The Effects of Prekindergarten Programs on Later Academic and Social Achievement

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The Effects of Prekindergarten Programs on Later Academic and Social Achievement

by

Johanna Jennifer Soulé

August 2004

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State University of New York College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education
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Johanna Jennifer Soulé

APPROVED BY:

[Signatures and dates]
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Abstract

This study investigated how prekindergarten effects students’ language arts and social achievement. It targeted one first grade classroom as a case study in an urban elementary school in Western New York. In this classroom, the researcher collected writing samples, observed social skills, and collected Reading Excellence Act Scores. The scores of students that attended prekindergarten were compared to those students that attended preschool and Head Start.

Also, kindergarten and first grade teachers were surveyed to determine the teachers’ perceptions of prekindergarten. An informal interview was done with the current prekindergarten teacher in the urban elementary school as well.

Overall, the prekindergarten students in the one first grade classroom in the urban elementary school were more advanced in their language art and social skills compared to their preschool and Head Start peers.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the keeper of my sanity, Matthew. Thank you for pushing and encouraging me to finish this part of my teaching career. You believed in me and I was able to make it past this obstacle because of your support. We have a very happy future ahead of us founded in the unbreakable love we have for one another.

I would also like to thank my parents and family for everything they have done for me. Your constant support, love, and advice never goes unnoticed or unappreciated. I have all of you to thank for helping me through this phase in my life. I love you all and thank you from the bottom of my heart.
The author, Johanna Soulé, was born in Buffalo, New York on . She attended the State University of New York College at Brockport from 1999-2003 and received a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education in May of 2003 and a Master of Science in Elementary Education with a focus in Math, Science, and Technology Inquiry in May of 2004.
Chapter 1

Statement of Problem

Introduction

Recently in the United States, there has been a growing movement for universal prekindergarten. Attendance rates for early education programs have been soaring as nearly three-fourths of young children in the United States attend some form of preschool. Current research has shown that attending a high-quality prekindergarten program can produce substantial gains in children’s learning and development.

This study will examine how first grade students in an urban elementary school who attended prekindergarten compare, academically and socially, to their kindergarten and first grade peers who did not attend prekindergarten.

The Research Question

Does attending prekindergarten affect the language arts and social success of students in kindergarten and first grade? How do teachers feel about the importance of students attending prekindergarten?

Methods

In order to answer these two questions, the researcher will conduct the study in an urban elementary school in Western New York. The study will focus on the kindergarten and first grade teachers in the elementary school and the first grade students in the researcher’s classroom.
The researcher will identify all students in first grade who attended prekindergarten to determine the percentage of first grade students who have attended prekindergarten. No names will be used to protect student confidentiality.

A survey will be distributed to all kindergarten and first grade teachers concerning their opinions on the effect prekindergarten has had on their students. Each teacher will be provided with a list of students who attended prekindergarten in their classroom. Questions will focus on the teachers’ perceptions of prekindergarten and how it affects performance of those students in their classrooms who attended prekindergarten. A code will be assigned to each teacher to protect anonymity.

Lastly, using the researcher’s classroom as a case study, the social skills of the prekindergarten and non-prekindergarten students in the class will be observed and compared. In addition, writing samples will be collected and analyzed once a week for three months. Data about reading levels will be collected in the form of scores that are mandated by the Reading Excellence Act (REA). In these REA scores, teachers do a miscue analysis on each student to determine reading level. Each student will be assigned a number to protect anonymity.

**Limitations**

The findings of this study are limited to only one first grade classroom in only one urban elementary school. What is found to support or not to support the thesis in this classroom cannot be generalized about all first grade urban elementary schools because the outcomes are specific to the classroom under investigation.
Similarly, the teachers’ perceptions reflected in the findings of this study are limited to only one urban elementary school. If other teachers were included in this study, data would vary due to differences in student population, social factors, economic factors, geographical setting, and school policies.

Lastly, the differences between school records and parent questionnaires concerning whether or not a student attended prekindergarten is a huge limitation to this study. Several students’ records conflict with parent input. When conflicts were found, the researcher used the parent questionnaires to determine if a student attended prekindergarten.

**Definitions**

For the purposes of this research definitions are:

**Prekindergarten**

A half-day schooling program offered at a public school for three-to four-year-old students. Prekindergarten follows state and/or district standards and curriculum.

**Preschool**

The term preschool is sometimes used interchangeably with nursery school and child care center. They may offer an all-day or half-day format. Preschools vary widely in affiliation and may be completely independent or affiliated with a religious organization or a part of a nationwide chain.
Head Start

In this study Head Start is a free federally funded non-public preschool program for "at-risk" three- to five-year-old children from low-income families.
Chapter 2

Introduction

The early education system in the United States has recently experienced a tremendous growth as the benefits of a quality early education are beginning to surface. More and more of today’s children are attending a form of preschool before formal schooling begins. Senator Zell Miller, the former governor of Georgia, has called preschool “the most important grade” (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003, p. 57). The U.S. public agrees, judging from the steadily growing attendance rates and state movements toward universal prekindergarten.

Definition of Preschool

But what exactly is considered preschool? The term preschool is sometimes used interchangeably with nursery school and child care center, however, a growing number of states have begun funding preschool programs offered at public schools, called prekindergarten or pre-K. These prekindergarten programs generally have a set curriculum and very structured learning outcomes that guide teachers and students in learning. The federal government also funds a preschool program, Head Start, for "at-risk" three- to five-year-olds from low-income families.

Preschool programs vary greatly concerning curriculum. Traditionally, preschools have been more concerned with social skills, emotional maturity, and cognitive development than with formal academic schooling (Gale Research, 1998).
Some programs focus solely on social development and exploration through play, while other programs are academically based. Some might have a very detailed and developed curriculum while other programs are more of a child care service. According to Barnett and Hustedt (2003), “U.S. preschool programs are generally mediocre and inconsistent, and the best programs are too expensive for most U.S. families to afford,” (p. 54).

Nevertheless, three-fourths of young children in the United States do participate in a preschool program (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003). Research has shown that there are significant benefits for those children attending a quality early education program. The problem is that not all of those children attending a preschool program are attending a quality program. The current push in the United States is for better quality programs to take full advantage of the enormous potential children have for learning at an early age.

**Cognitive Research**

New research has expanded public understanding of the extraordinary capacities of young minds and the significance of the early years for later development and learning. The National Research Council’s Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy (Kendall, 2003) concluded that young children are more capable learners than current practices reflect and that good educational experiences in the preschool years can have a positive impact on school learning.
Neuroscience and Young Children

The period in a child’s life between the ages of four and six is a time of intense activity in the brain. Between the ages of four and six the brain is pruning connections between brain cells. As the child is exposed to different experiences in life, the brain reinforces some of these connections and prunes back others that are not going to be useful. The brain is becoming more focused and more specialized. It’s taking shape. When a child is young, the taking in of information and refining and reinforcing brain connections takes place more easily and as a matter of course. Everything is forming for the first time. The brain is writing to a clean slate. However, to correct a reading problem in third or fourth grade, you have to undo certain pathways that the child has developed. The faulty connections are difficult to undo and it takes much more time to relearn the correct pathways. Learning it right the first time really pays off (D’Arcangelo, 2003).

There have been several advances in technology that have allowed us to see what parts of the brain are active during certain tasks. Sally Shaywitz, a pediatrician, neuroscientist, and member of the National Reading Panel, has conducted studies to examine the ways in which readers’ brains process information. In an interview with Shaywitz, Marcia D’Arcangelo (2003) reports that, in order to read, children and adults typically use three brain systems. The first area is in the front of the brain and is called the inferior frontal gyrus, or Broca’s area. The other areas are in the back of the brain: the parieto-temporal region and the occipito-temporal region. These three areas are all on the left side of the brain, the region that is traditionally devoted to
language. Broca’s area is responsible for the articulation of spoken language. The parieto-temporal region is involved in analyzing and sounding out the parts of words. And the occipito-temporal region, also called the visual word form area, is where all the information relating to words and sound comes together so that the reader recognizes and reads the word instantly.

These three regions are crucial in reading. In children who have difficulties with reading, there is a difference in the systems in the back of the brain (the parieto-temporal and the occipito-temporal areas). In comparing the brain activity of a good reader to that of a struggling reader who has been asked to sound out an unfamiliar word, there is a significant underactivation of the two regions in the back of the brain in the struggling reader. After limiting a study to children’s brain activity, it was found that the difference is there from childhood.

This is important because often when children are having trouble learning to read, adults tend to think that it is a developmental lag. Data shows that children who have this brain disruption do not outgrow it. Thus, it is urgent that children with reading problems get help as soon as possible. The problem is not going to go away. These findings stress the importance of children learning to read early and in a developmentally appropriate way and the preschools in the United States must facilitate their programs accordingly.

However, Coles (2004) disputes Shaywitz’s findings by arguing that magnetic resonance imagery (MRI) cannot make the distinction between lower level tasks such as rhyming and higher-level tasks such as comprehension. Also, in Shaywitz’s
research poor readers were excluded from the study if their reading problems were non-neurological, such as emotional or familial. However, there were no created evaluation methods or criteria for separating the two groups of poor readers, (Coles, 2004). Therefore, according to Coles (2004), Shaywitz’s cognitive research is based on faulty grounds.

**Developing Fluency at an Early Age**

Another part of reading that can be developed early, according to neuroscientists, is reading fluency. The goal of preschool, kindergarten, and first grade is to provide the experiences and the substrate that will lead to automatic reading on a behavioral level, and on a neurobiological level, to begin to build the neural systems that are responsible for fluent reading. An automatic reader is defined by D’Arcangelo (2003) as a reader that uses the visual word form area in the back of the left side of the brain for fluency when reading. This area allows a child or adult to just look at a word and instantly know it without devoting any attention to it.

The goal of reading is to become an automatic reader. In order to become an automatic reader children need the experience of reading words correctly a number of times so that their neural model is an exact replica of the printed word. The replica reflects the way the word is pronounced, the way it’s spelled, and what it means. In the exact neural model, all these features are bonded together. That word is represented in the word form area, and its recognition becomes instant, automatic. That is wonderful because it frees readers to use all of their attentional resources to comprehend and think about what they are reading. Children with reading problems
are categorized as children that never have the experience and practice of reading the word correctly enough times to build an exact model. So their neural models are a little off. They don’t form permanent neural models in the word form areas, and therefore, don’t read automatically. They are not skilled readers.

What this all means is that in order to build fluency, the foundation must begin when children are very young. Shaywitz (D'Arcangelo, 2003) suggests talking to young children and getting them to appreciate the sounds of language. In the early preschool phase, it’s important to have fun with language and draw a child’s attention to rhyme and alliteration. The National Reading Panel found that programs that emphasize repeated oral reading with feedback and guidance build fluency. Early intervention will help ensure that a child will become a fluent reader. What nature hasn’t built, schools can help to build. The whole idea is to build the systems and the right connections, so you will not have to repair faulty connections. Do it early and do it right!

Benefits of Preschool

Research has established that preschool education can produce substantial gains in children’s learning and development, but researchers disagree about whether such gains are permanent. Several programs seem to offer immediate benefits, but those benefits diminish within two years after leaving the program. Most research on early education has focused on its effects on the IQ scores of economically disadvantaged children and has found few preschool programs that have produced lasting IQ score gains.
But studies also find that preschool education produces persistent gains on achievement test scores, along with fewer occurrences of grade retention and placement in special education programs. Other long-term benefits from preschool education include increased high school graduation rates and decreased crime and delinquency rates. Barnett and Hustedt (2003) have found that several prekindergarten studies indicate that high-quality, effective early education programs improve the learning and development of all children. Melhuish (2001) concurs by stating “day care and preschool education of high quality have been associated with short-term and long-term cognitive, social and emotional benefits for children’s development. The strongest effects appear to occur for children from disadvantaged backgrounds” (p. 2).

The discrepancies in the research results lie in the quality of the program being studied and in how “benefits” are defined. In a high-quality program researchers have been able to find substantial benefit in the children participating. But in other preschool programs of less quality the benefits have not been as great. Long term benefits of attending preschool, especially quality preschool, must take into account not only academics but also effects on children’s attitudes to learning, their self esteem and on their task orientation (Melhuish, 2001). Thus, to determine the effectiveness of preschool, research must also include the overall attitudes for learning that are instilled in the early childhood years.

The extreme importance of early childhood education has been established across the board. Debate still exists on what exactly that education should be.
However, the message is that the first years of school are as important for an educated population as any other period, and perhaps more. Marge Scherer (2003) confirms that early learning time for children may be the most valuable in their lifetime.

**School Readiness**

In past years, early childhood care focused simply on meeting the increasing demand for care outside the home with little or no emphasis on children’s development or education. But as educators and researchers explore these issues, a growing body of research stresses the academic, social, and emotional benefits associated with quality early childhood experiences. In addition, the objectives of the National Education Goals Panel and the sweeping preschool reforms set forth in the No Child Left Behind legislation position school readiness as a national concern (Freeman & King, 2003).

**Definition of School Readiness**

Many research studies (Barnett & Boocock, 1998; Barnett & Hustedt, 2003; Freeman & King, 2003) have confirmed preschool’s positive effects on school readiness and school success, especially for our most disadvantaged children. But what exactly is school readiness? Definitions are important because perceptions of the ways in which children develop can shape decisions about programs and policies related to early schooling. Many educators face the question of how to assess children’s readiness for school. Pianta and LaParo (2003) define school readiness as follows:

Children are ready for school when, for a period of several years, they have been exposed to consistent, stable adults who are emotionally invested in
them; to a physical environment that is safe and predictable; to regular routines and rhythms of activity; to competent peers; and to materials that stimulate their exploration and enjoyment of the world and from which they derive a sense of mastery. These factors alone would be better indices of readiness for school than any measurable aspect of child performance. (p. 24)

Readiness Assessments

Current readiness assessments are very limited approaches to determining students’ readiness to enter into kindergarten. Following the assumption that readiness skills are located within the child, most schools use assessments that focus on the child’s demonstration of certain discrete skills. For example, the ability to name letters or numbers, or knowledge of vocabulary are discrete skills that schools use to assess readiness in children. These assessments, however, measure only a small sample of young children’s knowledge and skills and account for only about 25 percent of the differences among children when they reach school (Pianta & LaParo, 2003). If we understand that children’s skills are embedded in interactions and relationships, then assessment of readiness takes a different course and may focus on observations of the child’s interactions in home and school settings and the qualities of those settings.

Achievement Gap

Neuman (2003) agrees with the factor of quality in early childhood settings by stating that a high-quality prekindergarten has been documented to be the single best investment for improving achievement. The key words here are high-quality. Not every family in the United States can afford or has available a high-quality
prekindergarten program. Therefore, children are entering school on a very uneven playing field.

In expecting universal proficiency in reading and math by 2013-14, No Child Left Behind seems to assume that all children are equally prepared for formal instruction in kindergarten and first grade and that all children start school ready to learn. There are some powerful and devastating statistics to counter this assumption. According to Neuman (2003) in her article, *The Case for High-Quality Prekindergarten*, and previous studies, there is a huge gap between what higher SES children and lower SES children bring to the table in kindergarten. There is a huge discrepancy that will not level the playing field even after one year with extraordinary kindergarten teachers (Neuman, 2003). This discrepancy is called the achievement gap.

Recent studies (Lee & Burkain, 2002; Neuman, 2003; West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000) have shown a consistent correlation between socioeconomic and demographic risk factors and learning difficulties in schools. The greater the risk factors, the fewer the school readiness skills children may have. Risk factors include such situations as having unstable adults caring for a child, living in a physically unsafe environment, and having inconsistent adult role models. These risk factors account for the great achievement gap between those lower SES children and those higher SES children. Children with multiple risk factors tend to be in the lowest SES and are likely to have had limited exposure to books, language, storybook
reading, and other literacy-related activities known to provide a critical foundation for reading achievement. This lack of exposure jeopardizes their progress in literacy.

Juel, Biancarosa, Coker, and Deffes (2003) summarize research that suggests that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds know around 6,000 fewer words than their middle-class peers do when they start school. This gap seems to increase over time. In their own evaluation of students' development in decoding and vocabulary from preschool through first grade using the Woodcock Diagnostic Reading Battery, Juel et al. (2003) found similar discrepancies. The students in their sample demonstrated a relative weakness compared with national norms in both letter-sound identification and oral vocabulary when they began preschool, as do many students living in poor neighborhoods. Each year, the students' decoding skills improved. By the middle of first grade, their average decoding skill score was slightly higher than the national norms. If these low SES children did not attend preschool, they would not have made the significant strides that were accomplished.

Neuman (2003) notes that, over the past 10 years, we have failed to compensate for the achievement gap when it can best be overcome, in the earliest years. She makes the case that, if we are serious about closing the achievement gap, we cannot wait for children to enter the doors of kindergarten. Serious reforms must immediately and systematically address the enormous differences in school readiness between children from diverse backgrounds if we are to have any chance of having all children reach proficiency by 2014.
Although in all likelihood the gap will not be erased entirely, it can be reduced substantially through high-quality prekindergarten programs that acknowledge that many children do not enter school adequately prepared. “If we are to succeed in closing the achievement gap we must put our efforts into creating high-quality prekindergarten programs for the nation’s at-risk children” (Neuman, 2003, p. 286).

**Prekindergarten Programs**

Senator Zell Miller, the former governor of Georgia, has called preschool “the most important grade” (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003, p. 57). The U.S. public agrees, judging from the steadily growing attendance rates and state movements toward universal prekindergarten. In fact, three-fourths of young children in the United States participate in a preschool program (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003).

Public schools have enormously increased their involvement in programs for three- to five-year-olds. More than 40 states now invest in prekindergarten initiatives. More than 25 states and other groups have developed standards for the prekindergarten years, placing strong emphasis on academic outcomes (Hyson, 2003). In 1995, Georgia introduced the first statewide universal prekindergarten program, a model that offers a free preschool education to all four-year-old children, regardless of family income. New York and Oklahoma soon followed with their own universal prekindergarten programs, and in 2002, Florida voters approved a constitutional amendment stipulating that all four-year-olds in the state be offered a free prekindergarten education by 2005 (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003). According to Kagan and Neuman (2003), thirty states report some efforts to build early childhood systems,
which represents a substantial increase over the 16 states that reported such systems-level initiatives in 1998.

Investments nation-wide in early education for children under five-years-old also have dramatically increased at both the federal and state levels. Using the 2002 value of the dollar as a constant, federal expenditures on direct services for early care and education increased from about $8.8 billion to $16.3 billion between 1992 and 2001 (Kagan & Neuman, 2003).

**Evaluation of Existing Prekindergarten Programs**

Recent research has shown that preschool education is academically, socially, and economically a sound investment (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003). Three studies - which examined the High/Scope Perry Preschool program, the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention program, and the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers - provide comprehensive evidence that academic and other benefits from preschool education can yield economic benefits that far outweigh the cost of intensive, high-quality preschool programs (Barnett, 1996; Masse & Barnett, 2002; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002).

These studies identified several long-term economic benefits of early education, finding that both former preschool participants and taxpayers can benefit from public investments in preschool education. For example, former preschool participants were less likely to cost taxpayers money in the long term for such public services as schooling (participants were less likely to be retained in grade or placed in special education), welfare (as adults, participants were more likely to get better jobs
and earn more money), the criminal justice system (participants were less likely to
break laws or participate in other delinquent acts) (Barnett, 1996; Masse & Barnett,
2002; Reynolds et al., 2002).

Another study evaluating the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project found the
financial payoff for society when sending a child to a high-quality preschool program.
Melhuish (2001) writes the High/Scope Perry Pre-school Project has been the most
extensively evaluated study of preschool effects and has a strong experimental design.
A follow-up of children in this project at 27 years of age found evidence of
continuing developmental benefits, and a cost-benefit analysis indicated the
potentially high financial payoff for society of preschool education; $7.16 returned
for every one dollar invested (Barnett, 1996; Melhuish, 2001).

The Head Start initiative was also a source of many studies of the effects of
preschool education. Early evaluations of Head Start usually showed no advantage to
the Head Start children (Good, Biddle, & Brophy, 1975). Furthermore, even where
positive findings were obtained, the advantage to the Head Start children typically
disappeared a few months after the end of the program. Where Head Start children
were significantly above control children on measures of IQ or achievement at the
end of the program, follow-up measures taken later usually showed that the advantage
had disappeared and the control group had caught up to the Head Start groups.
However in later studies, researchers found that Head Start programs have an
immediate positive effect on child development but these effects wash out after two
years (Melhuish, 2001).
Model early intervention programs, such as the Abecedarian Project and the Perry Preschool Project, provide compelling evidence of the significant benefits and long-term savings that high-quality programs create for schools and society (Neuman, 2003). These and other high-quality programs have been studied and have proved the tremendous benefits a quality prekindergarten program can have for young children today.

**Prekindergarten Curriculum**

Research has shown that if a child attends a high-quality preschool program, the benefits are innumerable. But what exactly is a high-quality preschool program? The answer lies in the schools’ philosophy and curriculum. Educators seem to have reached a consensus on the need to provide a warm and sensitive social environment for young children in classrooms. However, the variation in classroom experiences reflects a lack of consensus about an appropriate instructional curriculum and how teachers should deliver the curriculum through rich, active, feedback-producing interactions that offer children opportunities to think, solve problems, and actively practice skills (Pianta & LaParo, 2003).

Early education classrooms vary widely in the activities in which children participate and the quality of the classroom environment. Pianta and LaParo (2003) conducted observational assessments of classroom environments in prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade settings to find out what kinds of activities children were participating in during their early childhood education. Results found exceptional variability in activities, but an overall picture emerged from their observational
studies of the typical early education classroom. There were a lot of whole group instruction, a fairly positive social environment, and somewhat low levels of productivity and engagement in academic activities.

**Adult-Directed Academic Instruction vs. Exploration and Play**

Most educators and educational researchers agree that programs for children most in need should begin at an earlier age and should include full-day, full-year services for the children and their families. However, there is much disagreement on whether preschool aged children should be receiving adult-directed academic instruction or whether they should be learning through their own exploration and play.

Hyson (2003) and colleagues studied almost 100 children for several years to examine whether children were better or worse off when they attended preschools that emphasized adult-directed instruction and the basics of reading and math rather than preschools that focused on play and exploration. It was found that children whose families enrolled them in highly academic preschools and emphasized academic skills at home gained no advantage in overall cognitive abilities. Because of the extra instruction they knew a few more letters and numbers when they started kindergarten, but those differences disappeared by the end of first grade. Also, the children in the academic environments thought less creatively and had less positive attitudes toward school at the end of kindergarten. Those parents that thought that they were giving their children a head start by enrolling them in a rigorous
academically-based preschool were actually doing more harm in the long term to their child’s creativity and overall attitude toward school.

Excellent prekindergarten, kindergarten, Head Start, and child care programs put academics in their place as essential but not isolated components of an effective early education system (Hyson, 2003). The following example is from a classroom in New Jersey’s state-funded preschool program and it demonstrates how to blend academics with play or free exploration.

Laura Giorgio, a teacher at the Charles C. Hudson School, has gathered a small group of children on the rug. She holds up a copy of The Three Little Pigs, a favorite story of this group. She reminds the children of their interest in the wolf blowing down the pigs’ houses. Alejandro remembers that the wolf couldn’t blow down the brick house because it “was stuck with glue.” Laura gives each child a bag of feathers, stones, yarn balls, wooden blocks, and other objects. She challenges the children to figure out which objects will move when they are blown and which will not. Flinging themselves onto the carpet, the children begin their investigations. (Hyson, 2003, p. 21)

This is a prime example of the way academics can be blended with free exploration so children are able to learn from their interests. Practices that effectively support early academic competence build on young children’s natural interests and learning styles, including play, drawing, and talk. Without a nurturing, playful, responsive environment, an academic focus may diminish children’s engagement and motivation. But a “child-centered” environment that lacks intellectual challenges also falls short of what curious young learners deserve. By putting academics in their rightful place, early education programs can enhance children’s experiences now and build the foundation for their later success (Hyson, 2003).
Standards for Prekindergarten

Now the question remains, should prekindergarten have a set curriculum and standards to follow? Some suggest taking kindergarten standards and watering them down to produce an appropriate prekindergarten curriculum. However, the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education warn against simply “dumbing down” K-12 standards and curriculum (Hyson, 2003). Instead, programs can draw upon research-based resources from national professional organizations and from some already established state prekindergarten standards to identify those concepts and skills that are the most significant for later learning and that create the most interest and enjoyment right now.

Hyson (2003) believes that administrators, curriculum developers, supervisors, and professional development specialists can effectively include academic content in their early childhood programs if they keep a few important guidelines in mind. The first guideline is to select important and appropriate academic content. This means that early childhood educators should choose intellectually challenging academic content that connects with young children’s abilities and interests.

The second guideline is to promote social and emotional competence, teacher-child-family relationships, and positive approaches to learning. Both an academic emphasis and social-emotional focus are essential to high-quality early education. A very important third guideline is to insist on well-prepared teachers. The National
Research Council recommends that every teacher of three- to five-year-old children should hold a bachelor’s degree with a specialization in child development and early childhood education. New Jersey’s preschool initiative and a number of other state prekindergarten programs follow this recommendation despite the funding challenges.

The next guideline asks programs to use appropriate instructional strategies. Preschool-age children are not developmentally ready for very in-depth academic content. Their interests and play must be combined with academic content to make it meaningful and developmentally appropriate.

And the last guideline instructs programs to use appropriate assessment methods. Again, children at this young age are not developmentally ready for testing. Skilled early childhood teachers should be able to make observational assessments of children during free exploration and play (Hyson, 2003).

Quality of Prekindergarten Programs

According to Melhuish (2001), early research was primarily concerned with whether children attending preschool developed differently from those not attending. Later work recognized that day care or preschool experience is not unitary and that the quality or characteristic of experience matters. Therefore, a quality prekindergarten can have significant benefits for one child, while another child who attends a different prekindergarten might show no long-term benefits. Again, quality is the key. These differences in children’s experiences in different preschool settings
may have developmental consequences, and be part of the explanation of whether preschool experiences are beneficial or not.

Financial Burdens to Achieving Quality

One problem facing the United States and quality prekindergarten programs is financial resources. According to Kagan and Neuman (2003) the financial resources spent on child care are still insufficient to cover the actual cost of establishing quality program. Unlike other nations with which the United States is routinely compared, U.S. public investment in early child care and education remains markedly low. In other developed countries, parents’ fees typically cover 25 to 30 percent of the costs of child care, with the government picking up the rest of the tab. By contrast, parents in the United States carry the burden of roughly 60 percent of the costs of early care and education (Kagan & Neuman, 2003).

In the long run fronting the cost of high-quality preschool programs pays off. Barnett and Hudstedt (2003) state, high-quality preschool programs have been found to reduce grade retention and high school drop out rates for middle class students by 25 to 50 percent, saving the taxpayers’ money in the long run. However, as of right now parents in the United States are being asked to cover the cost of quality early childhood education. Because of this financial burden, early childhood programs do not offer high enough salaries to teachers. Thus, quality suffers.

Low Standards for Teacher Quality

Head Start is one program where quality is compromised because their current child care standards are extremely low. All over, the state child care standards are
low, but Head Start requires that only half of its teachers have a two-year college
degree (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003).

The High/Scope Perry Preschool program, the Abecedarian Early Childhood
Intervention program, and the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers, the three
successful prekindergarten programs mentioned earlier, all had higher standards for
education than do most typical early education programs today (Barnett & Hustedt,
2003). Many typical early education programs today hire underqualified teachers and
pay those teachers salaries that average less than half of a public school teacher’s
salary. Teachers from each of these successful programs had credentials and received
compensation equivalent to those of public school teachers.

Barnett and Hustedt (2003) also reported that teachers in prekindergarten
programs sponsored by public schools were better educated, earned higher salaries,
and had lower turnover in their jobs than teachers in privately operated programs.
Private program providers voiced concern that teachers took private program
positions only as stepping-stones to more lucrative jobs in the public schools. Head
Start directors frequently voiced similar concerns, because their teachers earn roughly
half the salary of public school teachers. Substantial evidence shows that all of these
advantages for public programs lead to higher education quality and improved
learning and development for children (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003).

Teachers of early childhood education have a very difficult job and should be
paid accordingly. Hyson (2003) reports, effective early childhood teachers must fine-
tune a balance between adult direction and child-initiated activities, from moment to
moment and from child to child. They must be able to celebrate and guide young children’s energy, fantasies, and intense curiosity. They must create experiences that build the warm, nurturing, secure relationships from which young children can launch into academic challenges. Effective teaching does not happen automatically, and degrees alone are not enough. Ensuring high-quality early childhood teachers requires ongoing, job-embedded professional development and supervision. That type of quality requires sufficient financial funds, which are currently not available to all prekindergarten programs.

Creating High-Quality Prekindergarten Programs in the United States

To create the high-quality early childhood education programs that will produce significant benefits in the children of the United States, much work needs to be done. Barnett and Hustedt (2003) suggest that the states face the challenge of successfully developing a universal prekindergarten program that delivers uniformly high-quality education services to all children by mixing publicly and privately operated programs funded with federal, state, and local government dollars. Even though policy makers have targeted United States public investments in early care and education, the quality is not there.

Better wages, regulations, quality control, and accountability need to be found in the area of early childhood education (Kagan & Neuman, 2003) and educators must take on the hard work of developing and implementing sound policy. This challenge will require higher standards and increased public funding. It will also require creative new approaches to move from the current uneven patchwork of
private and public programs to uniformly and highly effective universal prekindergarten programs that provide a high-quality early education for every child in the United States (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003).

**Teachers' Perceptions of Prekindergarten Programs**

The effects that prekindergarten has on the children in the United States can be studied through the perceptions of the country’s kindergarten teachers. In fall 1995, Pianta and LaParo (2003) surveyed a national sample of more than 3,500 kindergarten teachers, asking them to identify problems or challenges in children’s adjustment to kindergarten. These teachers reported that about one-third of the students in their classrooms had some problems making the transition to school and about one-fifth of the students had difficult adjustments marked by serious concerns.

To determine how preschool affected these children, Pianta and LaParo (2003) then asked teachers to identify the specific problems demonstrated by children in their classrooms who were not making good adjustments to school. A total of 46 percent of the kindergarten teachers reported that at least half of the students in their classes had difficulty following directions. Thirty-one percent of teachers also reported that another problem was a lack of a formal preschool experience. Other problems that teachers most frequently reported for half of the class or more included lack of academic skills (reported by 36 percent of teachers) and a disorganized home environment (35 percent). Thus, although kindergarten teachers clearly value academic skills, they also place strong emphasis on children’s social and task-oriented skills as indicators of their readiness for school.
The kindergarten teachers in the Pianta & LaParo study believed that if a child came to school with "teachability skills," then she or he would profit from the instructional environment that the teacher offers. Not surprisingly these teachers also identified the lack of formal preschool experiences and a disorganized home environment as problems for many children in their classrooms, reflecting the teachers' belief that home and child care settings contribute in both positive and negative ways to the development of teachability. Therefore, an important piece of readiness for kindergarten for these kindergarten teachers was that a child had a quality form of preschool experience prior to entering their classrooms.

Conclusion

Because of the many benefits that a quality prekindergarten program can achieve, educators and policy makers must push to implement quality early education programs that every child can afford. This review illustrates that quality programs have achieved significant benefits and that the United States must push for more funding in order to develop a quality prekindergarten for every child.

In this study the researcher will be looking at kindergarten and first grade teachers' perceptions of prekindergarten and its effect in their classroom. The researcher will use her first grade classroom as a case study for focused observations comparing the social skills and writing skills of students who attended prekindergarten with those who did not.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted in an urban elementary school in Western New York. The researcher attempted to find answers to the questions, "Does attending prekindergarten in a public school affect the language arts and social success of students in kindergarten and first grade? How do teachers feel about the importance of students attending prekindergarten?"

Data Collection

The first step the researcher took in beginning this study was seeking approval by the school’s administration to conduct the study in the urban elementary school. Once the administrator approved the topic of research, a proposal was written to the Department of Education and Human Development at the State University of New York at Brockport asking for approval. Also, another proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board regarding the human subjects involved in the study. When the Department of Education and Human Development and the Institutional Review Board approved the study, the data collection and research began.

School Records and Parent Questionnaire

To begin this study, the researcher reviewed school records to determine which first grade students attended prekindergarten. The school records indicated if a student attended Pre-K or if a student attended Preschool. If a student’s name was not
indicated, the researcher assumed that the student did not attend either Pre-K or
Preschool. The researcher could not determine a clear definition of Pre-K and
Preschool, which appeared on the school records. This is a limitation to the reliability
of the school records.

In conjunction with the school records, the researcher sent home a parent
questionnaire (See Appendix A) with the first graders in the researcher’s classroom
inquiring about each child’s preschool experiences. Parents and/or guardians were
asked to check if their child attended prekindergarten or another form of preschool.
The return rate of the parent questionnaires was 100%.

There were conflicts between school records and parent questionnaires. Some
parent questionnaires specifically stated that the child attended Head Start and the
school records did not indicate such attendance. When a conflict occurred, the
researcher used the parent questionnaire. This was a limitation in the researcher’s
study.

*Informal Interview With Prekindergarten Teacher*

After those students who attended prekindergarten were determined, the
researcher met with the current prekindergarten teacher to discuss the prekindergarten
learning outcomes and goals. The researcher gathered the prekindergarten curriculum
as well as assessment tools that were currently being used. The researcher also
conducted an informal interview to obtain information on how the prekindergarten
teacher perceived the prekindergarten role in the education of students (See Appendix
I). From the interview results, the researcher searched for emerging themes.
With the information gathered from the prekindergarten teacher, the researcher generated a survey (See Appendix B) based on exit level prekindergarten goals to be distributed to kindergarten teachers. The survey focused on how students who attended prekindergarten compared to the rest of their kindergarten class in the areas of reading, writing, and social skills.

Surveys were distributed to two kindergarten teachers who taught the current first graders in the researcher’s classroom last year. Only those students who attended prekindergarten were studied through this survey. The return rate of surveys to the researcher from kindergarten teachers was 100%.

One of last year’s kindergarten teachers retired and therefore it was not possible to distribute surveys to that teacher. Not all the first grade students in the researcher’s classroom were rated by their kindergarten teachers because of the retiree and the fact that some students attended kindergarten outside the urban school in this study.

The researcher analyzed the kindergarten teacher surveys by constructing a matrix and tabulating percentages for each category. The reading, writing, and social skills categories were then compared to each other to find emerging themes.

First Grade Teacher Questionnaires

Next, the researcher gathered the kindergarten learning outcomes and curriculum. From the end of the year kindergarten goals, the researched developed a questionnaire (See Appendix C) for first grade teachers. This questionnaire again
focused on reading, writing, and social skills and asked the teacher to compare the prekindergarten students in first grade to those who did not attend prekindergarten.

This questionnaire was distributed only to the researcher’s mentor teacher concerning the first grade students in the researcher’s classroom. To provide greater reliability, the researcher’s mentor teacher and the researcher completed the questionnaires together, agreeing on all answers. The questionnaire was completed during the fifth month of school. The researcher and the researcher’s mentor teacher knew the students very well by January and were capable of answering the questionnaire with great validity.

The researcher analyzed the first grade teacher surveys by constructing a matrix and tabulating percentages for each category. Then the prekindergarten percentages were compared to Head Start and preschool percentages. The researcher searched for emerging themes.

First Grade Social Skills Observation

Then, a list of expected first grade social skills were obtained from the researcher’s mentor teacher. This list was developed by a group of first grade teachers in the urban elementary school. From this list, the researcher developed an observational assessment tool (See Appendix D) to determine the social skills of the students in the researcher’s first grade classroom.

The researcher and the researcher’s mentor teacher each completed the same assessment tool in February 2004 to increase the tool’s reliability. Students were observed from September through February by both the researcher and the
researcher’s mentor teacher. By February, both had observed the students for six months and were able to accurately fill out the assessment tool.

The social skills assessment tool was analyzed mathematically on a spreadsheet database. To increase reliability, the researcher’s data and the researcher’s mentor teacher’s data were mathematically averaged.

**Writing Samples Rubric**

The researcher then developed a rubric (See Appendix E) for assessing first grade students’ writing samples. The rubric was based on first grade writing expectations. The rubric was concerned with capitalization, punctuation, spacing, beginning sounds, and ending sounds.

The writing samples that the researcher collected are a part of first grade students’ regular Writer’s Workshop curriculum. The researcher collected two writing samples a month from the students’ Writer’s Workshop folders for seven months, starting from September. However, during the month of January only one writing sample was collected due to the holiday break at the end of December and the beginning of January. Therefore, thirteen writing samples were collected throughout the seven months.

After the writing samples were scored according to the rubric, the researcher entered all scores into a spreadsheet database. Scores were mathematically analyzed by calculating and comparing averages for the entire class, averages for the students that attended prekindergarten, averages for the students that attended preschool, and averages for the students that attended Head Start. There was one student that
attended both Head Start and prekindergarten. That student was taken into account in both averages.

Also, to determine if the difference in the averages was significant an Independent t-test was performed. This mathematically proved if the difference in averages was significant or insignificant.

Reading Excellence Act Scores

The researcher then collected the reading and comprehension levels of each student in the form of REA Scores. The Reading Excellence Act asks teachers to do running reading records and other reading tests each September on each of their students. The researcher collected the results of these tests. Along with reading and comprehension level tests, the students were also graded on their ability to predict and their reading habits.

The researcher compared REA scores from those students that attended prekindergarten to those that attended preschool or Head Start. The data was analyzed by each category of reading test.

Teacher Perception Questionnaire

Finally, the researcher developed a teacher questionnaire (See Appendix F) focusing on teachers’ perceptions of prekindergarten. The questionnaire was six questions and required a Yes or No response.

This questionnaire was distributed to all kindergarten and first grade teachers in the urban elementary school. There are four kindergarten teachers and five first grade teachers in the school. Three of the four kindergarten teachers are female. All
four teachers are White/Caucasian. All of the first grade teachers are female. Four of the first grade teachers are White/Caucasian and one is Black/African American.

Along with the questionnaire, a statement of informed consent (See Appendix G) was distributed. The return rate of questionnaires to the researcher was 100%.

The teacher perception questionnaires were analyzed by constructing a data matrix and determining percentages. Informal Interviews were conducted as a follow-up to the questionnaires.

Subjects

The case study in the researcher's classroom consists of nineteen first grade students. Twelve of the students are Black/African American. Four of the students are White/Caucasian. The remaining three students are Hispanic. In the classroom there are twelve boys and seven girls.

Also in the classroom are a full-time classroom teacher, a full-time paraprofessional, and an intern who teaches fifteen hours per week. The full-time classroom teacher is a female and is White/Caucasian. She has been teaching in the urban elementary school for seven years. The full-time paraprofessional is also female and is White/Caucasian. She has been working in the urban district for three years. She works with one student that is physically handicapped and uses a wheelchair to be mobile. The intern is a female and White/Caucasian as well. She is a full-time graduate student and this is her first year of teaching experience.
This study has increased validity and reliability due to triangulation of the data (See Triangulation Grid below). The researcher used parents, school records, and teachers to obtain data on the subjects in the study. Increased validity and reliability occur because of the combination of several sources of data collection.

Triangulation was also taken into account concerning specific data collection tools. The social skills observational tool increased validity when the researcher triangulated the data collection by having both the researcher’s mentor teacher and the researcher complete the observational tool. Likewise, the validity increased when the researcher and the researcher’s mentor teacher completed the first grade teacher questionnaire together.

To triangulate the data concerning teachers’ perceptions of prekindergarten the researcher administered the Teacher Perception Questionnaire and conducted an informal interview with the current prekindergarten teacher. After both had been analyzed, the researcher conducted informal, follow-up interviews with certain teachers that had answered no to some questions on the Teacher Perception Questionnaire. The researcher looked for emerging themes from these informal interviews.

A question of this study was to determine if prekindergarten affects the language arts success of students. To make this aspect more valid, the researcher looked at both writing and reading (See Triangulation Grid below).
### Triangulation Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question/Focus</th>
<th>Data Source #1</th>
<th>Data Source #2</th>
<th>Data Source #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are teachers’ perceptions of prekindergarten effecting the language arts and social skills of students in kindergarten and first grade?</td>
<td>Teacher Perception Questionnaire</td>
<td>Informal Interview with Prekindergarten Teacher</td>
<td>Informal Interview as a Follow-up to Teacher Perception Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does prekindergarten have an effect on the language art skills of first graders?</td>
<td>Writing Samples</td>
<td>REA Scores</td>
<td>First Grade Teacher Questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does prekindergarten have an effect on the social skills of first graders?</td>
<td>First Grade Teacher Questionnaires</td>
<td>First Grade Social Skills Observation from Teacher #1</td>
<td>First Grade Social Skills Observation from Teacher #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does prekindergarten have an effect on the language art and social skills of kindergarteners?</td>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher Survey (Writing Section)</td>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher Survey (Reading Section)</td>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher Survey (Social Skills Section)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many first graders attended prekindergarten, preschool, and/or Head Start?</td>
<td>School Records</td>
<td>Parent Questionnaires</td>
<td>First Grade Teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Generalizability

The findings of this study reflect the students and teachers at only one urban elementary school. This study cannot be generalized to other populations. What is found to be true or false here should not be generalized about all urban elementary schools because the outcomes are specific to the school under investigation.
Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

Throughout this study, the researcher was able to find data about students who attended prekindergarten, students who attended Head Start, students who attended preschool, and teachers' perceptions of prekindergarten. The return rate of all surveys and questionnaires was 100%. From that information, generalizations and conclusions were drawn.

Generalization 1

Overall, the teachers in the urban elementary school feel that prekindergarten is beneficial to their students (See Appendices H and I).

- “I feel strongly that Pre-K provides a significant advantage to kids. I think kids that attend prekindergarten have a heads up or maybe a one up on kids that don’t.” ~ excerpt from informal interview with Prekindergarten Teacher (See Appendix I)

- 100% of kindergarten and first grade teachers agreed that attending prekindergarten gives students an advantage upon entering kindergarten. (See Question 1, Appendix H)

- 89% of kindergarten and first grade teachers agreed that students are more likely to be in higher reading groups if they attended prekindergarten. (See Question 2, Appendix H)

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89% of kindergarten and first grade teachers agreed that students in their classroom that attended prekindergarten would more likely be better writers. (See Question 3, Appendix H)

Teacher A disagreed that students who attended prekindergarten will be in higher reading groups or be better writers, because she said that the urban elementary school district prekindergarten program does not push academics so therefore the students would not have a reading or writing advantage. The prekindergarten program at the urban elementary school uses learning through exploration and play.

100% of kindergarten and first grade teachers agreed that students that attended prekindergarten tended to have more social skills than those that did not attend prekindergarten. (See Question 4, Appendix H)

Only 67% of kindergarten and first grade teachers thought that attendance in prekindergarten should be mandatory. (See Question 5, Appendix H)

Teacher B did not think attendance in prekindergarten should be mandatory because some children may have a more enriching home environment than they might receive in prekindergarten.

Teacher C did not think attendance in prekindergarten should be mandatory because she believes that government should not tell citizens that anything is mandatory.
Teacher D did not think attendance in prekindergarten should be mandatory because she feels that some four-year-olds might not be ready to leave their home. She believes that some children are not ready for the demands and standards placed on them.

100% of kindergarten and first grade teachers believed that attending prekindergarten has significant benefits for students. (See Question 6, Appendix H)

**Generalization 2**

Prekindergarten has a positive effect on the language art skills of first graders.

- The average score on writing samples for those first grade students that attended prekindergarten (12.49 out of 20) was higher than both the averages for preschool (10.60 out of 20) and Head Start (11.87 out of 20) students. (See Appendices L and M)

- In all the REA Testing Categories, prekindergarten students scored either the highest or the second highest when compared to preschool and Head Start students. Prekindergarten students would have had the highest average in Reading Level, if not for one student in the preschool category, who skewed the data by scoring at a very high level. Prekindergarten students scored second highest in Predictions and Reading Habits. In the Rhyming and Syllables categories, prekindergarten students attained the highest average. (See Appendices J and K)
The students who scored the most above average ratings on the First Grade Teacher Questionnaires in the Reading Section were prekindergarten students. Head Start students received the most average ratings and preschool students received the most below average ratings. (See Appendices P and S)

Again, prekindergarten students averaged higher ratings in the above average category on the First Grade Teacher Questionnaires in the Writing Section as compared to preschool and Head Start students. Head Start students scored the highest in the average category and preschool students scored the highest in the below average category. (See Appendices Q and S)

Generalization 3
Prekindergarten has a positive effect on the social skills of first graders.

On the First Grade Teacher Questionnaires concerning Social Skills, prekindergarten students scored more above average ratings than preschool or Head Start. Preschool scored the most average ratings and preschool and Head Start both scored the highest below average ratings. (See Appendices R and S)

Prekindergarten students also consistently demonstrated more social skills on average than Head Start or preschool students. (See Appendices T and U)
• “I feel strongly that Pre-K provides a significant advantage to kids. I think that kids that attend preschool have a heads up or maybe a one up on kids that don’t, definitely socially. They learn to use [social] skills and learn that ability to be able to have that social relationship with kids and carry that on when they move on to kindergarten and first grade.” ~ excerpt from informal interview with Prekindergarten Teacher (See Appendix I)

Generalization 4

Prekindergarten helped to prepare kindergartners for school. As a result, the kindergartners that attended prekindergarten were average as compared to the rest of the class in the areas of Reading, Writing, and Social Skills.

• Kindergarten students that attended prekindergarten were rated in Reading, Writing, and Social Skills as average compared to the rest of the kindergarten class. (See Appendices N and O)

Generalization 5

A majority of first grade students at the urban elementary school attended prekindergarten or some other form of preschool.

• According to school records, 52% of first graders attended prekindergarten. 9% of first graders attended preschool. That leaves 39% of first graders that did not attend preschool or prekindergarten. (See Appendix V)
• In four out of the five first grade classrooms, the majority of students attended prekindergarten. (See Appendix W)

• Teacher A had 47% of her students attend prekindergarten. Teacher B had 64% of her students attend prekindergarten. Teacher C had 32% of her students attend prekindergarten. Teacher D had 53% of her students attend prekindergarten. Teacher E had 63% of her students attend prekindergarten. (See Appendices W and X)

Concluding Statements

The majority of students at this urban elementary school have attended prekindergarten or preschool. Prekindergarten in this urban elementary school has been more effective than preschool in developing students’ social and language art skills.

The teachers in this urban elementary school perceive how valuable prekindergarten is to their students. Research supports the teachers’ views that a high-quality prekindergarten program is beneficial to students.
Chapter 5

Implications

Introduction

The researcher surveyed kindergarten and first grade teachers, studied one first grade classroom, and interviewed a prekindergarten teacher to find out if attending prekindergarten effects students’ language arts and social skills in kindergarten and first grade. This study was important for teachers and staff because it showed the areas where prekindergarten students were excelling and how important prekindergarten can be in a child’s education.

Implications

From this study, the researcher found implications about how attending prekindergarten effects students within this urban elementary school.

- Overall, it is beneficial to send students in this urban elementary school to prekindergarten.
- Prekindergarten is an important start to a child’s use of social skills.
- Prekindergarten helps to lay the foundation for literacy, especially if this literacy background is not found in the home environment.
High-quality programs result in greater benefits to students. Therefore, this urban elementary school’s prekindergarten program must have been of better quality that the preschools that some students attended.

**Questions for Further Study**

- What particular aspects of a prekindergarten program make it a high-quality program?
- Is it more beneficial to focus a prekindergarten program on social skills or get an early start teaching reading and writing?
- Does a student’s home environment contribute more to student success than a prekindergarten program ever could?
- Are students who have a rich home environment more likely to be the students that attend prekindergarten?
Dear Parents/Guardians:

In order to best serve your child’s educational needs, I need to gather some information about your child’s previous schooling. Please take a few moments to fill out the bottom half of this sheet and return it to school with your child as soon as possible. I greatly appreciate your cooperation!

Miss Soulé

Please check one of the following:

_____ My child attended Pre-K in Rochester City School #39

_____ My child attended Pre-K in a Rochester City School other than School #39

_____ My child attended Pre-K outside of the Rochester City School District

_____ My child did NOT attend Pre-K

Additional Comments: ________________________________

______________________________

______________________________
Appendix B

Survey concerning

Please compare the student in question to the rest of your class in all of the following areas. Is this student below the rest of your class in this area, about average, or above average? Circle the most accurate rating of the student.

Above Average (AA)
Average (A)
Below Average (BA).

**READING**

AA  A  BA  1. Student’s Reading Level
AA  A  BA  2. Student’s knowledge of own name in print
AA  A  BA  3. Student’s comprehension of stories
AA  A  BA  4. Student’s recognition of uppercase and lowercase letters
AA  A  BA  5. Student’s ability to rhyme
AA  A  BA  6. Student’s interest in reading

**WRITING**

AA  A  BA  7. Student’s ability to hold pencil correctly
AA  A  BA  8. Student’s ability to print first name
AA  A  BA  9. Student’s ability to print last name
AA  A  BA  10. Student’s ability to write letters
AA  A  BA  11. Student’s ability to use letters when writing
AA  A  BA  12. Student’s ability to use words when writing
AA  A  BA  13. Student’s interest in writing

**SOCIAL SKILLS**

AA  A  BA  14. Student’s ability to work in small groups
AA  A  BA  15. Student’s ability to work independently
AA  A  BA  16. Student’s ability to solve a problem
AA  A  BA  17. Student’s ability to relate to other children
AA  A  BA  18. Student’s ability to relate to adults
AA  A  BA  19. Student’s ability to express feelings
AA  A  BA  20. Student’s ability to follow directions
AA  A  BA  21. Student’s ability to listen to others
AA  A  BA  22. Student’s ability to speak clearly
AA  A  BA  23. Student’s participation in class discussion
Survey concerning

Please compare the student in question to the rest of your class in all of the following areas. Is this student below the rest of your class in this area, about average, or above average? Circle the most accurate rating of the student.

Above Average (AA)
Average (A)
Below Average (BA)

READING

1. Student's Reading Level
2. Student's knowledge of letter/sound correspondence
3. Student's recognition of beginning sounds
4. Student's recognition of ending sounds
5. Student's ability to rhyme
6. Student's interest in reading

WRITING

7. Student's use of spaces between words when writing
8. Student's use of correct capitalization
9. Student's use of correct punctuation
10. Student's ability to write words with correct beginning sounds
11. Student's ability to write words with correct ending sounds
12. Student's ability to write full sentences
13. Student's interest in writing

SOCIAL SKILLS

14. Student's ability to work in small groups
15. Student's ability to work independently
16. Student's ability to solve a problem
17. Student's ability to relate to other children
18. Student's ability to relate to adults
19. Student's ability to express feelings
20. Student's ability to follow directions
21. Student's ability to listen to others
22. Student's ability to speak clearly
23. Student's participation in class discussion
# First Grade Social Skills Observation Checklist

~Please check if you see these social skills consistently demonstrated~

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<th>Works in small group</th>
<th>Works independently</th>
<th>Solves conflicts</th>
<th>Relates to other children</th>
<th>Expresses Feelings</th>
<th>Follows Directions</th>
<th>Listens to teachers</th>
<th>Listens to other children</th>
<th>Speaks clearly</th>
<th>Participates in class discussions</th>
<th>Cooperates with class members</th>
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*Student number corresponds with seating arrangement to keep confidential and protect student privacy*
# Rubric For Writing Samples

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<th>Capitals</th>
<th>Punctuation</th>
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<th>Beginning Sounds</th>
<th>Ending Sounds</th>
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<td>All capitals at the beginning of every sentence and of every proper noun.</td>
<td>Periods, question marks, or exclamation marks at the end of every sentence and used correctly.</td>
<td>A spaceman size space in between each word.</td>
<td>Correct beginning letter/sound correspondence for every word.</td>
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<td>Capitals at the beginning of every sentence.</td>
<td>Periods, question marks, or exclamation marks at the end of every sentence but used incorrectly.</td>
<td>A spaceman size space in between most words.</td>
<td>Correct beginning letter/sound correspondence for most words.</td>
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<td>No spaces between words.</td>
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Teacher Perceptions of Pre-K Survey

As a part of my thesis about the effects of Pre-K on academic and social achievement in kindergarten and first grade, I am asking you to please complete this survey. No names will appear in my thesis and all information will be kept confidential!

Please circle Yes or No to the following questions.

Yes  No  1. Do you feel that attending Pre-K gives students an advantage upon entering kindergarten?

Yes  No  2. In your classroom, are students that attended Pre-K more likely to be in higher reading groups?

Yes  No  3. In your classroom, are students that attended Pre-K more likely to be better writers?

Yes  No  4. In your classroom, do students that attended Pre-K tend to have more social skills than those students that did NOT attend Pre-K?

Yes  No  5. Do you think attendance in Pre-K should be mandatory for all students?

Yes  No  6. Do you think that attending Pre-K has significant benefits for students?
Statement of Informed Consent for Kindergarten and First Grade Teachers at Andrew J. Townson School No. 39

The purpose of this research project is to determine if attending Pre-K has an effect on the Language Arts and social skills of students in kindergarten and first grade. In this survey the researcher is inquiring about the teachers' perceptions of the effect Pre-K has on their students. This research project is also being conducted in order for the researcher to complete her master's thesis for the Department of Education and Human Development at the State University of New York College at Brockport.

In order to participate in this study, your informed consent is required. You are being asked to make a decision whether or not to fill out this survey. If you want to participate in the research and agree with the statements below your completion of the survey signifies your consent. You may change your mind at any time and leave the study without penalty, even after the study has begun.

I understand that:
1. My participation is voluntary and I have the right to refuse to answer any questions.
2. My confidentiality is guaranteed. My name will not be written on the survey. There will be no way to connect me to my written survey. If any publication results from this research, I would not be identified by name.
3. There will be no personal risks or benefits because of my participation in answering the questions in this survey.
4. My participation involves reading a written survey of 6 questions and answering those questions by circling either yes or no. It is estimated that it will take approximately 2 minutes to complete the survey.
5. Approximately 12 people will take part in this study. The results will be used for the completion of a master's thesis by the primary researcher.
6. Data and consent forms will be destroyed by shredding when the research has been accepted and approved.

I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the study realizing I may withdraw without penalty at any time during the survey process. Returning the survey indicates my consent to participate.

If you have any questions you may contact:
Primary Researcher
Johanna Soulé
(585)395-9638

Faculty Advisor
Betsy Balzano
(585)395-5549
Teacher Perceptions Survey Results

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Teacher A answered no to question 2 and 3, because she said that the urban elementary school district prekindergarten program does not push academics so therefore the students would not have a reading or writing advantage. The prekindergarten program at the urban elementary school uses learning through exploration and play. *Teacher A has been teaching for 22 years.*

Teacher B answered no to question 5 because, she believes that Pre-K should not be mandatory because the program might not be as good as other options that students might have. Some children may have a more enriching environment at home than they might receive in prekindergarten. *Teacher B has been teaching for 18 years.*

Teacher C answered no to question 5 because, she believes that the government should not tell citizens that anything is mandatory. She did not like the term mandatory. She also believed that her children benefited more from staying home with her then attending prekindergarten. *Teacher C has been teaching for five years.*

Teacher D answered no to question 5 because, she feels that some four-year-olds might not be ready to leave their home. She believes that some children are not ready for the demands and standards placed on them. She also believes that when the child is developmentally ready for school then the gap that exists by not attending prekindergarten can be made up quickly. *Teacher D has been teaching for seven years.*
Informal Interview with Prekindergarten Teacher at Urban Elementary School

**Researcher:** Based on anything you have read or your opinion, how do you feel about the effect attending Pre-K has on academic and social performance in Kindergarten and First Grade?

**Prekindergarten Teacher:** Well, I feel strongly that Pre-K provides a significant advantage to kids. I think kids that attend preschool have a heads up or maybe a one up on kids that don’t, definitely socially. Especially this program because it is completely geared toward their socialization and their ability to make friends, communicate with friends, work out problems, and be able to even just use their words instead of yelling or hurting another child. Being able to say, “I want to use that” and then the child can say back, “when I’m done with it you can use it.” They learn those skills and learn that ability to be able to have that social relationship with kids and carry that on when they move on to kindergarten and first grade. Kids just don’t learn that out of nowhere; someone has to teach them. And sometimes it’s not taught at home because there is just an assumption that they know it. They learn a lot about books and reading. They are being read to every day [here] and some of these kids aren’t read to every day at home. A lot of kids aren’t read to at home so they are getting it here. Just attending school, being in a structured atmosphere, being able to transition and follow routines [is a benefit of attending prekindergarten]. Being able to do these things are hard for preschoolers and if they learn that now, kindergarten is going to be a lot easier. It’s a lot more structured than it used to be. They are always successful [here and] it gives them a positive feeling about school. There is never going to be a place where they are frustrated. We don’t set up an environment where they are not successful. Everything is challenging but I’m not going to do anything that is not developmentally appropriate for all children and so we work a lot in small groups so they’re learning and we are building up where they are and moving them up. They learn to write their names and other things that are important for the start of kindergarten. If they don’t have that it is a set back for the kindergarten teachers.

**Researcher:** What about academically? Learning letters and numbers?

**Prekindergarten Teacher:** Well I don’t personally make them sit down and make them write on the lines all their letters but in small groups in a small atmosphere they enjoy sitting at the table and writing. Children I know that have started too [write] have shown some writing skills. They’re prewriting. We’ll work on those things they are interested in and we work on it with them. There is an hour of choice time every day upon arrival. We are at the table and they can choose what they want to work on and depending on what center they are in throughout the day really depends on what you can teach them. There is so much to learn in the block center or at the computers or even with play dough. There are so many things they can learn in their play, which is so positive for them to learn and to be excited about what they are doing. And it’s fun; they are not sitting there bored out of their mind. They certainly don’t have the attention span yet. But I’m not sure that our program is based on academics. My philosophy has changed a little bit being [here]. We could torture kids all day trying to teach them their numbers but they are going to learn [their numbers] in something we are doing together. Like when we graph all the apples we found outside or the color of leaves or they can learn their numbers in a game that you created out of felt. They are going to learn it then, not when you sit them down. We are going to do that the rest of their lives.
REA Score Results

Average

Reading Level  Predictions  Reading Habits  Rhyming  Syllables

REA Testing Categories

Prekindergarten  Preschool  Head Start
## REA SCORES ~ Raw Data

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Writing Sample Results

Prekindergarten: 12.49
Preschool: 10.6
Head Start: 11.87
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**Prekindergarten Average:** 12.49

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**Preschool Average:** 10.60

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**Head Start Average:** 11.87
Kindergarten Teacher Questionnaire Results of Prekindergarten Students

Areas on Questionnaire

- Reading
- Writing
- Social Skills

Number of Items

AA = above average
A = average
BA = below average
### Kindergarten Teacher Questionnaires ~ Raw Data

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First Grade Teacher Questionnaires ~ Reading

- AA = Above Average
- A = Average
- BA = Below Average

- Prekindergarten
- Preschool
- Head Start
First Grade Teacher Questionnaires ~ Writing

![Bar graph showing writing skills across different grade levels and programs.]

- **Prekindergarten** (black bars)
- **Preschool** (red bars)
- **Head Start** (green bars)

**Legend:**

- **AA** = Above Average
- **A** = Average
- **BA** = Below Average

**Axis Labels:**

- **Writing** (x-axis)
- **Average** (y-axis)
First Grade Teacher Questionnaires ~ Social Skills

Social Skills

Average

Prekindergarten
Preschool
Head Start

AA = Above Average
A = Average
BA = Below Average

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First Grade Social Skills Observation

- **Head Start**: Average = 15
- **Preschool**: Average = 11.83
- **Prekindergarten**: Average = 17.4

Average (out of 24)
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<th>Relates to other children</th>
<th>Relates to adults</th>
<th>Expresses Feelings</th>
<th>Follows Directions</th>
<th>Listens to teachers</th>
<th>Listens to other children</th>
<th>Speaks clearly</th>
<th>Participates in class discussions</th>
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Preschool Average 11.83

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Head Start Average 15.00
Percentage of First Grade Student Attendance in Prekindergarten or Preschool

- 52% Prekindergarten
- 39% Other
- 9% Preschool
First Grade Attendance in Prekindergarten or Preschool

First Grade Teachers

Percentage

Teacher A Teacher B Teacher C Teacher D Teacher E

Prekindergarten Preschool Other
### First Grade Student Attendance in Prekindergarten or Preschool ~ Raw Data

<table>
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<tr>
<th>First Grade Teachers</th>
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<th>Preschool</th>
<th>Total Students in Classroom</th>
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<td>Teacher D</td>
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### First Grade Student Attendance in Prekindergarten or Preschool ~ Percentages

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<th>Other</th>
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### First Grade Attendance in Preschool or Prekindergarten

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References


