

THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATIONAL SETTING DURING
PRE-KINDERGARTEN YEARS ON KINDERGARTEN READINESS

by

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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
With a Major in

School Psychology

Approved 2 Semester Credits

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The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
August, 2001

at kindergarten teachers' expectations of skills children should have when entering kindergarten. This review looks at the way changing family dynamics has impacted the number of children enrolled in a daycare or preschool. The purpose of this review of literature is to describe the influence of different educational settings during pre-kindergarten years on kindergarten readiness.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Whether or not to send a child to preschool, daycare, or stay at home is a concern that many parents face today. Parents want to know if sending their child to a preschool, structured daycare, or staying at home with them will better prepare the children to enter school, both academically and socially. Not only do parents face this question but the government is also interested in the answer to this question (Sawhill, 1999). There is growing concern in our nation as to whether or not preschool, daycare, or parents staying at home with their children is best to prepare them for kindergarten. This concern is growing more and more as the expectations of kindergarten increase and the number of parents that are working increases.

There are varying beliefs in regards to whether or not a structured daycare, preschool, or children staying at home with family members is most beneficial for children in their preparation for kindergarten. There are numerous studies and articles that support preschools when looking at the benefits it has on kindergarten readiness. As Sawhill states "high-quality, educationally orientated child care is one of the most effective strategies for improving later school performance" (1999, ¶ 2). It has been found that the best results of preschool on kindergarten readiness come from programs that begin early, are able to help children to have higher school achievement, reduce grade retention later in school, and reduce the need for special education at a later age (Sawhill, 1999). It has also been pointed out that preschool and structured daycare not only has an effect on academics but on a child's socialization skills. Kimball, Lindauer, and Petrie (1998) believe that a high-quality, age-appropriate preschool program is likely

to improve a child's intelligence and achievement.

There is a flip side to the belief that preschool and structured daycare are important in the success of preparing a child for school. There are professionals that argue that a preschool or daycare is not necessary for preparing a child for school. It is felt by these professionals that if a child is brought up in an enriched home environment they are just as prepared to begin school (Horn, 2000). Horn (2000) stated that there are four things that are needed to ensure that a child arrives at school ready to learn. First, children need to be healthy so their natural abilities can grow and mature. The second is that children need to have developed a sufficient degree of emotional maturity and self-confidence so they can take on new challenges and lessons. Third, children need to develop good language skills so they can ask and answer questions and take part in-group discussions. Lastly, that children develop good social skills so they will be able to get along with other children and follow directions given by adults.

In summary, there are numerous different beliefs as to what is the best setting for a child during their first five years that will ensure that they are prepared for kindergarten, which is considered the foundation of school. Not all parents have the ability to stay at home with their children. Conversely, not all parents have the ability to place their child in the "best" daycare or preschool.

The lifestyles of many parents have changed. There are more single parent families that are forced to work to support their children and there are more two-parent families that also have both parents working. When this occurs there is a need for quality care for their children that will serve them best. Today, preschool and daycare is more to parents than a safe place to leave their children during the workday; it is becoming more

of a place where the children can begin to develop fundamental skills in academics and socialization (Galinsky & Friedman, 1993).

Sending children to preschool or daycare is growing due to the increase in mothers that are now in the workforce. The amount of women in the workforce has increased since the 1990's and is now 47%, as projected by Galinsky and Friedman (1993). To show that this trend is commonly occurring, Galinsky and Friedman (1993) found that 66% of married working men have wives that are also in the workforce. Additionally, 53% of single-parent families in the United States have children, and the parent is in the workforce (Galinsky & Friedman, 1993). To help the families that need assistance with childcare there has been many federally funded programs to ensure that children receive an early education that is academically and socially guided.

One such program that was started in the 1960's is Head Start. Head Start is federally funded program that provides care for children ages three to five years that are from low-income families. There has not been sufficient research since 1985 that has shown the impact that Head Start has on kindergarten readiness (Knight, 1991). Earlier studies of Head Start have suggested that it has had a modest effect on long-term academic and socialization success (Knight, 1991). However, Head Start has been shown to show a positive effect on the well-being of the children that it serves. Thus federal money continues to support the program. It is important to look at the federal money that supports all early education programs that serve our children.

As was shown federal support for early education programs has taken place since the 1960's (Knight, 1991). The main reason for federal funding of early education programs is to ensure that all children, especially those from low-economic status

families, are ready to start school ready to learn (Knight, 1991). More recently, President Bush, in 1990 passed a bill that was known as the National Education Goals 2000 (Goals 2000; Section 102-2). The National Education Goals 2000 (Section 102-2) stated that all children in America would start school ready to learn. Goals 2000 (Section 102-2) went on to state that all children would have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare children for school. This bill put in to place a higher demand on preschools and daycare's to prepare children for kindergarten and in turn has had impacted the way kindergarten is today.

The Goals 2000 set into motion a wave of which federal funding that was to be used to improve child care, especially early educational child care. One such funding was the Child Care and Development (CCD) Block Grant Act 1990 (Blank, 1994). CCD was to help states make significant improvements in state child care programs and policies. Many states used the money to improve licensing and monitoring of activities (Blank, 1994). Wisconsin used the federal money to create legislative blue print for the state's future childcare activities (Blank, 1994). Most likely this money was used to increase the effectiveness of these programs to ensure quality daycares and preschools that would prepare the children for school.

Wisconsin has numerous preschools, daycares, and stay at home families. It is not only a question of the nation but of Wisconsin families as to what is the best way to prepare children for school, more specifically kindergarten. A review of research reveals that there is a wide range of beliefs as to what is the best placement of children to increase their kindergarten readiness. There are a variety of in-home daycares, structured daycares, federally funded daycare's and preschools in Wisconsin. There is not only an

interest in the nation as to what is the best pre-kindergarten education for preparing for school but it is of interest to Wisconsin residents.

A review of the literature shows that preschools and structured daycare settings are essential for kindergarten readiness and that government agrees with this position. Studies have also shown that family care during the first five years is also beneficial for kindergarten readiness. Therefore, the research question for this study is to determine whether there is a difference in kindergarten readiness of children based on the educational setting where they are cared for during their pre-kindergarten years.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the difference between pre-educational settings during first five years in a child's life, as measured by survey data, and kindergarten readiness as measured by a kindergarten readiness testing for beginning kindergarten children.

Purpose of the Study

Past research has shown that there is not a consensus on what is considered kindergarten readiness. Research also shows that kindergarten readiness has changed over the years to include more academic skills. It has also been the intent of past research to look at what is the most beneficial setting for a child to prepare them for kindergarten. There are various settings that a child may be in during their pre-kindergarten years that may include daycare, at home with parents or family members, and preschool.

Further, past research shows that not only are parents and educators interested in the answer to the question of what is kindergarten readiness and the most beneficial setting, but so is the government. The government has provided money for preschool,

such as Head Start, and has passed bills such as the Educational Goal of 2000. The intent is to help prepare the child in poverty and the minority child with the same pre-kindergarten education as their peers so they will enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to review the literature with regard to kindergarten readiness and the setting in which children are in during their pre-kindergarten years. It is also the intention of this paper to review what was and now is considered “ready for kindergarten” as well as reviewing current curriculum for preschool and kindergartens. The changing dynamics of the family will also be reviewed to show how this has impacted the setting children are in prior to entering kindergarten. Lastly, the review attempts to look at perceptions of teachers, specialists, and parents as to what they believe are considered kindergarten readiness.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study relates to the importance for teachers, parents, and the governments understanding of what is the most beneficial setting for children during pre-kindergarten years. Kindergarten readiness skills appear to be increasing both academically and socially therefore, determining the most beneficial setting will only help to prepare children to enter the world of school more prepared and able to succeed. There is varying research, as to what is the most beneficial setting for a child. It is hoped that through review of the literature one will gain a better understanding of what constitutes “kindergarten readiness” to date and the benefits of different pre-kindergarten settings on preparing for kindergarten. Finally, this study will also provide a framework from which future research on kindergarten readiness and pre-kindergarten educational setting can be developed.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

The review of literature discusses different beliefs about whether or not preschool or another educational setting is necessary for children in order for them to be ready for kindergarten. There have been studies done that look at whether or not preschool, or other settings are effective for preparing children for kindergarten; however, many of the studies are not current. Because the recent literature on this topic is scant, the review of the literature is expanded to explore the history of school readiness, what the general public considers readiness for kindergarten, kindergarten teachers' views of readiness for school, parent's views on kindergarten readiness, and a review of popular kindergarten and pre-kindergarten curriculum. Finally, a critical analysis of past research will be addressed.

History of School Readiness

The concept of academic readiness has been around since the 1800's when parents were the sole individuals that were responsible for teaching their children reading and writing skills (Gillespie-Silver & Scarpti, 1992). Even though there were schools, only those children that were from wealthy families were able attend. It was not until the mid- and late 1800's that parents gave up their major role in teaching academic readiness (Gillespie-Silver & Scarpti, 1992). By the time of World War II, educators assumed the role of teaching academic skills such as reading and writing to school age children (Gillespie-Silver & Scarpti, 1992). It was during the 1930's that educators at the Gesell Institute began to develop school readiness measures to determine if a child was developmentally ready for the structured learning environment of school (Gillespie-Silver

& Scarpti, 1992). Since this time there has been an abundance of school readiness measures that have been developed to determine whether or not a child is ready to attend school and learn. Not only have there been specific dates in history that have led to where we are today, but there has been federal involvement in early education that has influenced school readiness.

Federal involvement in school readiness began around the 1930's and continues to influence kindergarten readiness of children today (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Takanishi, 1999). During the 20th century, the federal government was involved in three national programs that were aimed at improving early education programs to better serve children and prepare them for school (Takanishi, 1999). These programs were the Works Progress Administration (WPA) nursery schools, the Lanham Act Child Care Centers, and Head Start Programs (Takanishi, 1999). Of these three programs that have been federally supported, only the Head Start Programs are currently serving children and preparing them for kindergarten.

Federal legislation in the 1960s, such as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) targeted early education programs as social reform (Takanishi, 1999). The purpose of ESEA, which is now known as Title I, was for preschool programs to provide and meet the special needs of educationally deprived children (Takanishi, 1999). Title I continues to serve children that need special care in order to learn academics. Also instituted in 1965, as Title III of ESEA, additional centers and services for preschool children were authorized (Tankanishi, 1999). In 1972, the Comprehensive Head Start, Child Development, and Family Services Act stated "child development programs must build upon the role of the family as the primary and the most

fundamental influence on the development of children, and must be provided only to children whose parents or legal guardians request them” (Takanishi, 1999, p. 311). However, the federal government also states that children in poverty, based on the income of the mother, should and do receive childcare provided for them (Takanishi, 1999). More recently, the National Educational Goals of 2000 influenced school readiness and programs available to children (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). However, even though there have been various federal laws and changes in the history of school and academic readiness there is still disagreement as to what constitutes readiness for kindergarten.

Therefore, not only is it important to look at the important dates in history and the federal involvement that has shaped what is considered readiness for kindergarten but it is also important to look at the history of the definition of readiness and theoretical views that have shaped the definition. Historically, readiness has been defined as two separate concepts; readiness to learn, and readiness for school (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). Readiness to learn has been looked at as a developmental concept that an individual is able to learn specific things. Whereas, readiness for school, is viewed as an individual's ability to be successful in the school environment (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). The concept of school readiness, which begins in kindergarten, combines both the concept of readiness to learn and readiness for school. The definition of school readiness implies that a child is developmentally ready for school and that the child must adapt to the construct of the school environment (Carlton & Winsler, 1999).

The assumption of the definition, which is used today for school readiness, is based on historical theoretical concepts of maturation. For instance, Piaget's theory that

children need to be in a certain biologically based developmental stage in order to learn in school (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). This suggests that children are naturally programmed and follow an internal clock that is set as to when a child will begin to learn certain concepts. Numerous teachers follow this theory and believe that there is not much that a teacher or parent can do to speed up the learning of a child; that learning will take place when a child is biologically ready (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). This seems to be a belief that many teachers have today; however, it does not seem to be what is been considered when looking at kindergarten readiness.

Today there are various techniques that are used in our nation to decide whether a child is ready for school. The most common practice that is used is that of cut-off dates (Laidig, 1998; Carlton & Winsler, 1999). Cut-off dates look at when a child is born in relation to when they are able to enter kindergarten. Another technique used is kindergarten readiness evaluation. There are two forms of evaluations that are used to measure kindergarten readiness, those that measure developmental milestones and those that measure academic knowledge (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). Many districts implement their own readiness scales because there is not one universal evaluation that is used to date. The third technique that is used is delayed entry into school. The decision whether or not to delay a child from entering kindergarten is ultimately up to parents, but may be influenced by teachers (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). Other techniques that have been used in regards to kindergarten readiness are “redshirting” and transition classes. Redshirting basically means that a child’s entry into kindergarten is delayed for one year until the child is developmentally ready for school (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). The concept of transition classes is that a child will be placed in a preschool or another environment that

will prepare them for school (Carlton & Winsler, 1999).

A review of history shows that there have been numerous laws, movements, and definitions of school readiness that have impacted when a child is considered ready for school. There continues to be disagreement as to what constitutes readiness for school that will, in turn, continue to impact what is considered the most beneficial placement of a child to prepare them for kindergarten.

Kindergarten Readiness

The concept of whether or not a child is ready for school varies among educators, teachers, and what popular child development literature suggests. There is no universal set of behaviors that are required of a child to enter kindergarten (Laidig, 1998). In the United States the sole requirement for entrance into kindergarten is chronological age; children must be five years old by a certain date, which is usually by September first of the year the child would be entering kindergarten (Laidig, 1998).

The general belief for kindergarten readiness is that children will have developed a group of skills necessary to learn. These skills may include readiness to read, write and count, sit and listen, follow two-step directions, ask an adult for help, to interact appropriately with other children, and to toilet independently (Laidig, 1998). There are numerous checklists that are available to parents that would allow them to see if their child is ready for kindergarten when compared to other children their age. For instance, there is a checklist for kindergarten readiness that is rather specific and includes such things as cutting with scissors, follow rules, manage own bathroom needs, control of self, identify alphabet letters, etc. (Gisler & Eberts, 2000). *Early Childhood Educators* #3 has a somewhat similar list that states that the knowledge of size, color and shape, numbers

and math readiness, reading readiness, position and directions, time, and listening and sequencing are what kindergartens look for in a child to be ready for school (Cousineau, 2001).

There appear to be varying thoughts on what specific skills a child should have before attending school. Perhaps a more inclusive and universal checklist of what a child should know before attending school needs to be developed in order to ensure that the children are entering school with the essential skills ready to learn. However, many professionals agree that when looking at kindergarten readiness one must remember that children develop at different rates (Laidig, 1998). Therefore, Laidig (1998), a school psychologist, believes that one should expect a typical kindergarten class to have children that enter with a wide variation in their school-related skills.

Kindergarten Teachers' Views of Kindergarten Readiness

It is important to look at what the educators of kindergartner students believe constitutes readiness because they are the people that receive the children first in school. There is an increasing gap between children and their readiness skills when they enter kindergarten (Kelly, 2001). This in turn has an impact on the manner in which kindergarten teachers base their curriculum. As quoted by a kindergarten teacher in an article by Kelly, "The gap has widened. There is a greater range of developmental levels now (2001, ¶ 3)." When children come to school with such a range of skills it has an effect on the environment of the kindergarten classroom. There are many children, who have attended an educational based daycare or preschool, that have now set the stage for kindergarten readiness. This has also set the standard for the curriculum in kindergarten towards reading and mathematics, and away from cutting and pasting and beginning to

learn the alphabet (Allen, 2001).

There are numerous reasons as to why the readiness skills of kindergarten students are increasing. There are more mothers that are in the workforce and that are sending their children to preschool (Allen, 2001). Typically, children are acquiring knowledge of the alphabet and numbers that was traditionally taught to them in kindergarten in years past. Thus, more and more school districts are trying to figure out how to narrow the gap between the children that do attend educational daycare centers and preschool and those children that do not (Allen, 2001).

In 1993 the U.S. Department of Education conducted a study of public school kindergarten teachers' views on children readiness for school. There were numerous findings of this extensive study. It found that of the kindergarten teachers that were surveyed, the top four qualities that they felt were important for kindergarten readiness were physical health; rested and well-nourished; the ability to communicate needs, wants and thoughts verbally; and enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities (see Table 1). Along with these four qualities more than half of the teacher placed significant importance on the ability to follow directions, not being disruptive in class, being sensitive to other children's feelings, and the ability to take turns and share (U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

The 1993 study done by the U.S. Department of Education also found what the kindergarten teachers thought were the least important skills for children to have upon entering school. The skills included good problem solving skills, ability to identify primary colors and basic shapes, ability to use pencils and paint brushes, knowledge of the alphabet, and the ability to count to 20 (see Table 1). The differences between what

the general population and kindergarten teachers believe are the necessary skills for entering school has an impact on the manner in which parents and other professionals prepare children for school.

Table 1

Qualities of Kindergarten Readiness as Described by Teachers

 Qualities in order of preference

1. Physical health
 2. Rest and well-nourished
 3. Ability to communicate needs, wants, and thoughts verbally
 4. Enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities
-

Least preferred

-
1. Good problem solving skills
 2. Ability to identify primary colors and basic shapes
 3. Ability to use pencils and paint brushes
 4. Knowledge of the alphabet
 5. Ability to count to 20
-

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 1993

Along with the other informative information gathered from the survey by the U.S. Department of Education (1993) were kindergarten teachers' views on the impact of preschool on kindergarten readiness. Generally, it was felt by a minority of teachers that preschool or other formal education in reading or math was beneficial for children. It appeared to be strongly felt that the majority of what was being instructed during the early years in preschool and daycare should be what is taught during the children's first

year of school. Further review of the findings showed that it was mainly felt by teachers, who taught in poverty schools, that more formal early education is beneficial for students before entering kindergarten.

Parents Views on Kindergarten Readiness

Not only is it important to review that literature as to what kindergarten educators believe is considered kindergarten readiness but it is also important to review what parents believe constitute readiness. Parents are ultimately the people that decide when it is time for their child to enter kindergarten. For example, parents may choose to enroll their child in kindergarten based solely on the cut-off date, or they may choose to delay their child's entrance into kindergarten for one year until they feel that their child is more developed.

Parents' hold a range of beliefs about what skills and social attitudes their child must possess in order to succeed in kindergarten (West, Hausken & Collins, 1995). Since they hold varying beliefs, it is important to look at those since their beliefs will influence the activities and programs that they will engage their children in during their pre-kindergarten years. A study that was conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics in 1993 showed that parents thought that it was essential for a child to be able to communicate his or her needs, wants, and thoughts verbally and that their child be enthusiastic in approaching new activities (West et al., 1995). This study also revealed that parents thought it was very important that their child be able to sit and listen and be able to take turns. The most important skills that parents thought were necessary for kindergarten readiness, contrasting that of kindergarten teachers, was their child's ability to know the letters of the alphabet, being able to count

to 20, and the ability to use a pencil and a paint brush (West et al.).

Other studies have been done that show parents and teachers beliefs about kindergarten readiness are similar. Diamond, Reagan, and Bandyk (2000), stated that the three most important skills that a child should have upon entering kindergarten to ensure success were listening, feeling confident, and following directions. This study also found that parents are more likely than kindergarten teachers to feel that academic skills are necessary for kindergarten and determining if their child is ready for kindergarten (Diamond et al., 2000). Also stated in the Diamond et al. article, was that those parents who strongly believe in academic and behavioral kindergarten readiness skills are necessary, tend to enroll their children in more formal and informal education both at home and in community based programs such as preschools.

Many of the studies conducted that look at parents view on kindergarten readiness have also looked at ethnic and educational backgrounds of the parents to see if there was a correlation between their beliefs and their education level. The research found that parents' educational level influenced the types of activities and programs in which they enrolled their children (West et al., 1995). In the Diamond et al. article it stated that "mothers that were less-educated were more likely to endorse performance-orientated instruction and to engage in fewer informal learning activities at home than mothers with more education (2000, p. 3)." Those parents that have a not completed high school, have graduated from high school, and are college educated, view the skills of social and behavior appropriateness as most important (West et al.).

Review of Kindergarten Curriculum and Pre-Kindergarten Curriculum

The intent of this portion of the literature review is to show the different types of

skills that are taught in preschool and other pre-kindergarten programs as well as review the curriculum used in kindergarten. It is hoped that by reviewing common curriculums used in preschools and kindergarten one will gain a better understanding of what is considered “ready for kindergarten”.

Today, Head Start and state pre-kindergarten programs serve about two-thirds of U.S. 4-year-olds living in poverty (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1998). The National Association for the Education of Young Children supports a developmentally appropriate practice; whereas, academic critics feel that developmental programs are socially constructed and are not sensitive to cultural and individual differences (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1998). The article by Schweinhart and Weikart (1998) outlined three curriculum models. Model one is a direct instruction model where the teacher presents materials and the children respond to them. In the direct instruction model teachers clearly defined academic goals of reading, writing, arithmetic, and language. The second model that is outlined in Schweinhart and Weikart (1998) is that of high/scope curriculum. This is considered an open environment in which both the teacher and the child plan and initiate activities together. They intend to promote intellectual, social, and physical development. The third model in the article by Schweinhart and Weikart (1998) was the traditional nursery school. This consists of a child-centered approach in which the child initiates all activities. The goal of the traditional nursery school is to create an environment that a child can develop naturally.

Like the various curriculums for preschools and daycares, there are various curriculums for kindergartens. The type of kindergarten that is used varies, depending on state and district policies that govern curriculum. The type of curriculum that is used

often depends on the type of kindergarten that is within a district. The following will review the different types of curriculum used depending on the type of kindergarten structure. The first is a developmental kindergarten in which the focus is on lower and slower levels of academic content that is offered in a regular kindergarten and its goal is to prepare children for school and prevent retention at later grades (Nelson, 2000). The second curriculum is that which is centered around a multi-age classroom. The intent of this curriculum is to provide more individualized instruction that considers their individual developmental level not their grade level (Nelson, 2000). The third curriculum is that tied to a full-day kindergarten. Here, academics are highly stressed (Nelson, 2000). However, some full-day kindergartens focus on both academics and daycare activities such as field trips, lunch, nap, and free time (Nelson, 2000). The final curriculum that is reviewed in the Nelson (2000) article is that of kindergarten with lower class size. Here, they do focus on academics, but they are also able to do more one-to-one instruction and attend to individual needs and thus create their curriculum around individual needs (Nelson, 2000).

It is important to first be familiar with the type of kindergarten that a child will be entering when deciding if the child is ready for kindergarten because their readiness will depend on the type of program provided (Nurss, 1987). It is important to also remember that in the past kindergarten was a child's initial school experience. "Now, kindergarten is an integral part of the elementary school's curriculum and the focus has shifted from social to cognitive or academic" (Nurss, 1987, p. 2). Today, many states fund full-day kindergartens because it is believed that children will have long term benefits from being in school longer. Kindergartens vary in the degree to which they stress cognitive skills

and the individual districts determine this. Some kindergartens use a less structured curriculum with small group instruction, learning centers, and whole group language activities (Nurss, 1987). Whereas, some kindergartens use a structured whole group, paper and pencil activities that are focused on academics such as reading and mathematics (Nurss, 1987).

Related Research on Preschool and Kindergarten Readiness

Much of the research that has been done relating to the topic of kindergarten readiness strictly looks at preschools and the effect it has on kindergarten readiness. However, much of this research is becoming outdated and a more extensive study of all types of educational settings, not just preschool, needs to be done to review the effects, if any, they have on kindergarten readiness. This section will review studies and articles that speak to the effect of preschool on kindergarten readiness.

Throughout much of the review of literature it is evident that preschool is considered to have a positive effect on kindergarten readiness skills. A U.S Department of Education study found that young children who attended a center-based preschool program attained more literacy skills and numerical skills than children that did not attend the same type of programs (Elkind, 1996). Not only does preschool play an educational role in short term outcomes, such as kindergarten readiness, it has also been found to be beneficial for long-term outcomes. For instance, preschool programs have been shown to increase intellectual gains when attending a well-selected preschool program. Preschool has also been found to improve a child's chances of becoming a better-achieving student through the primary grades when the length of preschool attendance is longer (Kimball et al., 1998).

The attendance of preschool for low-economic status students has been proven time and time again to be beneficial (Knight, 1991). It is necessary to look at the programs that these children attend in order to ensure that they are receiving the same quality of early education programs as their peers. This is important to look at so that no child is left behind or falls between the gap when they all first begin school. As stated above, preschool has shown to increase cognitive functioning, school achievement, and social adjustment (Sawhill, 1999).

For the most part, the studies that have been done show that overall preschool is effective for kindergarten readiness. A study by Warden (1998) was conducted to see the effects of developmental preschool on school readiness and kindergarten achievement for at-risk children. The results of the study showed that there was a significant difference in kindergarten readiness for children who attended preschool when compared to those that did not attend preschool. The study also indicated that developmental preschool serves as an early intervention strategy for improving kindergarten readiness skills. This study is supported by another that was conducted in Illinois that looked at the effect of Pre-kindergarten At-Risk programs. Their summary report for the 1990-91 school year showed that their program had a positive influence on kindergarten readiness (Illinois School District, 1992). Yet another study that was conducted to look at the effectiveness of a pre-kindergarten program on kindergarten readiness for both at-risk and non at-risk children found that the pre-kindergarten program proved to be beneficial for kindergarten readiness (Bush, 1997). The Bush (1997) study concluded, the Liberty County, Georgia's public school pre-kindergarten program, that both at-risk and not at-risk children were more developmentally prepared for kindergarten than their peers that did

not attend the program.

Not only is there research on the benefits of preschool for low-economic status children but there is research on the benefits for all children in general. With the nation's focus increasing on school reform, accountability, and increased achievement, there is more of an awareness from professionals, teachers, parents, and government of the importance of establishing a good foundation for children before they begin kindergarten. The interest of the government is increasing with new federal laws and funding evolving to improve the quality of the schools and the skills in which America's children possess. More federal funding for preschools and other educational settings is taking place because of the important role it plays in preparing children for the future (Sawhill, 1999).

There is some research on preschools however, that show preschools have little or no effect on kindergarten readiness. This area of study appears to be scant. A study by O'Brien (1991) revealed that early intervention programs such as preschools and Head Start did not have an effect on kindergarten readiness. The author stated that the reason for this was that what the children were perceived to have skills in, as measured by a kindergarten readiness scale, did not transfer to the public school. The study suggests that this may be due to the difference between classroom organization and teacher styles between preschool and primary school. With the numerous different findings from the studies there appears to be little consensus on what helps children become ready for kindergarten. So, the question that arises is: Is it the readiness skills, or the flexibility of students to adjust to a different environment that is important for success in kindergarten? It is believed by some that the academic skills that are taught during early education programs are unnecessary and may discourage a child's natural desire to explore and

learn (Horn, 2000). Horn (2000) suggests that preschool, one that is 1/2 of a day, is not harmful but that one should choose a preschool program that is developmentally appropriate and not one that focuses exclusively on academics because the family environment is just as beneficial as a preschool.

There are many differences between what the general public, government, teachers, and parents consider to be skills that prepare and ensure that a child is ready for kindergarten. Many of the studies that have been completed on the topic of kindergarten readiness and the influence of early education programs are outdated, focus on preschool alone, or are focused on only the low-economic status families. There is a need to clarify many issues when looking at programs that are beneficial for kindergarten readiness such as what constitutes readiness and what type of education setting is most beneficial to all children. The current proposed study wishes to look at the latter of the two concerns.

Critical Analysis of the Research

Historically, the concept of school readiness has been around since the 1800's (Gillespie-Silver & Scarpti, 1992). Since the 1800's the individuals that are involved in educating children has progressed from being the sole responsibility of parents to being the responsibility of parents and educators. Not only are parents and educators invested in the readiness of today's children, but also is the government. The government has invested money since the 1930's into programs to help ensure that children begin school ready to learn (Takanishi, 1999). More recently, the National Educational Goals (2000) have stressed the importance of children being prepared for school and that the first responsibility to ensure that they do is with their parents.

The concept of school readiness varies between teachers, parents, professionals in

the field of education, and the government. Some parents, teachers, and professionals believe that a child is ready to begin school once they have the ability to pay attention, know their colors, can participate in group activities. Others believe that children should enter kindergarten knowing the alphabet, numbers to at least 20, spell their name, and be able to get along with other children. The government's main guideline is that children who are born before September 1st of the year they will be entering school, are permitted to enter kindergarten (Laidig, 1998). The impact of not having a universal guideline to follow has increased the varying degree of developmental abilities within a classroom. It also appears that each district within each state has the ability to set forth their own guidelines as to what is considered readiness for kindergarten.

Looking more specifically at the research, the beliefs seemed to vary mostly between teachers and parents. Teachers believe that a child who enters kindergarten should be physically healthy, rested and well-nourished, the ability to communicate needs, wants, and thoughts verbally, and be enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Teachers tend to not place as much importance on a child's academic skills as parents do. More and more parents are enrolling their children into preschool and daycares so their children will obtain the readiness skills to enter kindergarten. This may be due to the changing dynamics of the family or it may be due to increased attention on children and their education.

A review of current preschool and kindergarten curriculum shows that the times of napping, cutting and pasting, playing, and minimal academic work is disappearing in the classrooms and more academic curriculum has moved into its place. This may be due to the increased pressure that teachers have from upper grades that they expect the

kindergarten students to enter their classroom with the ability to read, write, and do simple mathematics. The switch from having kindergarten as an introduction into school has also been shown by more school districts moving away from half-day kindergarten to full-day kindergarten programs.

Studies have been done in the past to see if certain federally funded and community based programs for pre-kindergarten children increase their kindergarten readiness. Of these studies they have found varying conclusions as to the effectiveness of preschool programs for kindergarten readiness. Much of the research that is done looks at at-risk, poverty children and not the overall readiness of all children. They also do not explain what type of kindergarten curriculum the children are being entered into and what constituted readiness for that district. Therefore, future research should be done that looks at individual districts and their children's readiness skills. The kindergarten model that they are entering should be reviewed also. Since, there is no universal guidelines as to what is considered readiness for kindergarten studies must continue to focus on individual districts children and their benefits from preschool, daycare, or staying at home with family on their kindergarten readiness. Future research should continue to look at the impact socio-economic status and education level of parents' to show the impact that they have. These studies will continue to look at government-funded programs for pre-kindergarten readiness and the impact they have on individual districts readiness of children.

The next chapter will include the issues mentioned above to propose a study on two communities in Wisconsin and the impact that preschool, daycare, or staying at home with family has on kindergarten readiness. The participants, data collection, data

analysis, anticipated finding of the study, and limitations of the study will also be discussed. The proposed study will have findings that can be generalized to comparative communities with similar pre-kindergarten programs and kindergarten curriculums. It is hoped that the finding will also give parents, teachers, and the government information of the effectiveness of the different educational settings of pre-kindergarten children on their kindergarten readiness in Wisconsin.

Chapter III

Methodology

This chapter will consider the implications of past research as it applies to the purpose and significance of the proposed study. The methods that will be used in the proposed study will be explained. Lastly, this chapter will look the significance of the proposed study, anticipated findings, and the potential limitations of the proposed study.

Implications of the Current Literature for Future Research

The issue of kindergarten readiness is of importance to parents, teachers, and the government. The concept of what constitutes kindergarten readiness has been widely discussed between parents, teachers, the government, and professionals in the field. The beliefs of individuals have influenced what types of programs parents enroll their child in during their pre-kindergarten years, the curriculum of kindergarten, and the amount of money that is given to communities by the government to help fund some pre-kindergarten programs. As the change in kindergarten continues and the dynamics of families change so will the skills of children entering kindergarten. Therefore, it is necessary to explore what type of setting during pre-kindergarten years is most beneficial for children's kindergarten readiness skills. Past research provides evidence both for and against preschools as being beneficial for kindergarten readiness. However, these studies have not discussed the type of kindergarten curriculum that the children are entering into or looked at the effects of daycares or children staying at home with family during pre-kindergarten years has on kindergarten readiness skills.

The intent of the proposed study is to expand on past research and look at the effects of preschool, daycare, and staying at home with family has on kindergarten

readiness. It is also the intent of the proposed study to review the type of kindergarten curriculum that a child will be entering because that will impact whether or not a child is considered ready for kindergarten.

Thus, the purpose of the proposed study is multifold: 1) to examine the effectiveness of preschool, daycare, and staying at home with family on kindergarten readiness skills of children entering kindergarten; 2) to review the type of kindergarten curriculum the child is entering into; 3) to investigate the dynamics of families who's children will be entering kindergarten; 4) to explore the impact of federally funded programs for pre-kindergarten children; and, 5) to determine what is the most beneficial setting for children to be in to prepare them for kindergarten.

Based on this, the following research objectives are proposed:

1. What is the most beneficial setting for pre-kindergarten children on kindergarten readiness skills?
2. What are the changing dynamics that influence the setting in which a child is placed in during pre-kindergarten years?
3. How does kindergarten curriculum address the stated kindergarten readiness skills that children must possess?

Proposed Study

Subjects. Approximately 100 randomly selected children and their parents will be involved in the study. The participants will be both male and female approximately around the age of five. The children will come from families of varying economic status, from two rural communities in Wisconsin.

Instrumentation. There will be two different instruments that will be used in this

study. The first will be an investigator-developed questionnaire that will be given to the parents of the children. The questionnaire will be used to determine economic status and type of educational placement for their child during pre-kindergarten years. The questionnaire will also assess other demographic information such as single or two-parent family, age of parent(s), parental education, how long child was in preschool, and the presence of older siblings.

The second instrument that will be used in this study will be a kindergarten readiness test that is administered to all beginning kindergartner students. Once the two communities have been selected a copy of their kindergarten readiness test will be obtained. The instrument that will be used for the purpose of this study will be a similar test that is used in both communities. The kindergarten readiness test will be used to determine which academic and socialization skills beginner kindergartners have upon arriving for the start of their educational career. The selected children will have already been administered the readiness test.

Procedure. The method that will be used to conduct this study will be in a form of a test and a questionnaire. After obtaining informed consent, the participants will fill out the questionnaire regarding their child's pre-kindergarten educational setting. The data from the kindergarten readiness tests will then be obtained for the children. The subjects will be grouped into different categories such as, at home, instructional daycare, formal daycare, and in-home daycare. The completion of the questionnaires by parents and kindergarten readiness test of children from the two communities will make up the final sample for the study.

Data Analysis. Correlations between pre-kindergarten setting and readiness will be

examined to evaluate differences between kindergarten readiness children depending on their pre-kindergarten setting. The content of readiness tests will be reviewed and compared to determine preferred and important skills for kindergarten children to possess. Familial factors will be described and correlated with readiness to assess their bearing on preparedness. Kindergarten curriculum will be obtained and evaluated to see if and how it address skills on pre-kindergarten testing.

Significance of the Study and Anticipated Findings

The significance and anticipated findings of the proposed study are correlated with one another. The findings from the study will add to the body of knowledge in regards to kindergarten readiness and the effects of pre-kindergarten setting on children's readiness skills. This study will also help to clarify, for the communities and those similar, as to what is the most beneficial setting for children to be in before entering kindergarten. The governmentally funded programs will also be reviewed to see the significance, if any, they have on kindergarten readiness for children.

Possible limitations of the Study

In projecting into the future regarding this study there are four limitations that are foreseen. The first is that the area in which the study will be conducted will not have a multicultural basis that is representative of the U.S. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings will be minimal. They will only be able to be generalized to communities that have similar multicultural basis. The second limitation would be that there is not a wide variety of socio-economic status among the participants. Since the two communities are rural communities there is limited poverty or low socio-economic status that is representative of the general U.S. population. Again, as mentioned before, this will

lessen the amount that the findings will be able to be generalized to a larger population than that of the communities chosen. Third, the survey form is not standardized. Lastly, those that consent to participate may be subject to selection bias issues; meaning, they may be motivated to participate due to their own concerns regarding their child's kindergarten readiness.

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