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Parents' Perspectives on Early Childhood Literacy

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Parents' Perspectives on Early Childhood Literacy

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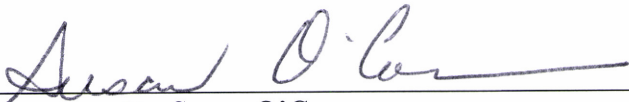
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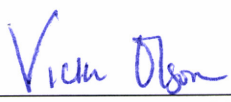
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Abstract

Learning from birth to the age of five is critical for the development of literacy in children, as well as influencing the ability of children to have later success in school. Enrollment in a preschool with a structured literacy program is a way to enhance literacy in young children. It has also been shown that parental involvement in child literacy programs improve the educational benefits to the child.

This study uses qualitative research based on interviews with parents of children enrolled in the SEEDS program at the Community Child Development Center in order to better understand their perspectives of the SEEDS program. This research seeks to understand parents' perspectives of the SEEDS curriculum on early childhood literacy to determine the level of their awareness and understanding of the curriculum, their perspectives on the benefits of the curriculum and its effectiveness on their child's learning. The effectiveness of the SEEDS Early Literacy program also relies, to a certain extent, on the involvement of parents to support literacy development practices in the home. Through understanding parents' perspectives on early literacy development at the Community Child Development Center, it should be possible to better understand any gaps in parent's understanding of the SEEDS program being administered by the Community Child Development Center and better understand the level of involvement of parents in their child's education at home.

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Parents' Perspectives on Early Childhood Literacy

Introduction

It is 10:00 a.m. on a weekday morning at a preschool in a major metropolitan area suburb. Toddlers in the Ladybug Room are called by their teachers to come over for Group time. All the children gather on the purple carpet one by one to begin Group time. Group time begins with the teacher pointing to the calendar and asking the children "What is the name of today's day of the week?" The Ladybug Room is filled with the noises of children shouting out different answers of "Tuesday,..no Wednesday." The teacher says "Good try." The teacher then corrects the class and says "Today's day is Monday January 2012." The teacher then sings the song "There are Seven Days in a Week" to the tune of "Oh My Darling Clementine."

Group time is one way to teach children about the world around them and it happens every morning at the Community Child Development Center. The teacher updates a calendar, a weather chart, reviews the theme of the week, reviews the letter and number of the week, sings songs and tells stories. Group time is just one part of the SEEDS Literacy Program at the Community Child Development Center, where structured learning methods are used to teach children, infants through age five to develop literacy.

Parents do not observe the lessons being taught in the classroom, but they do see the benefits of the curriculum. One of the parents (Mrs. Wells) interviewed as part of my research recalled how her child mimicked Group time at home: "Actually this is a cute story, last night in her playroom she took a bunch of books

and laid them out on the floor and said 'Okay, it's time for group.' She made me and her Dad sit down on the floor next to her and she said 'Everyone gets a teacher book.' She (also) sings the 'Days of the Week' song to the tune of the 'Adams Family' song. So she is very aware of her surroundings." Although this parent observed that her daughter was role playing at home, she was more impressed about how the vocabulary of her daughter seemed to be so much more developed in comparison to other children her daughter's age. In other words, she saw the benefits of the SEEDS Literacy Program, but did not fully understand the curriculum or recognize Group time as a specific component of the SEEDS Early Literacy program.

This parent's observation was shared by the parents I interviewed. They indicated the SEEDS Literacy Program benefited their children, but they did not understand what SEEDS was. Another parent felt her child was also advanced and was impressed with her child's sign language skills: "It's (SEEDS) working. She is much more advanced than say kids that don't go here or learn in that type of school setting." However, I noticed during my interview, this parent was not familiar with aspects of the SEEDS program. This prompted me to question what the perspectives of the parents of children at the Community Child Development Center were on the SEEDS Literacy Program and what they knew about the program. Additionally, to what degree were parents involved in the education of their children? The SEEDS Literacy Program was created based on the belief that important literacy skills do not develop spontaneously but are shaped by careful instruction.

The goal of my research was to better understand parents' perspectives on the SEEDS Literacy Program and their understanding of their child's learning. From my perspective, I observed parents dropping their children off at the Community Child Development Center without much engagement with the teachers, and during parent teacher conferences, they seemed to be more interested in how their child behaved than how much their child was learning. This seemed to indicate a low valuation of what the Community Child Development Center was bringing their child. It also appeared as if parents were, overall, disengaged in the development of their child's literacy. As a preschool teacher, I also found it my responsibility to initiate conversations with the parents about their child's learning so that they better understood how their child was performing. I wanted to understand how parents felt the SEEDS Early Literacy Program was benefitting their child's literacy development and whether they were familiar with specific aspects of the SEEDS Early Literacy program. By better understanding the parents' perspectives of the SEEDS Early Literacy program, it could be determined whether the program was effective as the collaborative process it was intended to be (between parents and teachers), and if not, what were ways that might make the program more effective and bridge the gap between the parents and the teachers at the Community Child Development Center.

Literature Review

While it is widely accepted that preschool is beneficial for children's literacy, the connection between the parents and their children's preschool experience and the impact of preschool on early literacy is often overlooked. Parents possess varying levels of awareness of the nature of early literacy programs in which their children are enrolled. This chapter will explore literature which describes concepts related to learning to read, the importance of early literacy after birth and biological factors behind the importance of early childhood literacy, the impact of home literacy practices to children's language and emergent literacy skills, and parents' perceptions of early literacy taught in a preschool setting. This chapter will also explore proven early literacy program educational methods, and the connection to the SEEDS early literacy program.

This literature review is organized into the following categories: (a) concept of reading starting from birth; (b) importance of early literacy for early childhood population in learning settings; (c) the importance of home literacy practices in children's language and emergent literacy skills; and (d) parents' perceptions of early literacy taught in a preschool setting.

Throughout this literature review, many references stating how early literacy helps enrich children's vocabulary and written communication ability to succeed academically will be explored.

The Importance of Literacy Starting From Birth

According to researchers Arnold and Colburn (2010), both literacy and language development begin the day a child is born. Specifically, "three-quarters

of the brain develops after birth. In the first three years of life, trillions of connections are made between brain cells as the brain grows to 80 percent of its adult size. The connections create pathways that are key to learning and remembering” (p. 16). Arnold and Colburn (2010) argue that reading is a key contributor to a child’s early language development. Since the brain is continuously developing, it is crucial to make connections with a child by reading literature and teaching basic fundamentals to enhance vocabulary and knowledge of early literacy. According to Horst (2003) reading to a child starting from birth will make a lasting impression for years to come. According to the Colorado Parent Information and Resource Center (CPIRC) (as cited in Oakes & Virbick, 2001, p. 166), “80 percent of the total brain growth takes place in the first three years of life. As any child’s librarian knows, a child’s experiences with language and literacy in the first years of life form the basis for later reading success.” The National Research Council states “The ideal time to begin sharing books with children is during babyhood, even with children as young as six weeks” (as cited in Oakes & Virbick, 2001, p.1).

By the age of 25, the neo-cortex part of the brain is fully developed in an adult. The neo-cortex function is to form links to the emotional brain where the brain itself can sift through daily sensory input (Horst 2003). This means that up to the age of 25, the human brain is still developing and creating pathways and connections to learning. By planting the seed of literacy early, it allows more time for a child to learn and enhance literacy concepts. It also allows for a higher

success rate in academic performance when the child reaches school. Horst (2003) states:

The emotional brain/amygdala is more active and developed in babies than the thinking brain. By the age of 2 or 3, toddlers' neo-cortex has built some pathways from the emotional brain and is better able to filter out sensory input that the child is receiving. The neo-cortex is thought to not be fully developed until the age of 25. That means that until the age of 25 the brain continues self-regulation of pathways. After that time, our habits are harder to change, yet always able in an ever-changing brain. After the age of 25, habits are often hard to obtain or change (p. 121).

As care providers, parents and teachers, it is important to help children learn the skills needed to become successful. Early literacy such as reading to children from birth, teaching them their ABC's and numbers, implements good educational habits, which are harder to change later in life. According to Arnold and Colburn (2010), scientists call this a "window of opportunity" (p. 2). The window starts to close at around age 5 and the optimal time for language development is over by puberty. As a teacher and or caregiver interacts with a child by reading and discussing what the pictures and words mean through the book, the child gains literacy awareness and new concepts. (Arnold & Colburn 2010) They further state:

Similar to the infant stage, when a parent, teacher or caregiver speaks directly to and interacts with toddlers through picture books, singing

songs, pointing to and naming objects, it broadens the child's literacy understanding and allows for them to become a successful reader (p.1).

The job of parents and teachers is clear. The more they support children in getting the tools they need to build pathways between the emotional brain and thinking brain, the more they will be able to control their impulses and "think before they act." On the other hand, Arnold and Colburn (2010). argue that children who receive little to no attention from their caregiver have smaller brains compared to their own peers. This seems to indicate that a lack of early literacy practices at home or in the preschool education academics could delay the development of literacy skills. The stimulation from the one on one contact from their caregiver reading to them is enhancing the concept of reading and literacy at an early age. From the words that the child is seeing and that the parent is tracking, to the words that the child is hearing, all help the child to put the two concepts together to form the concept of reading and early literacy. If a child is raised in a stimulating environment where their parent's enhance literacy awareness by reading to their child, a child's intelligence level has the possibility of increasing by twenty-five percent. (Colburn 2010) The more a parent promotes literacy in the home the more likely the child will become more successful learning language early in life. It is clear that early literacy is an essential educational component in a young child's life, which is why it is essential that caregivers, parents and teachers provide the child with varying opportunities for early literacy.

While it is important for a child to have exposure to early literacy from the time of birth, it is just as important for a young child to continue that exposure by attending preschool classes in a structured environment. During the child's experience at school they will gain new knowledge of the alphabet, phonological awareness, letter-sound correlation, and print concepts. In order for a child to learn how to read, it is most effective to teach children the concept of literacy in a structured format, such as learning their letters and sounds in association with whole words. They must be able to recognize how and what letters, when formed together, make a word. Arnold and Colburn (2010) state:

Step by step, children discover the meanings of words, the rhythm and flow of the language and how to put words together to tell stories. They also learn letters and their corresponding sounds, and that letters represent spoken words. All of this must happen before a child can read printed words and understand what they mean. (p. 16)

Additionally, Horst (2003) talks about how early childhood teachers can develop "windows of opportunity," by encouraging children to utilize "their senses; motor development, emotional development, sound awareness and music, cognitive development; visual discrimination, math, vocabulary and language" (p.20). It is important to provide daily opportunities for these "windows of opportunity." Colburn (2010) also notes that babies learn through the use of their five senses that have been found to stimulate the brain of the child, helping it grow. For example, a child can read the word "daddy," but the child must be able to hear the word numerous times before the child's brain can develop strong

pathways to the word itself, and distinguish the difference between one daddy and another. According to Arnold and Colburn (2010), repetition supports brain development. They argue:

The first step in being able to read the word “daddy” is hearing it as a baby ... again and again and again. Before long, the brain has developed strong pathways to the word, which continue to develop as the child learns more about her daddy and other daddies. Those pathways are essential to the child’s ability to eventually recognize the word “daddy” on a page of print (p. 16).

Furthermore, Arnold and Colburn (2010) argue that “in order for a child to become familiar with a word he or she needs to hear it nine to fourteen times” (p. 16). Children love to do things over and over, like reading book, or engaging in hands on practice with physical objects. The more a child hears a word, the more they are able to learn, recite, and say the word out loud (Fowler, Irwin, Moore, Tornatore 2012). For parents and early childhood educators it is important when reading and speaking to repeat words over and over again; repetition is key for children when they are young and learning a language.

Importance of Early Literacy Development during Pre-School Years

Children who attend preschool classes that offer early childhood literacy awareness are more successful in reading and comprehension before attending kindergarten than those children who don't. The rich literacy components that they are taught help the child gain knowledge needed for achieving grade level

reading comprehension and subsequent grade levels to come. According to Wasik (2011):

A sizeable body of research has shown that exposing children to print at an early age is helpful in many aspects of learning to read. In particular, although most children will not encounter instruction in decoding (or sounding out) new words until kindergarten or first grade, they can begin to build foundational knowledge in pre-school that will later help them take advantage of this instruction. (p. 184)

In the article *Framework for Developing Evidence-Based Early Literacy Learning Practices*, Trivette, Masiello, Roper and Robyak (2006), discuss how emergent literacy, whether it is verbal or nonverbal, is important before a child can learn how to read or write. The authors define emergent literacy as “including the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are part of the developmental process that children experience prior to formal reading and writing instruction.” (p. 1). Research shows, the more a child is exposed to early literacy, whether in the home or school setting at an early age, the more successful they are when they reach kindergarten, and the less they struggle in other primary grades. Dunst, Trivette, Masiello, Roper and Robyak, (2006) state that “emergent literacy development is the verbal and nonverbal skills that are the foundation for the process of learning to read, write and develop other literacy-related abilities” (p.1). The authors explain the importance of a child experiencing early literacy to prevent difficulties in school later on in the child’s life. When a child acquires preschool fundamentals such as early literacy skills, they’re more apt to become

better students when they reach kindergarten because of the pre-taught education of early literacy in their preschool classroom. These skills provide the understanding and step by step process, from identifying letters of the alphabet to sounding out letters of words so that the children are able to identify their alphabet letters, as well as colors and shapes. By children knowing their letters they are able to identify their own name and are able to spell their name using written letters, too. In multiple studies, according to Lonigan et al., (2000); Senechal and LeFevre (2002) and Storch & Whitehurst (2002), research on emergent literacy indicates that the two key literacy skills of phonological and print awareness are strong predictors of formal literacy development (as cited in Massetti p. 555).

Justice and Kaderavek (2004) also explain the importance of emergent literacy skills that help promote success for children who attend kindergarten later on after preschool and continue with other grades. They state:

That is, emergent literacy skills-which are typically acquired in the preschool years-provided the foundation for children's subsequent transitions to early or beginning reading and, ultimately, the achievement of conventional, skilled reading. The importance of early attainment of emergent literacy skills to children's later achievements in skilled reading demonstrates the importance of developing effective models of emergent literacy intervention to reduce the likelihood of later reading difficulties (p. 202).

When children approach the age to attend kindergarten, they are expected to demonstrate competence in prior literacy skills. The goal of early childhood teachers is to enhance the fundamentals of early literacy and to better prepare their students for kindergarten. Further evidence of the importance of early literacy in a preschool setting was demonstrated in a study that was conducted by assessing the Early Literacy and Learning Model (ELLM). Elliott and Olliff, (2008) cite an initiative by the University of North Florida and Florida Gulf Coast University to improve the literacy skills of young children. The focus of this initiative was to measure the advancement of children's emergent literacy and letter recognition through instruction and adapted activities based on the ELLM. The study was conducted in a Family Resource Center (FRC) classroom much like a typical classroom with learning centers, educational materials and printed labels of objects and spaces. Twenty children, aged two through four, participated in various activities over a period of a year which focused on six emergent literacy concepts for a minimum of one hour a day. The six concepts included: reading aloud, independent reading, oral language, phonological awareness, letter and sound knowledge, and development of print concepts. Over the nine-month period, letter recognition positively increased in the children of at least three years of age. The end results of the study concluded that educational activities and pre-reading instruction enhances the ability of children's understanding in emergent literacy development. The outcome of the study was that the children were able to increase their literacy skills by a large margin by focusing one hour during the school day for nine months on the six emergent literacy components.

Conversely, according to Fowler, Irwin, Moore, Tornatore (2012) research data indicates that if a child doesn't learn how to read before the third grade, he or she will have difficulties in their academic studies. For a child to comprehend the fundamental concepts of early literacy at an early age is important and makes a positive educational difference in them being successful in school. Per Fowler et al. (2012), "This phenomenon has been observed in research examining how new readers acquire the skills to read: early success in acquiring reading skills typically leads to later successes in reading as the learner grows" (p.20). Children who fall behind in reading readiness, are more likely to increase the gap between them and their peers. Their reading difficulties then inhibit learning in most other subjects. The negative impact of having a limited vocabulary during early age is backed up by a study conducted by Walker, where children with the lowest literacy scores still were the lowest performers seven years later. (qtd. in Callaghan, Madalaine 2012 p.19).

Techniques to Promote Early Literacy in the Classroom

Per Fowler et al. (2012), learning to read is one of the most important academic activities which can impact a child's literacy development:

Converging evidence suggests the skills that best prepare children for later reading success include alphabet knowledge, concepts about print, phonological awareness, and expressive vocabulary. Alphabet knowledge is simply the ability to recognize and name letters. Young children who recognize letters are likely to be those with the greatest exposure to books (p.20).

For children to recognize words, they must recognize letters of the alphabet. To introduce alphabet knowledge, one can begin by showing a child the first letter of their name to expand on alphabet knowledge during story time. There are countless books that focus on letters of the alphabet. These books can be used and then linked to the alphabet song. According to Callaghan and Madalaine (2012), when working with very young emergent readers, it is important to choose books that use one sound for each letter and have consistent, easy-to-read text (for example, "C is for Cat") (p. 14).

According to Elliott and Olliff (2008), labeling items in the classroom helps teach letters: "Pre-reading children benefit from labeling objects in preschool classrooms and from discussion of signs and labels of familiar products" (p. 556). Roskos and Christie (2009) discuss the significance of how different writing concepts or labels are displayed on toys and how this helps a child not only learn individual letters but be able to recognize words as well. Labels help to establish a connection between the concept of an object with a written word.

According to Vukelich (as cited in Lynch, 2011) by incorporating structured literacy into preschool learning centers, children begin to recognize letters in names and other words of everyday objects they come into contact with printed throughout the center. Through the utilization of structured literacy development methods in the center, including play, it not only encourages the child to learn letters and words, but helps make a connection to the daily and monthly lesson taught in the classroom that is being taught.

While it is important to teach children these labels, the research shows that teaching letters alone will not make a child an effective reader. (Fowler, Irwin, Moore & Tornatore, 2012). Ball (2009) states:

Kindergarten classrooms provide critical contexts for the development of early literacy skills, especially among children who may be at risk due to language or environmental factors. By focusing on classroom variables that promote early literacy development, kindergarten teachers have the opportunity to support reading achievement for all children. Many factors combine and interact to create a literacy-rich classroom environment. Collectively, literacy-rich environmental variables include (a) structural components, (b) language opportunities and exposure, and (c) classroom management strategies.”

According to Lynch (2011), one aspect to creating a literacy-rich classroom environment is storybook reading, which helps develop alphabet recognition and overall literacy. Reading stories to children allows them to be able to connect letters to sounds and meaning. The idea is that literacy is further developed through children’s interactions with the text, which involve the creation of predictions and the confirmation of those predictions from the story. Another function of story book reading is to develop children’s vocabulary, which is a predictor of reading success. (Irwin, Moore, Tornatore, Fowler, 2012)

A commonly implemented activity in early childhood development, the “morning message,” is another version of the shared story experience (Barbara Wasik, 2011). This activity consists of a scheduled part of the daily curriculum

where children are seated in a circle, and are told what will occur in the classroom that day, or are told about a topic which ties to the curriculum, or are told about recent activities in the classroom that may have personal relevance to the children. The “morning message” allows children to actively participate in learning the structure of print and to learn about letters, sounds, and conventions of print. The concepts communicated during the “morning message” support the understanding of alphabetic principles, and the knowledge that letters represent sounds in spoken words, which, in turn, supports learning how to read. According to Wasik and Hindman (2011), a foundational understanding of the alphabet, and an understanding that letters represent sounds and ultimately words (and print), allows children to learn and decode words, thus enabling children to learn how to read.

Play can be an effective component of a rich literacy environment that teachers can provide. Encouraging reading and writing during play activities allows for children to express their personal interests and engage in more attentive learning. This can be in the form of markers and whiteboards or academic play centers in the classroom which focus on subjects like math, where children are encouraged to write and practice what is being taught during group sessions.

According to J.P. Gee, (1999), children’s personal interests are part of socially situated identities formed over time during play. According to a study by Wells Rowe/ Neitzel (2010), children actively influence their play and writing, according to their own personal interests, which are formed over time through experiences and social interaction. Also, as part of the study conducted by Wells

Rowe/ Neitzel, children's play activities and early writing skills at a "writing table" were observed over time to determine how play impacts emergent writing. It was found that children's play activities could be characterized into one of eight different profiles, and as a result, also demonstrated a consistent interest-based pattern of writing. Wells Rowe/ Neitzel concluded that teachers should provide additional writing activities based on children's personal interests as part of play to increase the development of early literacy:

If teachers wish to deeply involve all children in playful experiences with writing, this may require providing opportunities for children to use writing for a wider range of purpose than is typical in most preschool classrooms and consider offering activities that match children's personal interest patterns. In future studies, it will be important to develop such writing activities and to examine children's responses (p. 194).

The authors also outline the importance of play for early literacy learning in that it can support children's understanding of the connections between oral and written language. (Roskos and Christie, 2009) state, "Research seems to suggest that children can gain much knowledge about print when it is integrated into play centers" (p.43). In a classroom, teachers have buckets of toys, shelves, furniture and cabinets labeled so a child is able to identify the toy and the name of the toy by the letters marked on that bucket.

Vukelich (1994, as cited in Lynch, 2011) found that literacy-enriched dramatic play for children's learning is also beneficial. Children become familiar with the literacy print posted in the centers the more often they play through

repetition and by associating meaning with the words of the objects they play with.

Other proven ways to engage children in the pre-school classroom include the use of music and song, and repetition and hands-on experience with material items such as an easel for writing, foam alphabet letters, and access to previously read books. (Fowler, Irwin, Moore, Tornatore, 2012). Children are able to learn and grasp onto concepts in a classroom setting when there is a catchy tune which they know and can relate to. Wiggins discusses how music encourages children to learn. When children are able to sing a song they have learned, they are more likely to recall the words verbally than if they were to just speak the words out loud. According to Wiggins (2007), “In the early learning setting, music’s engaging nature encourages children to attend during reading activities, invites them to be active listeners, and promotes comprehension and dialogue”(p. 62). Furthermore, Wiggins found in addition to teaching text and writing, songs help children learn how sound works in language, and create connections between words and meaning.

Making connections between words and sound alone is not enough to qualify as effective early literacy; connections must be made in a way that is meaningful to the child, and this is where repetition comes in. Arnold, Colburn (2010), found that in building connections between sound and language, repetition helps the developing brain to comprehend which connections should be strengthened.

Importance of Home Literacy Practices in Children's Language and Emergent Literacy Skills

Another contributing factor to the development of early literacy, in addition to providing skills development in a structured classroom environment, is the home literacy environment, and the degree to which parents interact with their children. Understanding how the home literacy environment affects children's acquisition language and literacy has become of increasing interest during the past three decades. A study conducted by Roberts, Jurgens, and Burchinal (2005) focused on four specific assessments around home literacy practices, including shared book reading frequency, material book reading strategies, the child's enjoyment of reading and material sensitivity and an assessment of the quality and openness of the home during the early children's language and emergent literacy skills. The study included seventy-two African American children ranging from three to five years old and their caregivers, examining early literacy practices that were followed in the home since infancy. The primary caregivers were from low-income households. Parents/caregivers with children between the ages of eighteen months and five years of age were interviewed every year about the regularity with which they would read to their child and the interest their child had when being read to. Parents/caregivers were observed while reading to their child once they were between the ages of two and four. During this time the examiner would record the parent/caregiver's behavior. For children between the ages of three to five, the children's responses and expressive language and vocabulary were assessed, followed by the children's emergent literacy skills that were assessed at

four years of age and kindergarten. The home literacy interactions by the parents/caregivers proved to be a strong predictor of children's language and early literacy skills.

In order for children to become prepared for Kindergarten, it is important for parents to promote and encourage their children to read in the home. Raising a Reader is a national nonprofit organization that offers an evidence-based early-literacy and parent-engagement program. With its mission of engaging parents in a daily book "cuddling," it helps to promote healthy brain development, parent-child bonding, and early literacy skills critical for success in school. Parents who take the time to read to their child are not only creating lasting impressions for their child but the connection of early literacy as well. When parents then take that initiative, they're seen as a model when reading to their child and then the child is influenced by them.

In a research finding by McDonald (2010) it stated that children today are not prepared for kindergarten and in turn parents are not strong enough advocates in helping their own children with literacy development:

The academic difference among five year old children is alarming and overwhelming for any competent, caring professional educator. There is hope on the horizon if parents, school officials, college personnel and government leaders will take a leadership role in helping families with children at the target age level, to learn the basics in reading in order to allow each child a balanced attack on the academic challenges which face him or her in our school systems. (p. 72)

It is important for parents and early childhood teachers to put forth the effort in utilizing each window of opportunity with children to make early impressions and to connect with them. McCune (2010) discusses how the Department of Education of Colorado developed a program to help promote student achievement by encouraging teachers and parents to get involved. It would enable students to become more successful with the encouragement of their teachers and parents.

Parents' Perceptions of Early Literacy Taught in a Preschool Setting

According to Horst (2003), parents feel that early childhood educators are experienced in their field, and know what is best for children. As educators, it is their job to understand, support and delegate what best practices suit that child.

Horst (2003), states:

Parents trust that we as Early Childhood Teachers should know what is best for children. Over the last 50 years or more research has been done in children's homes, daycare and in our universities. Our goal was always to understand how a child develops and what we can do to support it. Today different organizations and institutions have created documents about what Best Practices are for children. We still have a lot to learn but it's important that what we do daily with our children be thoughtful and intentional and based on solid research and data (p. 26).

However much reliance parents place on teachers, they are also able to accurately assess the literacy of their children. In a study conducted by Donna Boudreau of Portland State University (2005), a parent questionnaire was used to assess emergent and early literacy of preschool children. The purpose of this study was to determine how well parents judged the literacy of their learning-impaired children and development of literacy-related skills to support later literacy acquisition. The participating parents answered thirty-one closed questions concerning five literacy-related areas: phonological awareness, print concepts, alphabet letters, writing, interactions around books. Two segments were reviewed: seventeen preschool students with speech impairments and twenty age

matched peers who are considered “typically developing.” The questionnaire data in the emergent and early literacy setting served as a tool for assessing supportive information. The results of the study showed that both parents of learning-impaired children and typically developing children showed correlation in their effectiveness in assessing their children’s literacy abilities, and that parents can be considered “key informants in understanding their child’s development” (p. 42).

In research conducted by Dale, (1996), the parent report was described as the “systematic utilization of the extensive experiences of parents (and potentially other caregivers) with their children.” (p.161). Furthermore, per Diamond, Squires (1993) after comparing home literacy practices of the two groups of children, it was determined:

Parent reports are a desirable assessment tool for a variety of reasons.

First, they provide access to parents’ extensive knowledge about their child across time and contexts and provide information about behavioral skills that may be difficult for the examiner to observe. (p. 109).

Further, according to Boudreau (2005), “The findings support the predictive validity of parents as reporters of children’s early literacy skills. However, these projects looked at how well parents’ reports of preschooler’s knowledge and skills would relate to future performance” (p. 34). The results revealed a strong correlation between the examiners gathering measures of the early literacy study and the parents’ responses for the children with language impairments only. The parents of language impaired children accurately rated their children’s progress low in their knowledge of literacy compared to other

parents in another controlled group. Parents' reports are therefore beneficial in assessing the true knowledge and literacy skills of their own children in early childhood.

For parents to help their child become successful academically, parents must express encouragement and participate in early literacy enrichments such as reading to their child starting at birth. Diamond and Flückiger (2012) state how parents are an important part of a child's emergent education and schooling. Horst (2003), states,

Research tells us that early relationships are predictive of the success of children. Children who have strong, positive connections with parents and caregivers will develop more self-confidence, self-control and sustained attention. All of these skills are very important for school readiness" (p. 115).

This idea of parental support enhancing the focus and learning of children is further supported by both Doyle and Zhang (2011) and as cited in Flückiger, Diamond, Jones 2012, p. 54) "It is acknowledged that children do better in school when parents are engaged in their learning." Parents that are a part of their children's education impact the success rate of the child. When parents are involved in their child's education, they have an understanding of what their child is learning and how their child is doing. They know the expectations of what their child should be learning because they are involved in their education. Also, as summarized by Doyle, Zhang (2011), parents' perceptions of how their children

perform in early literacy programs could impact the enrollment of children in such programs:

This study has shown that participation structure does impact parents' decisions to enroll in programs and remain in them. Clearly, parents' perceptions of how they or their children would be involved, affected enrollment, and ongoing participation. For practitioners, this suggests that in planning for the recruitment of families, parents' pre-program beliefs and expectations as well as practical matters, such as the ease of implementing program activities, must be taken into account. Giving parents a choice of program types may be the ideal approach; however in practice it may be necessary to choose one model. The findings of this study suggest ways that practitioners can enhance program up take and engagement. These are important considerations if programs are to meet the needs and interests of the families they serve (p. 232).

In a study of multi-cultural parental beliefs around varying preferred ways to educate children, Anderson and Hayden (1997) determined that parental involvement, even if not aligned with teaching methods in the classroom, were still beneficial:

It is important for teachers to recognize that there are many ways for children to learn to read and write and that emergent literacy reflects a particular perspective of literacy acquisition. Teachers should encourage parents to support their children's literacy learning in ways familiar to them, even though the practices might not reflect the teachers' beliefs.

Indeed, teachers can provide a range of literacy activities, including some considered more traditional, which build on what parents do at home (p. 514).

The SEEDS Early Literacy Program

The SEEDS literacy program was created to assist young children in developing their cognitive language abilities, and works to meet the child's individual needs. The SEEDS Literacy Curriculum taught at the Community Child Development Center focuses on providing opportunities for children to become more literacy aware through the use of a structured early literacy curriculum, which is taught by teachers in the classroom setting. The curriculum helps children develop their knowledge of comprehending the concepts of reading: alphabet letter recognition, phonological awareness, and letter-sound, print concepts as a form of verbal and written communication. The SEEDS literacy program was created based on the belief that important literacy skills do not develop spontaneously but are shaped by careful instruction. Originally developed by the University of Minnesota Center for Early Education and Development, SEEDS is composed of five separate categories: Sensitive (to become aware and respond to individual child abilities/needs/feelings), Encourage (scaffold with affirmation, positive non-verbal), Educate (scaffold child learning), Develop by Doing (scaffold with hands on learning), and Self-Image (respected and capable).

The focal point of the SEEDS Literacy Program is to teach the whole child using proven methods of literacy, such that the child is able to comprehend the

written and spoken word, and communicate their personal needs to others in a meaningful way. SEED's is a literacy-enriched environment and curriculum as well as a process to assess the learning process. The SEEDS program allows children to learn sign language at a young age as a tool to express their needs. Hart and Risley (1995) stated that, "Research has shown that adults who frequently talk to infants are helping expand the infants' vocabularies" (p.7). For example, the use of sign language enables infants to communicate both physical and emotional needs, such as needing their diaper changed, receiving a snack or drink due to hunger, or desiring one on one time. Furthermore, this curriculum enhances the fundamental concepts of literacy, meaning how to read, write, speak, and the general ability to communicate. The SEEDS literacy program has been fully integrated into every Community Child Development Center in the intermediate and pre-kindergarten classrooms.

SEEDS uses other proven means to develop early literacy, such as labeling and play. Specifically, in SEEDS classrooms, there are buckets of toys that are labeled, and all doors, cabinets and furniture are also labeled with a picture of what is inside, and a description of the contents in sign language. Each of these provides for opportunities to develop language skills. In addition, all lesson plans include both a letter and number which are focused on each week by the teacher. Displays of the number and letter are labeled around the room for children to become familiar with and learn as the week progresses through repeated exposure to the letters and what they represent.

SEEDS is a structured approach to developing emerging literacy in preschool children, however, preschool literacy programs like SEEDS, although effective on their own, can be further enhanced by active parental involvement in the home environment. Another component of SEEDS is family involvement to support classroom instruction. Therefore, it is important to have parental involvement in addition to structured teaching methods to fully develop children's literacy.

Summary

According to the research conducted, the evidence plainly supports the notion of exposing young children to emergent and early literacy practices with the goal of helping them to become successful in later reading development and schooling. Much of the research is focused on case studies encompassing the significance of early childhood literacy at a young age, however there was not as much research on how parents aid in early childhood literacy or reports based on the parents' perspectives of the programs themselves. According to studies cited, parents have the ability to make a positive impact on their children's emergent literacy through direct involvement in the home, but as McDonald (2010) noted, parents are typically not strong enough advocates in helping their children develop literacy. Regarding my thesis topic of Parents' Perspectives on the SEEDS Literacy Curriculum at Community Child Development Center, I will rely heavily on my own research to solidify my theories and ideas.

Methodology

This research seeks to understand parents' perspectives on the impact of the SEEDS Literacy Program on their child's development. Did parents believe their children were better able to sing or say their ABCs, name household objects, and express themselves? Did parents notice improvements in literacy with their son or daughter at school and at home? And, more importantly, were the parents aware of the SEEDS Literacy Program in use at the Community Child Development Center? In order to address these questions, I gathered data from the parents themselves.

This is an action research project which uses qualitative research methods. As Mills (2003) states, "Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted to gather information about how a particular groups operates, learns and understands concepts within that environment" (p. 5). The data is gathered with the goal of gaining insight, developing reflective practices, effecting positive changes in the school environment, and improving student outcomes. In order to collect concrete data it takes months to interview participants and gather other evidence to complete the process. "Qualitative research uses narrative, descriptive approaches to data collection to understand the way things are and what the research means from the participants in the study" (Mills,2003, p.4). The qualitative approach may include: face to face interviews, making observations and video/tape interactions. The purpose of researching the SEEDS Literacy Program at the Community Child Development Center was to seek to understand the parents' perspectives of the literacy program and understanding their views and concerns

on the effectiveness of how the teachers of the Community Child Development Center were educating their son or daughter with the SEEDS Literacy Program. The data was gathered through face to face interviews in a private setting in either a classroom or the parent's home. Each parent's perspective was valuable to this research.

Setting

From May of 2011 to January 2012 data was collected for my thesis. When determining what type of methods to use to gather the various data for this research, I used several different strategies. In order to gather data, I chose interviewees based on their involvement with the program. I asked each parent at school if they would be interested in participating in my research study. Five parents from the four parent groups agreed to participate. Each parent group (mother, father, or both) had the choice of having the interview conducted either at their own home, or before or after school in the library at the Community Child Development Center. The library is a learning center available to parents to check out books on parenting or to meet for parent-teacher conferences. It is a dark room with wood paneling, hardwood floors, a flat screen television, a computer screen which is used to monitor the classrooms, and four wingback chairs. One wall contains shelving for the books.

I explained before each interview what would take place. I told each interviewee that the interview would be audio taped and, if for some reason I needed to speak with them again, a second interview would need to take place. The four families who participated in the interviews are described below.

The Johnson family. The Johnsons chose to do the interview at their house because they have a one and a half year-old daughter and it was more convenient. I arrived at their home around 5:30 p.m. The family lives in a nice suburban area. Their house is an upper middle class three story home, newly built. When I arrived at the home, Jan (the mother) answered the door and their daughter, Alice, came running to greet me. Alice was wearing a pink dress with bare feet. Her mother was very friendly. She is a Caucasian female with black short chin length hair, brown eyes, about 5 feet tall and in her mid to late thirties. She asked me to come in and asked me where the best place to conduct the interview would be. I mentioned whatever seems to be most comfortable. The father, Chad, later came and greeted me as Jan and I approached the kitchen and asked me how I was doing. The father was very nice and quiet at times. Meanwhile, their daughter was running back and forth from the family room to her playroom; playing with her toys and trying to gain my attention. Their daughter was a very energetic, smiley little girl. Her mom states that she has her “bold personality.”

The Johnson family and I have known each other for three years since I have been at the Community Child Development Center. The parents and I share a lot in common due to the fact their daughter is in my class and we share the same views on issues on parenting and education.

The Wells family. One evening after work, I arrived at the Well's home. Mr. Wells and Anna, his two year old daughter, were outside watering the flowers. Bill greeted me and welcomed me to their home. He asked his daughter if she would say "Hello," to me but I think she had the understanding that I had come over to her house to babysit instead. Mr. Wells is a Caucasian male in his late thirties. Anna had blond hair which was very curly and blue eyes like her Dad. Mr. Wells mentioned that his wife wouldn't be home for another ten to fifteen minutes. We sat in the kitchen and began once Mrs. Wells arrived; Mr. Wells left and did not participate in the interview. As we talked, the daughter sat on her father's lap. Mrs. Wells has a very upbeat personality. At school Mrs. Wells always greets me with a smile. She seemed nervous at first because she knew she was being audio taped and somewhat embarrassed because she felt she should be more knowledgeable about the SEEDS program and the curriculum at the Community Child Development Center.

The Wells Family and I have known each other for the past three years since I have taught at the Community Child Development Center. Both parents are lovely people and both are so positive when they pick up their daughter at school and seem enthusiastic about the program. They always have a smile on their face and are always considerate of others and their well-being.

The Anderson family. The interview with the Andersons took place in the library at the Community Child Development Center one late afternoon. Mrs. Anderson stands 5'11 with light brown hair up in a ponytail. She is a white female in her late thirties. Mrs. Anderson and I have known each other for the past three

years that I have taught at the Community Child Development Center. Mrs. Anderson is such a warm and caring person. She is so friendly to all the staff and is very considerate of others. She always wants to know how I am and asks with a warm smile on her face. We share a lot in common and have gotten to know one another over the course of three years. The daughter is a well behaved little girl who seemed engaged and curious in the classroom.

The Wright family. The interview took place at the Community Child Development Center in the Parent Resource Library where most meetings with parents or staff are held. Jim Wright stood 5'8 and is in his mid-thirties. He is a white male with salt and pepper hair with blue eyes. I have known Mr. Wright for the past three years since I have taught at the Community Child Development Center. Mr. Wright is a very friendly and optimistic person. As a teacher, I have taught both of his sons over the past three years. Both of his sons are bright, energetic little boys who I've gotten to know well.

Data Gathering

Each interview took thirty minutes, and during that time, I made copies of the questions to make personal notes for myself. Each of the parents had to agree to sign a consent form to participate in the interview and for the interview to be recorded. Before the interviews took place, I began with six questions:

1. How well did the parents understand the SEEDS Program?
2. Did the parents themselves notice if the literacy program impacted their daughter or son at home?
3. What was their child's experience with literacy in the SEEDS Program?

4. What was their overall response to the program?
5. What aspects of the program were liked the most or least?
6. Also, what (if anything) would they like to see added to the early literacy program at the Community Child Development Center?

From those questions additional questions were asked based on responses. The parents were selected based on the length of time I have known them and their interest on the subject of the research. During the interview, depending on the questions given, most participants were very willing to share their views. Most of the initial questions in the interviews were based on their understanding of the SEEDS Literacy Program. I recorded the interviews with the parents in an open manner, transcribed the interviews, and also took written notes.

Data Analysis

According to Mills (2003) "Research interprets data to make sense of the research findings and to answer the question, 'so what?'" (p. 4). In order to complete the methodology chapter of my research, I transcribed my interviews into print field notes. After transcribing I read and re-read my interviews and coded them. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) coding is "assigning categories and properties" to recorded data. When I reviewed the coded information provided by the parents, it allowed me to interpret and assign meaning to my research data. After the information was analyzed, I was then able to see what trends resulted that contributed to my research outcome. Coding involved several steps in order for the data to be analyzed. First, I structured the data of the interview question responses from the four parents in a spread sheet

around the six interview questions. Each parent's response was summarized from my notes and recorded for each question. After all the responses were recorded, I looked for similarities between responses. From the codes, themes were developed from the data. Any parent responses which occurred two or more times for each question were noted to be of significance as a "theme."

I used a grounded theory approach to theory generation, which, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), is a "discovery of theory from data (which) is systematically obtained and analyzed from social research" (p. 2). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), Grounded Theory is a "comparative analysis" that is based on the collection of data points, which, after analysis, allow for a theory to be developed. This is different than matching data to a pre-determined theory or theory that is based on logical deduction. Grounded theory provides "relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations, and applications" (p.1).

Findings

The common themes identified in this study are (a) the SEEDS Literacy Program has had a positive impact on their children's literacy; (b) parents have varying levels of awareness of the SEEDS Literacy Program; (c) there is need for more information regarding what the SEEDS Literacy Program is; (d) the need for home-based parent involvement. The four themes will be expanded on below and supported by direct, relevant comments from the interview participants to questions regarding the SEEDS Literacy Program.

My research information consisted of six interview questions answered by five parents of children enrolled in the Community Child Development Center. The interview was audio taped as the parents answered the questions regarding the SEEDS Literacy Program at the Community Child Development Center. The questions covered the parents' understanding of the SEEDS Literacy Program; how their children experienced the program; what the parent's response to the SEEDS Literacy Program was; if the parents noticed an impact at home; and whether parents felt the SEEDS Literacy Program at the Community Child Development Center needed any improvement. Several themes emerged from the interview response data that allow a general consensus to be made about the parents' perspectives regarding the SEEDS Literacy Program.

Parents' Awareness of the SEEDS Literacy Program

When asked about how their children experienced literacy in the SEEDS Literacy Program, parents tried to identify both aspects of literacy as well as tried to identify aspects of the SEEDS Literacy Program. One parent (Mrs. Johnson) demonstrated awareness of the SEEDS Literacy Program, and was pleased with

the information provided about the SEEDS Literacy Program, "I like the part of the SEEDS program where learning takes place all day long." Mr. Johnson continued: "There is nothing I would add for now. The SEEDS program is great and has been very instrumental in helping our daughter learn and communicate." However my findings indicate this was not a typical parent response. Parents were able to identify some characteristics of literacy; however, none could articulate the key characteristics of the SEEDS Literacy Program. Mrs. Anderson, when asked how her child experiences literacy in the SEEDS Literacy Program, was not able to offer a concise description of characteristics of the program:

Well like you said there is stuff written on the doors, windows, drawers, the trash can, basically everywhere she would see. There are flashcards on all those things that she would see. Read to everyday and books on hand that she can read through. You guys sing songs..um then there are all the things on the walls where you do all your counting and all that. Counting would be considered a part of the SEEDS Literacy Program.

Mrs. Anderson stated, "My understanding is that it is the program that is used at the Community Child Development Center to teach my daughter how to communicate. Basically with her, reading and writing, and speaking skills, I guess." Mr. Wright wasn't able to define what the SEEDS Literacy Program was when asked, and when asked what he liked best about the program, he said he said "I don't know the details of the program I could say I like best or least...As I think about this in going through these questions, maybe for me, a better understanding of what the literacy program is." Mrs. Wells was explaining what

part of the SEEDS Literacy Program he liked least, when she paused and replied: "I would like to say what I like the least is maybe as a parent, and maybe this is me but I don't feel that I fully understand the SEEDS Literacy Program. I don't know of the SEEDS program."

Mrs. Johnson responded to the question of how her child experienced the SEEDS Literacy Program at the Community Care Development Center this way: "...should I know what the SEEDS program is?"

From the parents' perspective, although they could not identify specifics about the SEEDS Literacy Program when asked, based on their visits to the classroom and seeing evidence of the SEEDS literacy reading curriculum, they correctly identified some aspects of the Literacy Program. This includes the word wall, labeling of items, and children's names. When asked about how their child has experienced the SEEDS Literacy Program, three of four parents mentioned the labeling of objects on walls or the objects themselves. Mrs. Wells identified labeling of items, "Books everywhere, I guess when I think about what's on the walls, everything is labeled." Mrs. Johnson noted: "My child experiences the SEEDS program every day that she attends daycare by seeing words written down and learning to speak. Also, by identifying objects and the words associated with it." Mrs. Anderson said: "There's stuff written on the doors windows, drawers, trash can; everything she would see. There are flashcards on all of those things you would see." Being read to was another aspect of the SEEDS Literacy Program that parents mentioned. Mrs. Wells said, "I would say just her day to day environment...knowing that books are part of group time." Mrs. Anderson stated,

“Teaching my daughter how to communicate...reading, writing, speaking skills and understanding.”

Although some parents correctly identified aspects of the SEEDS Literacy Program, overall, they could not describe the SEEDS Literacy Program without further questioning or prompting. Clearly the Community Child Development Center needs to do a better job in educating parents about how literacy is taught.

Parents' Belief in the Effectiveness of SEEDS

My findings indicated that there was a unanimous opinion that the SEEDS Literacy Program had a positive impact on their child's literacy. At home, the parents saw the positive benefits of the SEEDS curriculum based on the questions that the children asked their parents and in how they played. Mr. Wright said, “I know it is working because he's developing especially well. We probably see it most in his vocabulary, words that he understands, and letters that he puts together.” Some interviewees were more definitive with their answer and felt confident about the educational progress that their child made through the SEEDS Literacy Program. Mrs. Wells stated that “she knows her numbers and letters” and also went on to explain:

We have a good friend who has a child who is two months younger than my daughter and probably has a vocabulary of 20 to 30 words, and when I look at my daughter who, I mean, she probably had 20 to 30 words when she was in the infant program and moved into the toddler program at the Community Child Development Center.

She strongly felt that her child was progressing more than other children who do not attend the Community Child Development Center. She couldn't be happier and also mentioned that she was impressed with the conversations she had with her one and a half year old:

Girls are typically more verbal than boys, but I look at the structure she has for learning, and I think it lends itself to that, and I look at her when she occasionally starts speaking Spanish, and to me that's so impressive, and she is not even aware she is doing it.

Similar to Mrs. Wells, Mrs. Anderson felt that the program gave her daughter an edge on literacy skills compared to other children who did not attend a preschool with a literacy program such as the Community Child Development Center: "She is much more advanced than kids that don't go here or (participate) in that kind of a school setting."

One of the most beneficial aspects of the SEEDs Literacy Program is the positive impact it had on parent communication with their child. Mrs. Anderson stated "My daughter wants to read. It has taught me a lot about how to communicate with my daughter." The SEEDS Literacy Program has had a positive impact in their child's literacy such as increasing literacy ability, phonics skills, literacy comprehension, and communication. Mrs. Johnson was happy how her daughter was able to reciprocate what she learned at the Community Child Development Center back to them through speech and recognition and also explained that the program provided a foundation for literacy: "I feel like the curriculum and the scaffolding that happens has helped my daughter to verbalize

by sign language and in turn has helped with language and communication.” Mrs. Wells said “We have been blown away by what my daughter has learned at such a young age.”

One interesting subtheme that resulted was the awareness by the parents on the positive impact that sign language (part of the SEEDS Literacy Program) had in the development of their children’s literacy. For two questions which deal with the impact and benefits of the SEEDS Literacy Program, three of the five parents noted the benefits of sign language. Mrs. Johnson captured the essence of this by stating, “The SEEDs program has been very beneficial in helping my daughter communicate with sign language and has helped her develop skills.” Mrs. Johnson goes on to say, “The sign language has been very important in being able to communicate with our daughter and understand her needs.” Mrs. Anderson was impressed with her daughter’s ability to communicate: “She signs most words, which is important to be able to communicate with others.”

The parents felt very confident in the teacher’s lessons that they taught the children and also confident in what they were learning. Mrs. Anderson stated that, “Well she can pretty much sign everything. She can sign important ways in how to communicate with us like ‘more,’ ‘done,’ and things when she couldn’t speak. She still uses it to this day when she doesn’t get what she wants and when she is frustrated, otherwise her language skills are so good.” Overall, each of the parents in this study saw the beneficial impact of the program in the literacy skills of their children.

Parents Desire More Information on the SEEDS Program

After the parents were interviewed, my findings indicate that there was a consensus regarding the understanding of the SEEDS Literacy Program. Most parents were in agreement that more information needs to be provided by the Community Child Development Center to improve the understanding of the SEEDS Literacy Program and allow for more parent involvement at home. Mrst Johnson demonstrated awareness of the SEEDS Literacy Program however my findings indicate this was not a typical parent response. Mrs. Wells initial response to what she would like to see added to the SEEDS Literacy Program clearly indicates the need for more information. She shaares:

Well, assuming I should know what the SEEDS Program is, I might say more parent education on what the SEEDS Program is (needed)t would also be nice to have pamphlets displayed that provide information about the SEEDS Literacy Program that is taught daily in the classroom.

Mrs.Anderson expressed that she wanted to learn more about the program and become more involved. She seemed concerned that she didn't know enough about the SEEDS program: "I'm not educated in Early Childhood Education so I don't know." Mr. Wright, when asked if he had any last thoughts about the SEEDS program, indicated he wanted a better understanding of SEEDS for the benefit of his son, "As I think about this in going through these questions, maybe for me a better understanding of what the literacy program is. For now it's important for my son, but eventually my other infant son as well." He also was interested in obtaining more information about the Early Literacy program, he continues, "But

it would be more helpful for us to know a little more about the program itself. I'm sure it's (information) available; my wife might have a better understanding than I."

According to some parents, informational pamphlets would be useful in providing more information on the SEEDsProgram. Other parents wanted to know more about the program but did not have specific recommendations. In order for parents to have a better understanding of the SEEDs Literacy Program, more information needs to be provided.

Parents Would Like to be more Involved with their Child's Education at Home

Most of the parents (three of four parents) had the opinion that more information or resources provided to them about the SEEDS Literacy Program would help with their comprehension of the program. They also wanted to support their child's learning at home. Mrs. Wells supported this in response to the question related to what she would like to see added to the Literacy Program: "I would love to be able to get involved with my child and with literacy." Mrs. Anderson stated "I guess I would have to really observe a class to know if I felt there was something missing. I'm not educated in Early Childhood Education so I don't know. I don't feel like I could suggest anything (to be added to the program)." In response to whether he had any more comments during the interview, Mr. Wright said "I should get more familiar with the program as a whole. Maybe for me, a better understanding of what the literacy program is."

The lack of awareness of the SEEDS Literacy Program seems to prove to be a major barrier to parent involvement. Three of the four parent groups interviewed, did not have an understanding of the SEEDS Literacy Program and two of these parent groups mentioned they wanted to be more involved. This includes a desire for more materials to be able to take advantage of what their children were learning at school and be able to utilize their knowledge to reinforce it at home

Mrs. Wells knew of the weekly lesson plans but this wasn't enough, he comments, "I know in the (weekly) lesson plans it says what you have read, but I don't have the books or to better coordinate at home with what is happening at school." During the interview with Mrs. Anderson, it became clear she knew of the program, but wasn't sure of how it fit into her daughter's daily education at Community Child Development Center. According to her, "My understanding is that it is the program that is used to teach my daughter to communicate." When asked how her child experienced literacy in the SEEDS Literacy Program, she mentioned the weekly lesson plans provided by the Community Child Development Center, but did not indicate any interest in being more involved at home: "Um...I don't know. I get a lesson plan every week in what you do for that week."

In the Wright interview, the father mentioned how he was very happy about the SEEDS Literacy Program at the Community Child Development Center and felt that his son's language development has progressed significantly. When asked if there was anything he would like to see added to the Literacy Program,

his response indicated he would like to be more involved at home with his son: "There are things that I'd like to help my son with. You know, occasionally you know like buttoning down certain letters (and) the sequence of numbers." He also mentioned how it would be nice if there were informational pamphlets that offered information about the curriculum that is taught daily in the classroom

Parents would also like to be more involved in their child's education, such as having take-home work sheets which build on daily lessons. Two of four parents stated they wanted to be more involved with their child's education. They indicated that not only would it benefit their child but also make them feel better as parents about being more in their child's education. The parents as a whole wanted to be a part of their child's education, and being a part of their education is being engaged with their child and knowing what they're learning at the Community Child Development Center. Mrs. Wells indicated it would be helpful to improve parent involvement by the Community Child Development Center by sending home take home learning sheets with the current week's lesson for parent and child to do together, she shares, "Are there things that we could be doing at home to really help or supplement or reinforce what the program is teaching her?" Mrs. Wells was the only parent who mentioned the daily lesson plans provided to parents by the Community Care Child Center and the reports of her child's daily learning activities through baby connect emails, and how he tries to incorporate the material at home, she continues, "We do try too, not always but at times tie in relevant things at home based on the lesson plans." Mrs. Johnson concurred "It would be easier to help support my child at home by increasing more parent

involvement, things like take home enrichments that included the days of the week or the current week's lessons." Mr. Wright had the same perspective and stated, "I would be interested in having take-home worksheets provided for both my son and I, so that we are able to review that week's lesson plan together. Mrs. Anderson reiterated the same point as Mr. Wright, "It would be helpful if the Community Child Development Center sent home weekly take home worksheets that we could work on together." She felt that take homework sheets would help make her more involved as a parent her child's education and more knowledgeable about the SEEDS Literacy Program.

In conclusion, a significant number of participants felt that it would be helpful if the Community Child Development Center provided take homework sheets so that both parent and child would be able to review that week's lesson plan. This would also enable parents to be more involved. In addition, the parents thought that by offering pamphlets that provided useful information on the program, this would allow them to be more educated on the SEEDS Literacy Program and enable them to better support the development of their child's literacy. Awareness of the weekly lesson plans was not enough; parents wanted more information on how to use them.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Throughout my research, I found that parents had varying perspectives on literacy and had little to no specific knowledge of the SEEDS Literacy Program at the Community Child Development Center. When parents were asked the question: "What is your understanding of the SEEDS Literacy Program?," most parents responded that they were unaware and lacked knowledge of what SEEDS was. However, parents did recognize that a structured program was in place based on their regular visits to the center. Parents' perspectives on what literacy consists of varied from reading comprehension, to the child's vocabulary (knowledge of words and objects) or other aspects of literacy.

The lack of understanding of the SEEDS by parents indicates improvements should be made in how the Community Child Development Center educates parents on aspects of the SEEDS Literacy Program. Parents also wanted to be more involved in the education of their children. They did not have a good understanding of the specific lesson plans in place, or what activities they could do at home to help their children learn, which suggests that parents are likely not as involved in their child's education as they could be. Although parents have some responsibility for taking the initiative to learn more about what the Community Child Development Center offers their children in the way of an early literacy curriculum, clearly the Community Child Development Center could do a better job of educating parents on the programs, and how they could be more directly involved with their children's education.

Parents' Awareness of the SEEDS Literacy Program

Although parents were able to identify some aspects of the SEEDS Literacy Program during my interviews, it was clear that they did not have thorough knowledge of the program, or even awareness of the program itself. They typically focused only on the child care services the Community Child Development Center offered. Two of the four parents stated they did not know what SEEDS was, and the other two parents only knew that it was a literacy program, but could not describe specific aspects of the program without being prompted. Mrs. Wells explained that she had no idea what SEEDS was. Mrs. Anderson guessed that the SEEDS Literacy Program was just reading, writing, and speaking English, but she didn't know the specifics of the SEEDS Literacy Program.

Parents are given a tour when they enroll in the Community Child Development Center, and the SEEDS Literacy Program is briefly explained; however, it appears that parents only were aware of the aspects of the program they observed at the Community Child Development Center when picking up and dropping off their children, and from meeting with the teachers. As I interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, I noticed they often had puzzled looks on their faces as I asked questions about the SEEDS Literacy Program. Mrs. Wells didn't know anything about the SEEDS Literacy Program and said she was aware that some books were read to her child, but she didn't have access to the information to be able to follow along at home with her child or buy the right books.

When asked what aspects of the SEEDS Literacy Program they liked best, two of four parent groups struggled to identify characteristics of the program. Mr. Wright replied "I don't know the details of the program well enough to say which I like best or least." Mr. Wright also stated when asked about any last comments they had, that "...it would be helpful for us to know a little more about the program itself." Mr. Wright indicated he did not have an understanding of the program when asked about it. Mrs. Anderson, when asked if there is anything that needed to be added to the SEEDS Literacy Program, stated she would need more information on the program in order to respond.

Another perspective parents had was the Community Child Development Center was little more than a daycare center. Two of four parent groups interviewed had this opinion. When asked about their initial expectations of the Community Child Development Center, Mrs. Wells responded she had no real expectations of her children. She thought of it as daycare. However, she realized there was a curriculum in place and that her daughter was learning by attending. Mrs. Wells touched on a key concept that parents seemed to miss: what the Community Child Development Center offers is not just daycare, but actually a structured environment where their children are being taught a literacy curriculum.

When asked how their children experienced the SEEDS Literacy Program, parents drew on what they observed in the classroom – labeling, word wall, objects, storytime. However, through my interviews, I could tell the parents were not certain of their answers. In responding to the question if there is anything

should be added to the literacy program at the Community Child Development Center, Mrs. Anderson mentioned she would need to observe a class to know if there was something missing (from the early childhood literacy program).

It is clear the Community Child Development Center needs to do a better job of educating the parents about the structured early literacy program, the value of the early literacy program, and do a better job of communicating to parents how they could be more involved in supporting the lesson plans in which their children are participating.

Parents' belief in the effectiveness of SEEDS. Parents' perspectives on SEEDS showed they believed the program to be effective, despite most not having a thorough understanding of the early literacy program at the Community Child Development Center. All four parent groups indicated they believed the program to be effective. Mrs. Johnson felt it improved the communication skills of her daughter. Both Mrs. Wells and Mrs. Anderson mentioned they were impressed with how advanced their children were compared to other children they knew who didn't attend a preschool. Mr. Wright was very happy about the SEEDS Literacy Program at the Community Child Development Center and felt that his son's language development has blossomed. He thought his son was advanced regarding his ability to recognize letters, words and pictures at 2 1/2 years of age.

The SEEDS Literacy Program is based on proven methods of interaction with the child and also relies on the participation of the parents at home to support what is being taught in the classroom and in developing child literacy. This direct

interaction is what develops literacy. Research by Arnold & Colburn (2010) supports this:

Similar to the infant stage, when a parent, teacher or caregiver speaks directly to and interacts with toddlers through picture books, singing songs, pointing to and naming objects, it broadens the child's literacy understanding and allows for them to become a successful reader (p.16).

SEEDS uses a variety of ways to develop literacy in ways that are meaningful to children, including the use of story time and sign language in developing literacy in infants. Hart and Risley (1995) state that, "Research has shown that adults who frequently talk to infants are helping expand the infants' vocabularies" (p.7). Arnold and Colburn (2010) state that repetition and teaching children in ways that are meaningful to them strengthens connections between sound and language.

Parents recognized that the Community Child Development Center provides a structured learning environment that motivates children to learn. Mrs. Johnson likes the continual learning part of the SEEDS program, where learning is taking place all day long. She also likes the emphasis on reading. Mrs. Wells recognized the importance of the structured environment provided by the Community Child Development Center and when asked about her response to the SEEDS early Literacy Program, recalled how her daughter seemed to have advanced vocabulary in comparison to other children and identified the structured nature of the program as one reason for this.

Mrs. Anderson recognized the benefits of the daily stories where the children were read to, and the impact that had on her child's motivation to learn. She noted that her daughter is motivated to read "all the time" and recognizes objects on the page when she is being read to. Mrs. Wells observed how the structured environment at the Community Child Development Center motivates her child to learn and mimic storytime at home and described a "formal way of learning" as part of the reason for this.

According to two of four parent groups, the SEEDS Literacy Program also has a positive impact on communication between parents and children. Parents recognized children were motivated to learn and communicate with their parents through the use of sign language they were being taught at the Community Child Development Center. Mrs. Anderson expressed how her daughter wants to read and how it has taught her how to communicate with here daughter. Mrs. Johnson also believes the SEEDS program has been very instrumental in helping her daughter learn and communicate. Mrs. Johnson also explained that the program provides a foundation for literacy through the curriculum, her daughter is better able to verbalize through sign language and this has helped her daughter develop her language and communication skills.

Parents desire more information on the SEEDS program. Recognizing the benefits of the early literacy program was not enough for most parents. A majority (three of five) of parents indicated they would like to know more about the SEEDS Literacy Program. Mr. Wright said he wanted to know more about the literacy program itself. He indicated that understanding the SEEDS Literacy

Program was important right now, since he had a son who currently attended the Community Child Development Center, but in addition, that it would be important for his infant son, who would be attending the Community Child Development Center in the future. Mrs. Wells had no awareness of the SEEDS Literacy Program, but wished she knew more about the program and expressed an interest in observing the lessons being taught for one day. During my interview with her, she mentioned that no one at the Community Child Development Center had sat down with her and explained what the SEEDS program is. Mrs. Anderson, after the interview, expressed she felt “alarmed” she did not know more about the SEEDS program.

The desire for more information about the SEEDS program on the part of the parents contrasts with efforts already in place by the Community Child Development Center. Tours of the facility and descriptions of the SEEDS Literacy Program are presented to prospective and new parents, and once enrolled, weekly lesson plans are provided to parents to make them aware of specific topics being taught to their children. Not enough was being done to educate the parents about the SEEDS Literacy Program and information available about the program.

Mrs. Wells expressed interest in receiving informational pamphlets from the Community Child Development Center to learn more about the SEEDS Literacy Program. During my research, the Community Child Development Center had first been issuing weekly printed summaries of lesson plans to the parents by leaving them in assigned mailboxes. Later, emails of the lesson plans were sent to parents. This was primarily due to the fact that the parents were not

taking home the lesson plans out of their assigned mailboxes. However, even after the email lesson plans were put into practice, parents were asking for more printed material about the SEEDS Literacy Program. This shows there was some preference by the parents to receive printed lesson plans. It is unclear why the parents did not, as a group, accept the printed lesson plans. It may be that parents were in a rush to get home and had other things on their mind at that time of the day and simply left without picking up the lesson plans. Also interesting is the fact that the emailed lesson plans did not seem to be any more effective, since most parents didn't seem to have knowledge of the specifics of the weekly lesson plans. This could be due to several factors. It is likely that the parents lacked an understanding of the SEEDS program overall; didn't understand how the lesson plans supported the program, and therefore, did not know how to use them. It could also be due to an ineffective effort on the part of the Community Child Development Center to communicate the importance of the lesson plans to the parents. There are no visual aids displayed to explain the SEEDS Literacy Program, and no marketing to the parents of the importance of the weekly lesson plans.

One clue as to the link between parents' awareness of the program, and valuing the program, and also actively using the lesson plans at home, is demonstrated by Mrs. Wells, whose responses show she had a better awareness of the program than the other parents I interviewed. She was aware of the emailed lesson plans, and incorporated them at home on a daily basis. She explained they review the lesson plans and talk about what is in her baby connect email and what

she did and learned during the day. Mrs. Wells, when asked about what her expectations of the Community Child Development Center were, explained she had no real expectations for her daughter to learn and thought of it as daycare. However, after time, she realized the impact the SEEDS Literacy Program had on her daughter's literacy skills. According to Doyle and Zhang (2011), parents who see both the benefits and design of an early literacy program valued the program the most. This seems to indicate that if parents value the program in which their child is enrolled, which means seeing the benefits of the program as well as understanding the program, they are more likely to be motivated to participate in developing the literacy of their child at home. This also suggests the inverse maybe true: the less aware the parents are of the SEEDS Literacy Program, the less they would value the program, and the less likely they would be to implement literacy practices at home to support weekly lessons.

Parents would like to be more involved with their child's education at home. Parents overall wanted to be more engaged with their children's education at home. Three of the four parent groups wanted to be more directly involved at home in supporting what their children were learning at the Community Child Development Center. Mrs. Johnson had the least knowledge of the program and did not express an interest in being more involved at home. There was the expectation that all teaching should be done by the Community Child Development Center. Mrs. Wells had a different perspective, and was the parent who seemed to most value the SEEDS Literacy Program at the Community Child Development Center. She actively uses the weekly lesson plans as a guide to

teach her daughter at home. According to Mrs. Wells, she and her husband look at the lesson plans their daughter is following and, if possible, incorporate items at home in learning. Mrs. Anderson expressed a desire to learn more about SEEDS and wanted to be more involved in the program. Mr. Wright was not familiar with SEEDS but wanted to help his son learn at home.

Parents seemed to recognize that by being more directly involved with their children at home and participating in structured learning activities (to support weekly literacy lessons), this would benefit their children further. According to the studies done by the Colorado Department of Education, parents can play an important role in helping their children to learn McCune (2010). Per Doyle Zhang (2011) "Family literacy programs involving parents can result in positive effects on children's language and literacy development (p. 223)."

Parents wanted to be more a part of their children's education, but stumbling blocks seemed to be a lack of understanding of SEEDS and placing a low value on the benefits of the program. Most parents felt they didn't have the information needed to supplement the weekly lessons offered at the Community Child Development Center. Not valuing the early child literacy program was demonstrated by two of the four parent groups. As Mrs. Johnson noted, she regarded the Community Child Development Center as a "daycare center" and Mrs. Wells initially thought of the Community Child Development Center as providing childcare before realizing that a structured literacy program was also being offered to her child.

Parents' Perspectives on Early Childhood Literacy

The SEEDS Literacy Program is based on proven methods of developing literacy in children through direct interaction with the children by teachers through story time, sign language, and other methods, which has been shown to broaden the child's literacy and to be a more successful at reading Arnold & Colburn (2010). The SEEDS Literacy Program also encourages parental involvement to further support learning at home. Family literacy programs involving parents can positively impact children's language abilities and literacy Doyle and Zhang (2011).

Since parents have an important role to play in the development of their children's literacy, it is important they have an understanding of the ways in which children learn, what curriculum their children are being exposed to, and how they can support learning at home. The enrollment of children in such early literacy development programs can be shaped by parents' perceptions of how their children perform in early literacy programs. Doyle and Zhang (2011).

According to responses from the interview participants, parents were mostly not aware of the SEEDS program or the specifics of its approach to developing literacy in preschool age children. Many parents viewed the Community Child Development Center as a daycare center, which offered no formal instruction. However, when asked, parents recognized some aspects of the program from their experience with the Community Child Development Center and saw the benefits of the program in the literacy abilities of their own children compared with other children. If the Community Child Development Center was

not doing a good job of educating parents on its Early Literacy Program, then a key part of the curriculum (parent involvement) is likely not being achieved, and the potential literacy development in children not fully realized.

Recommendations

1. The Community Child Development Center needs to do a better job of educating parents on the existence of the SEEDS program and the benefits of the education that is being provided to their children. One way for parents and teachers to better connect, is to reinforce the SEEDS Literacy Program curriculum during semiannual parent-teacher conferences.
2. The Community Child Development Center should be more proactive in communicating how parents can support their children's literacy at home and better utilize the weekly lesson plans so parents can be more involved in the education of their children. One way to accomplish this would be to hold periodic open house seminars on lesson plans and ways to support literacy development at home.
3. The Community Child Development Center should promote the value of the program to the parents (and prospective parents) to increase enrollment and therefore improve the literacy of children reaching kindergarten and allow for more success later in school.
4. The Community Child Development Center needs to remind the parents of the importance of the weekly lesson plans and more importantly, educate parents on how best to use the lesson plans to support the curriculum.

5. The Community Child Development Center should issue easier to understand lesson plans that parents can take home and interact with their children.

Reflections

The goal of my research was to better understand parent's perspectives on the Early Literacy program at the Community Child Development Center. As a preschool teacher, my understanding at the Community Child Development Center was that the parents were generally aware of the SEEDS Early Literacy program and involved in their child's education. My impression was that the parents were engaged and aware of the Early Literacy program even though they didn't ask questions of how their child was doing academically. Also, the Community Child Development Center is a private preschool and costs a significant amount of money to enroll a child. My assumption was that parents would naturally have a good understanding of the program and be more involved in supporting their children's education.

However, as a teacher at the Community Child Development Center, I never witnessed parents asking questions about their child's education and they appeared to be concerned about their child's well-being and social behavior. I was interested to see what perspectives parents had on the Early Literacy program at the Community Child Development Center, and how much they valued the education the Community Child Development Center was providing their children.

Looking back, my understanding of the parent's perspectives of the literacy program at the Community Child Development Center has changed significantly after the interview process took place. Most importantly, the parents seemed to lack specific knowledge of what the SEEDS Literacy Program was and the different components that made up the curriculum that was being taught to

their children every day. It was surprising how little the parents knew of the SEEDS Literacy Program. Most parents didn't even recognize that the Community Child Development Center offered a structured literacy program to improve the literacy of their young children and instead, viewed the Community Child Development Center as little more than daycare. Parents didn't value what the Community Child Development Center was offering their children. Some parents had a difficult time answering the question of what literacy is and were not able to identify examples of literacy in their children's classroom. Personally, before the interviews, my understanding was that parents would have been more aware and knowledgeable of their child's preschool academic education. The reality was, they assigned the primary responsibility of caring for their children to the Community Child Development Center and for the most part, were not very involved with developing their children's literacy at home.

I learned that instead of educating parents on the SEEDS Early Literacy program and the curriculum and methods of literacy development in place, the Community Child Development Center was not successful in communicating what the SEEDS Early Literacy program was to parents and how they should be involved with their children to enhance the classroom curriculum.

However, I did learn that parents wanted to be involved in the education of their children, they just weren't aware how. The take-home lesson plans available to parents to support weekly lessons in the classroom were not widely used by the parents. The Community Child Development Center should have done a better job in promoting their program to both prospective and current parents therefore

parents would have understood the SEEDS curriculum as a whole and have been more likely to use the lesson plans available to them and be more involved with their children's education.

Better understanding parents' perspectives on the SEEDS Early Literacy program has helped me understand the importance of communication between the Community Child Development Center and the parents in supporting the development of early childhood literacy. Teachers play an important role in bridging the gap between the parents and the Community Child Development Center. But, just as important, management of the Community Child Development Center needs to supplement the program with learning guides and better promote the aspects of the Early Literacy program to the parents.

Parents' perspectives on the programs their children are enrolled correlate to their participation in these programs. Personally, as a teacher, when I witness parents that are involved in their own child's education, they become more aware of their own child's learning process in the classroom and the child is more successful academically. My study suggests that by better educating the parents of children enrolled in preschools about the curriculum, promoting the benefits of the program to parents, and providing them resources to support the objectives of lesson plans in the classroom, the full potential of the program can be realized.

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