of teaching may never be realized. When the goals and objectives of the program and individual children are determined, the teacher is able to plan, organize, set up and create a learning environment suited for the developing child.

Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) felt that teachers should have a general idea of the time when activities should begin and what the sequence of activities will be, but then it is necessary to observe and determine the needs of the children and allow for flexibility. The teacher who has planned activities but has built them on a flexible base will not be disturbed when opportunities for taking advantage of "teachable moments" arise.

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) stated, "Language has long been seen as one of the most important facets in the development of young children, whether it is used for self-expression, communication of feelings and emotions, or thought, which is the process of converting pieces of information into meaningful concepts" (p. 329). According to that statement, the early

childhood teacher should emphasize the importance of listening and speaking. Language activities should include brainstorming sessions that involve thought-provoking realistic and nonsense questions.

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) suggested the following activities to be included in daily language developmental sessions:

1. Gather a bag of small objects and allow each child to pick an object from the bag and describe it. This game enhances language development.

2. Allow time for "show and tell."

3. Make surprise boxes and have the children guess what might be inside.

4. View a video without sound and have the children make up the story (p. 334).

Throughout the day there will be many opportunities to develop listening and speaking skills in early childhood-aged children. The teacher should keep in mind that young children's attempts to express themselves are more important than perfect language usage.

According to Miller and McDowelle (1993), "Reading and writing are two main ingredients of the early childhood language arts program" (p. 82). Teachers can do much during the early childhood years to prepare children for reading.

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) determined that young children must be familiar with letter shapes before recognizing and naming letters of the alphabet. They went on to report that when teaching letter recognition, make the children aware that 11 of the letters have basically the same shape in both lower- and upper-case such as Cc, Kk, Oo, Pp, Uu, Vv, Ww, Xx, Yy, and Zz. In addition, they suggested that many experiences with tools such as brushes, pencils, crayons and magnetic letters aid in refining strokes and letter recognition.

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) mentioned that there are other areas of language arts that are vital to early childhood education. Activities involving both listening and speaking should be incorporated into the language arts curriculum. They suggested that activities should consist of reading to the children, allowing the children to tell stories, listening to poetry, performing finger plays and dramatic plays with puppets.

In order to be successful in teaching number concepts, the early childhood teacher must realize the individual levels of understanding among the children. According to Eliason and Jenkins (1986) the first concept of becoming aware of sound and sequence of numbers (counting) is the focus for early childhood children. They indicated that activities including counting steps as they are climbed, objects as they are stacked, playing

finger and toe games and reciting familiar nursery rhymes and
songs will reinforce the child's ability to begin memorization
of the sequence and the sounds of numbers, even before the
meanings of the numbers are understood.

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) maintained that number concepts
are generally best learned from incidental learning, rather than
from formalized structured lessons. As young children gain
experience and knowledge of numbers, other concepts such as
measuring, telling time and estimating may be introduced.

Young children have a natural curiosity for the environment
in which they live. Eliason and Jenkins (1986) believed that
frequent science activities should be planned with questions
and incidental, spontaneous science experiences can take place
at any time during the day.

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) suggested that a "science corner"
is an exciting approach to teaching science to early childhood-
aged children. Materials may be made available for the children
to explore, and activities will encourage the children to observe,
inquire and make generalizations. They also determined that
opportunities to use and develop the sensory capacities (seeing,
hearing, tasting, smelling and touching) will develop skills
in classifying and drawing conclusions.

According to Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) the "science corner" may include simple items such as soil, water, flashlights, magnifying glasses, magnets, scales and containers. Eliason and Jenkins (1986) suggested that the "science corner" should include plants, rocks, ant farms, earthworms and/or other insects and perhaps a chicken incubator.

Early childhood teachers are also responsible for teaching good nutrition. Including food experiences in the curriculum will help to educate the young children.

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) suggested that field trips to grocery stores, orchards, bakeries, dairies and farms in the area are educational excursions that relate to sound nutrition. Activities including making fruit salad, open-faced sandwiches with cookie cutters, juice from squeezed fruits and pudding encourage the importance of good nutrition in maintaining physical and psychological health.

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) concluded that the basis of the social studies curriculum in the early childhood program should be the self-concept, the family concept and then introduce the children to other people and places in the world around them. They reported that before children can accept, support and reach out to others, they must first have confidence in themselves. Learning about people begins with self-awareness and progresses to knowledge of others.

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) offered the following techniques for building a child's self-esteem:

1. Value the child's work and efforts.

2. Accept each child for himself or herself.

3. Do whatever possible to help children overcome any physical problems, but also help them accept those problems that cannot be changed.

4. Praise children for specific accomplishments.

5. Encourage children to help and support others.

6. Allow children to be independent.

7. Be cheerful and positive with the children (p. 300).

An overall goal of any early childhood program is to assess each child's needs and establish goals for the child. Eliason and Jenkins (1986) suggested that discussing such feelings and emotions as anger, fear, joy and love will provide opportunities for children to understand themselves.

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) felt that field trips to the police department, fire department, dentist's office post office and local hospital will help children to develop an understanding of others around them. These excursions will give children an opportunity to develop a secure feeling in regard to the community helpers.

Eliason and Jenkins (1986) maintained that since music should be an integral portion of the early childhood curriculum, its main objective is for the child's enjoyment. As in other areas of the curriculum, the teacher must allow for individual differences among young children.

Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) felt that teaching songs and singing are the most common musical experiences for the early childhood years. Eliason and Jenkins (1986) determined that musical games, rhythmic activities and exploring locomotor movements are important segments of the music curriculum also.

Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) state, "Children's involvement with art is critical for intellectual growth and academic achievement, and its contribution to the whole child cannot be ignored" (p. 280). They suggested that art activities including painting, drawing, constructing, modeling and sewing should be introduced to early childhood-aged children.

According to Essa and Rogers (1992), "Spontaneous play offers so many benefits; therefore it is important for teachers to include it in all aspects of the program" (p. 44). Teachers foster and encourage play in the early childhood program by their planning, actions, interactions and attitudes.

Social and emotional development are enhanced through play opportunities and also stimulate the child's creativity. Play

involves and promotes language development and helps children to develop listening skills. Essa and Rogers (1992) maintained, "Play is a vital component in enhancing the child's overall development and must be encouraged and respected" (p. 40).

Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) stated the following: "Children's socialization, learning, growth, and development depend on the family. Children are greatly affected by the manner in which parents reinforce their behavior; parents, in turn, are affected by the way children respond" (p. 200).

The early childhood program cannot provide all of the children's needs by itself. Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) affirmed that early childhood educators need to become familiar with the status of the children and their families. Only then can the teacher understand the child as a whole.

Child development and achievement in an early childhood program is enhanced when parents and teachers work together. Sobut and Bogen (1991) stated, "Federal Law 94-142 not only recommends but actively mandates parental involvement in early childhood programs" (p. 20). Given this information, one must recognize the importance of including a parent involvement component, particularly when establishing an early childhood program. The director must ensure that empathy on the part of

the teacher exists as well as organize activities that include
parental participation.

There are formal and informal methods of involving parents
in the early childhood program. The teacher must realize that
what works with one family may not work with another. Effective
early childhood teachers must become aware of a variety of methods
to involve parents.

According to Seefeldt and Barbour (1986), "Conferences are
a traditional method of involving and informing parents in school
life (p. 211). Teachers should prepare a written agenda to
discuss each child's progress, supply samples of the child's
work and end each conference in a positive manner.

Home visits are another form of parental involvement.
Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) suggested the following groundrules
for home visits:

1. Call ahead of time.

2. State the purpose of your visit.

3. Be on time.

4. Encourage parents to allow the child to stay for the
visit.

5. Discuss positive aspects of the child's behavior.

6. Be an active listener (p. 213).

Informal contact with parents is a productive method of cementing the relationship between home and school. Informal contact includes telephone calls, notes sent home, bulletin board displays and newsletters.

Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) maintained that keeping parents informed is vital, but involving them as active partners in the classroom provides an even stronger base of support for schools and families. Watkins and Durant (1987) relayed the following statement, "It is not uncommon for parents to work in the unpaid capacities of classroom, noontime, or field trip aides to teachers" (p. 131). It is imperative that the roles of the parent volunteers be spelled. The volunteers should receive written information concerning the early childhood program's policies as well as procedures pertaining to their roles.

Many early childhood education programs stress parent education. Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) stated the following: "Parents have skills, talents, and expertise. They know a lot about raising their own children' nevertheless, many do look to the early childhood program for help in continuing their own education about child development and rearing" (p. 216).

Some schools conduct formal monthly meetings in order to provide information and speakers on topics concerning raising a young child. Parents can be polled to determine which topics and speakers will be of most benefit to them.

The final step in planning an early childhood program is evaluation. Eliason and Jenkins (1986) indicated, "Evaluation is the process of determining the degree to which the desired objectives are achieved and it includes evaluating the general curriculum, unit and lesson plans, procedures and goals, and the performances of the children and the teacher" (p. 245).

Informal evaluation takes place daily. Teachers reflect on their daily plans and adjust them continuously in order to remain in harmony with the children's abilities and needs. Eliason and Jenkins (1986) determined that evaluation of unit and lesson plans must include both negative and positive aspects. The successful evaluations build confidence in the teacher, and the negative evaluations may indicate where planning may not have been adequate. Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) felt that quality early childhood teachers automatically judge the value of their teaching and programs, as well as the growth of the children at the moment of their teaching.

Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) indicated that formative evaluation is used for any evaluation of the teaching-learning process that leads to improving the curriculum, teaching and children's growth and learning. Formative evaluation would include regular assessment of the child's progress through observation and rating scales.

Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) pointed out that summative evaluation takes place at the end of a lesson, unit or school year. It is occasionally conducted by outside consultants, rather than by staff members, to provide an objective evaluation and judgment concerning the success of the teaching and the program as a whole.

According to Watkins and Durant (1987), "Standardized tests are frequently used for summative evaluation" (p. 312). Eliason and Jenkins (1986) suggested that checklists of developmental skills can be utilized for assessment of the child's progress. Checklists can be general in nature and include cognitive skills, motor skills, social development and emotional characteristics or they can focus on specifics areas such as math or language.

Although most districts have a formal plan for evaluating their teachers, the early childhood teacher automatically receives evaluation by means of continually examining the curriculum, units and children. Since the teacher actually does the planning, scheduling, and evaluating, he or she is the key to the early childhood student's success.

In conclusion, research seemed to indicate that teaching early childhood-aged children can be one of the most deeply satisfying experiences in the world. The task is a tremendous one. The teacher must attempt to build an educational climate that enhances

the children's development, nourishes emotional health and encourages physical growth. The teacher must also foster satisfying social interactions, enhance creativity, develop language skills and promote the development of mental ability. The final result should be an early childhood program that provides a rich and stimulating environment which has been created by caring, supportive and knowledgeable adults.

Chapter III

Design of the Study

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the multiple components necessary to create an exemplary early childhood program. The survey questions were designed to examine information and perspectives relating to the program director, staff members, parental involvement, identification and assessments procedures and various services relating to the early childhood program.

The study investigated the following early childhood program components:

1. The staff understands the purpose of the early childhood program.

2. The staff spends time reviewing developmental and learning theories relating to early childhood-aged children.

3. Job descriptions for all personnel are clear and specific.

4. Roles and responsibilities of each staff member have been described.

5. Training and staff development are made available.

6. Staff members are formally evaluated.

7. Program goals and objectives are developed and written by the staff.

8. Screening and identification procedures are defined.

9. Staff members understand the purpose of assessment of each child.

10. Assessment procedures for each child are defined.

11. Staff members understand the assessment instruments.

12. Staff members understand the indicators of each child's growth and learning.

13. All services to be provided for the children are identified and described.

14. A policy manual is available for parents and staff members.

15. The program meets individual needs of each child.

16. Parental involvement is a priority.

17. Home visits are a priority.

18. Parent conferences take place on a yearly basis.

19. The early childhood program director is aware of legislation that has an impact on the program.

Sample and Population

The researcher surveyed all of the early childhood program directors in the Illinois Educational Service Centers, Numbers 16, 17 and 18 that serve 32 counties in Southern Illinois.

The counties selected were:

E. S. C. #16   Macoupin, Madison, St. Clair, Clinton, Washington, Monroe and Randolph

E. S. C. #17   Crawford, Jasper, Lawrence, Richland, Clay, Marion, Jefferson, Wayne, Edwards, Wabash, Hamilton and White

E. S. C. #18   Perry, Franklin, Jackson, Williamson, Union, Saline, Galatin, Hardin, Pope, Johnson, Massac, Pulaski and Alexander

There are 78 early childhood programs in the geographical area which was surveyed. This area allowed for a large enough sample to make a fair assessment of the results. Questionnaires were mailed to program directors. A follow-up letter was mailed two weeks following the initial mailing in an attempt to increase the number of responses.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The questionnaire utilized was designed by the research and is included as Appendix A. The questionnaires, mailed during the month of November in 1993, were designed to collect data by means of a two part process.

Part One of the questionnaire consisted of general information from the participants concerning gender, experience at their present position, degree level, district enrollment, program enrollment and the number of years the program has been in existence.

Part Two of the questionnaire was designed to collect the perceptions of the participants relating to the program director, staff members, parental involvement, identification and assessment procedures and other services provided to the early childhood-aged children.

Data Analysis

The questionnaires that were returned were tabulated by hand in terms of participant's response to individual survey items. General information about the participants concerning gender, years of experience, degree level, district enrollment, program enrollment and the number of years the program has been in existence is reported in Chapter IV.

The results of Part Two of the study were tabulated and reported in the form of descriptive statistics. The data were organized in tables from the information obtained from the participants and are included in Chapter IV.

Chapter IV

Results

General Information

The purpose of the study was to develop exemplary guidelines

for the implementation of an early childhood program. The study

was designed to report perceptions of early childhood directors

to determine the components that are most significant to meet

the multiple needs of early childhood-aged children.

Early childhood program directors were asked to respond

to questions relating to the multiple components necessary to

create an exemplary early childhood program. Part I of the

questionnaire provided general information about the participants

such as gender, years of experience, degree level, district

enrollment, program enrollment and the number of years the early

childhood program had been in existence. The questionnaire

yielded a 78% return.

As shown in Table 1, the number of male/female participants

responding to the questionnaire was fairly equal. The majority

of those responding had over 15 years teaching experience. Most

of the program directors had obtained a M. S. in Education or

a Specialist Degree and above. The Majority of participants

indicated that their district's enrollment was over 1,000 and

their program enrollment was over 20. The results also showed
that a nearly equal number of early childhood programs had been
in existence for 2-5 years and 6-9 years.

Table 1

General Information Resulting From Returned Questionnaires

	N	%
Gender		
Male	29	48%
Female	32	52%
Years Experience		
0- 5	6	10%
6-10	5	8%
11-15	10	16%
Over 15	40	66%
Degree Level		
B.S. Education	10	16%
M.S. Education	24	40%
Specialist & Above	27	44%
District Enrollment		
Under 199	0	0%
200-399	8	13%
400-599	8	13%
600-799	6	10%
800-999	8	13%
Over 1000	31	51%
Program Enrollment		
5-9 Students	7	11%
10-14 Students	7	11%
15-19 Students	8	13%
Over 20 Students	39	65%
Program Existence		
First Year	0	0%
2-5 Years	25	41%
6-9 Years	22	36%
Over 10 Years	14	23%

Tables 2 through 7 report the frequencies for responses in which the participants were asked to reply by marking one of the following: (SA) Strongly Agree, (A) Agree, (U) Undecided, (D) Disagree, or (SD) Strongly Disagree.

Table 2

Responses Relating to the Early Childhood Staff   (N) / %

	SA	A	U	D	SD
The staff understands the purpose of the early childhood program.	(48) 79%	(13) 21%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
The staff spends time reviewing developmental and learning theories relating to the early childhood-aged children.	(29) 48%	(25) 41%	(5) 8%	(2) 3%	(0) 0%
Job descriptions for all personnel are clear and defined.	(26) 42%	(31) 51%	(0) 0%	(4) 7%	(0) 0%
Roles and responsibilities of each staff member have been described.	(30) 49%	(25) 41%	(2) 3%	(4) 7%	(0) 0%
Training and staff development is made available.	(40) 66%	(21) 34%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
Staff members are formally evaluated.	(43) 71%	(16) 26%	(2) 3%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
Program goals and objectives are developed and written by the staff.	(32) 53%	(26) 42%	(3) 5%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%

Through the utilization of the questionnaire, the researcher determined that 100% of the program directors strongly agreed or agreed that their staff members understand the purpose of the early childhood program. Table 2 reflects that the majority of the program directors felt that staff members spend time reviewing developmental and learning theories that relate to early childhood-aged children. Results of the questionnaire relating to the job descriptions for all personnel also indicated that the majority of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that job descriptions were clearly defined.

As illustrated in Table 2, the results showed that the majority of the program directors strongly agreed or agreed that roles and responsibilities of each staff member have been described. An overwhelming 100% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that training and staff development were made available. Table 2 indicated that staff members were formally evaluated. The results of the survey also showed that staff members wrote and developed goals and objectives for the early childhood program.

The questionnaire attempted to determine how involved the screening and assessment procedures were in individual early childhood programs. The figures displayed on Table 3 not only strongly indicated that screening and assessment procedures are in place in the majority of the early childhood programs, but that staff members understand the purpose of assessing each child and the assessment instruments as well.

Table 3

Responses Relating to Screening and Assessment   (N) / %

	SA	A	U	D	SD
Screening and identification procedure are defined.	(46) 75%	(15) 25%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
Staff members understand the purpose of assessment of each child.	(42) 69%	(19) 31%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
Assessment procedures are defined.	(39) 64%	(21) 34%	(1) 2%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
Staff members understand the assessment instruments.	(32) 53%	(27) 44%	(2) 3%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
Staff members understand the indicators of each child's growth and learning.	(25) 41%	(31) 51%	(5) 8%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
All services provided for the children are identified and described.	(26) 43%	(32) 52%	(2) 3%	(1) 2%	(0) 0%

Another question included in the survey pertained to the policy manual for the parents and staff members involved in the early childhood program. Table 4 reflects that nearly one-half of the participants indicated that a policy manual was available.

Table 4

The Policy Manual   N / %

	SA	A	U	D	SD
A policy manual is available	(30)	(16)	(9)	(5)	(1)
for parents and staff members.	49%	26%	15%	8%	2%

As illustrated in Table 5, the participants in the survey overwhelmingly considered that their early childhood programs met the needs of each child.

Table 5

Meeting the Needs   N / %

	SA	A	U	D	SD
The program meets the	(30)	(30)	(1)	(0)	(0)
needs of each child.	49%	49%	2%	0%	0%

The survey assessed the perceptions of the early childhood program director in relation to parental involvement. Table 6 reflects that parental involvement, home visits and parent conferences were priorities in the districts that responded to the survey.

Table 6

Parental Involvement   N / %

	SA	A	U	D	SD
Parental involvement is a priority.	(38) 63%	(21) 35%	(1) 2%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
Home visits are a priority.	(36) 58%	(15) 25%	(6) 10%	(4) 7%	(0) 0%
Parent conferences take place on a yearly basis.	(50) 82%	(11) 18%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%

Table 7 indicates that the majority of the early childhood
program directors who participated in the survey either strongly
agreed or agreed that they are aware of current legislation that
could have an impact on the early childhood program in their
districts.

Table 7

Meeting the Needs   N / %

	SA	A	U	D	SD
The early childhood program director is aware of legislation that has an impact on the program.	(32) 52%	(25) 41%	(40) 7%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%

Chapter V

Summary, Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

This study focused on the perceptions of early childhood program directors concerning the multiple components necessary to create an exemplary early childhood program. That was accomplished by administering a survey to early childhood program directors in the Southern Illinois Educational Service Centers, Number 16, 17 and 18 that serve 32 counties in Southern Illinois. There are 78 early childhood programs in the geographical area that were surveyed.

Analysis of the survey results provided information concerning the early childhood programs such as: responses relating to the early childhood staff, responses relating to screening and assessment procedures, the policy manual, meeting the needs of each child, parental involvement and the program director.

The survey yielded a 78% return. The results of the survey were tabulated and reported in the form of descriptive statistics and were included in Chapter IV. The results of this study will also assist the researcher in establishing and developing a model early childhood program whenever the opportunity may arise.

Findings and Conclusions

Research has indicated that the overall purpose of early childhood programs is to produce positive short- and long-term effects on children. Results of the survey indicated that 79% of the program directors strongly agreed that early childhood staff members understand the purpose of their programs. The results clearly pointed out to the researcher that there is an apparent understanding of the purpose of the programs in the majority of the early childhood programs in Southern Illinois.

The survey reported that 89% of the early childhood directors strongly agreed or agreed that their staff members spend time reviewing developmental and learning theories relating to early childhood-aged children. One could conclude that this large percentage tends to indicate that there is a general understanding that a positive learning climate is reflected in the manner in which the classroom is operated. Staff members are willing to spend time establishing a curriculum and atmosphere that is appropriate for the developmental level of young children.

The results of the survey pointed out that a significant percentage of the program directors maintained that job descriptions, roles and responsibilities for each staff member are clearly defined. This large percentage indicated to the researcher that the program directors have affirmed that each

staff member's job description in connection with their early
childhood program have been given priority. The researcher feels
that if everyone who is involved with the program, whether it
be certified or non-certified personnel, understands his/her
role in the day-to-day operation of the program, the children
can only benefit from the comfortable atmosphere.

It is meaningful to note that 66% of the program directors
reported that they strongly agreed that training and staff
development were made available to staff members. The researcher
anticipated a higher percentage result in that particular
category. An additional 34% of the directors agreed that training
and staff development were made available.

The results of the survey pointed out that 97% of the early
childhood program directors strongly agreed or agreed that staff
members are formally evaluated. This overwhelming percentage
did not astonish the researcher. Formal evaluation is a segment
of every facet of public education. One can conclude that the
program directors are operating their programs and evaluating
their staff as has been prescribed in the Illinois State Code
Manual.

Once again, a high percentage (95%) of the program directors
strongly agreed or agreed that program goals and objectives are

developed and written by the early childhood staff. This result
is closely in line with the 89% that indicated that staff members
also spend time reviewing developmental and learning theories.

The researcher was pleased with the responses of the survey
in relation to screening and assessment procedures. One hundred
percent of the program directors who were surveyed strongly
agreed or agreed that screening and identification procedures
are defined in their program. The high percentage results from
the early childhood program directors indication that 100% of
the staff members understood the purpose of assessing each child.
Ninety-eight percent of the program directors agreed that
assessment procedures are defined. Results also verified that
97% of the staff members understand the actual assessment
procedures that are utilized in their programs. Ninety-two
percent of the directors strongly agreed or agreed that staff
members also understood indicators of each child's growth and
learning. An additional 95% of the results indicated that program
directors strongly agreed or agreed that all services for the
early childhood-aged children are identified and described.
One can readily conclude that the majority of the existing early
childhood programs in Southern Illinois realizes the importance
of screening and assessing each child in order to ensure that
the individual needs of each child are being met.

Perhaps the most surprising result the researcher encountered was in the area of the policy manual for the early childhood program. Seventy-five percent of the directors strongly agreed or agreed that a policy manual was available for parents and staff members. The researcher has concluded that there are existing early childhood programs in Southern Illinois that operate without a policy manual. It is the researcher's opinion that this is not sound educational practice.

An overwhelming opinion was expressed in the results of the survey that indicated that 98% of the directors strongly agreed or agreed that their early childhood programs meet the need of each child. One can conclude that this high percentage rate is a reflection of the model early childhood programs that exist in Southern Illinois.

Results from questions on the survey concerning parental involvement reported that 83% of the program directors strongly agreed or agreed that home visits are a priority. One hundred percent of the directors who responded to the survey strongly agreed or agreed that parent conferences take place on a yearly basis. It is the opinion of the researcher that the vital component of parental involvement in the early childhood program is prevalent in the programs that were surveyed.

Ninety-three percent of the program directors who responded to the study strongly agreed or agreed that they were aware of legislation that has an impact on their early childhood program. The researcher has concluded that the directors understand the importance of keeping abreast of recent legislation and current publications that could affect their programs.

Finally, one can conclude from the overall results of this study that the early childhood programs existing in Southern Illinois appear to be exemplary in nature and are model programs. From additional comments included in the survey results, the research also concluded that directors of some existing programs would be willing to supply information and assist in any way possible in the creation and establishment of an additional early childhood program elsewhere in the area.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to gather beneficial information and perceptions from early childhood program directors concerning the multiple components necessary to create an exemplary early childhood program. The information provided in the study will serve to assist the researcher, as well as anyone who would be interested in early childhood education.

According to this survey, 25% of the program directors reported that there is no policy manual available for parents and staff members. As mentioned in the related literature, there are formal and informal methods of parental involvement. A policy manual would be considered a formal method of keeping parents and staff members informed on the aspects of the program. The researcher would recommend that a policy manual should be devised and made available for parents, staff members, administration and the board of education. An additional recommendation would include inviting some parents to participate on a committee that would be responsible for devising and revising a policy manual for the early childhood program.

The majority of the program directors who responded to the survey maintained a high percentage of positive responses in relation to the early childhood staff. There were seven questions of the survey in reference to the staff members. Recommendations would include the assurance and understanding that through staff induction, new staff members would be made aware of the purpose of the program to ensure it would continue to be successful. The researcher would also strongly recommend that staff members participate in any possible training and staff development sessions that would become available.

As previously mentioned, there are several forms of parental involvement. It is the researcher's opinion that a vital component to any successful early childhood program is strong parental involvement. An additional recommendation would include that parent conferences would not only take place on a yearly basis, but on an "as needed" basis. Home visits are also essential in order to gain an insight to possible behaviors that students may exhibit at school. If given the opportunity to serve as an early childhood director, the researcher would strongly recommend to staff members that home visits should take place whenever needed. It is also recommended that the program director participates in yearly home visits as well.

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Appendix A

<u>Program Director Questionnaire</u>

Anita K. Pond
Route #1 Box 122
Geff, Illinois   62842

Dear Program Director:

The following questionnaire relates to my field study for the
Specialist Degree at Eastern Illinois University. It is designed
to examine information and perceptions concerning the multiple
components necessary to create an exemplary early childhood
program.

The questionnaire will take approximately ten minutes of your
time to respond. Please return the instrument in the stamped,
self-addressed envelope.

The completion and return of this questionnaire is vital to the
success of my study. Your responses will remain anonymous as
the results will be reported by category rather than by name
or school district.

Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Anita K. Pond
Researcher

Complete and return if you would like a copy of the results of
the survey.

Name _____

School _____

Address _____
     Street   City   Zip

Part I: General Information

Please mark (X) the appropriate response.

1. Gender

a. _____ Male   b. _____ Female

2. Years of Teaching Experience

a. _____ 0 - 5 years   c. _____ 11 - 15 years

b. _____ 6 - 10 years   d. _____ over 15 years

3. Degree Level

a. _____ B. S. Education

b. _____ M. S. Education

c. _____ Specialist and above

4. District Enrollment

a. _____ under 199   d. _____ 600 - 799

b. _____ 200 - 399   e. _____ 800 - 999

c. _____ 400 - 599   f. _____ over 1,000

5. Early Childhood Program Enrollment

a. _____ 5 - 9 students   c. _____ 15 - 19

b. _____ 10 - 14   d. _____ over 20

6. Number of Years the Early Childhood Program Has Been
    in Existence

a. _____ First year   c. _____ 6 - 9 years

b. _____ 2 - 5 years   d. _____ over 10 years

Part II: Perceptions Concerning the Early Childhood Program

The purpose of Part II of the questionnaire is to determine your perceptions of the Early Childhood Program in your district. Please circle the appropriate response.

Rating Scale: 1 = Strongly Agree   (SA)
               2 = Agree   (A)
               3 = Undecided   (U)
               4 = Disagree   (D)
               5 = Strongly Disagree   (SD)

		SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	The staff understand the purpose of the early childhood program.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	The staff spends time reviewing developmental and learning theories relating to early childhood-aged children.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Job descriptions for all personnel are clear and defined.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Roles and responsibilities of each staff member have been described.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Training and staff development is made available.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Staff members are formally evaluated.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Program goals and objectives are developed and written by the staff.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Screening and identification procedures are defined.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Staff members understand the purpose of assessment of each child.	1	2	3	4	5

10. Assessment procedures are defined.   1 2 3 4 5

11. Staff members understand the assessment instruments.   1 2 3 4 5

12. Staff members understand the indicators of each child's growth and learning.   1 2 3 4 5

13. All services provided for the children are identified and described.   1 2 3 4 5

14. A policy manual is available for parents and staff members.   1 2 3 4 5

15. The program meets the needs of each child.   1 2 3 4 5

16. Parental involvement is a priority.   1 2 3 4 5

17. Home visits are a priority.   1 2 3 4 5

18. Parent conferences take place on a yearly basis.   1 2 3 4 5

19. The early childhood program director is aware of legislation that has an impact on the program.   1 2 3 4 5

Appendix B

Follow-Up Letter

Anita K. Pond
Route #1 Box 122
Geff, Illinois   62842

Dear Program Director:

Recently you received a copy of a questionnaire relating to your
perceptions of the Early Childhood Program in your district.
If you have completed and returned the survey, I want to thank
you for your cooperation. If you have not found the time to
complete the survey, I hope that you will be able to do so soon.

Please return the survey instrument in the stamped, self-addressed
envelope.

Once again, thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Anita K. Pond
Researcher

Appendix C

Map of Educational Service Centers

MAP OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICE CENTERS