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Kindergarten Teachers' and Parents' Opinions Toward Preschool Program Curricula and the Methods of Teaching

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KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' AND PARENTS' OPINIONS
TOWARD PRESCHOOL PROGRAM CURRICULA AND THE
METHODS OF TEACHING

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Education and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education

by
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Abstract

This study was conducted in order to investigate and to compare the opinions of kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten children toward preschool program curricula and the methods of teaching preschool.

The subjects consisted of sixteen teachers and twenty parents. These participants were asked to complete a survey. The survey given to the teachers asked them their views concerning different aspects involving preschool programs. The parent survey asked the parents questions concerning the same matter. Fifty percent of the teachers and parents were later interviewed to gather further information on their opinions toward preschools. Different interview questions were presented to each subject depending on the information given in the survey.

Survey and interview information was compiled and summarized in tables showing the opinions within each group of subjects. The opinions varied greatly toward preschool program curricula and the methods of teaching preschool.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this investigation was to determine and to compare the opinions of kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten children toward preschool program curricula and the methods of teaching preschool.

Questions to be Answered

1. What are the opinions of kindergarten teachers toward what should be included in a preschool curriculum and what method of teaching should be used?
2. What are the opinions of parents of kindergarten children toward what should be included in a preschool curriculum and what method of teaching should be used?
3. How do the opinions of kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten children compare?

Need for the Study

Research has indicated that people have many different opinions about preschool programs and what children should be learning before the age of five. Many feel that academics are being pushed on children too early in these programs. Begley and Carey (1983) found that “intense early learning is drawing fire from psychologists not only because it doesn’t live up to it’s claims, but also because it may impede other skills” (p.65). Sava (1987) states that “play is learning for children. Using paints, sand, water, and blocks in activity centers with other children or by themselves, help preschoolers develop control of their bodies, investigate causes and effects, and follow up on the innate human curiosity that is the root of all high achievement” (p.15).

On the other hand, some people believe that the earlier the child learns, the better. They feel that the best years for the child to absorb information are between birth and five years of age. Langway, Jackson, Zabarsky, Shirley, and Whitmore (1983) found that "Cathy Rigby, 30, an Olympic gymnast at 15, knows that pushing 'can hurt, can destroy' but still she's flashing reading cards at her three-month-old daughter, Theresa Anne, 'just to open doors' " (p.63).

Definitions

Curriculum - all of the topics that would be included throughout the school year. Examples of topics that may be covered in a preschool curriculum are colors, shapes, feelings, and motor activities. Sometimes a planned amount of time is allotted for these topics so all of them are covered within the school year.

Method of Teaching - the way the teacher would teach the concepts to the children. (e.g. learning through a play atmosphere or learning through a more structured atmosphere with instruction and worksheets.)

Summary

Research has indicated that people have many different opinions about preschool programs and what children should be learning before the age of five. This investigation determined and compared the opinions of kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten children toward preschool program curricula, as well as methods of teaching.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Purpose

The purpose of this investigation was to determine and to compare the opinions of kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten children toward preschool program curricula and the methods of teaching preschool.

Introduction

Statistics show that in 1983, fifty-three percent of children in two-parent families had working mothers, including more than forty-six percent of children under the age of six. Most of the working mothers, approximately sixty-two percent of them, had preschoolers and worked full time (Kamerman, 1983). If this was the case in 1983 what are the percentages of working mothers with preschoolers today? Seventy, eighty, ninety percent?

Since women are forced to work today, their children are being sent off to school at an earlier age. Preschool programs have emerged as the largest single type of child-care service for three to five-year-olds (Kamerman, 1983). There are many different kinds of preschool programs available. Some are very structured and focus on academics, while others are set up to allow children to discover their world through observation and play.

Attitudes vary on which type of program best suits young children. Should young children be introduced to an academic atmosphere at the ages of three and four, or should they be allowed to engage in a preschool program that is based on play and self creativity? In her book, Kindergarten Is Too Late!, Ibuka (1977) maintains that early childhood experiences leave impressions on the brain and become part of a person's foundation in life. These early childhood experiences

should include a stimulating environment to make the foundation strong. Ibuka stated:

Unless the foundation is sturdy, it is useless to try to erect a sturdy building: even if the building is beautiful in appearance, it will crumble to pieces when touched by a gale or an earth tremor, if the foundation is not firm. Early development is about this most important foundation-making. This foundation must be made very strong from the beginning, for it will be impossible to start laying foundations when the building is up. (p.63)

The foundation in children's education is very crucial. The environment a child is exposed to can be one factor in creating a strong foundation for the child. Ibuka (1977) describes a study completed by Ford. He took care of an immigrant couple from Africa, whose baby he had sent to nursery school immediately after birth. The baby was brought up exactly in the same environment as an Israeli child. The IQ of this African child at the age of four turned out to be 115, as high as that of the Israeli child. Ford concluded that human ability is determined by education and environment.

Katz (1988) comments on the development of young children and what they should be doing. She believed:

If you look at the developing world, you will see a large proportion of children at the age of six and seven engaged in child rearing, raising their siblings who are two and three, sometimes even younger. It can be done. That doesn't mean it should be done. Many of us have seen very young children selling newspapers at traffic lights and wondered how they manage to be so street-wise when they are so little. They can do it. You can see in day care centers and kindergartens young children working on worksheets or reading from flashcards. You can make children engage in rote counting of large numbers and do exercises reading the calendar. But that doesn't mean you should do it. You can make children work for gold stars and tokens and all sorts of rewards, but that doesn't mean you should. What's interesting is that

almost anything you get young children to do they appear to be so willing to do. They don't appear to be suffering, and some of them even look as though they love it. The developmental question is not so much how children learn, because children always learn. They learn to lie, to steal, to mistrust, and so on. The developmental question is what is it that young children should do that best serves their development in the long term. (pp. 29-30)

Reasons for Preschool

Several factors have contributed to the increasing amount of children attending preschool today. In his book, Social Development in Childhood: Day-Care Programs and Research, Webb (1977) cited the research of Blehar. Blehar suggested that one of the reasons is that, more and more women with preschool children are seeking employment because of economic pressures and changes in attitudes. The Woman's Liberation Movement left many women wondering whether or not their place should be in the home.

In her newspaper article McNamara (1989) reported that Robert C. Granger, a national expert on early education, believes one main reason for the increase in preschool is due to the effort of getting poor mothers of young children into the work-force. Granger also feels there is a desire to prevent school failure. Adults are trying to give children the best possible start, especially the children from poor, disadvantaged homes.

Children may react differently to being put in a preschool or child-care situation. Some children can handle being away from mom and dad, while others cannot. Blehar (1977) discussed a study, by Moore(1964,1969), which dealt with the effects of various types of child-care, which had begun before the age of five, on children's social behaviors at age seven or eight. Maternal employment ranged from part-time work begun in the child's fourth and fifth year to full-time work begun when the child was a baby. Two samples of children had been identified. One in which child-care was stable and the other

which was unstable. Children who had experienced unstable care at the age of seven showed signs of insecurity and were easily upset. They were also reported to have more fears than other children and showed signs of nervousness. Unexpectedly children who had stable care tended to seek more attention from their mothers at age seven, and mothers reported having poor relationships with their children.

On the other hand, some children have the need to experience more than they can get at home. In his book, Teaching the Child Under Six, Hymes (1981) suggested that children at the ages of three, four, and five are developmentally ready to go somewhere. They feel independent and need to be with children their own age. The need for companionship and challenge usually shows up in most children at the age of three.

Begley and Carey (1983) reported a study by Craig Ramey at the University of North Carolina. Ramey researched 175 children, half of whom were reared by their parents, and half of whom were enrolled in preschool from the age of three months. He tested the children 15 months after they were in the program. He found that those who attended preschool outscored those that did not by 15 points on IQ tests.

Academic Methods of Teaching Preschoolers

Some people believe that the earlier the child learns, the better. They feel that the best years for the child to absorb information is between birth and five years of age. These people are looking for an academically based atmosphere in which their children will receive this type of education. An academically based atmosphere would include learning concepts such as reading, writing, and arithmetic in some sort of planned and organized fashion.

Langway, Jackson, Zabarsky, Shirley, and Whitmore (1983) cited several cases of parents who were using some sort of academic program to teach their children before the age of five. One example of parents

using an academic program that these researchers reported on is Linda and Bruce Hale of Boston Massachusetts who barely managed to get their three-year-old son Bryan into the last opening at a Montessori school. Bryan is being coached in reading and arithmetic with nightly storybook and flashcard sessions. The Hales believe children have to be started young when it comes to education and pushed toward their goal. They have to be aware of everything: the alphabet, numbers, and reading.

Glazer (1988) reported a study in which IBM computers were used in a writing program for kindergartners. By the end of the program, 72 percent of the students had progressed beyond word by word writing to the production of phrases and sentences. Fifteen percent of the children had developed writing at a level that is considerably advanced for normal expectations for beginning readers. Kindergartners in the computer program tended to read at higher levels compared to children who did not use the program.

Researchers suggest that an important component of any pre kindergarten program is literacy acquisition. Opportunity should be provided for those children whose level of cognitive or developmental readiness permits awareness of phonemes, grapheme-phoneme matching, and recognizing the terminology of reading. Weir (1989) reported:

The trend to public education of young children has provoked much discussion as to the nature of programs offered. Research findings suggest there are early reading related skills that arise across the preschool period that facilitate the acquisition of analytical reading related skills. A whole language program that enhances the initial concepts about print is regarded as an appropriate approach to literacy acquisition. Learning activities endorsed under such an approach extend the learning strategies children have already adopted. A whole language approach is also an appropriate means to develop analytical reading related skills. In such

a program those children who are developmentally ready have opportunity to extrapolate understandings about language from a range of literacy experiences. (p. 459)

Socio-economic status may have an effect on the type of program selected for preschoolers. Researchers have presented the idea that children from low-economic families may do better if placed in an educational environment starting at an early age. Glazer (1988) cites the research of Bereiter and Engelmann as suggesting "that accelerating the academic content of preschool for low-income children had positive results on their learning achievement." (p. 56)

In addition to this research, Glazer (1988) also reported a study cited by Schweinhart and Weikart. This study was published in 1984; it followed the school careers of 123 black children from poor families. The children were randomly assigned either to a group that attended a preschool or to a group that did not. The study found that at the age of 19, the graduates of the preschool were arrested less often, bore fewer illegitimate children, were more likely to be employed and less likely to be on welfare. In addition, more of them completed high school, more went on to post secondary education, and fewer were assigned to special education classes for remedial help.

Further stressing the effects of preschool on low-income children, Moore and Moore (1979) cited the results of a study conducted by Bissell.

Bissell found that the greater a child's socioeconomic disadvantage, the more effective was a highly structured program in producing cognitive gains. The less structured programs were more effective with the least disadvantaged. Bissell suggests "that the disadvantaged have developed fewer resources to learn by themselves in unstructured programs than have the more advantaged students." (p. 194)

Academic focus in preschool years remains an issue of much debate. The early pressure on young children to perform academic tasks introduced through direct instruction appear quite harmless, in

the short term. However, if taken into account the long-term consequences, results from longitudinal studies suggest that curricula and teaching methods should be approached so as to optimize the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and desirable feelings; and that these are mutually inclusive goals, each of equal weight. It is not very useful to have skills if, in the process of acquiring them, the disposition to use them is lost. On the other hand, the disposition without the skills is also not a desirable outcome (Katz, 1988). In addition, Begley and Carey (1983) reported:

John Stuart Mill was drilled in Latin and Greek before the age of four and wound up with an IQ between 190 and 200. But Einstein had no early math training and didn't talk until he was four. With more parents flashing cue cards at their toddlers and replacing teddy bears with computers, psychologists are trying to determine whether intense early teaching pays off in higher intelligence or achievement in later years. The evidence is far from clear. (p. 64)

Non-Academic Methods of Teaching Preschoolers

Many adults believe children are being pushed to learn at too early an age. They feel that if the need arises for children to be placed in a preschool, the preschool should be non-academically based. Learning through play should be the main goal of the educators.

Joffe (1977) points out that Evelyn Omwake suggested the importance of a play in the early days of nursery schools. In those days, such phrases as good play environment, appropriate play experiences, free play, dramatic play, group play, parallel and solitary play, quiet play, and play materials comprised much of the teacher's vocabulary. Nursery teachers of this time made an effort to avoid academic instruction. They believed young children were not psychologically or physically ready to read because their eye muscles were insufficiently developed and that developing reading readiness was much more profitable. Reading readiness could be developed by

providing experiences which would “predispose” the children toward books.

Adding to these earlier thoughts of nursery school education, Sava (1987) discussed his rationale for a non-academic preschool.

Play is learning for children, and what appears to adults as aimless pattering about with paints, sand, water, and blocks, in activities centers with other children or by themselves, help preschoolers develop control of their bodies, investigate causes and effects, and follow up on the innate human curiosity that is at the root of all high achievement. A good preschool program, moreover, offers children a richer learning environment than all but the best homes and most attentive parents provide, and permits them to explore it without fear of failure. Under the guidance of trained teachers who respond to the spontaneously expressed interests of the children themselves, rather than trying to impose on them a predetermined curriculum that reflects adult learning priorities, young children are encouraged to develop a self-confidence and pleasure that provide the best possible motivation for formal schooling. (p. 15)

Researchers have stressed that play should be a large part of a non-academic preschool program. A main concept that children are learning through their play is social interaction with others. Several research studies have been conducted on early social development. In his book, Social Development in Childhood: Day-Care Programs and Research, Webb (1977) cited the work of Greif. Greif reported the following studies. One study conducted by Garvey and Hogan “examined the social speech and behavior of preschool children and concluded that young children are capable of genuine social activity” (p. 144).

A second study reported by Greif was conducted by Mueller who found “that preschool children are able to initiate and sustain verbal contacts. Also pre-verbal children, approximately one year old, attempt to interact with their peers” (p. 144).

Finally, a third study examined children's social interaction skills, to determine how children achieve social contact. Children were studied in pairs, in free-play situations. Twenty-four nursery school children from middle-class professional families participated. Twelve of the children ranged in age from three and a half to four and a half. The other twelve ranged from four and a quarter to five and a half years of age. Six girls and six boys were in the younger group, while seven girls and five boys were in the older group. Findings from this study support the views that children are sociocentric, are capable of sustained social interactions, and can benefit from peer interactions. When left alone, all pairs of children employed both verbal and nonverbal techniques of interaction. The children frequently talked to each other even during solitary play (Webb, 1977).

Supporters of a non-academic preschool are criticizing advocates of academic preschools by stating that academic preschools are ignoring the fundamentals of child development, especially the need for preschoolers to explore based on their own curiosity and to develop a sense of independence. Glazer (1988) described a study done in 1986 by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. The study tracked 68 low-income children considered at risk of failing school. The children were randomly assigned at ages three and four to one of three preschools: a direct-instruction school, a traditional nursery school with abundant free play, or a school in which the children planned their activities together with trained teachers. The study concluded that graduates of direct-instruction preschools were more antisocial by the time they reached adolescence (age fifteen) than were their peers who attended developmentally oriented preschools. The graduates of the two developmentally oriented preschools reported engaging in only about half as many delinquent acts as the direct-instruction group. In addition, the graduates of the two developmentally oriented preschools reported only about one-fifth as

many acts of violence, drug abuse, and such family related problems as fights with parents or running away from home.

Elkind (1987) maintains that academic programs present a danger to preschool children. He stated, "whether tests are used or not, formal academic instruction can be harmful for children. Teaching 4-year-olds as though they were 7-year-olds creates a great deal of stress for little children and is counterproductive as well" (p. 14).

One of the best ways to see how children are reacting to a preschool experience is to observe them during their time there. Many observations may be made by spending some time with the children during their busy day. Cartwright (1987) investigated children learning through play. She observed several children while they were building with blocks. She reported:

I watch the play of these young children with increasing respect. They are drawn together not by me, their teacher, but by their own united purpose. They learn new information, perseverance, and democratic process through their own group action.

Todd and Emily build a 10-foot boat with large hollow blocks. (most of our fathers are fisherman.) After considerable struggle, the children complete a high pointed bow and long, low stern typical of our lobster boats. They add a cabin, a winch to haul traps, steering gear, engine, lobster buoys, traps, and crates. Their building attracts a good many crew members, whose mingled voices come through: "Get aboard!" "We're going fishing!" "Did you bring lunch?" "It's in that basket." "Can't get this engine started, damn it." "Well, you've over-choked it and she's flooded." This from Travis our 4-year-old mechanic. "Rmmm, rmmm! Going now. Cast off, you guys." "Untie those lines!" "What lines?" "The ropes to the dock. What are you a farmer?" says Noah, who goes out fishing with his dad. "Hey! Big seas ahead." "Look at those waves. Gigantious!" "Wow! Put on your lifejackets." "Got yours?" "Yup." "My God, Mary. Phew, what a stink!" "Why?" "You're standing in my bait barrel." (p. 9)

Also investigating children during play, Smith (1987) stated, "Informal experiences (for example, at the water table, or in the animal center, sandbox, or block corner) allow children to explore objects freely and discover their properties, what they are made of, and how they react when acted on in various ways" (p. 35).

Summary

The decision made for children pertaining to a form of education in their earlier years can obviously affect their well-being in future years. Self-esteem, curiosity, motivation, and social development are a few areas that could be affected. Research indicates that there are positive and negative qualities in both academic and non-academic educational preschool programs for children. The child must be considered when choosing a particular preschool program. Many factors could affect parents' decisions. Economic-status and environment are just a few that were mentioned in the research on preschool programs for children.

Chapter III

Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this investigation was to determine and to compare the opinions of kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten children toward preschool program curricula and the methods of teaching preschool. The following questions were answered.

Questions

1. What are the opinions of kindergarten teachers toward what should be included in a preschool curriculum and what method of teaching should be used?
2. What are the opinions of parents of kindergarten children toward what should be included in a preschool curriculum and what method of teaching should be used?
3. How do the opinions of kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten children compare?

Methodology

Subjects The subjects for this study were 16 kindergarten teachers and 20 parents of kindergarten children. They were randomly selected from suburban school districts in western New York.

Materials Materials for this study included separate surveys given to the teachers and parents. These surveys were similar in fashion, but some of the questions asked were different. The surveys were created by the researcher. In addition to the surveys, different interview questions were designed by the researcher for each subject selected for interviewing. The interview questions were designed to obtain further details from the subjects.

Procedures The researcher randomly selected 16 kindergarten teachers and 20 parents from kindergarten classrooms located in suburban schools in western New York. These subjects were asked to fill out a survey designed by the researcher. After examining both sets of surveys, the researcher then contacted fifty percent of the teachers and parents to interview in more depth. Different interview questions were presented to each subject depending on the information given in the survey. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain further detailed information from each subject chosen. Survey and interview information was compiled to identify the opinions of the kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten children toward preschool program curricula and methods of teaching these programs.

Analysis of Data

The results of the surveys given to both teachers and parents were combined separately to identify the opinions toward preschool curricula and methods of teaching. The answers to the surveys are summarized in tables showing the opinions within each group of subjects. There are two separate sets of tables. The first set described teachers' answers to the survey questions, while the second set described the parents' answers to the survey questions. Additional information was written in essay form to further explain answers given on the surveys, and to compare the teachers and parents answers. Interview information was also described in essay form.

Summary

Kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten children located in suburban school districts in western New York were surveyed about their opinions toward preschool curricula and methods of teaching. Fifty percent of the teachers and parents were later interviewed in more depth. The answers to the surveys, within each

subject group, were noted in table form to show the results. Additional information was written in essay form.

Chapter IV

Findings and Interpretation of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this investigation was to determine and to compare the opinions of kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten children toward preschool program curricula and the methods of teaching preschool.

This chapter presents the findings of the study in three parts. The first part answers the question, "What method of teaching preschool do teachers and parents think is appropriate?" The second part shows in table form, curricula that teachers and parents are interested in for preschool children. The third part shows in table form, the comparison between teachers' and parents' opinions toward what should be included in a preschool curriculum.

Analysis of Data

In answering the question, "What method of teaching preschool do teachers and parents think is appropriate?", all 16 teachers believed that preschool should be taught using a non-structured method of teaching (e.g. learning through play, field trips, show and tell). Sixteen out of 20 parents of kindergarten children believed a non-structured method of teaching should be used, while four of the parents surveyed felt a structured method of teaching was necessary (e.g. worksheets, table activities, mainly academics).

Table 1 includes activities/concepts that kindergarten teachers claim should be included in a preschool curriculum. Also included in Table 1 is the number of teachers that indicated which activities/concepts were more important than others.

Table 2 includes activities/concepts that parents of kindergarten children claim should be included in a preschool curriculum. Also

included in Table 2 is the number of parents that indicated which activities/concepts were more important than others.

Table 3 includes the percentage of teachers and parents that chose the particular activities/concepts for a preschool curriculum. A comparison of percentages is presented in this table.

Table 3

Percentage of Teacher /Parent Choices for Preschool Curriculum

Activity / Concept	Teacher Percentage	Parent Percentage
<u>Social Skills</u>	88%	65%
<u>Listening Skills</u>	25%	40%
<u>Large Motor Skills</u>	31%	20%
<u>Fine Motor Skills</u>	31%	25%
<u>Art Activities</u>	44%	20%
<u>Field Trips</u>	19%	5%
<u>Cooking</u>	13%	10%
<u>Recognize Letters</u>	19%	40%
<u>Recognize Numbers</u>	13%	20%
<u>Musical Activities</u>	31%	10%
<u>Story time</u>	56%	0%
<u>Freeplay</u>	63%	0%
<u>Show and Tell</u>	6%	0%
<u>Drama</u>	31%	0%
<u>Body / Space Awareness</u>	6%	0%
<u>Manipulatives</u>	19%	0%
<u>Clay</u>	13%	0%
<u>Safety Concepts</u>	6%	0%
<u>Counting</u>	0%	30%
<u>Seasons</u>	0%	5%
<u>Colors</u>	0%	40%
<u>Shapes</u>	0%	20%
<u>Sharing</u>	0%	50%
<u>Independence</u>	0%	25%
<u>Respect for Others</u>	0%	15%
<u>Phone # / Address</u>	0%	10%

- Note: The number of teachers in the study was 16, while the number of parents was 20. The percentages were figured according to these numbers.

Summary

The question, "What method of teaching preschool do teachers and parents think is appropriate?", was answered.

Information from parents' and teachers' surveys was compile to create Table 1 and Table 2. Table 1 included activities/concepts that kindergarten teachers felt should be included in a preschool curriculum. Table 2 included activities/concepts that parents of kindergarten children felt should be included in a preschool curriculum.

The percentage of teachers and parents that chose the particular activities/concepts was compared in Table 3.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this investigation was to determine and to compare the opinions of kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten children toward preschool program curricula and the methods of teaching preschool.

Conclusions

Sixteen elementary school teachers participated in this study along with twenty parents. Several conclusions can be drawn from the information given by these participants.

The results of question one on the teachers' survey, which asked how many children were in their classroom, can be related to those of question two, which asked how many children came from a preschool. The relationship that exists is the percentage of children in the classroom with a preschool experience. On the average, seventy-seven percent of the children in each classroom went to a preschool prior to kindergarten.

On the parents' survey the results of question one, which asked how many years did your child attend preschool, the average number of years was between one and two. Two of the parents stated that their children did not go to preschool. Both parents strongly stated they felt the need to stay home with their children. Both also stressed their children received quality care and socialization experience right at home. Neither one of the parents were believers in preschool education.

Question two on the parents' survey, asked if the child enjoyed the preschool he/she attended. All answered "yes" except one parent. This parent commented that the preschool her three-year-old son attended

was structured and he did not do well in this setting. He didn't enjoy attending and he did not learn. The parent decided to send her son to a non-structured preschool the following year. He was much happier at the new school.

The results of question three on the teachers' survey, which asked if the concepts children experienced in preschool are covered in the kindergarten curriculum, can be related to question three on the parents' survey, which asked to describe the concepts their child learned in preschool and if they thought the concepts were appropriate for their age level. Many of the replies given for question three by the teachers described the concepts of socialization skills, basics in letters, numbers, colors, and shapes, calendar, and small motor skills (such as use of scissors).

The parents mentioned socialization skills (interacting with other children, learning to listen, and sharing) as the main concept learned by their children. Numbers, letters, and colors were also mentioned several times. All of the parents thought these concepts were appropriate for preschool, except one parent who felt her daughter's school was too structured with academics. She stated, "They didn't have much fun. I don't think it was appropriate. Academics was emphasized above all. We were very unhappy with this program."

On the teachers' survey, question four asked if the children that went to preschool showed signs of burn-out or boredom in kindergarten. Ninety-percent of the teachers replied, "No." Most of the teachers' replies were consistent in that the repetition of skills previously learned by the children in preschool had a reinforcement effect. The five-year-olds showed eagerness and curiosity during class when different creative ideas and approaches were used.

Question five on the teachers' survey asked what they felt should be included in a preschool curriculum. Social skills was the most mentioned concept by eighty-eight percent of the teachers. Sixty-three percent mentioned freeplay and fifty-six percent mentioned story time

as being important for a preschool curriculum. Several other concepts were written on the surveys, but not as frequently as these. Some concepts such as counting, seasons, colors, and shapes were not mentioned by any of the teachers. However, a few of the parents felt these concepts were important.

The majority of the parents that answered question four, which asked if their child's preschool was structured or non-structured and whether or not they liked the way the preschool was run, replied: non-structured. They also stressed that they liked the schools very much and so did their children. Many commented on the preschools as being fun.

Only a couple of parents said that their children went to structured preschools. One parent commented on her child's preschool by saying, "I don't ever think the teachers really sat on the floor and talked or played with the kids." That same parent thought the class was too structured for that age, however, other parents expressed that their children have shown neatness, organization, and just-so mannerisms when in a structured setting. The remaining parents stated that their children's preschools were a balance of structured and non-structured curriculum. Many commented on academics being taught in a fun, playful way. Most of the parents were happy with the preschools because they felt their children were learning, and enjoying the experience.

Question six on the teachers' survey asked if the teachers thought preschools should be structured or non-structured. One-hundred percent of the teachers stressed a non-structured setting as being more appropriate. Many agreed preschoolers should experience a lot of socialization through play. Several teachers also commented that academics should be saved for kindergarten. Preschoolers should be in a "no pressure, no competition" atmosphere. Experimenting through play and hands-on activities are most appropriate for this age group.

Question five on the parents' survey and question seven on the teachers' survey were added to allow the parents and teachers to express their overall feelings on preschool education before kindergarten.

Parents' comments had many similarities. Numerous parents replied again that preschool should be a social experience for children. Many expressed that it was important for children to break away from mothers and fathers and preschool was a good opportunity to do this. Independence would be learned because of this separation of parent and child.

Another common reply was that preschool gets children ready for kindergarten. Listening skills are enhanced and built upon prior to the kindergarten experience. Building self-esteem and confidence was a final commonality between the parent comments.

The overall feelings of many teachers included the thought of preschool as not being a high pressure atmosphere but a stimulating, play-oriented environment. Many felt that socialization was very beneficial to children at this age. Several teachers replied that some form of preschool should be incorporated into a child's life because of society and the pressure that is placed on children today. However, many did comment that parents can become involved at home with their children, and preschool did not have to be a requirement. Parents who take the time to work with their children see equally successful outcomes in their children's learning.

Fifty-percent of the teachers and parents surveyed were interviewed to obtain further information on their personal views toward preschools. The interviews were informal and discussions were based on the subjects' experiences with preschools and the information given on their surveys. Several opinions were noted from the parent interviews. A few of the most notable opinions were: children shouldn't be in chairs or at tables, children should never be forced to do anything they don't want to do, preschools should not be used as a baby-sitting

outlet, every child is different, therefore may require a specifically oriented setting, pre-kindergarten skills should be challenged in some way, preschools provide relief from siblings and allow for building of a child's independence. When these interviews were conducted, there was a doubtful sense that parents would be able to respond to the questions in a constructive manner, however, the aforementioned responses are surprisingly constructive and positive.

When teachers were asked to respond to the questions many teachers commented on the concepts that should be taught in preschool and the fashion in which to teach them. One question that was asked on the survey was, what do you feel should be included in a preschool curriculum? None of the teachers' responses to this survey question involved basic concepts such as letters, numbers, colors and shapes. Therefore, a question was added by the interviewer reflecting these concepts in an effort to gain further information on the importance of these general concepts. All of the teachers agreed that the basic concepts of letters, numbers, colors and shapes could be introduced in an enjoyable and playful way. Although, they remarked that these concepts should not be forced on preschoolers.

One teacher felt preschool was not necessary as long as the child had a good neighborhood environment for socializing and parents who were involved. Another teacher said that she encourages parents to keep their children home if they are not ready to enter kindergarten. She believed strongly in counseling for parents to help them realize the needs of their children.

Finally, one teacher stated one of her concerns when children enter kindergarten. She said she didn't mind if children came from a preschool situation as long as they were taught things properly. For example, holding a pencil. If preschool teachers were working on writing, coloring, etc. the children should be taught how to properly use their instruments. She stated, "It's hard to undue things in kindergarten."

When comparing the survey and interview responses of the parents and the teachers, it was found that both parents and teachers strongly believed that socialization among preschoolers was the most significant concept. Another response to the survey that was consistent among parents and teachers was the belief that a non-structured setting for preschoolers is more appropriate. According to the survey results, parents generally felt that basic concepts such as letters, colors, numbers and shapes were of greater importance in the curriculum, whereas, the teachers felt that basic concepts were not as important.

Implications for Research

The importance of preschools has been expressed by many people. This study investigated the opinions of kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten children toward preschool program curricula and the methods of teaching preschool.

The teachers and parents who participated in this study were not asked to reveal their gender. If further investigated, gender may prove to be important in the formation of attitudes toward preschool curricula and the methods of teaching preschool. It may be true that fathers and mothers have very different attitudes toward preschool programs for their sons and daughters.

Number of years a child was in preschool may also be another area that would be beneficial to investigate. It is possible that kindergarten teachers may use this information to further familiarize themselves with the children and their possible capabilities.

Further research could be done on families with two children, one who went to preschool and one who didn't. Investigations could indicate the differences between the siblings intelligence level and knowledge prior to entering kindergarten. Teachers and parents could benefit from this information.

This study investigated the opinions toward preschool program curricula and the methods of teaching preschool. Future research might concentrate on one topic or the other. Information on preschool program curricula may prove to be beneficial to preschool teachers. The information could be used to improve their curricula and get the parents involved in the decision making for their children's future education.

Implications for Classroom Practice

Information concerning parents' and kindergarten teachers' opinions toward preschool curricula and methods of teaching preschool might prove to be helpful for classroom use in many ways.

The teachers could use the information given from parents and incorporate some of the parents' ideas into the curriculum. Parents can observe children at home as well as in school to help teachers decide what is best for the preschool children in their classroom. Curricula could be set up depending on the levels of intelligence of the children and the previous experiences they may have had.

This information may also be beneficial for placing children in the appropriate preschool classroom. Parents could use the information given by the kindergarten teachers to see how they feel about the education of children before the age of five. Knowing what a teacher may think is best for a three and four-year-old child may influence parents on making appropriate decisions for their children concerning structure and concepts taught in an individual preschool.

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Appendix A
Letter to Teachers and Parents

To whom it may concern,

October 1990

I am a graduate student at SUNY at Brockport. I am presently working on my thesis toward a Masters Degree in Reading. My thesis is entitled, "Kindergarten Teachers' and Parents' Opinions Toward Preschool Program Curricula and the Methods of Teaching."

I have taught preschool for three years prior to substitute teaching in the Hilton and Greece Central School Districts. I have experienced two different philosophies on teaching children before the age of five. I would like to investigate the opinions of both teachers and parents toward preschool program curricula and the methods of teaching.

Enclosed is a survey that I have designed for my research. It would be greatly appreciated if you could take the time to fill it out. The information that you provide is highly confidential and will be used only within the confines of my study. I will be picking up the survey in a week.

If you have any questions you may contact me during the day or evening at 352-9134.

Thank you for your time and cooperation,
Donna Korona Roethel

Appendix B
Teacher Survey

Teacher Survey

NAME:

SCHOOL:

TELEPHONE:

Please feel free to use additional space on back of paper.

How many children are in your classroom? _____

How many children do you have that came from a preschool? _____

Do you feel that the children that experienced preschool have learned concepts that are covered in the kindergarten curriculum? If so what?

Do you think the children that went to preschool show signs of burn-out or boredom in kindergarten? Please state some examples if possible.

What do you feel should be included in a preschool curriculum?

Do you think preschools should be structured (Ex. worksheets, table activities, mainly academics) or non-structured (Ex. learning through play, field trips, show and tell)? Why?

What are your overall feelings on preschool before kindergarten?

Appendix C
Parent Survey

Parent Survey

NAME:

TELEPHONE:

(optional)

Please feel free to use additional space on back of paper.

How many years did your child attend preschool? _____

Did your child enjoy the preschool he or she attended? _____

Please describe the concepts your child learned in preschool.

Do you feel these concepts were appropriate for his/her age? Explain.

Was your child's preschool structured (Ex. worksheets, table activities, mainly academics) or non-structured (Ex. learning through play, field trips, show and tell)? Did you like the way the preschool was run?

What are your overall feelings on preschool before kindergarten?