

EXPLORING PARENTS' GOALS FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S PRESCHOOL EXPERIENCES

By

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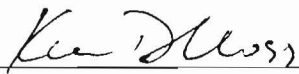

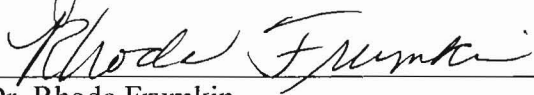
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Abstract

Today's education requires that children attend a fitting preschool setting aligned with their parents' goals. Parents may take innumerable factors into consideration when choosing the right preschool for their child, such as the school's philosophy, their personal beliefs, instruction, location, and the school's reputation. Parents' own early educational experiences may also influence them in profound ways as they pursue their decision-making process.

This study aimed to explore parents' goals and own early childhood experiences in an effort to help teachers better understand and connect with parents. The study used interviews and an online questionnaire. The questions were both specific and open ended, as one of the goals was to learn about personal accounts and memorable experiences parents may have enjoyed in their earliest educational settings. Results indicate that parents do in fact place children in certain preschool settings based on their own early educational experiences, as they want them to either go through the same enjoyable occurrences or undergo better experiences. Implications suggest early childhood centers should understand parents' own experiences and goals in order to forge a deeper connection between educators and parents through a sharing of personal, early educational accounts. Such connections could result in a more comforting and enjoyable learning experience for children, since parents and teachers will be more able to work together toward the same goals.

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Chapter 1: Conceptual Framework

The Power of Early Educational Experiences in Pre-Kindergarten

An early educational setting can have profound effects on a child's social, emotional and intellectual development. Early educational years lay a foundation to support social and emotional development that can help young children forge relationships with teachers and fellow peers. Social, emotional and cognitive domains are just three areas educators seek to develop before the end of a school year. Teachers constantly strive for their students to reach goals of improvement during a school year, hopefully reaching high levels of achievement by the end of the year. But the goals a teacher may possess for his or her student(s) may not be similar to the goals a child's parent may have in mind. Parents' own early educational experiences may have hidden influences over the kinds of educational goals they have for their children. Perhaps by building understanding with parents as part of the school selection process, both teachers and parents can work together towards the same educational goals and experiences for children.

Building relationships with families is an essential aspect of being an early childhood professional because children's learning and development is situated in the cultural and social context of their communities, families, and homes (McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012). Not only can early childhood professionals gain knowledge about children from families, but parents can gain knowledge from early childhood professionals on topics including child development, peer relationships, and fostering development through play. When early childhood professionals work together in supportive partnerships with parents, it is possible to develop effective guidance strategies to respond to individual children's behaviors (McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012). According to Barblett and Maloney (2010), factors such as positive relationships, a foundation for positive mental health, early school success, and integration of developmental skills are all important for academic success, well-being, and happiness

with overall quality of life. As a result, the field of early childhood education would benefit from understanding linkages between parents' early childhood experiences and resulting expectations and feelings about their own children's early childhood experiences.

Methods and Approaches of Preschool

Preschool students may experience learning through a variety of methods, traditions, and preschool approaches. Major approaches include the Reggio Emilia approach, the Montessori approach and the Head Start curriculum (Spodek & Saracho, 2003). Each of these uses different strategies of developmentally appropriate instruction to diversify learning for all students; however, each approach shares a common end goal that their students will flourish into confident and independent thinkers who can become significant contributors to society.

Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia experience, created this preschool approach based on the works of thinkers such as John Dewey and Jean Piaget. The central tenets of the Reggio approach address four areas: the image of the child, negotiated learning, documentation, and the child's social relationships (Kim & Darling, 2009). Students are viewed as natural explorers and are given the opportunity to freely collaborate with other peers, other teachers, or even parents, and are assessed through documentation of observations. Reggio Emilia has an abundance of materials available for students to access at any time; children are usually collaborating in groups through project-based learning. These materials are usually donated or constructed by family members of the community (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011). Whether they are buying crayons and markers or building tables and chairs for the students to sit at, the community takes an active role in their children's early childhood education. Reggio Emilia might even go as far as to allow children collaborate with parents during center time as co-learners, since parents are learning the inner minds of their children. This kind of familial

participation portrays the commitment this approach shows to forging bonds between school and home life.

The Reggio Emilia approach is based on social constructivist theories that see children as social beings active in the construction and determination of their social lives (Kim & Darling, 2009). Children and adults construct their knowledge through experiences with the environment and the people around them. Reggio classroom setups demonstrate how this approach enacts its beliefs in learning through experience and collaboration. Reggio Emilia schools are wide open spaces with big windows, allowing natural light to enter and the children to connect with their outside environment. This physical space shows that a classroom is not only an inside environment but outside as well. The Reggio approach provides experiences children can take with them throughout life. For example, classrooms have learning centers set up as restaurants and shops for children to role play in. Centers such as these allow children to tap into their imaginations and prepare themselves for real life situations. Children play a large role in shaping their own lives through their own experiences.

Because the Reggio Emilia approach collaborates with families and the community, it differs from the Montessori curriculum. Although the Montessori Method allows for students to learn through the world around them as well, children learn independently. One of the main Montessori goals is for their students to be absorbed in their work. They aim to enhance student concentration, allowing students to freely choose what they want to work on, but they must do their work alone and at their own pace. Maria Montessori's faith in the unlimited possibilities of the child never faltered. She was convinced of the need for schools for young children and was consistent in her advocacy for the establishment of such institutions and the need for educating parents about starting their children in school as early as possible (Povell, 2007). Due to the fact that Montessori had originally dedicated her teaching philosophy to special needs children, her curriculum revolves around necessary life skills that

should be developed in children at early ages. Her methodology consists of three principles: teaching academic skills, teaching life skills, and modeling social skills. Many of the materials in Montessori early childhood classrooms provide sensory experiences for young children, and these same materials are used again with elementary aged children in Montessori contexts to support new learning experiences (McKenzie & Zascavage, 2012). Montessori schools use repetition as a key strategy for their students so they can develop a sense of confidence when working independently at a play center. When choosing a center to work at, students are urged to choose one they somewhat know and feel comfortable with. This allows them to truly master the skill at hand. The curriculum not only includes the instructional materials used for learning, but also refers to the course of study for each discipline and scope and sequence within each grade level necessary to build conceptual understanding. For example, each learning center a student works at is geared toward a specific learning discipline. Curriculum areas include everyday living activities, sensorial activities, math activities, language activities, cultural education activities and art/music/drama/physical activities (McKenzie and Zascavage, 2012). All six learning areas provide the opportunity for differentiated learning, self-paced work, and self expression of feelings and experiences.

However, not all families possess the means necessary to place their children in such specialized preschool settings. For families of a low socioeconomic status, preschool placements are often within a Head Start program. Head Start is a federal program that promotes school readiness of children ages birth to 5 from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social and emotional development. Head Start was initiated in 1956 to address cognitive and behavioral developments of prekindergarten children in America's low-income households, and eligibility for Head Start continues to be defined according to federal poverty guidelines (Rikoon, McDermott, & Fantuzzo, 2012). In Head Start programs, the average preschool day is typically composed of two types of activities: teacher-directed

structured activities such as circle time, or child-directed unstructured activities such as free play (Zaghlawan & Ostrosky, 2011). Just as most preschools tend to focus on school readiness and life skills, Head Start programs pay most attention to school readiness and preparation for their students. Because students hail from low socioeconomic backgrounds, they are instructed with early intervention techniques to build a foundation for strong academic, social and emotional skills. These techniques include behavior interventions, social and emotional enhancement, as well as academic reinforcements. The Head Start program was created so children of lower class backgrounds can have equal access to an early childhood education so that they would have the opportunity to experience the joys and outcomes of preschool and early learning.

Preschool Variations by Culture

Early educational experiences for children as a whole are vitally important. The three preschool approaches discussed above are three of the most commonly adapted preschool approaches in the U.S.; however, children from different cultures may experience early learning through different approaches. Accordingly, cultural factors are also important experiential components parents should take into account when choosing a preschool setting. Certain cultural values can determine how a child can experience school. Preschool education, like all other forms of education, is intended by the society that controls it to transmit important cultural values to the participants (Aukrust, Edwards, Kumru, Knoche, & Misuk Kim, 2003). As a result, different cultures make different choices about preschool education. Parents, preschools, and schools in different cultures vary greatly in the extent to which children are encouraged to develop long-term relationships with people outside the family circle – most notably peers and teachers (Aukrust et al., 2003). What parents wish their children to experience or how long they want these experiences or forged relationships to last may vary depending on the cultural community differences of the parents. For example, one study found that among different communities

of different cultures, dissimilarities existed in parental descriptions of their own child's friendships and beliefs about the needs of young children in general for close and continuing relationships in preschool and primary school (Aukrust et al., 2003). The end result of the study showed that parents of some cultures favored the value of long-term continuity with peers and teachers, whereas parents of other cultures had a more academic than relational focus on school. Other parents of different cultures valued both quality learning experiences and close peer relationships in preschool.

Parents can mediate children's first interactions and relationships, guided by cognitive models or ethnic family beliefs framing what children want and what their culture allows them to do (Aukrust et al., 2003). Early childhood experiences of these cognitive models and cultural family beliefs can be considered as influential practices that parents perpetuate while raising their own children. These models relate to the parents' culturally shared conceptions about how best to further their goals promoting child survival and academic success, emotional prosperity, personal happiness and self actualization (Aukrust et al., 2003).

Specific family and cultural beliefs can affect early learning experiences, as parents can attribute differential values to various goals. For example, in Japan, the development of social skills and a sense of group belonging are considered major goals for preschoolers (Tobin, 2009). Class sizes tend to be large, up to 40 students per class, to decrease the role of the teacher's personality and increase the likelihood of peer interactions. Because exclusion from the group is extremely undesirable, a wide range of behaviors is tolerated. Students are expected to collaborate harmoniously, so even if a child is not exactly participating in an activity, he or she is deemed a participant for simply being in attendance. Teachers take a hands-off approach to most disputes between children, including physical fighting, as well as to children's choices to participate in or to move to another activity. Most behavioral problems are believed to be due to the disruptive child's inappropriately expressed emotional need to be

dependent, resulting in gentle care and careful attention to accepting the child, rather than a biological problem to be treated medically or a willfully chosen behavior to be punished (Tobin, 2009). Success is thought to be achieved by hard work and perseverance and is not considered the result of an innate talent.

In China, however, children are taught to behave as part of an orderly, regimented collective that is obedient to its leader. For example, children eat meals silently and sit quietly for long periods of time during the school day while the teacher reads or instructs them. Unlike the Japanese programs, group dynamics are authoritarian, as the relationship between the teacher and the child is more important than the relationship between the children (Tobin, 2009). Teachers tend to take on a more parental role towards their students, so obedience and behavior are valued greatly. Although both China and Japan share some values of preschool education philosophies with the United States, they differ in their lack of focus on gradual development of independence and self-confidence. Both examples are rather drastic, either allowing children to freely collaborate and work on their own as the teacher observes, or presenting the classroom setting as a hierarchy that requires the children to report to an authoritative figure. In the U.S., early educational settings strive to allow children to work and collaborate on developmentally appropriate practices through teacher modeling, shared learning and then independent learning, in a way blending elements of China's and Japan's models. These cultural differences are important when viewing preschool settings because parents may or may not feel comfortable allowing their children to part take in certain learning strategies. Different families from different cultures may feel that specific learning strategies may be more important to others, so they may base their placement decisions on the learning objectives preschool teachers may hold for their students.

The Study

Positive experiences and relationships built by children at the preschool age can have a profound effect on their entire outlook towards school and academics; as a result, it is essential for parents to choose an appropriate early childhood educational setting for their children. Different children may adapt to preschool approaches differently. A positive experience for one child in the Reggio Emilia approach may be negative for another child, depending on the family's cultural values and expectations. What is true for all children, however, is that all factors taken into account for choosing a certain preschool setting should have the child's best interest at heart and should leave the child with positive early experiences to look back upon.

This study explores how parents' early educational experiences may influence their decision to place their children in certain preschool settings. There are two parts to this study, both involving parents only and not their children. The first part of this study invited all parents to fill out a brief questionnaire. The second part of this study included individual face-to-face interviews involving parents who agreed to share more insights about their own experiences and how they influenced their selection of the preschool for their children. Interview and questionnaire questions revolved around topics such as parents' early educational memories, what they felt was most important for their child to experience during preschool, and why they chose the particular setting where their child was currently enrolled. Research areas focused on specific experiences parents may have had while enrolled in their earliest educational settings, how they felt at that time, what they feel they gained from being placed in this setting, and what parents may or may not have wanted their own children to experience while placed in a preschool setting. Research areas also focused on what factors parents took into account when choosing the specific preschool setting for their child.

Research Questions

- To what degree do parents' goals for their children's preschool match the social, emotional and intellectual development goals implicit in the school's philosophy?
- What are some major goals parents have in mind for their child's preschool experience?
- In what ways might parents' own experiences have influenced their choice of preschool for their children?

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

What Parents May Consider When Choosing a Preschool

There appear to be no studies that assess how parents' personal early educational experiences affect their selection of preschools for their children. However, many studies explore factors parents do or should take into account when choosing an early childhood setting for their children. Excellent preschools exist across the country and offer settings for children to become successful and creative and to develop a true passion for learning. But how do parents decide which preschools offer the best experiences for their children? Research has identified a variety of factors parents should take into account when looking for a preschool setting for their child. A good preschool should have teachers who have an educational background that emphasizes clinical training and experience working with young children since the most helpful and experienced teachers interact in a positive way with young children and know how to encourage play (Defries, 2010). The length of time that the teachers have been at a particular school can be an indicator of whether the teaching staff is happy and remains at the school.

Another factor is whether a school's philosophy resonates with parents' own ideas (Defries, 2010). Parents must take into account all experiences their child may have while enrolled in a preschool setting. These experiences may have the power to shape their entire outlook on school as a whole. To a child of preschool age, the toys on the shelves and the classmates they play with are important. To a preschool student, school should be seen as an enjoyable experience and a time to make new friends, play with a variety of materials, create crafts, express their feelings, and listen to stories. They do not realize that they are learning important foundational information about the world around them that may span from how to appropriately respond to certain situations like sharing toys to planting little seeds to make the Earth a more beautiful place. Parents must listen to their gut feelings when they enter a preschool and listen to how the teachers and the children interact. Preschools can also be evaluated by

looking at the materials they possess such as books, props, craft materials, toys, sensory materials and the use of these supplies through activities that are developmentally appropriate (Bagnato, McLean, Macy, & Neisworth, 2011). In order to assess schools, parents should meet with administrators and teachers. This allows for communication between all caregivers and develops a foundation for continuous communication during the school year for all to reach common goals. All goals should attend to the social and emotional developmental needs of the children and how the school day may be created to include time for play and social interactions.

The social and emotional well-being of a child is vitally important for early childhood professionals to ensure. During the early learning stages, children are coming to terms with their feelings in a social setting for the first time, so programs that can help foster student emotional security can benefit a child greatly. Young children who are aggressive can easily establish a stable pattern of social problems by the time they reach lower elementary school, and many children who demonstrate behavioral problems are being asked to leave schools or daycare settings by the time they are 6 years old (Schultz, Richardson, Barber, & Wilcox, 2011). Evidence shows that growth and development in the social and emotional domain during the early years affects the health, wellbeing and competence of children throughout life (Barblett & Maloney, 2010). According to Barblett and Maloney (2010), factors such as positive relationships and inclusion, a foundation for positive mental health, early school success, and integration of developmental skills are all important for academic success, wellbeing and happiness with overall quality of life. If children attend a preschool program that caters to their learning needs, then they will build an early learning foundation that will allow them to embark on a path to school readiness and success.

Preschool Factors for Children with Disabilities

Parents must also take certain factors into account if their child has a disability if they want their child to reach cultural goals or to be well-prepared for the transition to elementary school. Efforts to provide quality preschool programming for children will likely be more successful if parents' logistical needs and desires for their children are taken into account (Glenn-Applegate, Pentimonti, & Justice, 2011). Some research suggests that many parents value the same elements of preschool quality that child development experts do (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011). For example, parents of students with disabilities desire strong interactional or relational processes, such as the teacher's responsiveness to the children's needs; the frequency with which the teacher smiles, laughs, and engages with the children; and the nature of the relationships shared among the children, adults and relevant others (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011). When provided with a checklist of such process quality elements suggested by professional caregivers, parents agreed with nearly all listed aspects as being important. Since the quality of the preschool process directly relates to child interactions with teachers, therapists or fellow peers, parents may consider this to be vitally important as these social interactions can act as necessities for interventions and progress. Process quality also includes the ways in which teachers adapt and respond to children's individual needs and behaviors, which is likely to be a priority for parents of children with atypical development (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011).

The early childhood centers these children attended were either in public school or Head Start programs. Most classes were inclusive, while others were early childhood special education classes. As part of their involvement, parents completed a questionnaire designed to measure their perceptions of preschool quality (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011). Items from the questionnaire were both open-ended and forced choice asking participants to list aspects they considered when choosing a preschool or to rank certain elements from what was most to least important to them. Results of the open-ended

questions found the most common factor was the ability of the program to provide therapy or help for a child's specific disability or need. About 50% of the respondents indicated this aspect; 37% responded that the presence of a special needs program or the program's acceptance of children with special needs was a primary consideration; 22.2% identified location as the most important factor; and 20.4% of the respondents named interpersonal teacher qualities such as friendly teachers and staff as important considerations (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011). There was a high degree of variability among the rankings. When choosing an item to be most important in finding a preschool setting for their child, most parents considered if the teachers were caring, stable, and responded to children's individual needs (Glenn-Applegate et al., 2011). There was also a slight portion of the participant sample that felt that the preschool option given to them was the only option for their child. One implication of the study is that communication bridges should be built with preschool programs to accommodate families that seek interventions and suitable preschool programs for their child. All preschool programs have at least some degree of early intervention tactics worked into their daily lessons; depending on what degree of intervention the child needs, his or her needs could be met through parent-teacher collaboration. Effective programs are responsive to the unique needs of children and parents and entail interaction between parent characteristics, program resources, and outcomes (Jacobson & Engelbrecht, 2000).

Effects of Cultural Differences on Preschool Experiences

Socialization goals and expectations among parents of multicultural backgrounds may differ concerning the early educational experiences of their pre-school children. A study done by Achhpal, Goldman, & Rohner (2007) suggests that to maximize the effects of early childhood programs and interventions, it is important that all educators and policy makers recognize and respond to differences in parents' goals and expectations. The study explored how two groups of parents from European American and Puerto Rican backgrounds valued pro-social skills, school readiness skills, and skills that

relate to good behavior rather than creative and physical skills. Differences between both groups were found regarding the relative importance of skills within different developmental domains (Achhpal et al., 2007). The participants of this study consisted of 60 parents of with children in a Head Start preschool, 30 European American and 30 Puerto Rican. Of the 60 participants, more than half were mothers, of both backgrounds, and the rest were grandparents or foster parents. Parents were interviewed about their beliefs during a 90 minute face-to-face interview. The interview developed by Achhpal and Goldman (2007) was an extensive semi-structured interview consisting of open-ended questions about parents' beliefs about child rearing and education. The interviews suggested that both European American parents and Puerto Rican parents felt that pro-social skills and good behavior were the top two important competencies for their children to gain from the early educational setting (Achhpal et al., 2007). However, past these two rankings, European American parents felt integrity, affective skills and autonomy were of importance and ranked highly, whereas these competencies were ranked lowest for Puerto Rican parents. In contrast, for the Puerto Rican parents, educational attainment received a high rank and pre-academic behavior was ranked as least important. In short, parents felt that their child should be a good person, follow the appropriate behaviors at school, stay away from drugs and problems, have manners, adapt to social norms and be socially conscious (Achhpal et al., 2007). European Americans felt it more important that their child learn to be in good moral standing, think independently and have the power to make the right decisions. Puerto Rican parents felt that their child's intellectual capabilities were of greater importance. Although each set of parents held different cultural and educational values, they all found themselves with children in the same preschool.

Another study, by Karoly & Gonzalez (2011), goes into depth of how immigrant families who choose early care and education for their children progress toward academic success. A substantial share of the population, immigrant children are more likely than children with native-born parents to face a

variety of circumstances, such as low family income, low parental education, and language barriers that place them at risk of developmental delay and poor academic performance once they enter school (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). The main goal for these children as they enter preschool programs is the promotion of their healthy development. Participation in center-based care and preschool programs for immigrant children has short-term benefits with the possibility of long term gains; however, the main issue is getting these children to participate.

Overall, immigrant children have lower rates of participation in non-parent care of any type, including center-based Early Childhood Education programs, than their native counterparts (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Chances are, given their low parental education rate, parents have no past early educational experiences interacting with fellow children through center-based and play-based learning. Lack of participation among immigrant families can be affected by the language barrier between teachers, families and students. Immigrant parents with few years of schooling and from certain countries of origin tend to be unaware of how important early education programs are for their children's subsequent school achievement. Because of the educational system in their own countries, they may not understand that center-based care, particularly at the preschool level, is the typical mode of initiation into the education process for children with highly educated parents. In fact, research has noted a positive link between the rates of early child-care enrollment in the country of origin and that immigrant group's tendency to enroll their children in preschool (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). As a result of these obstacles hindering the immigrant child's road to success, teachers must address their unique needs and differentiate for these children. Teachers are taking steps to reduce these barriers and include the family as a whole in the child's education through social networking and peer-to-peer relationships. Parental involvement in children's educational life can be strongly linked to the academic or behavioral success of students. Thus efforts are being made to improve immigrant parent involvement with Early

Childhood Education programs. Aside from keeping parents educated about the programs plans for student success, the classroom teacher should also incorporate parents in the classroom to share a lesson or activity with the children. This could prove fruitful in promoting children's success and transition to elementary school (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011).

When immigrant parents do select early childhood settings, it is particularly important to look for sites with multicultural practices. Students who hail from diverse backgrounds may gain advantage from sharing cultural values with their peers to gain a sense of confidence and self worth. In terms of today's English language learners, the early childhood population is becoming more diverse and there is a need to incorporate programs and practices that are reflective of multicultural education principles (Ogletree & Larke, 2011). Multicultural education is not only important for the students who are learning about new cultures, but for the English language learning students themselves to open up with their peers and share their cultures as well. Paula G. Purnell, Parveen Ali, Nurun Begum, and Marilyn Carter (2007) investigated how instructors can utilize the integration of early literacy skills and the arts to cultivate the appreciation and celebration of cultures in early childhood classrooms. The researchers interviewed individuals from immigrant families and presented three reflective accounts that illustrate the cognitive, emotional, and social benefits provided by culturally responsive learning environments. The first personal account told of a little girl named Neha who was an immigrant from China. She was enrolled in a Kindergarten classroom and was constantly teased. Soon, she shut down and tried to become unnoticed by her peers. As a result her school work suffered – as did her social skills. According to the article, Neha's negative kindergarten experience could have been counteracted if her teacher had the knowledge and strategies to create a culturally responsive classroom. Neha would have felt welcomed and appreciated for the wonderful and unique contributions she could bring to the curriculum. The other children would have been invited to explore the stories, art, music, and dance of Neha's home culture

(Purnell et al., 2007). The second account told of Ellen. Her parents divorced when she was an infant and her mother became a habitual drug abuser. Eventually her grandmother gained custody of her. However, Ellen felt out of place and alone in school as her peers shared happy stories of their families. Culturally relevant stories and activities can help young children connect academic lessons to their own life experiences, making the content more meaningful. Opportunities to share different life experiences also help to create a sense of community among diverse learners (Purnell et al., 2007). Finally, the third account told the story of Alex who was placed in a third grade, culturally responsive classroom setting. Alex's mother was a Chinese immigrant and asked to visit Alex's class and share her knowledge of the Chinese New Year with them. She brought them food and shared artifacts and stories with them. In return, the class asked many questions and spent the rest of the week learning about Chinese New Year traditions. As a result, the teacher sent a flyer home inviting family and friends of students to share their heritage with the class. Looking back at Alex's reflective piece, it is noticeable that his culturally responsive classroom was an enjoyable place for him not only because he was able to culturally express himself but incorporate the help of his mother in his classroom as well.

Effects of Parent Involvement on Child Early Learning Experiences

A study done by Havighurst et al. (2013) provides insights on the success of preschool aged children when parents take an active role in their child's early educational experiences. The study is based around a program called Tuning into Kids, which aims to improve socialization practices in parents of preschool aged children. The program helps parents gain a better understanding of how to respond to and coach their children's emotions and behavioral functioning (Havighurst et al., 2013). About 216 parents of preschool aged children were selected to participate in this study. They were given questionnaires prior to the study and after the study both exploring their beliefs and practices of emotion socialization. The program encouraged changes in parenting beliefs and behaviors while increasing the

emotional connection between parent and child (Havighurst et al., 2013). Parents attended one emotion session per week over a six week period where coaches demonstrated emotional exercises through role playing. Emphasis was placed on parents becoming aware of their own emotions as well as their children's emotions. As a result parents reported emotional awareness and regulation improvements in themselves and their children. Parents found they were less dismissive and more empathetic toward their children's needs. This study is a prime example of how parental reinforcement can enhance child understanding. Parental involvement, especially in a preschool aged child's educational experience, can allow the child to flourish as the child's school and home life are on the same communicative level. The study also highlights the benefits of parent teacher communications for the child's benefit.

In an effort to both bridge parent and teacher communication gaps and educate parents on positive guidance for their children, a study was conducted by McFarland-Piazza & Saunders (2012). The study reports finding of a follow up study where mothers were asked to participate in a 12-week program that allowed them to learn about positive guidance in a weekly seminar and implement it in an early childhood educational setting, with the help of an early childhood professional. Upon completing these field hours, a group of ten mothers and six early childhood professionals filled out a questionnaire that shared opinions and experiences.

A positive guidance approach aims to facilitate children's self-sufficiency, self-control and positive self-esteem (McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012). Most early educators are exposed to positive guidance techniques through their teacher education courses and many have the professional knowledge to work with parents to find effective ways to help their children together. However, because teachers are sought after for parenting advice, teacher delivery of effective methods can cause parents to lose confidence in themselves because they feel they are not as knowledgeable. Thus it is more desirable for early childhood professionals to avoid educating parents but rather empower them to have confidence in

their parenting (McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012). The point of this study was to show parents to not only utilize their child's early educator as a resource but to effectively communicate with each other and build a support system. Parents participated in one of two groups that they were randomly assigned to. The first group was a lecture only group where the mother attended a positive guidance seminar while their child was attending school and the second group was a hands-on approach allowing the mother to sit in a preschool classroom that their child wasn't enrolled in and observe positive guidance strategies modeled by the early childhood professional. Mothers in the hands-on group also had the privilege of implementing these positive guidance strategies in the classroom under the teacher's supervision. In the follow up study, only mothers who participated in the hands-on group were asked to fill out a survey based on the original study's findings that the mothers who participated in the hands-on group incorporated more positive guidance to their parenting style than did the lecture group (McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012). The parent survey asked open ended questions about overall experiences, what they gained from participating and how the early childhood teacher helped in any way. The early childhood professional questionnaire served as a way to obtain experiences and opinions of these acting as mentors through another set of open ended questions. Data were analyzed based on the idea of phenomenology, which holds that important knowledge can be gained through the understanding of other's experiences (McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012). Many of the parents and early childhood professionals indicated that the hands-on approach was more influential and beneficial for the learning of positive guidance practices. Parents stated they were supplied with the proper modeling for carrying out the technique, feedback for practicing the technique on their own and an additional support to further implement positive guidance strategies. Bridging this communication gap between parents and teachers to work toward positive guidance techniques is highly beneficial to increase enjoyable experiences for preschool students.

There are many factors parents must take into account when choosing a preschool program for their child. Factors that may affect the child's early educational experiences, factors that may affect the child's cognitive success and of course how the preschool program in question plans to incorporate the strategies for the child with the child's family as well should be taken into account. There are many aspects to be aware of when deciding how best to begin a child's journey on their first learning experiences. Regardless of the choices parents make, children's experiences should allow them to thrive and build a foundation of enjoyable early learning experiences that will grant them the confidence to progress to greater academic success.

Implications of the Literature

Although research shows many factors that parents should take into account when placing their child in a preschool setting, there was no research to show what parents actually take into account. Parents with preschool aged children currently have no voice in the literature and research. There is research done on program matches for children with disabilities; however, there is no research done on parents finding a program match for their child with a disability. Parental voice in the education field is a key element for teachers to think about. It allows teachers to pull out specific ideas and suggestions parents may have for their child and how the child's teacher may even differentiate more to that student. Parental voice also allows the teacher to set better goals for the child during the year as they are taking parent expectations as well as program expectations into account. Literature today should start looking more closely at parents' hopes and expectations for preschool programs.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

This study looked at parent goals for their preschool aged children and how parent's early educational experiences may have influenced their decision for preschool placement. Educators should be curious as to what goals parents have set for their child, what experiences they feel are most important for their child to have, and what expectations they have for the child's preschool teacher. The goal of this study was to explore parents' experiences and intentions for their own children in the interest of forging relationships between teachers and parents of preschool aged children.

By looking at developmental theories by thinkers such as Piaget and different preschool approaches such as Head Start, Reggio Emilia and Montessori methods, this study was able to frame questions in the study to explore a variety of preschool factors that parents may take into account when finding a school for their children, for example developmentally appropriate practices, incorporation of cultural values, personal philosophies versus school philosophies, available resources for the students and professionalism of the teacher. By exploring the research-based qualities of effective preschools, the study hoped to find linkages between what teachers strive to provide in preschool, parents' own personal early educational experiences, and parents' expectations for their own children. The goal of the exploration was to foster a stronger foundation for teacher-parent relationships and to build a more comforting and familial setting for students.

Informed consent (see Appendix A) was sought from parents of preschool aged children who would be invited to complete an online questionnaire (Appendix B) asking multiple choice and ranking questions about personal early educational experiences and early educational expectations for their children. Select parents were called back for face-to-face interviews asking more detailed questions (Appendix C) of personal early educational accounts and their experiences when choosing the preschool for their children.

This study had a total possible sample of 24 sets of parents, as the researcher had access to two classes of 12 children each. Half the parents returned informed consent forms and provided their emails for the online questionnaire.

Site Selection

The study took place with parents of children at the Wagner College Early Childhood Center (ECC), where the researcher was a graduate assistant to the head teacher of the 2.5 year olds in their very first school experiences. Descriptions of the site that follow refer to the 2012-2013 school year.

The school was located on Grymes Hill, in Staten Island, New York. The preschool offered both half and full day programs. Families ranged from middle class to upper-middle class from Asian, African American, Russian and Caucasian backgrounds. The school was private so did not fall under New York City Department of Education purview, but it followed Common Core preschool standards. The school firmly believed children learn best through play, so all classroom and center activities revolved around free play.

The classrooms in the school were warm and inviting, allowing for social, emotional and cognitive development through play. Upon entry, there was a large sandbox designed for group play, located at the front of the room along with a painting easel placed next to it and shelves filled with different art supplies and crafting materials. In addition to these shelves, there were many other low-lying shelves filled with labeled boxes of blocks, puzzle pieces, pegs, little people, little animals, cars, train tracks and trains, tools, dress up clothes and wide variety of books. Each toy on each shelf had a picture of the toy so the child could match the images and put the item back where it belongs. Amidst the endless shelves of toys there were cubbies where children could place their backpacks and other belongings.

Procedure

Approval for the project was sought and received from Wagner's Human Subject Review Board (see Appendices D and E). A detailed description of the study's intentions was provided to all recipients in the informed consent form, stating that all information would remain confidential and requesting a signature and email address if they wished to participate in the study. The subjects were informed that their decision to participate would not affect teacher opinions or actions while working with their children in the classroom. They were also informed that if they completed the electronic questionnaire, they would have the option to participate in a face-to-face interview to further understandings of their early educational experiences and build a stronger relationship with them. The follow up interviews were to be tape recorded, as indicated in the written consent form. Unfortunately, parents had little time to schedule interviews so brief answers were transcribed by hand. The follow up interview included parents who have had both positive and less than positive experiences in their own preschools. All data gathering occurred in March of 2013.

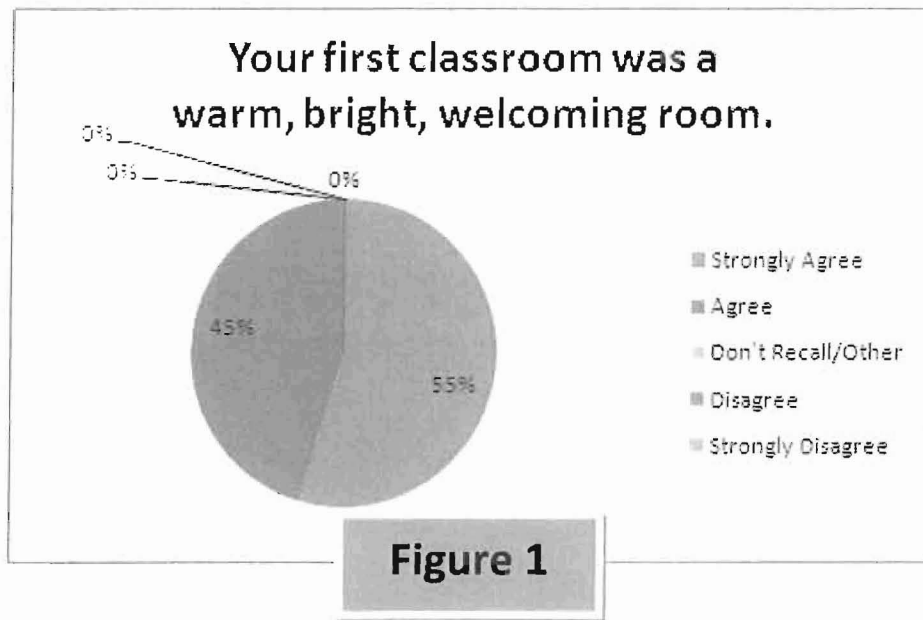
Data Analysis

All questionnaire and interview responses were compiled as individual case summaries to be compared and contrasted. Common themes and notable findings were isolated to explore the range of parental experiences and expectations. All responses were analyzed to uncover major themes, similarities and differences. The transcripts were destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Chapter 4: Results
Questionnaire Results
Quantitative

From what they recalled, most parents agreed or strongly agreed that their own preschools reflected general effective early childhood instructional philosophies (Figures 1, 2 and 3). More than half (55%) strongly agreed and all others (45%) agreed their rooms were warm, bright and welcoming and that they had access to varied games and activities:

- Your first classroom was a warm, bright and welcoming room.



- There was a multitude of toys, games and activities available to you.

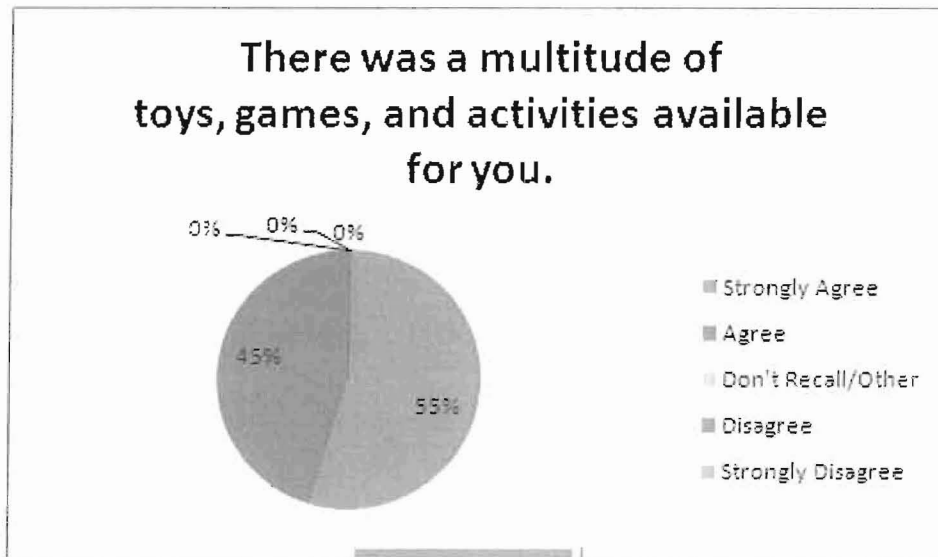


Figure 2

- More than half of the participants (64%) strongly agreed and all others (36%) agreed that they participated in many enjoyable social activities every day while placed in their own early childhood setting.

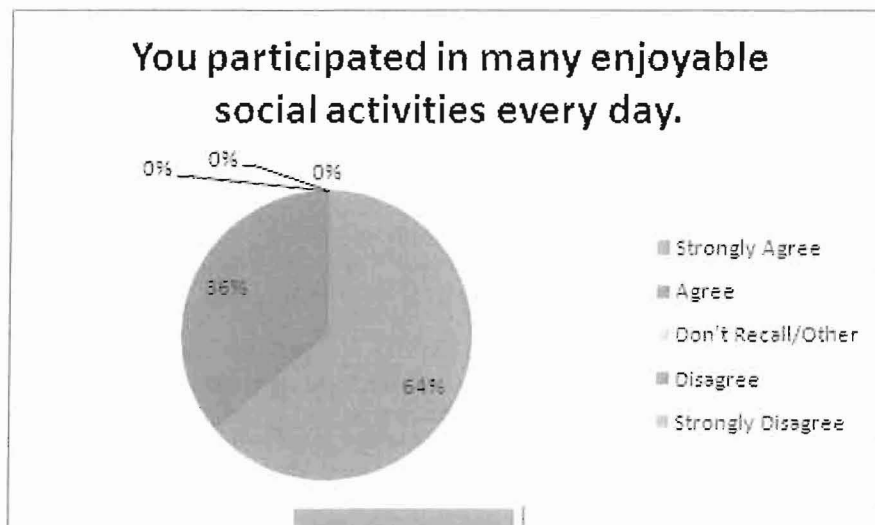


Figure 3

Parents reported that from what they can recall, their preschools provided opportunities for artistic expression, role playing, motor skill development and such through free play in learning centers. Although patterns were not as strong for these more specific questions about preschool experiences, as

Figure 4 shows, a large percentage agreed (36%) or strongly agreed (36%) that centers and shared-work supported their learning. The remaining percentage of participants (18%) disagreed with this statement and strongly disagreed (9%).

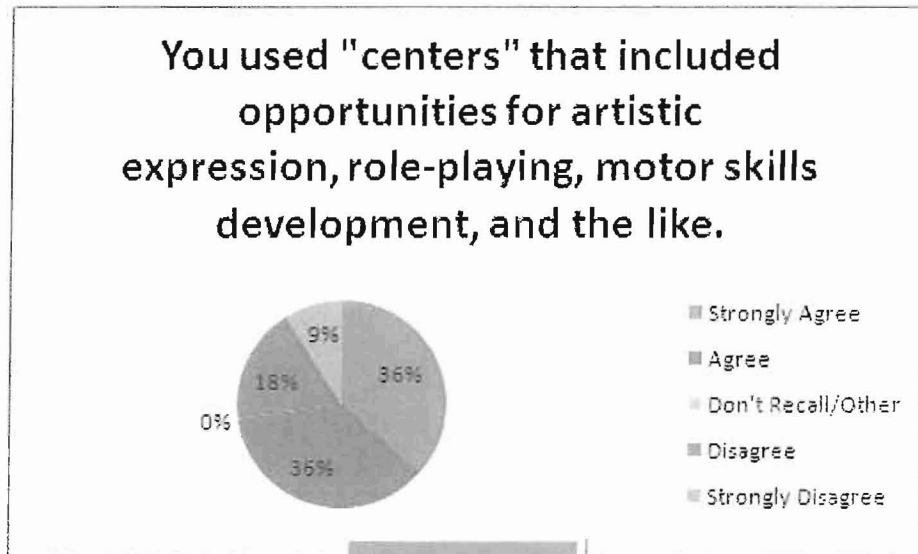


Figure 4

The largest proportion of parents (36%) agreed that they felt that there was a student-adult ratio in their early childhood classroom that made them feel that they always had the attention of an adult. Followed by parents who did not recall (27%). Smaller but notable proportions responded that they disagreed (18%) or strongly agreed (18%) with this statement. See Figure 5 below.

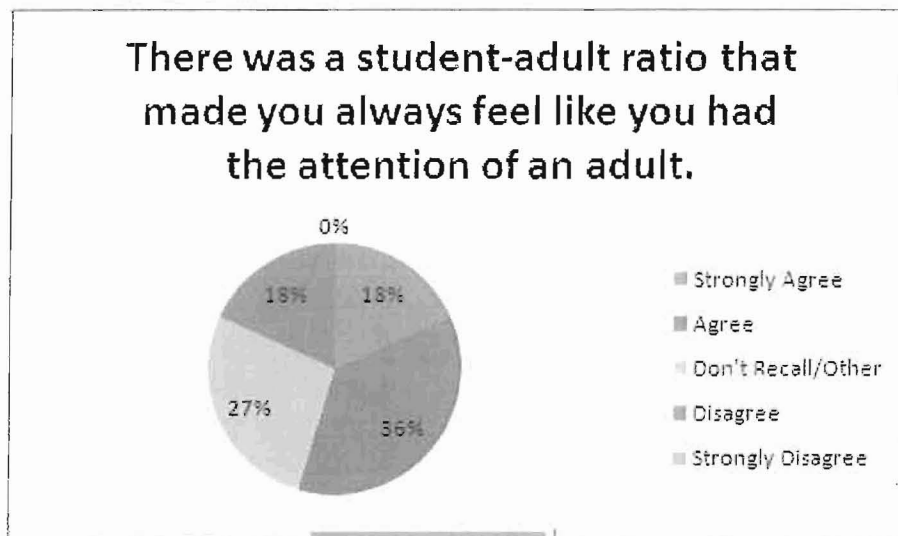
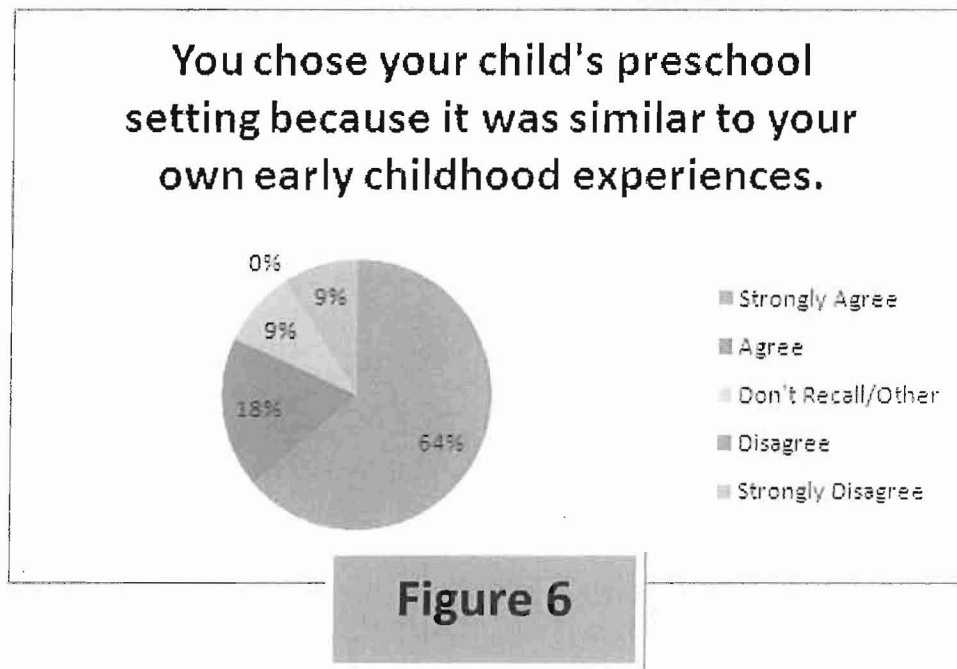


Figure 5

Most parents reported that they chose their child's preschool setting based on their own early educational experiences (82% strongly agree or agree as per Figure 6).



Parents felt it was extremely important for their child to grow socially and emotionally more so than intellectually. As Figure 7 indicates, intellectual growth was considered important by 65% of respondents; however, social and emotional growth was unanimously considered vitally important for their children. Their reports of their own experiences, however, did not reflect their own values for their children's preschool experiences; their own experiences had much room for improvement compared to their hopes for their own children's preschool lives (Figure 8).

Parents felt children should experience growth in these areas:

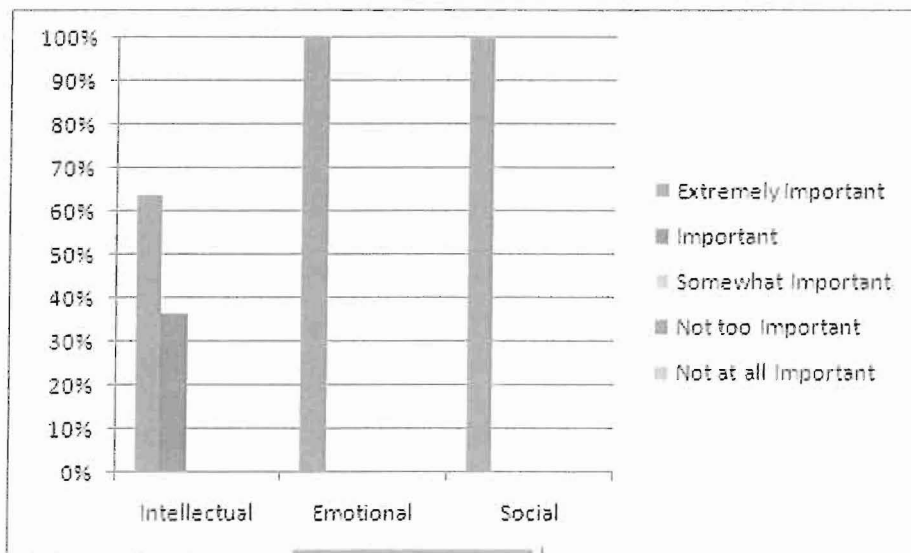


Figure 7

In their own preschools, parents reported their experience of growth in these areas as follows:

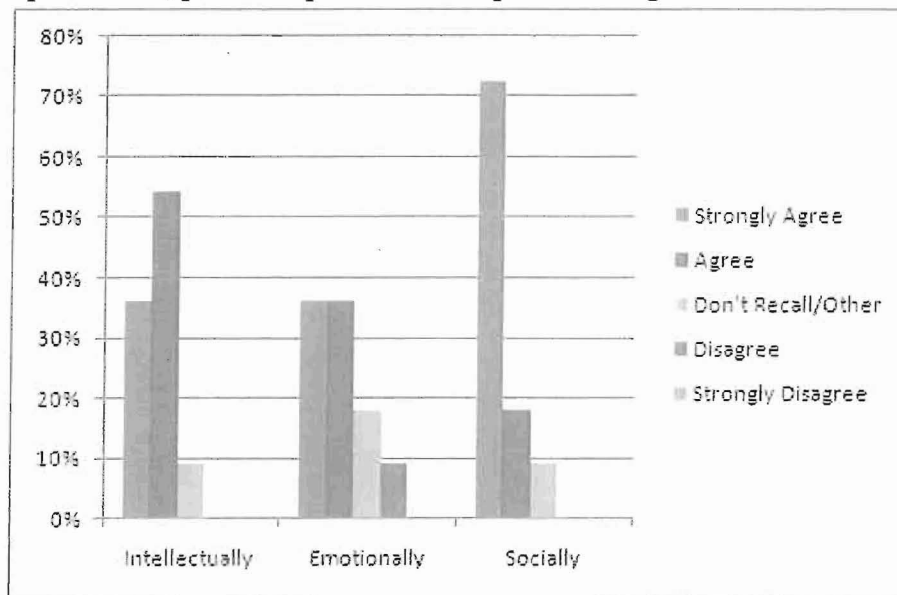


Figure 8

Qualitative

In the qualitative portion of the questionnaire, parents provided more insight into their responses. For example, the parent who had not attended a kindergarten setting during early educational years shared that the first school attended was a parochial school with strict rules and regulations that did not allow exploration through free play in an early educational setting. This parent chose a preschool setting not because it was similar to personal experiences, but because of a desire for the child to experience a different setting.

In the open-ended questions, parents were able to share their thoughts and feelings about their early educational experiences, which were predominately enjoyable. Their earliest memories were very happy, and they described the settings they were in to be warm and bright and gave vivid descriptions of toy placements. Although they recalled specific placements for toys in certain sections, they could not recollect if these sections were designated as “centers.” They did, however, experience free play and self-expression through art and role playing.

Additionally, parents indicated they chose this particular setting due to Wagner’s sterling reputation as both a college and a developmentally appropriate preschool. Parents also felt that Wagner’s ECC was an appropriate place for their child because they enjoyed the teacher-to-student ratio and the amount of free play the students were encouraged to have. As one parent noted, they felt that this preschool setting would not “stifle creativity or free thinking.” All parents stated that they wanted their child to grow socially and emotionally within the classroom setting in order to be prepared for future schooling. Figure 9 shows a sampling of parental comments, arranged by topic.

How might you describe your earliest formal educational experiences?

- In kindergarten, I remember playing and singing songs. In 1st grade, I recall less play and desks in rows. I also had a nun as a teacher and recall being afraid at times.
- As I think back kindergarten was a memorable experience .
I remember the interaction between my classmates and learning the first form of group discipline as well as having fun.
- It was a religious environment so we learned a lot about all the holidays, did a lot of arts and crafts, learned about the letters using a lot of worksheets-as well as playtime- went to school with all the kids from the neighborhood
- My mother used age appropriate workbooks from when I was 4yrs old.
- I attended a Montessori school at 4 years old. I remember stations to play at, free play, story time and small classes. I remember lots of books.
- It was a preschool setting with many centers for art and playtime. It was a positive experience from I can recall because I made friends that i still remain in contact with today.
- Great!

Please share any other thoughts you might have about your formal early childhood educational experiences and how those experiences might have influenced your choices to enroll your child or children in the setting(s) you chose.

- As a Board of Education teacher, I am we'll aware of there being less and less art centers in kindergarten, I think this is awful. I want my daughter to be well balanced and emotionally ready to handle school. She needs to know how to socialize and be intellectually ready. I feel like Wagner will do that for her.
- Having attended parochial school s we were exposed to discipline at a very early age this discipline formed a very strong foundation throughout my life and decision-making concerning my children's education
- Early Socializing with my peers had an effect on my ability to easily transition in various scenarios throughout my childhood, as well as aided in social-emotional development necessary to succeed in school as well as in my community. I want that for my child as well
- We chose Wagner's program because we believe in allowing Sophia to express herself and to encourage her to begin making her own decisions. We believed Wagner would encourage her in those areas. We do not want to stifle her creativity or free thinking (although there are restrictions) we wanted her to become more social and introduce her to a school setting. We love the play stations and the student/teacher ratios. I believe this is the setting I was exposed to and it seems to have been a positive experience for me.

If your response was "other" to any of the above items, could you please explain?

- Can't remember if the environment helped emotionally
- I cannot remember if I grew intellectually, emotionally or socially. I assume I did because I did well in school academically, I did not have any emotional issues and I was a social person. Perhaps my initial schooling laid the groundwork for all categories.

Figure 9

Interviews

The face-to-face interviews indicated that these parents chose the ECC based on the positive reputation it held within the local community. The five parents who participated in the follow-up interview spent 5-15 minutes discussing their thoughts, answering up to 7 questions. The general themes of these questions were related to all past early educational experiences of parents. Response summaries are provided here for each question.

- Q1. What are the earliest memories you can recall of your formal early childhood experience?

Parents all responded to this question with vivid descriptions of their earliest classrooms and how they felt about going to school for the first time. They all felt their classroom environments were warm and welcoming environments that gave them many opportunities to play and socialize with their peers. Socialization was an important aspect to parents as the majority of them felt that an early educational setting is an important place to begin learning social and emotional skills. Parents also recalled their transition to school. Some had a hard time transitioning to a school atmosphere and leaving their parents, while others adapted very well.

- Q2. Choose three adjectives that would best describe your early childhood educational experience.

Although the list of adjectives varied among parents, a trend of positive words was a recurring theme. Words such as great, happy (used by 3 parents) and fun stood out the most within the positive trend. Parents who did not respond with positive descriptive words did not recall their earliest experiences.

- Q3. What do you think you gained from your early childhood educational experience? What do you feel is most important for your child to experience while enrolled in preschool? Why?

These questions were touched upon in the online questionnaire, so parents elaborated on responses they gave electronically. Parents stressed the importance of early socialization among peers for their children. One parent in particular stated that early socialization left an effect on her allowing for an easier transition into first grade from kindergarten, and she wanted her daughter to experience the same thing. Parents also felt that early emotional skills were important to be acquired as well. How well children react in certain social situations was seen as an important skill to take into elementary grades, so parents felt that the developmentally appropriate practices being taught to their children at their current preschool setting were great. Parents also felt that free play was an important experience for their children, as it teaches them how to exercise their rights of choice around the classroom and interact with and respond to their classmates as well.

- Q5. How similar are your early educational experiences compared to what you want for your child?

Parents felt that because they experienced enjoyable educational experiences during early childhood, they wanted the same or better for their own child. None of the parents that were interviewed attended a preschool setting at a very early age but they felt that getting an “early start” for school with their children, who started school at age 2, would benefit them greatly. Parents felt that beginning preschool at such an early age could jump start the children on social and emotional learning allowing for a better temperament towards school and the grade transitions yet to come. One parent in particular was an elementary school teacher and felt that because she did not attend a preschool setting she now knows how important an early preschool setting can be to a child’s development.

- Q6. Why did you choose this preschool for your child/children?

The 5 parents that were interviewed with this question only had children placed in Wagner’s Early Childhood Center. They each chose this particular setting because they were former students at

the establishment or they felt that the staff was strong. They also felt that the school's philosophy of social, emotional and early developmental learning met their standards.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Findings

One's early educational experiences do appear to have the power to influence parents when deciding educational placement for their own children. This study hoped to gain a better understanding of parent experiences in early childhood settings, exploring how those distant experiences might relate to their hopes for their child's educational experiences. Research found during this study gave light to factors that parents should take into account when placing their child in a preschool setting; however, there was no research to show what parents actually take into account. Parents with preschool aged children currently have no voice in the literature and research. Because building relationships with families is an essential aspect of being an early childhood professional, such understandings are critical. Early childhood professionals need to know what goals and expectations parents hold for their children to better their classroom instruction and meet the parents' needs as well as the students'. Children's learning and development is situated in the cultural and social context of their communities and families and homes (McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012), and parents' own preschool experiences are part of that context.

The most important topics learned from this study were how formative the enjoyable experiences parents had in early childhood and how those experiences translated to skills and experiences they wished for their own children. Apparently, even into adulthood, children will also be able to make connections from learning activities in preschool to the life they live outside of school many years later. Tapping into parents' own positive recollections of preschool—or, alternatively, ensuring preschool will be more positive if a parent had poor experiences—might make learning more comfortable and familiar for both the student and parent. Researchers have found that when teachers promote parental involvement, students' attendance increases, students' dropout rates decrease, students' behavior improves, and students develop positive attitudes toward schools (Shirvani, 2007). In addition to early

childhood educational experiences bonding parents and children, a broader benefit implied by this study would be a capacity to develop a deeper bond between parents and teachers in preschool. The parent and teacher bonding over early childhood recollections could allow for more understanding, in turn producing a more familial and communal environment since everyone would be more able to work together to achieve success. Stronger links between parents and teachers could also allow parents to gain knowledge from early childhood professionals on topics including child development, peer relationships, and fostering development through play. As research demonstrates, when early childhood professionals work together in supportive partnerships with parents, it is possible to develop effective guidance strategies to respond to individual children's behaviors (McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012).

This study also highlighted that parents favored social and emotional growth during the preschool years over intellectual growth. The preschool years are critical years to lay down social and emotional foundations for students to carry with them into the beginning of their academic careers. Children who are socially and emotionally well adjusted do better at school, have increased confidence, have good relationships, take on and persist at challenging tasks and communicate well (Pahl & Barrett, 2007). According to Pahl and Barrett (2007), educators too often devote the early educational years of cognitive development to the promotion of academic skills for intellectual development. The early educational years are a time for building broader cognitive development as a gateway for critical thinking processes as well as social and emotional growth to first mold preschool aged children into students. Intellectual and academic development will soon follow if rich opportunities for social and emotional behavior are built. As one parent in this study noted, "Early socializing with my peers had an effect on my ability to easily transition in various scenarios throughout my childhood, as well as aided in social-emotional development necessary to succeed in school as well as in my community. I want that for my child as well."

Building a social and emotional base first, during the preschool years, is necessary for successful student transitions into elementary school settings. These transitions later lead to intellectual and academic development. Parents may intrinsically know what early childhood research has supported about social and emotional growth in early years.

Future Research

As parents' data showed, they wanted their children to grow socially and emotionally, feeling that intellectual growth was not as important in early years. This finding indicates that parents place their children in early childhood educational settings to grow socially and emotionally in order to prepare them for future school interactions.

It is interesting that there is a current demand for children to be placed in preschool programs at the ages of 2, 3 and 4, even though when most parents began schooling in kindergarten at the age of 5. These parents could not recall any early educational settings prior to 3 years of age, yet they sought early childhood settings for their children. While the phenomenon may be a function of increased work responsibilities for parents, it would be interesting to explore why early preschool experiences are perceived to be important to one's educational foundation yet may not even be recalled in later years.

Research states that parents sometimes place their children in early preschool programs to undergo early intervention practices for behavioral concerns and other issues. Perhaps parents are even searching for early age preschool programs as a source of relief in the form of a day care service. According to a study done by Woolfson, Durkin and King (2010), certain children, ages of 3 and 4, were placed in a Head Start program because they were considered at risk for school failure. They were placed in this program to potentially leave in equal educational standings with fellow peers (Woolfson et al., 2010). Woolfson, Durkin and King (2010) also stat that research from this Head Start program demonstrated

positive results for vulnerable children's IQ, cognitive, social and emotional development, language skills, concentration and behavior and educational attainments. In addition, there were long-term positive effects of early intervention programs on literacy and social skills. Thus, for parents of lower income backgrounds, exploring the balance between parents' desires for their children's growth in social and emotional areas and their hopes for children's academic development would be fruitful.

Indeed, the Reggio Emilia approach, the Montessori approach and the Head Start curriculum approach all practice different strategies of developmentally appropriate instruction to diversify learning for all students. It would have been beneficial to learn how parents may have chosen certain preschool settings within these approaches for their child. The Reggio Emilia approach is based on social constructivist theories that see children as social actors active in the construction and determination of their social lives (Kim & Darling, 2009). Montessori early childhood classrooms provide sensory experiences for young children to support new learning experiences (McKenzie & Zascavage, 2012). Head Start was initiated in 1956 to address cognitive and behavioral developments of prekindergarten children in America's low-income households and eligibility for Head Start continues to be defined according to federal poverty guidelines (Rikoon et al., 2012). Each approach is vastly different yet shares a common end goal that their students will flourish into confident and independent thinkers who can become significant individuals of society. It would have been profoundly interesting to see how parents deciphered the appropriateness of each of these approaches for their own child, as well as exploring how parents from different backgrounds might select preschool settings.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Wagner College supports the practice of protection of human participants in research. The following will provide you with information about the study that will help you in deciding whether or not you wish to participate. If you agree to participate, please be aware that you are free to withdraw at any point throughout the duration of the study without any penalty.

I am currently a student, here at Wagner College, enrolled to graduate with a Masters Degree of science degree in Early Childhood Education in May. As a future educator I hope to gain a greater knowledge of parents and their experiences in their earliest formal educational settings.

This study explores how parents' early educational experiences may influence their decision to place their children in certain preschool settings. There are two parts to this study- both involving parents only and not their children. The first part of this study is that all parents will be invited to fill out a brief questionnaire. This questionnaire will only be emailed to you upon signing your name and email address at the bottom of this consent form. The second part of this study is an individual face-to-face interview involving 8-12 parents who agree to share more insights with me. If you wish to participate in the interview, you may let me know through the electronic questionnaire. Your responses to the interview will be recorded and later transcribed for analysis. If you wish, you may have your electronic questionnaire transcript available to you. All information you provide will remain confidential and will not be associated with your name. You will have the opportunity to review, edit and redact the transcripts before they are used. Tapes and transcripts will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study or at the latest February 28th, 2013. If for any reason during this study you do not feel comfortable, you may withdraw yourself. Your participation in this study will require approximately 15 minutes for completing an electronic questionnaire and, if you agree to be interviewed, approximately 45 extra minutes.

If you have any further questions concerning this study please feel free to contact me: Paige Fazio at Paige.Fazio@wagner.edu (917-597-8939) or my faculty sponsor Dr. Karen DeMoss at Karen.Demoss@wagner.edu (718-420-4070). Please indicate with your signature and e-mail address on the space below that you understand your rights and agree to participate in the study.

Your participation is solicited, yet strictly voluntary. All information will be kept confidential and your name will not be associated with any research findings.

Signature of Participant _____

Print Name _____

Email of Participant _____

Appendix B: Online Questionnaire

Parents who agreed to participate completed an online questionnaire consisting of multiple choice, ranking of importance, and open-ended questions. The questionnaire follows:

This questionnaire is designed to help me understand parents' own experiences and expectations as I embark on my career as an early childhood educator. Please respond as candidly as possible. Again, all responses to this questionnaire will be kept confidential.

What is the earliest formal educational setting you were placed in?

- Birth - 2 years old
- 2 - 3 years old
- 3 - 4 years old
- Kindergarten
- First grade

At what grade did you begin a more book-based style of instruction (instead of, for example, free play)?

- Birth - 2 years old
- 2 - 3 years old
- 3 - 4 years old
- Kindergarten
- First Grade

How might you describe your earliest formal educational experiences? I'm interested in whatever comes to mind--there are no right or wrong answers! You might, for example, share what kind of setting was it, whether you liked it, what you remember as positive or negative--whatever comes to mind.

From what you can recall of your early educational years...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't remember/Other
your first classroom was a warm, bright and welcoming room.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
there was a multitude of toys, games, and activities available for you.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
you participated in many enjoyable social activities every day.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't remember/Other
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you used "centers" that included opportunities for artistic expression, role-playing, motor skills development, and the like.

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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there was a student-adult ratio that made you always feel like you had the attention of an adult.

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

setting helped you grow INTELLECTUALLY to my fullest capacity.

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

the setting helped you grow EMOTIONALLY to my fullest capacity.

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

the setting helped you grow SOCIALLY to

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't remember/Other

my fullest capacity.

If your response was "other" to any of the above items, could you please explain?

You chose your child's preschool setting because it was similar to your own early childhood experiences.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

You feel it is important for your child to experience...

	Not at all important	Not too important	Somewhat important	Important	Extremely important
Social growth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotional growth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Not at all Not too Somewhat Extremely
 important important important Important important

Intellectual growth

◌ ◌ ◌ ◌ ◌

Please share any other thoughts you might have about your formal early childhood educational experiences and how those experiences might have influenced your choices to enroll your child or

children in the setting(s) you chose.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire! If you are willing to be available for follow-up questions to help me better understand parental experiences and expectations, please share

your name.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Based on the answer patterns in their questionnaire responses, a subset of parents (approximately 7) were contacted, and agreed to at their own will, be available for a follow up interview. The follow up interviews were tape recorded, as indicated in the written consent form, which also provided participants the opportunity to review their transcript upon request.

Face to face interview questions consisted of:

1. What are your earliest memories you can recall of your formal early childhood experience? Follow up prompts if not addressed: (How old were you? What was the layout of your room? How would you describe your teacher?)
2. Choose three adjectives that would best describe your early childhood educational experience.
3. What do you think you gained from your early childhood educational experience?
4. What do you feel is most important for your child to experience while enrolled in preschool? Why?
5. How similar are your early educational experiences compared to what you want for your child?
6. Why did you choose this preschool (or any other setting) for your child/children?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Appendix D: Herb Application

Investigator: Paige Fazio

Department: Education

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Karen DeMoss

Title: Experiential Influence on Parents' Preschool Setting Choices

Rationale: One's early educational experiences may have the power to influence greatly when deciding educational placement for one's own children. The final result of this study will be to gain a better understanding of parent experiences and how they may relate these experiences to their child's educational experience. Building relationships with families is an essential aspect of being an early childhood professional because children's learning and development is situated in the cultural and social context of their communities and families and homes (McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012). Not only can early childhood professionals gain knowledge about children from families, but parents can gain knowledge from early childhood professionals on topics including child development, peer relationships and fostering development through play. When early childhood professionals work together in supportive partnerships with parents, it is possible to develop effective guidance strategies to respond to individual children's behaviors (McFarland-Piazza & Saunders, 2012). As a result the field of early childhood education would benefit from understanding linkages between parents' early childhood experiences and resulting expectations and feelings about their own children's early childhood experience.

A child's school setting may set the precedent for the future educational career of that child. A child's early educational setting may influence later choices – even during parenthood. Certain aspects

of preschool through first grade settings may seem appealing or not due to enjoyable or unhappy experiences parents may have undergone. Whatever the attraction or lack of interest may be, there may be an influential component behind parents' decision to place their children in a particular early childhood setting.

Specific Aims: The goal of this study is to explore to what degree parents' early formal education experiences might influence their actions and their educational expectations for their children.

Variables: Parental experiences and expectations will be explored through a series of interview questions. Parents' answers will allow me to better understand if their educational experiences may or may not have influenced their preschool setting choices for their own children.

Subject Selection: 30 parents of preschool aged children currently enrolled at the Wagner College Early Childhood Center.

Procedure: I will be working closely with the director of the Early Childhood Center in regards to reaching out to parents for their cooperation. I will then first pilot my electronic questionnaire with the current preschool teachers working in the Early Childhood Center. After receiving helpful comments of what may or may not be appropriate or relevant to my questionnaire, I will then invite 30 parents to participate by explaining the study and seeking informed consent. All parents who have agreed to participate in this study will be supplied with any information they may need to reach the electronic questionnaire.

Based on the answer patterns in their questionnaire responses, I will contact a subset of parents (approximately 8-12), who agreed to, at their own will, be available for a follow up interview. The follow up interviews will be tape recorded, as indicated in the written consent form, which also provides participants the opportunity to review their transcript upon request. Ideally, the follow up interview

would include parents who have had both positive and less than positive experiences. All steps of this procedure should be completed after a month's time. Subsequent analysis will include descriptive summaries of categorical responses and qualitative analysis of open-ended responses.

Materials: Informed consent form, electronic questionnaire, interview questionnaire.

Describe in Detail Any Deception Used: There will be no deception. The participants will be aware that the study intends to learn about how their early childhood formal educational experiences influence their choices.

Potential Risks & Safeguards: There may be a potential risk of discomfort for the participant filling out the questionnaire as they may not have had happy past experiences and may not want to share. Parents will be informed that all information will remain confidential and they have the option to omit what they like or stop anytime they wish. Of course, they also have the right to not participate as well.

Benefit to Subjects: Participants could develop a closer relationship to educators working with their children and the Early Childhood Center Staff could better understand parents' expectations. This deep understanding could forge a stronger bond with parents and teachers, allowing for a better experience for the child both in school and at home.

Broader Benefits: In terms of long term outcomes, this study will allow me to develop a more profound understanding of teacher to parent relationships and allow me to personally grow as an educator. This study will also be presented to my fellow colleagues who can also be enlightened to become a better equipped educator.

References: McFarland-Piazza, L., & Saunders, R. (2012). Hands-on parent support in positive guidance: Early childhood professionals as mentors. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(1), 65-73.

Appendix E: Herb Approval

Steve Jenkins <steven.jenkins@wagner.edu>

Feb 6

to me, Karen, Laurence, Anthony, maurmarlow, Sarah, Brian

February 6, 2013

Dear Ms. Fazio and Dr. DeMoss,

Your research proposal received by the Human Experimentation Review Board (HERB) on December 14, 2012 entitled "Experiential Influence on Parents' Preschool Setting Choices" (HERB project #F12-12) was considered under the no-harm review procedure (as defined in the HERB Policies & Procedures). Your proposal is approved contingent upon the following changes:

Required changes to consent forms

- The consent form should state approximately how long the questionnaire portion of the study might take.
- Paragraph 3, line 1: a) change **how your** to **how parents'**. b) change **your decision to their decision**.
- Paragraph 3, line 2: a) change **your children** to **their children**. b) After 'There are two parts to this study' add ', both involving parents only, not their children'.
- Before 'All' add 'The first part of this study is that'.
- Clarify whether the interviews with the parents in the second part of the study will be conducted individually or as a group.

Editorial and other suggested changes from the committee:

- Re. the voice of questions: Third person is used for questions 1-3, and first for questions 4-6. I suggest one voice be used consistently.
- Paragraph 2, last question: The use of 'most' in the statement is problematic because it suggests that parents are to choose which one of social, emotional, and intellectual growth is most important to them, when they actually are being asked to rate each of these types of growth individually. I recommend that 'most' be deleted.

Upon revision, this project complies with all of the requirements of HERB for the protection of human participants in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after the approval date.

1. A project status report (available on the HERB website) must be returned to HERB within one year.

2. Any significant change in the experimental procedure must be reported to HERB immediately prior to altering the project.
3. Any injury to a participant because of the research procedure must be reported to HERB immediately.
4. The investigator must keep all signed consent forms on file for 3 years past completion of the project.
5. HERB must be informed of the addition of new investigators not named in the original application.

Please inform HERB when the study has been completed. All future correspondence regarding this project should display the HERB identifying number.

All future correspondence regarding this project should display the HERB identifying number. Changed/missing documents should be submitted via email attachment. Please submit only those materials that have been revised.

Best wishes,

Steve M. Jenkins, Ph.D.

Acting Chair, Human Experimentation Review Board

Steve Jenkins <steven.jenkins@wagner.edu> Feb 13

to me

Paige,

The changes to your consent forms are approved and you may begin your research.

The link to your questionnaire is not valid. However, changes to that portion of your study were only editorial suggestions, so you do not need to resubmit a valid link.

Best of luck with your research,

S.