THE EFFECTS OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS’ EDUCATION LEVELS ON THE ACQUISITION OF SCHOOL-READINESS SKILLS OF KINDERGARTEN-BOUND STUDENTS

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A Dissertation

by

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I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this dissertation is suitable for shelving in the library and credit is to be awarded for the dissertation.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my four greatest supporters:

Craigus Thompson Sr., my husband - This degree should really have both of our names on it. Without your support, love and encouragement I could have never achieved this lifelong dream. Thank you for your motivation and always supporting me. I truly appreciate your strength, wisdom and your courage to walk down this educational path with me without reservations. Knowing and loving you has made me a much better person. You truly complete me!

Tayla Emonee and Craigus Lorenzo, my children – Everyday God gives me breath, my only mission is to be the best mother I can be. You are my inspiration and make life worth living everyday. I strive to be a great role model for you and truly appreciate the sacrifices you have made to allow me to accomplish this dream. I hope that I have made you proud because you make me proud everyday. This degree is just an example of how hard work, dedication and a willingness to dream big always equates to success. Always remember that failure is not an option in anything you strive to do. The world is yours for the taking so go get it!

Patsy Coleman, my mother – You are amazing! Growing up, I never remember talking about college but something you did created the desire for lifelong learning. I hope that I make you proud as I strive to be a great mother like you. Thank you for always supporting me in everything I strive to do and teaching me to dream BIG!
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When I began this journey, it was just that…. a journey! I knew that there
would be pitfalls, mountains to climb and valleys along the way. Very early in this
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sacrifices. As this part of the dream becomes a reality, I further understand the
extreme value of supportive family and friends. Words cannot express the appreciation
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and pure love throughout this three-year process. Thank you is simply not enough!

For my family and friends – I truly appreciate you! I hope that my journey
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Thank you, Team Tabby! WE DID IT!
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of

THE EFFECTS OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS’ EDUCATION LEVELS ON THE ACQUISITION OF SCHOOL-READINESS SKILLS OF KINDERGARTEN-BOUND STUDENTS

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This mixed method research study examines the impact of preschool teachers’ education levels on the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. Seeking to assess the problem of kindergarten-bound students not being academically and socially prepared, 81 teacher participants completed surveys and 5 teachers participated in qualitative interviews to examine the issue. Through the use of both quantitative and qualitative data, the following two research questions were analyzed:

1. Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Bachelors degree, Associate of Arts degree and Masters degrees) regarding teacher work experience on school-readiness skills as assessed on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment?

2. Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Bachelors degree, Associate of Arts degree and Masters degrees) regarding education
level on school-readiness skills as assessed on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment?

Utilizing the systems theory (Bess and Dees, 2008) and social systems theory (Banathy, 1996), the research study examined preschool and its effects within the larger educational framework of K-12 system and higher education. The literature reviewed provided information on the higher educated teachers positively influencing school-readiness skills while other literature refuted the notion of higher educated teachers increasing the acquisition of school-readiness skills. The research study assessed the education levels and work experience of preschool teachers based on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment tool.

Overall the quantitative findings demonstrated no positive or negative effects on the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students based on the education levels of the preschool teachers. The findings further demonstrated no negative or positive effects on school-readiness skills based on the work experience of the preschool teachers. The qualitative findings from the teacher participants’ interviews indicate a perception of school-readiness skills as academic skills only excluding social skills. The findings further indicate that additional factors such as parental involvement, effective communication, environment and high quality teachers and classroom environment contribute to improve preschool programs and increased school-readiness skills. Further, the qualitative data indicates the participants’ noted
short-term benefits of preschool programs while acknowledging that kindergarten-bound students are typically successful in kindergarten and beyond. This research study concludes with recommendations for future actions as well as policy implications for the Early Childhood Education field.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The United States kindergarten-bound, public school student population embarks on an educational journey that could greatly contribute to the success or failure of the country’s future workforce. These students are preparing for their future lives as law-abiding and productive citizens. Thus, academic, career, and life-skills preparation increases their ability to contribute to the country’s overall economic sustainability and competition with foreign countries particularly as the United States’ international educational rankings decrease.

Since the launch of Sputnik in 1965, the United States has remained focused on increasing the educational achievement of American students (Urban, 2010). For example, when the Soviet Union launched an artificial satellite, the United States, under the leadership of President Eisenhower, recognized that foreign countries were surpassing the country in the science and mathematical fields (Kay, 2009). This raised concerns about the United States maintaining its position as a superpower creating the use of schools as an apparatus to achieve these goals thereby creating increased implications for school-readiness skills and educational preparation. Consequently, this fostered the increased study of math and science for college students and the government introduced the National Defense Education Act. This bill encouraged college students to study math and science with incentives from the government financial assistance with their college tuition. Legislation such as this led to a new emphasis on science and technology in American schools in the hope of getting the
United States of America back to the top of the educational rankings amongst foreign countries (Urban, 2010). For example, in 2010 the United States had an average rating for science and reading but a below average in mathematics with past scores of 487 for math, 502 in science and 500 in reading categories. The scales range from 1 to 1,000 scale points (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010).

The goal of early learners and national goals for education were originally introduced in 1989 as a result of the National Education Summit facilitated by President Bush and the Nation’s Governors (States Impact on Federal Education Policy Project, 2009). The educational panel adopted six National Education Goals of: ready to learn; school completion; student achievement and citizenship; teacher education and professional development; mathematics and science; and adult literacy and lifelong learning. The original six goals were transformed into the Goals 2000: Educate America Act which were adopted in 1994, and amended in 1996 (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000). The six educational goals became eight national goals with the additional goals focused on safer school campus and increased parental involvement (North Central Regional Education Lab, n.d.). Embedded in these goals, the concepts of teacher accountability and highly qualified teachers were intended to positively impact students’ academic success and overall achievement. Goals 2000, signed into law by President Clinton, focused on the educational success of all students as the beginning of an outcomes-based educational system in which monitoring of students’ performance was based on empirically assessments and measurable data (Calzini & Showalter, 2009).
The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was a part of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. The federal statute funded primary and secondary education and aimed to provide all students equal opportunities and fair access to a quality educational system. ESEA of 1965 was reauthorized in 2001 and became known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (Hewitt, 2011). This federal policy forced the creation of performance accountability systems for school districts which included curricular standards and goals, consequences for low-performing schools, and improvement of teacher quality (Swanson & Chaplin, 2003). Since its original development and approval, the goal of the federal policy is the improvement of the educational system by improving K-12 students’ standardized test scores, course grades, and college preparation.

**Teacher Qualifications**

NCLB currently requires elementary through high school teachers to meet the following criteria to be classified as Highly Qualified Teachers: have at least a bachelor’s degree; and full state certification; and demonstrate subject-matter competency in the core academic subjects assigned (United Stated Department of Education, 2004). The core academic subjects are defined as English, Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Civics and Government, Economics, Arts, Foreign Language, History, Geography and Self-Contained/Elementary Multiple subjects.

The Highly Qualified Teacher stipulation created a baseline in which the teachers must meet and/or exceed the three eligibility requirements to teach in Title 1
school districts receiving federal funding. The federal law further provided flexibility for state and local school districts to determine the educational pathways to satisfy the subject matter competency requirement in which some states adopted curriculum-specific assessment tests for teachers, while other states measured competency by the equivalency of college credits earned in the particular major, or a major in the respective subject (Association of Texas Professional Educators, n.d.). For example, science teachers with a Bachelor in Science degree or teachers with sixty units of science in the post secondary setting were deemed competent based on their college course work; therefore, no additional subject-matter testing was required to meet the federal mandates.

State education agencies were also permitted to utilize the High, Objective, Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) pathway to satisfy the competency requirement with current teachers demonstrating mastery through the use of teaching experience, professional development and knowledge obtained through work experience (National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Center for the Education of Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At Risk, n.d.). This pathway permitted current teachers with verifiable work experience to continue teaching in their respective subject without having to complete other competency assessments or coursework. Individual states were authorized to develop an objective system demonstrating current teachers’ compliance of subject matter competency. For example, New York developed a personnel form in which current teachers can simply indicate their compliance with the competency requirements by scoring points for
education/credentials, work experience and professional development hours which satisfies the highly qualified teacher requirement (New York State Education Department, n.d.). As each state has a state-specific criteria, Florida awards two points per year of work experience, while North Dakota awards three points for every year of work experience (Education Commission of States, n.d.). These two states are examples of the vast differences being implemented at the state level to document and satisfy the subject matter competency related to the No Child Left Behind Act. Depending on the state, teachers may demonstrate varied levels of experience to successfully complete the HOUSEE criteria requirements.

These various avenues for meeting NCLB requirements provided states and local districts with the flexibility to tailor these requirements to their respective states and to student needs with additional requirements for the middle and high school settings. NCLB provided further guidance for meeting the eligibility criteria and each state had the authority to determine which grades constituted elementary and middle school (United States Department of Education, 2004). The states deemed which grades were considered appropriate for middle school and the middle school teachers were required by the state’s educational agency to pass a rigorous state-approved test of their core academic subjects, have a degree in the respective major or college units equal to having a major in the core content area. For example, an eighth grade algebra teacher must have the same skills and knowledge whether teaching in an elementary or middle school setting.
NCLB and Preschool Education

The emphasis of improved teacher quality was addressed by NCLB for elementary, middle and high school teachers; however, preschool teachers were not addressed in the federal law as preschool is not typically deemed a part of the elementary school system. Preschool programs were not forced to abide by any regulatory guidelines for educational requirements nationwide, thereby causing inconsistencies with the education requirements for preschool teachers throughout the Early Childhood Education field. The lack of preschool teacher qualifications in the federal policy and requirements from the federal government creates various inconsistencies in implementing educational pathways for preschool teachers. For example, an employer can employ preschool teachers without any formal education, while another employer may choose to only hire teachers with Bachelors degrees. An example of these inconsistencies are Arizona, California and Minnesota requiring state issued child development; the states of Alabama, Texas and West Virginia requiring at least Bachelor degrees while the states of Iowa, Virginia and New Mexico do not have any formal education requirements (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2011).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 focus of highly qualified teachers and teacher accountability was also a highlight when the federal law was implemented. Attempting to hold teachers, administrators, local school districts and state education agencies accountable for student progress and achievement scores, the federal law required reporting of schools’ performance to parents, the community and ultimately
the federal government (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010). The reporting of information included test scores, overall school performance targets, and any teachers who do not meet the highly qualified teacher criteria. Under the new law, any schools not achieving the performance standards, especially with the subgroups of minority students, English language learners and lower socioeconomic students, were also required to develop a plan of action for improvement.

**National Goals and Preschool Preparation**

With the national goal of all students attending school ready to learn, preschool and its impact on learning became a focal point for national attention (Vinovskis, 2008). It was in the early 2000s that the federal Head Start programs’ funding increased and the services spread across the country as the premiere funding source for majority of the preschool programs in the country (Deming, 2009). Between 1965 and 2011, the federal preschool program has provided services to over 30 million students of lower socioeconomic status families, mainly minority students (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2011). In 2007, Head Start adopted the Improving Head Start for School-readiness Act of 2007 for preschool students in alignment with the already adopted goals associated with NCLB Act of 2001 (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2011). The framework outlined five major areas of development to ensure students are ready to learn as they enter school. The five areas are as follows:
Social and Emotional Development

- maintaining positive adult-child relationships;
- developing positive interactions with peers and teachers;
- regulating behavior and emotional regulation;
- following classroom rules and routines, and
- developing of self confidence.

Language Development and Literacy

- building and comprehending varied and complex vocabulary;
- using and comprehending oral language communication;
- understanding print concepts;
- demonstrating competency in home language while increasing English proficiency for dual language learners

Approaches to Learning

- providing varied activities, materials and information;
- increasing creativity and independence in various topics and activities

Cognition and General Knowledge

- utilizing mathematic skills in everyday routines to count, compare, relate, identify patterns and problem solve;
- developing hypothesis and making predictions by utilizing information and activities in their surroundings; and
- increasing their own thinking and utilizing skills to remember information
Physical Well-Being and Motor Development

- controlling large muscles for movement, navigation and balance;
- controlling small muscles for utilizing utensils, self-care, writing, building and manipulation of varied materials; and
- identification and practice of healthy and safe habits.

With the adoption of the Improving Head Start for School-readiness Act of 2007 and the five development areas, the Federal Office of Head Start provided federally-funded programs with an outline of the critical areas needed to implement quality preschool programs to improve students’ academic and social competence skills. Each state tailored the five development areas to their particular programs, and developed plans to incorporate the School-readiness Act into their respective programs. California developed the Preschool Learning Frameworks (PLF) and there are currently two volumes with the third volume scheduled for a Spring 2013 release (California Education Department, 2008). The first volume of the curriculum framework addresses the four learning domains of social-emotional development; language and literacy; English-language development; and mathematics. The second volume addresses the domains of visual and performing arts; physical development; and health. The third volume will address social science/history and science.

The state-specific frameworks provide early childhood educators and administrators with strategies and information for curriculum planning, observation and assessment process, ongoing monitoring cycles and curriculum implementation (California Department of Education, 2010b). Each curriculum volume is developed
based on the following guiding principles: relationships are central; play is a primary context for learning; learning is integrated; intentional teaching enhances children’s learning experiences; family and community partnerships create meaningful connections; individualization of learning includes all children; responsiveness to culture and language supports children’s learning; and time for reflection and planning enhances teaching. The aim of the eight key principles is to promote the learning and development of preschool students as part of the school-readiness goals.

Much like the assessment systems and the accountability process within the K-12 arena, California has also developed a process to measure the achievement of school-readiness skills by kindergarten-bound students. The assessment tool utilized to measure the academic and social competence skills of kindergarten-bound students is the Desired Results Developmental Profile–Revised (DRDP-R) (California Department of Education, 2010a). In 2010, the Desired Results Developmental Profile – Preschool edition was created to assess the school-readiness skills of three to five-year olds. This assessment tool is widely utilized in California’s public preschool programs and the California Department of Education requires every program to complete the assessment twice per year as a condition of obtaining their state funds. The assessment tool is divided into seven developmental domains (i.e. self and social development, language and literacy development, English language development, cognitive development, mathematical development, health and physical development). Within the domains, there are 43 measures that align with the overarching domain. For example, in the social-emotional domain the measures include relationships with
adults, conflict negotiation and impulse control. The preschool teacher or assessor rates the student’s abilities based on the four development level of exploring, developing, building and integrating. Through the use of teacher observation, anecdotal notes and collaboration with others, the teacher assesses each preschool student. The goal of integration denotes a level of skill mastery for the preschool students of the respective measure within the domain.

Preschool Access, Funding, and Increased Demand

Prior to the NCLB law and a child’s fifth birthday, participation in an educational setting was not a common practice as preschool was thought to only be for highly educated and financially capable families who could afford the program tuition fees. The enrollment of preschool students was decreased due to the higher cost of private preschool programs and the lack of available state and federally funded preschool services (Bartik, 2011). Yet, the notion of accountability and emphasis on school-readiness skills, private and publicly-funded preschool programs funded through federal and state programs increased in California due to the greater demand for preschool services.

The California Department of Education appropriated $2.5 billion for child development programs for over 500,000 children in 2009, drastically increasing the number of preschool students and services accessible for the average family (California Department of Education, 2007). In 2005, 57% of American children ages 3-5 attended center-based early childhood programs (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). Since 2009, three to five-year-old children in the country are more
likely than ever to be enrolled in classroom-based preschool programs (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009).

With the drastic increase of preschool students and the usage of tax dollars, data collection and information related to the value of these educational services has also increased with an emphasis on accountability. The initial data provided evidence that a child’s participation in a quality preschool setting could positively affect school-readiness skills, as well as the child’s social, emotional and educational outcomes in their future years (McClelland et al., 2007). With this data, the importance of preschool was beginning to be recognized, and educators and policy makers began to understand the need to ensure that kindergarten-bound students had a quality and educational preschool experience.

The issue of preschool teachers’ level of education and its effect on preschool students’ readiness skills could affect many incoming kindergarten students as this student population has increased since the late 1990s both nationwide and in California. Within the United States of America, the enrollment of kindergarten students rose from 3.10 million in 1998 to 3.57 million in 2008 in public preschool programs (United States Census Bureau, 2008). In 2010-2011, California had 471,981 students enrolled in kindergarten classes through the public education system in 58 counties (California Department of Education, 2010b). With the preschool services being provided to such a large population, there became a need to document and determine the benefits of such services especially the federally and state-funded programs using tax dollars. For example, during the 1960s the High/Scope Perry
Preschool Programs was one of the first social experiments to capture statistical data of the positive effects preschool contributed to in the later adult years (American Youth Policy Forum, 1993). Utilizing control and test groups of 123 preschool students in Michigan tracked at ages 15, 23, 27 and 40 years old, the experiment concluded that preschool students attending two full school years cost society an estimated $12,356 compared to students without preschool experience at $88,433. The higher costs were associated with positive results related to the following: higher monthly income and employment rates, less children out of wedlock, fewer arrests, increased high school graduation rates and less use of the government’s social services system. The societal cost included public funds spent on social services including the criminal justice system, welfare system and special education services and the added benefits of higher taxation from increased income levels. The project’s final results determined that cost analysis benefit was a return of $7.16 for every $1 spent on the preschool services. The High/Scope Perry preschool project was a study which documented the long-term benefits of preschool services.

With the use of federal funds and tax dollars to implement the Head Start program, the costs and benefits of the educational program were also analyzed (Garces, Thomas, & Currie, 2000). These researchers’ compared Head Start students to their siblings whom did not receive preschool services. The results concluded the following: the test group of white Head Start students are about 22% more likely to complete high school than their siblings who attended another type of preschool or did not attend at all; the White test group of Head Start students are about 19% more
likely to attend some college than their siblings; the African American Head Start students are about 12% less likely to be arrested and charged with a crime as compared to their control group siblings. Those findings depict the long term benefits of preschool services for kindergarten-bound students and demonstrate the need for quality preschool programs that include an alignment of preschool teachers’ education levels.

The societal benefits associated with increased high school graduation rates, higher employment rates and less reliance on the public’s social services systems creates the need for a continued national focus on education reform including the improvement of the early childhood education system. With the election of President Barack Obama, the emphasis of major education reform and strengthening of the services provided during the first five years of child development continued. Announced in 2011, jointly by the United Stated Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services, the federal agencies challenged every state to compete for federal funds by submit grant application outlining a comprehensive plan to improve their early childhood education programs (United States Department of Education, 2012). The action plans included strategies to align and raise standards for existing early childhood development programs; improve training and support for early childhood educators through evidence-based practices; increase the number of infants, toddlers and preschool students served in programs; create effective evaluation systems and improve family engagement initiatives that promote effective practices and programs to help parents make informed decisions.
about their child’s educational future. California, along with eight other states, was awarded a four-year grant of $52.6 million starting January 2012 through December 2015 to implement the comprehensive plan (Weingarten, 2012). The action plan will focus on the following three tiers: child development and readiness for school; teachers and how they teach and interact with young children; and program and classroom environment. Recognizing the need to tailor the early childhood programs to specific geographical areas, the California Department of Education will collaborate with Consortia, a collection of seventeen lead agencies in sixteen counties, to ensure the federal funds are utilized at the county level to implement the tiers. Some of the Consortia’s specific goals include increasing the online training materials for the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales (ECERS) and the Preschool Learning Foundations (PLF); and collaborating with community colleges and universities to increase Early Childhood Education courses related to students with special needs, infant and toddler emphasis and program administration. The tier’s focus of student-teacher interactions and teaching practices may contribute to increased school-readiness skills of the kindergarten-bound students as a quality preschool education and experience involves multiple components including safe environments and meaningful relationships (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012).

Within the Early Childhood Education field, there are multiple pathways to obtain formal education and professional growth for ongoing learning experiences. After the traditional high school setting, individuals can continue their post secondary education in various educational settings. For individuals wishing to work with
preschool students, the main educational institutions are the community colleges or universities. This community college setting can be utilized to obtain child development permits or Associate of Arts degrees. From a local community college, an Associate of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education (ECE) can be obtained after completion of 60 college units with at least 24 units in the ECE major. Typically the Associate of Arts degree is a two-year program for full time students.

The next level of preschool teacher education is the obtainment of the Child Development Teacher permit. This permit is a part of the accreditation standards in the National Association for Education of Young Children (Neuman, & Copple, Bredekamp, 2000). While a national education standard, each state has specific requirements for obtaining child development permits. The permits are issued by the state agency responsible for teacher credentialing such as the Commission of Teacher Credentialing (CTCC). Within California, there are six different child development permits based on the education level of the preschool teacher. The various child development permits are: the Assistant Child Development permit (6 college units); Associate Teacher permit (12 college units); Teacher permit (24 college units); Master Teacher permit (24 college units); Site Supervisor (60 college units); and the Program Director permit (Bachelor degree). Each permit level authorizes the licensee to perform higher levels of supervisory duties and responsibilities. For example, a teacher with a Teacher child development permit can supervise a teacher with an Associate Teacher permit (Commission of Teacher Credentialing, 2012).
Within the preschool arena of Early Child Education, a preschool teacher can attend an university or college to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree by the completing 120 college units. The completion of 50 college units within the Early Childhood Education field is required for the ECE major. Various classes include Child and Adolescent Development, Social and Emotional Development and History of Childhood. It should be further noted that advanced degrees in ECE including Masters of Arts are also available at the university setting. With the increased use of technology, additional programs via online resources are also becoming widely utilized to further educational goals within the Early Childhood Education field. The online courses offer opportunities for Early Childhood Education educators to complete coursework to earn their degrees while enjoying the flexibility of class scheduling without barriers such as overcrowded classes, transportation and parking.

The United States’ educational system continues to struggle with the achievement gap and underperforming students. In 2009 and 2011, the achievement gap data showed that black and Hispanic students trailed their white peers by an average of more than 20 test points on the NAEP math and reading assessments at 4th and 8th grades, a difference of about two grade levels (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). Even with accountability systems and superficial interventions such as reading and curriculum programs without evidence based results, minority students continue to underperform relative to their white counterparts. The view of the country’s failing educational system includes decreased graduation rates; increased high school student drop out rates as well as lower standardized test scores
The concern of underprepared kindergarten students continues to be an issue in the United States, especially for minority students and students deemed “at-risk” based on factors such as the family’s income level. For example, four-year old Black, Hispanic and American Indians students demonstrated lower percentage of proficiency in various cognitive skills than did their peers who were White, Asian, or of more than one race (Institute of Education Sciences, 2009). The same statistical report shows only 55% of Black 4-year old, Hispanics (51%), and American Indians/Alaska Natives (40%) were proficient in numbers and shapes, compared with Whites (73%), Asians (81%), and children of more than one race (65%) upon entering kindergarten (Institute of Education Sciences, 2009). In sum, the quality of preschool programs and factors that contribute to kindergarten bound students’ success could lead to additional benefits in the larger educational system within our country.

**Critical Factors**

**Student-Teacher Relationships**

For this study, the quality of preschool programs and the experience of kindergarten-bound students are assessed through the two critical factors of relationships and environment. Relationships can be generically defined as a significance connection between two or more things, being related or interrelated. This established connection could be based on various factors such as emotional connection, business related goals or relatedness due to kinship or marriage. When this researcher discusses relationships, typically it relates to the connections between
teachers and students, teachers and parents or parents and students. The impact of the relationships was examined through narrative data from teacher interviews within the three educational groups. Questions related to how their postsecondary experience influences their teaching practices, the teacher’s perception of preschool benefits and factors that contribute to school-readiness skills will be addressed.

**Environment**

The environment referenced in this study included various aspects of the preschool program. Environment includes the arrangement of space both indoors and outdoors, the materials and activities offered to the children, the supervision and interactions (including language) that occur in the classroom, and the schedule of the day, including routines and activities. The physical environment relates to the actual classroom space utilized by the preschool students which are divided into functional areas such as dramatic play, writing areas, reading sections and large group/circle time areas. Within the physical environment, all materials, supplies, furniture and educational toys are included as a part of the physical environment. The environment also includes the outdoor environment of the playground area associated with the preschool program. This can be the program’s sophisticated playground structures of slides, swings, monkey bars or as simple as a large grassy area for organized group or free play. The environment also includes the classroom’s schedule of daily activities and routines within the preschool program. These aspects of the environment in a preschool program could play a significant role in the development of academic and social competence skills of kindergarten bound students.
**Problem Statement**

The role of the preschool teachers’ education levels and the effect on school-readiness skills are explored in this dissertation. School-readiness skills include both academic concepts and social competence skills for the kindergarten-bound students. For this dissertation, the issue of whether or not preschool students’ are academically or socially equipped upon entry into kindergarten is researched. The dissertation study focuses on the effects that the preschool teachers’ education level has on the school-readiness skills of their kindergarten-bound students. The dissertation also includes in-depth interviews of six preschool teachers from the three education groups to inquire about their strategies and techniques utilized to foster increased school-readiness skills within their respective classrooms. The study includes approximately 83 current preschool teachers from public preschool programs in the Sacramento County area. Data from the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R), a pre-existing assessment tool, is utilized to analyze the research questions.

The research questions that are evaluated by this dissertation are:

1. Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Bachelors degree, Associate of Arts degree and Child Development permit) regarding teacher work experience on school-readiness skills as assessed on the six domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile Revised (DRDP-R) assessment?

2. Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Bachelors degree, Associate of Arts degree and Child Development permit) regarding
education level on school-readiness skills as assessed on the six domains of
the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R)
assessment?

This study focuses on the acquisition of school-readiness skills for
kindergarten-bound students and the effects of the preschool teachers’ education levels
on acquiring skills related to academic and social competence. The preschool teachers’
education levels as it pertains to critical factors such as the preschool environment and
student-teacher relationship is researched. This dissertation seeks to determine if the
level of education for the primary classroom teacher affects the critical factors that
contribute to the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. This study
also provides information about additional factors that may contribute to the
educational success of preschool students and factors that contribute to quality
preschool programs. This study seeks to determine the relationship of a preschool
teacher’s education level on factors that affect the school-readiness skills of preschool
students. The critical factors may contribute to early interventions that could lead to
overall improvement in the country’s educational system for kindergarten through post
secondary students. The identification of critical variables and factors that produce
academic and social/emotional development may lead to the implementation of quality
preschool programs that may benefit all enrolled preschool students.

Methodology and Data Analysis

Through the use of quantitative research design of ANOVA data analysis, this
dissertation focuses on three teacher groups: teachers with Bachelors degrees; teachers
with Associate of Arts degrees; and teachers with state-issued child development permits.

This dissertation evaluates the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Bachelors degree, Associate of Arts degree and Child Development permit) regarding teacher work experience on school-readiness skills as assessed on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment?

2. Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Bachelors degree, Associate of Arts degree and Child Development permit) regarding education level on school-readiness skills as assessed on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment?

**Theoretical Framework**

For this dissertation study, the systems theory with emphasis on the Social Systems Theory is utilized as the theoretical frameworks to assess the effects of preschool teachers’ education level on the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students.

**Systems Theory**

“System theory comprises a broad conceptual framework that permits the identification of key inputs, outputs, and transformative processes in organizations such as colleges and universities at both the institutional and individual levels” (Bess
For over 50 years systems theory has been used in the fields of sciences, mathematics, social sciences, and communication. General systems theory is often used to explain natural and social phenomena occurring within organizations whereas social systems theory is used to explain behavior of individuals within the system (Bess & Dee, 2008a). More specifically, social systems theory is useful in “understanding how human beings as bounded systems interact with their environment” (pp. 109-110). Conversely, general systems theory can be used to solve broad complex problems. For this study, the social systems theory involves the preschool program as a system with the interrelated parts of the teachers, parents, preschool environment components, community and the students. These components of the preschool systems are the key inputs that can cause changes throughout the entire system. For example, the preschool teacher’s interactions with students will directly affect the output of parent-teacher relationship. If teachers have a positive relationship with the student then the output of teacher-parent relationship will also be positively affected. Another example is a negative preschool environment of classroom management issues, behavior concerns, inconsistent daily routines and lack of parental involvement creating a negative output of tarnished teacher-student and/or teacher-parent relationships. Those are two examples of how the key inputs of environment and personal interactions contribute to the overall outputs related to the entire system. These key inputs are affected by the preschool teachers’ education level, professional development experiences and relevant training. As each of the three teacher groups have varying post secondary experience, the interaction with students
and parents, classroom management skills and teaching practices will also greatly vary. Depending upon the pathway of education taken by the preschool teacher, age appropriate practices maybe employed to effectively establish relationships and provide effective teaching strategies for school-readiness skills.

As school leaders in the education field work to understand and explain human behavior, often systems theory is employed to analyze their complex institutions and societies. Both the organization and the individuals operate within a system. The system is comprised of elements that are interrelated and work to carry out particular functions that are in alignment with the organization’s goals. Systems can be as large as a university system, or as small as a two member academic team. Since the components of each system are dependent on each other, changes to one impact others. Within this study, the changing components are the preschool teachers’ education levels. The study assesses how changes to the education levels will impact the school-readiness skills of the kindergarten-bound students. This study also inquires about additional factors that may contribute to the quality of the overall preschool program as well as contribute to increased academic and social competence skills of kindergarten-bound students.

Bess and Dee (2008a) describe the often-unintended consequences that occur if one component of a system changes. For example, if a preschool program changes the academic curriculum, it may impact academic skills initially. This unintended consequence maybe caused by adoption of new curriculum, inadequately trained teachers, insufficient professional development opportunities or other unforeseen
reasons. The decreased academic skills are the result of a changed systems’ component causing negative impact although the adoption of the new curriculum was intended to improve the curricular component of the preschool program. Within this dissertation study, the entire system of the education system is drastically changed when changes are made to any part of the system. Another example of unintended consequences is if a preschool program changes either the number of students permitted to enroll increase or the eligible age of the students. The system, as an educational setting, would be forced to change such elements as the physical environment, curriculum expectations, teacher credentials, etc. to accommodate the system change although the primary reason for the change was to increase enrollment. These unintended consequences may influence teachers differently from the three groups depending on their training and work experience. As in the previously mentioned example, a Bachelors degree teacher with an emphasis in Early Childhood Education may already have the necessary coursework, classroom management techniques and background knowledge to effectively teach more and various age groups while the Child Development Permit teacher group only specialized in the infant/toddler age group through the completion of the twelve college units.

Systems theory has both advantages and limitations. Bess and Dee (2008a) describe the following three advantages to using systems theory:

1. The ability to make generalizations about an organization or individual,
2. The ability to focus on essential elements in organizations, and

3. A straightforward and useful diagnostic device. (p. 92).

Within this study, the essential elements of the school-readiness skills and preschool teachers’ education levels are assessed. Through the use of the pre-existing assessment tool, DRDP-R and evaluation of the education levels, the study focuses on the essential elements of the school-readiness skills and the critical factors of relationships and environment to determine the overall effect on the preschool educational outcomes of the kindergarten-bound students. This study utilizes the systems theory to make generalizations about the students’ outcome, both academically and socially, based on the preschool teachers’ education levels. For example, utilizing the systems theory may permit this researcher to determine if the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students are increased when the preschool teachers’ level of education is a Bachelors degree with an emphasis in Early Childhood Education. The use of the systems theory in this study also creates situations in which the key input of preschool teachers’ education level is altered and the direct effects can be analyzed through the use of the school-readiness skills data. For example, Child Development permit teachers with specific coursework in Early Childhood Education may have not have equivalent coursework in developing the math skills of preschool students therefore causing decreased mathematical skills in their respective classrooms. This difference in teacher education levels is caused by variations in the preschool teacher educational
pathways in which different programs have vastly different requirements for preschool teacher position.

Bess and Dee (2008a) also identify the following limitations: (a) the inability to make precise predictions of future events in higher education; (b) inability to intervene favorably to solve organizational problems, and (c) difficulty in immediate effectiveness in understanding, predicting, and influencing individual behavior. Within this study, the use of multiple teachers from various preschool sites limits the effectiveness of the social systems theory. The diverse preschool teachers with different teaching approaches, different intervention strategies and different relationship building techniques create an inability to predict individual’s behaviors due to the varied teaching approach within their respective classroom settings. For example, a teacher assessing a student on the DRDP-R measure of empathy might score a particular student as exploring the skill while another teacher may score the same student as integrating the skills masterfully. The systems theory’s limitation of predicting individual behavior is greatly related to the unpredictability of people especially children who are beginning to acquire social, academic, language and self care skills. The social systems theory’s limitations are further related to the background knowledge of the teachers from the three groups in which the respective educational pathways may not have fully developed their skills to effectively assess components such as social skills of preschool teachers.

A system can be viewed as a set of interrelated, interactive, and independent components. The relationship between each component provides structure that aids in
the organization being able to carry out necessary functions as well as maintaining the system’s health in its environment (Bess & Dee, 2008a). For these reasons, systems theory is helpful for analyzing both the behavior of an organization and the individuals within the organization.

Additionally, Bess & Dee (2008a) argue that systems are separated from their environment by boundaries:

The boundary is that part of a system that separates it from other systems, allows the system to define its identity, provides protection for the system through its filtering or selection mechanism, and acts as a point of contact and exchange with other systems in the environment. (p. 95)

While systems are separated by boundaries, Bess and Dee (2008a) explains that the different parts of a system must be organized to provide for effective functioning. There are four “organizational prerequisites” that must be attended to:

1. Adaptation – the exchanges that occur between a system and its environment.

2. Goal attainment – the ability for an organization to reach a stable relationship with its environment where both can achieve desired goals.

3. Integration – mutual support and collaboration between a system and environment that helps move toward achievement of common goals.

4. Latency – stability and continuity among system components that allows for organized activities within a system. (Bess & Dee, 2008a, p. 108)
Within this dissertation study, the educational system is greatly affected by the organizational prerequisites. The preschool teacher and their classroom environment must adapt to the preschool site in which the classroom is situated which are affected by numerous factors such as parental involvement, funding sources and program quality. The educational system, operating as an organized system involving inputs and outputs, has the goal of educating all students. The inputs of various stakeholders (parents, teachers, administration and students) must be in alignment to achieve the desired results of positive school-readiness skills. For example, preschool teachers acquiring the most beneficial preparation program will best suit the kindergarten-bound students by having the necessary teaching strategies to increase the school-readiness skills of the students. The additional inputs of parents can assist with the overall goal by increasing their participation in the classroom setting, assisting with homework and communicating effectively with the preschool teacher. Within the systems theory, the goal attainment of educating all students will be more easily accomplished with the alignment of the inputs (i.e. teachers, parents, etc.). For the effective functioning of the preschool program as a system, the preschool teachers’ education level must contribute to the school-readiness skills of the kindergarten-bound students by effectively accomplishing all four prerequisites for the benefit of increased school-readiness skills of the kindergarten-bound students.

Social Systems Theory

Originally coined by Banathay (1996) as the abstracted systems, later Bess and Dee (2008a) described it as the social systems theory in which “a self-contained set of
concepts that fits within general systems theory and can be useful in understanding how human beings as bounded system interact with their environments” (Bess & Dee, 2008a, p.109). Social systems theory’s basic premise is that the individual’s behavior (B) is a function (f) of the person’s (p) interaction with his/her environment (E): B = f(E, P) (Bess & Dee, 2008a). For instance, a decrease in a college enrollment is not solely due to the failure of the part of the admission administrator. Social systems theory suggests that one is to look at the environment that may have impacted the individual student for not wanting to enroll. The social system model uses two parallel tracks to explain human behaviors known as the nomothetic and idiographic (Bess & Dee, 2008a). The nomothetic track consists of the forces external to the individual and it consists of three interrelated parts such as organization, roles, and expectations. The idiographic track also consists of three elements to describe the individual’s behavior as follows: personality, individual beliefs, and need dispositions. Therefore, a person’s behavior depends on the degree the environment has on the individual and how much the individual’s personality is affected by the organization (Bess & Dee, 2008a).

Within this dissertation study, the social systems were the relationships of the various parts of the system. The system is identified as the preschool setting within the public and private education system. The social systems within the system are the relationships between various stakeholders including the teacher-student relationship, the parent-teacher relationship, parent-child relationship and the student-student relationship. For example, a preschool teacher with a Bachelors degree in Early Childhood Education may have more experience establishing relationships with the
parents and students creating a more conducive learning environment compared to a teacher with a Child Development permit without any knowledge of relationship building techniques. This difference in coursework and training could have effects on the relationship between the teacher and child. In addition, the educational differences could effects on the instructional practices provided to the kindergarten-bound students as the preschool teacher with less education may not have effective teaching strategies to ensure the school-readiness skills are acquired. These educational differences in the preschool teachers will ultimately affect the overall relationship as well as other social systems within the entire system.

**Operational Definitions**

For this research proposal, there are many operational definitions that require clear descriptions to ensure consistent use and understanding by all readers:

**Environment:** The environment includes the arrangement of space both indoors and outdoors, the materials and activities offered to the children, the supervision and interactions (including language) that occur in the classroom, and the schedule of the day, including routines and activities.

**Federal preschool program:** academically focused education settings in which federal funds are provided by the Federal government for implementation and delivery of services (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 1998).

**Postsecondary college experience:** any coursework attempted or completed after high school graduation or GED attainment at a community college or university setting.
**Preschool programs**: educational programs that emphasize learning and development through structured play and exploration (California Department of Education, 2008).

**Preschool students**: children ages three to five years old who actively participate in an educationally appropriate preschool program. Preschool students were also referred to as kindergarten bound students throughout this dissertation study.

**Preschool teachers**: early childhood educators who primarily work with students between the ages of three and five years old.

**Private preschool programs**: academically focused preschool setting in which state neither federal funds are provided any state or federal government agencies. Typically these programs are funded through parents’ paying tuition fees directly to the program.

**Relationships**: Connection between the stakeholders in the school system (i.e. teacher-student, teacher-parent, parent-student including the contribution to school climate, school bonding and positive orientation to school (Libbey, 2009).

**School-readiness skills**: students’ abilities upon entry into an official kindergarten class. According to the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, the skills are not merely academic abilities but also social capabilities and motor skills.

**Social and emotional development**: The process whereby children are able to acknowledge and manage their emotions, recognize the emotions of others, develop
empathy, make good decisions, establish positive friendships and handle challenges and situations effectively (Albright, Weissberg, & Dusenbury, 2011).

**Social learning theory:** the ability to learn from others in social settings through the use of modeling, imitation and observation (Bandura, 1997).

**State funded preschool program:** academically focused education settings in which state funds are provided by the state education agency for implementation and delivery of services (California Department of Education, 2008).

These streamlined definitions are utilized throughout the dissertation study to determine how the teachers’ amount of formal education affects students’ outcome as it relates to their school-readiness skills and social/emotional development among entry into kindergarten. These definitions are consistently utilized throughout the dissertation study.

**Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations**

The researcher assumes the following facts based on self-reporting of the preschool teachers:

Preschool teachers legally obtained the college degrees or state issued child development permits;

Preschool teachers will truthfully self-report their work experience and opportunities provided for parental involvement on the survey;

This dissertation study is limited to the preschool settings and preschool students within the Sacramento County school system in the State of California;
This dissertation study is based on approximately eighty three preschool teachers within the state and federally funded preschool programs in the Sacramento County area of California. The participating teachers are from various preschool sites within the surrounding Sacramento area.

This quantitative analysis is considered weak because it is based on the analysis of approximately eighty three preschool teachers. The dissertation study involved approximately 83 preschool classes, totaling approximately 2650 kindergarten bound students which are about 13.8% of the 19,117 kindergarten students in the Sacramento County area of California (California Department of Education, 2011). The smaller sample size did not permit the researcher to generalize the findings to a larger population therefore limiting the strength of the dissertation according to research standards. Although the dissertation is considered weak, the information obtained is valuable to the early childhood education field by providing information on how to adequately staff high quality preschool programs.

This dissertation study may only be generalized to the preschool settings within the state of California only and not other states due to the educational requirements being state-specific guidelines.

This dissertation study is limited to preschool teachers with Bachelor degrees, Associate of Arts degrees or state-issued child development permits only.

Although previous studies have shown a positive correlation for high school students with quality preschool experiences, this dissertation is not capable of addressing the long-term results due to the shortened length of data analysis.
Significance of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine whether preschool teachers’ level of postsecondary college experience has an effect on critical factors that contribute to school-readiness skills of academic achievement and social/emotional development. The targeted audience for this dissertation is all involved stakeholders in the education field. The information may be utilized to develop the framework for the educational needs of an ideal preschool teacher whom will effectively educate the kindergarten-bound students. The creation of a model for the best preschool experience for the kindergarten-bound students could also be created from information obtained in this study. The information from this dissertation can be utilized by education policy makers and education advocates to solicit additional funding for preschool teachers’ credentialing and training programs. The results of the dissertation may be utilized by preschool administrators and school districts’ Human Resources Departments to determine what educational requirements will be established for their preschool teaching staff.

Preschool teachers will also benefit from the dissertation as empirical data will be presented on whether additional schooling has any impact on their teaching ability or if other factors such as developing relationships with their students may also foster academic success and social development. The findings and conclusion will further assist preschool teachers in determining how to best meet the needs of their preschool students and whether post-secondary experience will be relevant to school-readiness skills. Preschool teachers will further be provided with information on what critical
factors will be essential to the implementation of successful and developmentally appropriate practices for their future preschool students to ensure academic success and social/emotional development.

Parents will also benefit from the dissertation as it will provide information that will be useful in the selection of preschool programs. The findings and conclusion will provide parents with further information on how to appropriately assess and determine preschool placements for their children. The analysis of the critical factors and teacher’s education levels will provide empirical data on which factors should be sought after when selecting an appropriate preschool setting for their three to five year old child.

The findings and conclusion of this dissertation study will also identify which critical factors can be improved and increased to promote the educational success of preschool students entering kindergarten. The identification of these factors will assist with the implementation and framework for how to design preschool programs that will provide academic outcomes and social/emotional development skills for kindergarten bound students.

Lastly, with the Achievement Gap and failing public school system in the United States, the identification of the critical factors for kindergarten-bound students will permit educational advocates and key educational leaders with empirical data and findings for continued advocacy for additional state and federal funding to increase preschool services for not just low income families but any family desiring a
productive head start to their child’s educational journey (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2008).

**Conclusion**

The dissertation study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1, the Introduction, provides a clear statement of the problem of too many ill prepared kindergarten bound students and brief summary of the literature review. The first chapter also provides the significance of the study with specific research questions and an outline of the theoretical framework including the Systems and Social Systems theories. Chapter 1 concludes with a summary of operational definitions for specific vocabulary terms such as federal preschool program, social and emotional development as well as preschool teachers along with an extensive review of the dissertation study limitations.

Chapter 2 provides an extensive review of relevant and current articles and literature materials related to the dissertation topic of preschool teacher education levels and kindergarten bound students’ school-readiness skills and social/emotional development. A review of additional literature related to other factors such as environment, educational level and teacher/student relationships will also be reviewed through relevant literature materials.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology process for the dissertation process. This section provides an extensive summary of the research design and the researcher’s justification for the research approach. Within the chapter, a discussion of Sacramento California as setting and eighty three preschools teachers as the sampling size is provided. The predetermined assessment tool is fully described
and reviewed within this chapter as well as an extensive discussion of the data collection process. Chapter 3 provides information on the measures taken by the researcher to ensure adequate protection of the participants’ rights by utilizing the appropriate IRB Human Review process established by the California State University, Sacramento.

Chapter 4 of this dissertation provides the analysis of the data collected during the data collection process. This chapter provides tables and figures which clearly depict the findings of the data collected as well as adequately address any inconsistencies observed during the data collection process.

Chapter 5 of this dissertation concludes with a thorough analysis of the researcher’s interpretation of the findings and recommendations for future actions. The researcher provides details on how this dissertation study can provide additional insight for future studies as well as generate additional questions that may need further discussion.

During the dissertation and data collection process, the researcher’s findings determined if higher levels of preschool teacher education levels directly correlates to higher academic achievement and the social/emotional development of preschool students who are kindergarten-bound.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

For this dissertation, an extensive review of current and relevant literature related to the topic of preschool teachers and education levels has been conducted. The literature reviewed for this dissertation depicts diverse findings on the impact of the educational level of preschool teachers, and the effects on school-readiness skills for kindergarten-bound students. The purpose of the literature review will be to review the literature that informs this dissertation study. This chapter will continue to explore the previous research related to the effects of preschool teachers’ education levels on the critical factors impacting school-readiness skills of kindergarten bound students as the research has many varying research findings.

Introduction

Preschool services for 3-5 year-old children have increased, with over 57% of American children in 2005 having attended center-based early childhood programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Four years later, it was estimated that three- to-five-year-old children in the country were more likely to be enrolled in classroom-based preschool programs (Snyder et al., 2009). Since the increase of preschool students in academic preschool programs and state and federal funding support, California received $859 million in 2009 for the Head Start and Early Head Start programs. It is estimated that by 2020, an additional 50,000 preschool teachers will be needed to staff the state, federal and private preschool programs (Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007). Additional research has been undertaken to determine what critical
factors contributed to the academic and social/emotional development of preschool students entering kindergarten (www.californiapreschool.org).

School-readiness refers to the capabilities of children, families and the educators to assist with positive student achievement in both formal and informal educational settings, including cognitive, physical and social-emotional capacities of the students as well as their interactions with other people (Sabol, & Pianta, 2012). Social emotional competence (sometimes referred to as social-emotional development) is the ability of students to interact with and form relationships with other, behavioural concerns and the ability to communicate with other people (Rhoades, Warren, Domitrovich, & Greenberg, 2011). With the increase focus of enrollment and state and federal funding, the preschool teachers’ education level as a possible contributing factor to the school-readiness skills will be assessed in this dissertation study.

**Preschool Teacher’s Education Level**

Within the Early Childhood Development field, there are various pathways toward completing education requirements to become a teacher or teacher assistants. These requirements vary greatly with specific states having particular guidelines for Early Childhood Education educators. Research frequently assesses teacher quality as the number one factor to preschool program quality (Mead, 2008). In 2004, there were over 1,200 higher education institutions offering preschool teacher preparation programs leading to Bachelors and Associate of Arts degrees (Maxwell, Lim, & Early, 2006). These various programs were estimated to graduate approximately 36,000
preschool educators annually, however, each program varied drastically with regard to field experience hours and coursework (Maxwell et al., 2006).

Gillentine (2010) advocates for preschool teachers to acquire formal certification as part of their career obligations. According to the article, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has been established as a voluntary process for teachers educating students between the ages of 2 and 18 years old. NBPTS are more commonly utilized by the K-12 teachers, but the author suggests that the preschool field also use the process for certification of the Early Childhood/Generalist position. Certification through the Board holds each teacher accountable for abiding by the five core assumptions:

1. Teachers being committed to students and their learning;
2. Teachers knowing their particular subject and how to effectively teach it to students;
3. Teachers being responsible for managing and monitoring student learning;
4. Teachers learning from their experience and thinking about their practice and;
5. Teachers being a member of professional learning communities.

Gillentine (2010) further suggests that this national certification would increase the education level of the preschool program, thereby increasing student overall achievement.

This author’s recommendations highlight the conflicts of having different requirements for different states; and, recommendations seek to provide a streamlined
pathway to education in the Early Childhood Development field. Adhering to the recommendations of national certification might permit the Early Childhood Education field to begin alignment between the various programs to improve the quality of teacher education programs and overall preschool quality. With the implementation of national certification for preschool teachers, preschool teachers could be included in the definition of Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT) as established in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal law. Gillentine (2010) further argues that with the nationally established certification, preschool teachers could be included in the federal regulations to increase student achievement and NCLB’s goals of proficiency for all students by 2014. The national certification for preschool teachers could also further the federal and state level discussions of how preschool programs could contribute to alleviating the achievement gap. These discussions could provide students with the necessary academic and social skills at the earliest onset of their educational experience.

Seeking to align preschool teacher program requirements, standards and competencies, Hyson (2003) recommended the accreditation of early childhood education programs through the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The accreditation process would utilize the five NAEYC standards for the program’s evaluation process which would occur every five years. The evaluation and accreditation process would focus on enhancing student’s competences, improving school climate and specific quality improvement activities. This study is critical to this dissertation as it highlights the inconsistencies among preschool teacher preparation
programs and a possible solution to alignment of the programs for the sake of increasing school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students.

In an effort to show the need for the alignment of preschool teacher competencies, Stayton et al. (2012) compared the standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) developed with the Division of Early Childhood (DEC). The committee noted that vast differences between state requirements for the education of preschool teachers. The researchers noted that 92% of the competencies could easily align to reflect nationwide standards for preschool teachers, while the additional 8% of the key elements would be reserved for state specific requirements related to state specific educational protocols. Stayton et al. (2012) encouraged the adoption of the aligned standards as an initial step in moving toward universal preschool services and expectations for all students.

The Stayton et al. (2012) and Gillentine (2010) studies are important as they outline the vast concerns associated with the current differences in the preparation programs for preschool teachers. Both studies utilize data to demonstrate how the preschool teachers’ preparation programs and competencies associated with the early childhood education arena affects the overall outcome of school-readiness skills for kindergarten-bound students. The studies further highlight the need for consistent programs amongst preschool teachers who are seeking higher education levels so the preschool students are not adversely impacted upon entry into kindergarten.
Another research study related to preschool teacher education and student achievement was published by the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) utilizing the Multi-State Study of Pre-Kindergarten (Early et al., 2007). The purpose of this research was to determine whether teachers’ education level had an impact on the quality of preschool classrooms and ultimately on academic success of their students. The preschool teachers were classified into four categories:

1. Preschool teachers with Bachelor degrees and higher who majored in Child Development;
2. Preschool teachers with Bachelor or higher degrees in other majors;
3. Preschool teachers with Associate degrees in Child Development; and
4. Preschool teachers without any child development coursework.

This study was conducted in state-funded programs in six states and included over 800 preschool students in 237 preschool classrooms. For this particular study, preschool student referred to primarily four-year-olds entering kindergarten in the upcoming school year. Data was collected through classroom observations using the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS), and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), teacher and assessment information from students in both the fall and spring. Researchers noted that additional factors such as teacher wages, number of hours per day in the classroom, percent of students below the poverty line and teacher to student ratio were all contributing factors to the level of program and classroom quality and the academic success of the preschool students.
Early et al. (2007) initially hypothesized that the higher educated preschool teachers would have academically advanced preschool students as well as better social skills for kindergarten. The researchers concluded that preschool students taught by the highest educated teachers with a Bachelor or higher degree in child development showed academic gains only in their math skills compared to teachers without child development degrees. The researchers also noted that their study sample did not include a random sampling of preschool teachers as only state funded preschool teachers were included, so the overall education level of the sample group was less than an average sample of random teachers. Research findings noted increased ability to name colors only for students with teachers who have Bachelor or higher degrees in majors aside from Child Development. Findings further showed that teachers with the child development associate permits attributed to slight gains in rhyming, numbers, colors and letters compared to teachers without any child development coursework permit. The students of teachers with the child development associate permits made slightly greater gains associated with the longer hours in the preschool setting per day.

The findings of this multi-state study draws conclusion that depict higher academic gains from higher educated preschool teachers as well as education avenues with an emphasis specifically on Early Childhood education (Early et al., 2007). These findings align with the social learning theory described by Bess and Dee (2008a) in which learning is developed through the observation, imitation and modeling of others. Within this theoretical framework, the higher educated teachers with Early Childhood Development Bachelors degrees and Early Childhood development permits
have specific preschool training that could be incorporated into their classroom environment. The Early Childhood education programs’ emphasis on developmentally appropriate techniques and age-specific skills provide the higher educated preschool teachers with methods to create appropriate learning environments for their students’ academic growth and social competence.

Jacobson (2007) reports that the research is still not clear on the impact of preschool teachers with Bachelor degrees on students’ academic success. The article reports that despite the federal governments push for all Head Start teachers to obtain the four year degree, studies still do not conclude that our country’s preschool programs will increase in the delivery of high quality instruction or students acquiring additional school-readiness skills. While research continues to reveal that higher educated preschool teachers have more positive student interactions and nurturing classroom environments, these positive traits are not solely due to the college degree. Jacobson (2007) further noted that the recent Head Start requirement did not require teachers to major in Child Development, so just simply getting any degree will probably not have any real academic outcome on preschool students. The article further noted that when preschool teachers earn Bachelor or higher academic degrees, they typically do not remain in the Child Development field, but instead transfer to the K-12 world where compensation is much higher. Jacobson (2007) concludes that since research conflicts on the value of Bachelor degrees, preschool teachers will benefit from professional development opportunities related specifically toward toddler and preschool settings.
On the other hand, Vue, Leon, and Howe (2008) researched the effects of a Bachelor degree in preschool settings on the quality of the classroom and overall student academic success. This research study involved 231 classrooms within 122 different agencies. The different agencies included preschool programs within school districts, federal Head Start programs, state funded programs, private programs and nonprofit preschool agencies. Through the teacher interviews, ECERS results, CLASS results and personnel file checks; the researchers concluded that classroom quality depended upon the teachers’ education, student interactions, program director’s education and the type of agency. Findings noted that nonprofit, private, Head Start and general child care programs had higher quality classrooms and academic gains when their preschool teachers had Bachelor degrees. In school districts and state preschool programs with already high education requirements, Bachelor degrees did not yield any additional benefit for preschool students. The article did however note that California’s Child Care Development Permit (CCDP) system requiring completion of early childhood education (ECE) college courses significantly bridges the gap between having no education to having a formal degree. The researchers noted that future research should focus on how to utilize the CCDP system to improve preschool quality, as the data continues to be inconsistent in the debate related to preschool teachers and formal educations.

Vue et al. (2008) contradicts to the notion of higher educated teachers correlating to higher achieving kindergarten bound students; however, the author did note the significance of the child development permit as a compromise between a
formal college degree and no post-secondary education experience. In alignment with the social learning theory, of learning through the modeling and imitation of skills, the child development permits enable the preschool teachers to utilize the age-appropriate training to foster academic achievement for the preschool students. The Vue et al. (2008) research is important here as it depicts vastly different findings and highlights the need for additional research on the impact of child development permits and early childhood education training. The researchers further suggest additional research on the child development permits to improve preschool quality and to potentially impact the achievement gap within the entire academic arena.

Heisner and Lederberg (2011) studied the impact of Child Development Associate (CDA) training as it relates to the effect on the beliefs and practices of preschool teacher. This research studied 76 lead preschool teachers with the formal education training as well as 50 lead teachers without the CDA, utilizing a predetermined survey entitled Teacher beliefs and practices survey: 3-5 years old. The survey focused on Early Childhood Education concepts and practices of teacher-directed styles of teaching. The participants self reported on the survey and both pretests and posttests were completed. Despite study limitations of Georgia only participants, small sample size, lack of actual observations of teacher’s instructional practices in the classroom, Heisner and Lederberg (2011), concluded that the CDA training contributed to increased appropriateness of teacher’s beliefs and self-reported practices by reducing their contrasting beliefs and self-reported practices. This increased appropriateness included higher quality learning environment in the
preschool classrooms lead by CDA trained preschool teachers who utilized Developmentally Appropriate Practices more frequently. The Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) framework established by NAEYC, the world’s largest organization focused on young children’s education, is a set of guidelines to help teachers make decisions about the most appropriate way to teach young children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The DAPS include advocacy for student-lead activities and teacher’s knowledge of developmental milestones for the 3-5 year old age range. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) further noted the importance of having both the CDA trained group and the untrained group as direct analysis of the effects of the CDA training could be analyzed based on the pretest and posttest comparisons.

The article related to the development of the Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) by the NAEYC is important to this dissertation study as it provides a framework and guidance for potentially aligning the curriculum implementation for all preschool teachers. The framework of best practices for preschool teachers supplies foundational guidelines that can be incorporated into developing a structured preparation program for new preschool educators.

Within school-readiness skills, reading abilities are frequently assessed as a measurement of future academic success. Research studies such as Lesnick, Goerge & Smithgall (2010) calculate reading levels in third grade to predict later educational success; therefore, reading fluency, word recognition and comprehension is a major aspect of school-readiness skills for kindergarteners. The relationship between preschool teachers’ education level and book reading practices for future reading
levels were examined with 60 Head Start teachers and 341 children (Gerde & Powell, 2009). The researchers focused on the use of book-focused utterances as a part of the large group reading practices. These reading practices were divided into five subcategories of informational statements, definitions, questions, teacher responses to spontaneous child language and other book focused utterances. The participating preschool teachers self reported on teacher questionnaires the information about their educational background. Gerde & Powell (2009) completed formal observations of the Midwest classrooms in which the large group reading sessions were audio taped in the Fall and again in the Spring of the school year. The researchers calculated the teachers’ use of book utterances and analyzed the growth of the student’s language skills based on the teacher’s reading practices. The researchers concluded that the higher level of teacher education correlated to the higher levels of book-related utterances. More specifically, preschool teachers with an Early Childhood Education educational background also utilized book-related utterances more frequently, with an increase of 10 more book related utterances with an ECE related degree. The receptive vocabulary of the preschool students was tested in the Fall and Spring of the school year.

Gerde & Powell (2009) found that students’ language skills demonstrated the greatest growth for preschool students with teachers who utilized more book-related utterances in the large group reading sessions. The researchers acknowledged the limitations of smaller sample sizes that did not permit contrasting teacher education groups (i.e. teachers with Associate of Arts in ECE versus teachers with Associate of
Arts only), and insufficient information to determine a casual relationship between preschool teacher’s reading practices and overall oral language as receptive vocabulary only was studied. Gerde & Powell (2009) suggested further studies to examine how preschool teachers in ECE accredited programs are learning skills related to large group reading practices so additional aspects of oral language can be researched.

On the other hand, Bogard, Traylor, and Takanishi (2008) argue that Bachelor degrees do not necessarily equate to higher academic scores for preschool students. The study raises awareness that every state has different academic institutions, so preschool teacher educational programs vary drastically; therefore, it is unlikely that the current efforts to research the benefits of education degrees are measuring the same concepts. For example, some degree programs require more student teaching hours, completion of additional specialized infant and toddler courses, or may have a cultural competence requirement which could all have some impact on the academic success of preschool students. Bogard et al. (2008) further question if academic achievement should be assessed when the preschool student enters kindergarten or only while in the preschool program. The amount of academic information and evidence of academic, social and emotional development over a longer period of time may also yield different results for the impact of the preschool teacher. Bogard et al. (2008) caution against only attempting to assess academic information for preschool achievement data through assessment information when teacher and student interactions may provide better data related to social, behavior and emotional skills
associated with academic performance. The authors suggest the Bachelor degree be utilized as the starting point for preschool educators and that a common and uniformed child development program is established to alleviate differences in college degree programs.

Bogard et al. (2008) could not fully conclude that higher levels of teacher education contributed to higher academic gains in preschool settings. Researchers noted that there was a correlation between the teachers’ scores on ECERS and CLASS evaluation tools in which teachers who scored higher tended to have more positive student interactions which could possibly lead to increased academic gains. The researchers noted that future research should study the relationship between professional development and mentoring programs for preschool teachers that may assist with improving student outcomes. Bogard et al. (2008) also noted that while data continues to be inconsistent related to Bachelor degrees to increase academic achievement, the child development field overall should continue to push for higher educated teachers to increase the professionalism in the early childhood field. The researchers also noted that increased education would permit higher salaries and would possibly attract higher quality teachers.

In the late 1990s, the research indicated that the higher level of preschool teacher formal education resulted in higher quality care (Howes et al., 2008). Years later with the implementation of the NCLB’s highly qualified teacher criterion, further research concluded just the opposite and the effects of preschool teacher’s education
level was not assessed to have an immediate impact on the overall quality of preschool programs (Early et al., 2006). Using research questions related to the following:

1. Methods of measuring preschool teacher education;
2. Method for measuring the influence of teachers on student learning;
3. Measurement for preschool student outcome

Bogard et al. (2008) concluded that neither the degree, major nor the certification of preschool teachers could be definitively contributed to higher preschool student’s school-readiness skills. The researcher proposed Bachelor degrees as the entry level for preschool teachers, combined with continued professional development and in-classroom training as part of a comprehensive formal education program, in alignment with the requirements of the K-12 education arena. The researcher further warns about the fiscal impact the higher education requirement would have on the preschool funding as teachers’ salaries would require drastic increases noting the percentage of states with Bachelor educated teachers vary such as 14.6% in Alaska and 98.9% in New York (Gilliam & Marchesseault, 2005). Bogard et al. (2008) noted that the preschool teacher preparation programs vary too greatly to fully assess their effectiveness in similar dimensions, so extensive research may be difficult to generalize between different states. The researcher emphasizes the effects of classroom accountability which includes teacher and student interactions and supportive learning environment as a better indicator of preschool student’s school-readiness skills than a teacher’s formal education level. The researcher however warned that social-emotional development should not be overlooked when assessing
school-readiness skills for preschool students. Lastly, Bogard et al. (2008) supported the notion of signature pedagogy in which the teaching profession has standardized teacher preparation which included extensive classroom teaching combined with mentoring (Shulman, 2005).

Bogard et al. (2008) recommends a standardized teacher preparation program to provide an easier pathway to assess teacher effectiveness for kindergarten-bound students. With the similar education preparation, teachers could graduate with the same knowledge base and educational foundation. The researcher suggests that Early Childhood educators research the best training model and what relevant information should be included in the preparation program to provide maximum educational value. The creation of a model program that could be implemented throughout the country could decrease the drastic variations associated with the Early Childhood Education college degree. With the recommendations of Bogard et al. (2008), potentially all preschool teachers would graduate with the basic knowledge associated with high quality preschool programs and successful kindergarten-bound students.

In 2009, the impact of formal education, professional development/training mentorship and supervision was assessed as it relates to 103 preschool teachers and family child care providers in the Los Angeles County area (Fuligni, Howes, Lara-Cinisomo, & Karoly, 2009). Through teacher questionnaires, formal classroom observations and data questionnaires, the researchers utilized the cluster analysis approach, an exploratory approach, to identify which educational supports provided background knowledge that benefitted the academic and social/development of
preschool students. The study’s results showed public preschool teachers had higher education levels than private preschool teachers and family child care providers and they scored higher in the Emotional Climate scores of the CLASS observational tool, which contributes to higher quality teacher and student interactions.

Fuligni et al. (2009) further concluded that the less educated teachers had higher levels of professional development, supervision and opportunities for mentorship which also lead to specialized child development training and an increase in school-readiness skills for preschool students. Simply put, Bachelor level teachers participated in less training/workshops, mentoring or professional development after their post secondary experience with the notion that obtainment of their degree was enough education and additional training, mentoring nor supervision was needed. Fuligni et al. (2009) further concluded that while Bachelor degrees maybe important to provide educational background to preschool educators, the concepts of ongoing professional development, opportunities for mentorship and specialized ECE trainings is also important to foster school-readiness skills among preschool students and high quality teaching professionals.

Nineteen researchers’ compiled data from seven previous early childhood education studies to analyze the impact of preschool teacher’s education level on prekindergarten students’ academic skills and classroom quality within a larger sample size across multiple preschool programs (Early et al., 2007). The data included four-year-old students from center-based preschool programs both in state and federally funded programs. Aiming to determine how the preschool teachers’ academic degree
and educational major affected academic skills in the year before kindergarten entry, the researchers aligned the research variables from the previous studies and focused on classroom quality, academic skills of receptive language, pre-reading skills and early math skills of the preschool students. The research study utilized the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS), Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment (ORCE), teacher questionnaires and Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test/Preschool Language Survey to collect quantitative data.

Early et al. (2007) concluded that while a preschool teacher’s education level is an important aspect for high quality preschool classrooms only two of the seven previous studies found evidence of more educated teachers having higher quality classrooms and Bachelor level teachers having higher quality classrooms. One of the studies’ results found that classroom quality decreased with a Bachelor level preschool teacher, while the remaining four studies found no evidence supporting the association of classroom quality with education level. The research study further concluded that degrees with an ECE major did not yield increased academic skills in the preschool students but there was some association with higher quality classrooms and ECE majors.

Early et al. (2007) cautioned against misinterpreting the lack of concrete findings between classroom quality/academic skills and preschool teacher’s education level to undermine the importance of highly qualified preschool teachers but instead a realization of the complexity of assessing teacher and classroom quality. The researchers solicited for a clear definition of highly qualified preschool teacher and
additional research on classroom quality and positive child outcomes as a part of a larger educational system inclusive of teacher education levels and other factors such as curricular support, skilled teaching assistants and physical setting.

In assessing preschool teacher’s education levels, the notion of highly qualified teachers does not have a universally utilized definition within the early childhood education field. This lack of clear terminology has been identified as a barrier to obtaining valuable research information on the impact of preschool teacher education levels (Early et al., 2007). Along with inconsistent teacher preparation programs due to specific state requirements, preschool teachers’ lack of knowledge about what academic skills they believe they have and actually have are also a barrier to identifying the appropriate professional development needs (Cunningham, Zibulsky, & Callahan (2009).

In this research study, teachers consistently reported increased perceived knowledge versus actual knowledge as it relates to teaching pre-reading skills to preschool students. Cunningham et al. (2009) noted that when the perceived versus actual knowledge of preschool teachers is not calibrated then professional development is not as effective as the participants are not aware of their educational shortcomings. The knowledge of their actual versus perceived knowledge in all instructional concepts, not merely pre-reading skills, is essential so participation can occur in the appropriate workshops/trainings to enhance their classroom instructional strategies to increase the preschool students’ academic skills or social-emotional development.
Cunningham et al. (2009) further advocates for the use of the Response to Interventions (RTI) model typically utilized with students to implement professional development programs. With this evidence-based model, the tier system is utilized so teachers can only progress to the next level of professional training after demonstrating mastery of the current level and the intensity increases with each tier level. With this model, teachers’ strengths and areas of needed growth can be easily identified to improve their instructional practices and would include formal observations of the students in the classrooms. While the RTI model would provide more effective and personalized professional development opportunities for teachers, the researchers caution that the model also requires more individualized trainings so more time consuming and less standardized. This intervention model approach could be utilized as a possible strategy to improve the professional development opportunities for preschool teachers thereby leading to increased preschool students’ academic success and social-emotional development.

Pianta et al. (2007) warns against legislation mandating the increase of education level and credentialed teachers with Bachelors degrees as the variations with curriculum implementation still create drastic inequities in the preschool classrooms.

**Critical Factors**

Various research studies have noted several critical factors that consistently contribute to high quality preschool programs and foster academic readiness skills and social competence for preschool students (Mead, 2008). These critical factors include
teacher quality, teacher-student relationships/interactions, parental involvement and classroom environment (Glenn-Applegate, Pentimonti, & Justice, 2011).

Teacher and Student Relationships

Relationships can be generically defined as a significance connection between two or more things or being related or interrelated. This established connection could be based on various factors such as emotional connection, business related goals or relatedness due to kinship or marriage. When this researcher discusses relationships, typically it will relate to the connections between teachers and students; teachers and parents; or parents and students.

Within the realm of human interactions, the essence and significance of interactions between two individuals has been shown to have positive effects on such life concepts as life expectancy, health and overall life happiness and success (Steptoe, O’Donnell, Marmot, & Wardle (2008). While relationships are critical at every stage in life, studies have further shown that children who have positive interactions and relationships within the first five years of their lives also demonstrate positive attachment for future lifelong skills such as high school education and employment (Madigan, Moran, Schuengel, Pederson, & Otten (2007). For preschool students regularly attending a preschool program, the relationship with their classroom teacher is a part of this initial bonding process as typically preschool students in a classroom-based program spent an average of 3.5 hours to eight hours per day interacting with their classroom teacher. This primary relationship aids in the initial attachment and
bonding process that is critical for students’ future abilities to develop and maintain relationships (Pianta, Nimetz, & Bennett (1997).

Previously extensive research on the relationship of preschool teachers and preschool students was hindered by the lack of age appropriate observation tools. Hoping to ensure age and developmentally appropriate practices, researchers were concerned with the lack of objective observation tools to capture the unique interactions of such young participants while taking into account the limited attention span and verbalization skills. With the increase of preschool programs and funding, the need for program evaluation demanded the formation of evaluation tools to assess the critical aspect of teacher-student relationships. With accountability as a major topic, in 2008 the development and use of the CLASS observational tools to assess the quality of teacher and student interactions began in federally funded preschool programs (Office of Head Start, 2008). The Head Start programs continue to be pioneers in utilizing the CLASS observational tool to officially assess the effectiveness of preschool programs as a requirement for federal funding.

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System incorporates the three domains of emotional support, instructional support and classroom organization. Within the three main domains there are ten dimensions (positive climate, negative climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for student perspectives, behavior management, productivity, and instructional learning formats, concept development, quality of feedback and language modeling that provide a thorough assessment of teacher and student relationships. For example, Downer, Booren, Lima, Luckner, & Pianta, 2010) utilized
the CLASS observation tool in longitudinal study of 40 preschool teachers with their 291 preschool students in 44 classrooms. During the 3-4 month period, 4 observations per child of 15 minutes each were completed using the nine domains of the observation tool. Hypothesizing that higher scores on the CLASS observation tool would correlate with more positive teacher-student relationships, Downer concluded that the CLASS observation tool is a viable research tool to monitor relationships between teachers and preschool students that could lead to academic success and social/emotional development.

Downer’s hypothesis of higher CLASS scores equating to more positive teacher-student relationships contributes to the social learning theory in which students learn by imitation, modeling and observation (Bess & Dee, 2008b). Within this theoretical framework, preschool students’ level of comfort with their preschool teacher could aid in acquiring more academic and social skills due to the positive nature of the relationship.

Further research conducted by Wildenger and McIntyre (2012) utilized a quantitative approach that analyzed 86 preschool students and their transition from a play-based preschool program to a structured academically-oriented elementary classroom with regard to teacher-student relationships and behavioral problems in kindergarten. The researcher concluded that students with more positive teacher-student relationships experienced fewer behavior problems in their later educational years and were rated as academically more prepared than their peers with negative teacher-student relationships.
Additional research studies focused on teacher and student relationships with regards to behavior management and the three elements of oral language, emergent literacy development and task orientation (Dobb-Oates, Kaderavek, Guo, & Justice, 2011). In 2011, the CLASS observational tool was utilized to explicitly assess the impact of relationships and teacher’s behavior management skills specifically for 398 preschool students and 67 preschool teachers in the high risk settings of Ohio and Virginia in the Fall and Spring. The researchers hypothesized that the preschool teachers who prevented and/or effectively dealt with misbehavior activities in the classroom produced an environment in which preschool students would obtain increased literacy and language learning for their kindergarten entry. In the Dobb-Oates et al. (2011) study, the oral language concept specifically assessed was receptive vocabulary only and the emergent literacy concept was print awareness only. For example, after a one day teacher training on the CLASS observation process, the researcher used the behavior management dimension on the observational tool to assess for behavior management in the preschool settings. The final results concluded that preschool teachers’ behavior management had significant and positive effect on children’s gains in print awareness, but not on the vocabulary knowledge. The final results were different than the researcher’s initial hypothesis and the differences were attributed to the assessment of vocabulary knowledge although it is not the only measure of oral language. Dobb-Oates et al. (2011) further noted that the preschool student sample included all students from lower socioeconomic levels and at risk of development delays. The researchers highly recommended further studies to test other oral language
concepts and the testing of other academic standards. In conclusion, this research study did not concretely assess that behavior management skills of preschool teachers had a positive effect on all academic concepts.

**Classroom Management Effects on Teacher-Student Relationships**

Within the factor of teacher and student interactions, classroom management has been closely linked to the quality of this relationship. Research suggests that teachers with effective classroom management skills tend to have more positive relationships with their students as well as the parents (Bluestein, 2011). Classroom management and relationships are built on concepts of emotional stability, trust and physical safety. The concept can be defined as the actions teachers take to create an environment that supports and facilitates both academic and social emotional learning (Everston & Weinstein, 2006). Within the 3.5 to eight or more hours of daily interactions between the teacher and students, trust is established and a mutual relationship begins development. Relationships are developed easier within the confines of emotional stability and physically safe surroundings. Effective classroom management can assist with establishing safe physical and emotional boundaries within a preschool classroom that contribute positively to teacher/student relationships (Snell, Berlinm, Voorhees, Stanton-Chapman, & Hadden, 2012). Furthermore, preschool teachers with effective class management skills tend to have less behavior interferences with the classroom learning process and maximize the instructional time during the program hours with academic and social-emotional development activities (Morris, Raver, Millenky, Jones, & Lloyd, 2010).
Classroom management plays a significant role in the development of student and teacher relationships especially for rookie teachers and/or teachers in multicultural classrooms (Van Tartwijk, den Brok, Veldman, & Wubbels, T. (2009). With the notion of relationships having a significant impact on school-readiness skills, the researchers analyzed the teachers’ perception on its importance through the management of the classroom environment. Utilizing teacher questionnaires, videotaped classroom observations and video stimulated interviews with a coding system, the researchers found that majority of the teachers commented on the importance of relationship building to effectively manage their classrooms. The teacher participants reported the use of such techniques as intentionally creating time for relationship building activities and opportunities to get to know their students individually. Van Tartwijk et al. (2009) report teachers of multicultural classrooms did not frequently mention the cultural background of their students in the interviews nor comment on any specific techniques to foster relationship building with diverse student populations. This study affirmed the teacher’s perception of the importance of student-teacher relationships as it impacts classroom management which conversely affects school-readiness skills.

Tal (2010) defines classroom management as a meta-skill that integrates cognitive perceptions (pro-active, ecological-systemic, and leadership-oriented), self-regulation skills, and interpersonal relationships with students and colleagues. Classroom management is also perceived as a cyclical process that includes advance planning, implementation, assessment during implementation, and a final evaluation.
This process takes into account factors related to the children and their environment, intentions to bring about progress in the activities carried out for learning and the emotional well-being of the children in the class. Simply stated, classroom management is the ability of the teacher to lead the class, both children and staff, toward achieving the socio-emotional welfare and learning of the students. Using a case study research model of 34 participants, Tal’s (2010) research study demonstrated that teachers’ with the ability to foster peer to peer relationships, proactively assess crisis potential situations, establish clear classroom goals and incorporate positive interpersonal skills were assessed by preschool parents with positive relationship rankings with the preschool students. The preschool teacher’s ability to effectively manage classrooms increased the positive teacher and student relationship ratings.

Within the classroom management studies, this researcher applies the systems theory in which a smaller part of the system has an effect on the overall functioning of the larger system with either negative or positive effects (Bess & Dee, 2008b). Within the classroom management concept, the smaller system parts are the students and their behaviors in the larger system of the preschool classroom. The student’s behaviors (positive or negative) have a direct effect on the overall organization of the preschool classroom with the teacher’s behavioral intervention skills as the independent variable. Typically if student’s behaviors are positive and the preschool teachers have intervention skills then the preschool setting is not adversely affected and contributes to positive teacher-student relationship and possible academic gains. If, however, the
student’s behaviors are negative and preschool teacher does not have adequate behavior management skills then the classroom environment and relationships are negatively affected.

**Social and Emotional Development effects on Teacher-Student Relationships**

School-readiness skills incorporate both academic concepts and the social-emotional development of preschool students entering kindergarten. The social-emotional development, also referred to as social competence, is the process of recognizing emotions in others, establishing positive friendships, developing empathy, knowing and managing one’s emotions, making good decisions and handling challenges and situations effectively (Sallquist et al., 2009). Recent research has shown the importance of preparing kindergarten bound students with both academic and social competence skills to ensure preparedness for their kindergarten year and future academic journey (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2003).

Part of the preparation for building social competence can be obtained through the implementation of social and emotional learning curriculum (Gunter, Caldarella, Korth, & Young, 2012). Using control groups and test groups for the 84 preschool students, the researchers implemented Strong Start Pre-K, a 10-week, highly structured and evidence based social and emotional learning curriculum. The teachers in the test group received the initial training along with two additional “booster lessons” after the 10 week session. Designed to teach appropriate situational actions, the curriculum’s goal is to increase emotional knowledge, increase pro-social
behaviors while reducing negative emotional symptoms and internalizing behaviors. The teacher’s self-reported findings indicated an increase in students’ emotional regulations and decreases in internalizing behaviors after the implementation of the social and emotional learning curriculum. Significantly more improvement of social competence was noted by teachers in the treatment group who received the additional booster lessons suggesting that the refresher lessons are beneficial for additional positive results. Salquist (2009) noted the level of conflict decreased in the treatment groups with the booster lessons, however, the level of conflict in the control group actually increased. The researchers also noted that student dependency and overreliance on the teacher in the control group increased contrary to the treatment group. Researchers hypothesized that the treatment group with the additional social and emotional learning lesson (booster lessons) would decrease in reliance on their teachers and be more independent refuting their initial conclusions. The teachers also reported more positive relationships with their students utilizing the Strong Start Pre-K curriculum which researchers report are due to the natural process of childhood social development and the process of teachers and students simply getting to know each other. Sallquist (2009) further noted the limitations of possible bias as the teachers were both the teachers of the curriculum and the raters of student behaviors and classroom outcomes depicting the behavioral changes. The research study depicts the importance of social and emotional competence as it relates to school-readiness skills and the impact of teacher and student relationships on those important skills.
Within the social systems theory, the basic premise is that the individual’s behavior is a function of the person’s interaction with their environment (Bess & Dee, 2008a). This theoretical framework seeks to analyze the impact of one’s behavior on the environment as a system in which behavior greatly influences the overall environmental setting. Within the preschool classroom, the kindergarten bound students’ level of social competence largely hinges on the development of emotional regulation, pro-social skills and decreasing internalizing symptoms. The students’ acquisition of these critical skills contributes to the overall preschool experience in which the student can successfully navigate their environment with the assistance of the preschool teacher and opportunities for learning social skills.

Social competence and the social-emotional development of preschool students is a component of school-readiness skills developed during the preschool years. The lack of social competence and severe behavior problems have been noted to negatively contribute to the academic success of kindergarten-bound students (Gilliam & Marchesseault, 2005). In Massachusetts, the expulsion rate for preschool students was 27.4 per 1,000 students compared to .8 in the K-12 grades (Gilliam & Shabar, 2006). Utilizing self reporting, researchers matched teacher-student’s gender and ethnicity to determine the relationship between peer social skills, frustration tolerance and conduct problems (Graves & Howes, 2011). The conclusions found that teachers consistently ranked girls higher in frustration tolerance and peer social skills than boys and African American children less competent. These results did not change when ethnicity was taken into consideration. Graves and Howes (2011) further concluded that when
teachers were ethnically similar to their students there were more positive interactions and less conflict. Despite the national fact of African American males entering special education more frequently than their Latino and Caucasian counterparts and higher rates of suspension and expulsions (Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2010), the Graves and Howes (2011) study found no significance in the gender and ethnically matched teacher and student’s interactions. Noting the limitation of staff diversity and self-reporting used, the researchers concluded that cultural awareness and competency amongst the teaching staff greatly aided in the decrease of negative teacher-student interactions and the development of social competence skills for kindergarten-bound students.

The Graves and Howes (2011) study is critical to this dissertation as it dispels the myth of minority students having negative behavior issues and the inability to learn social skills that later enhance their school-readiness skills. The study further contradicts the previous research (Shivers, Sanders, Wishard, & Howes, 2007) concluding African American students are at a higher risk of negative relationship with their teachers and peers.

**Environment**

The environment for this study examining the impact of teacher’s education level on kindergarten bound students incorporates various aspects of the preschool program. Environment includes the arrangement of space both indoors and outdoors, the materials and activities offered to the children, the supervision and interactions (including language) that occur in the classroom, and the schedule of the day.
including routines and activities (Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2010). Within the physical environment, all materials, supplies, furniture and educational toys are included as a part of the physical environment. The environment will also include the classroom’s schedule of daily activities and routines within the preschool program (Harms, 2009).

The physical environment also relates to the actual classroom space utilized by the preschool students. Read (2007) emphasizes the importance of preschool centers being welcoming and inviting for students, parents and the community as the physical structure of a preschool setting can elicit emotions and a sense of belonging that could foster academic growth and the desire for educational experiences. The researcher describes the ideal preschool setting as one with small scale structures (1 story level), windows for natural lightning and thresholds to transition from interior to exterior of the building. Read (2007) found that only 46% of preschool settings were the ideal physical environment for kindergarten-bound students due to preschool programs being co-located with mixed use occupancy, sharing space with other community based programs such as churches and being built a long time ago.

The Read (2007) research study is important to this dissertation, as the researcher describes the ideal physical environment and structures for high quality preschool programs. The findings describe how new preschool buildings can be designed and built to foster a sense of belonging and assist with welcoming the stakeholders. These findings shed light into how to create the most positive physical
environment for preschool students that can further lead to high quality preschool programs and academic success.

Rushton, Juola-Rushton and Larkin (2010) examined the impact of physically appropriate preschool classrooms on the neurons of preschool students’ brains. The researchers found the preschool classrooms that provide stimulating, active and creative learning environments aid in the development of dendrites in the young learners’ neurosystem that branch out to thousands of neurons in the various regions of the brain. The researchers further noted that classrooms arranged in the highly recommended functional areas (writing center, dramatic play, blocks/manipulative, science and reading center) aid in the release of neurotransmitters that strongly impact the focus, mood, emotions and empathy of students. Rushton et al. strongly recommend that administrators and teachers utilize these findings to create and arrange a preschool classroom that foster the optimal development of the brain system.

The researchers noted that aside from teacher quality and curriculum implementation, the physical arrangement of the preschool classroom greatly contributes to the neurosystem development that provides young preschool students with the capacity for later years of learning and academic achievement.

The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) is most often utilized to measure the quality of preschool environments. The assessment tool was developed in 1980 as an avenue to examine the quality of classroom environments (Harms, 2009). The revision of the assessment tool in 1998 provided an inclusion of special needs, culturally diverse and bilingual students and continues to be widely
utilized tool to assess the quality of infant/toddler, preschool, school age and family daycare settings (Sakai, Whitebook, Wishard, & Howes, 2004).

The term “quality” is utilized often when discussing the use of ECERS to evaluate preschool and other educational programs. Seeking to clarify how various preschool programs were defining and assessing quality within classrooms with the ECERS assessment tool, 76 articles were analyzed between 2003 and 2010 (La Paro, Thomason, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, & Cassidy, 2012). The authors labeled quality within the following two indicators: structural quality which included classroom materials, curriculum, teacher education and teacher-student ratios or process quality which included human interactions between teachers, children and peers. Utilizing a qualitative research approach with a coding system, the findings revealed inconsistent definitions of quality and varied perceptions of what the ECERS assessment tool measured with the assessed preschool programs. For this dissertation, the ECERS assessment tool will be utilized to measure the structural quality of preschool programs. La Paro et al. (2012) draws the conclusion that the inconsistent definitions and use of the assessment tool to measure the broad term of quality creates difficulties in assessing whether the ECERS scores can be generalized to positive student outcomes. The authors further recommends a toolkit approach in which measures within the assessment tool can be more narrowly defined and streamlined so assessment results can be generalized throughout the Early Childhood Development field.
Seeking to provide universal access to preschool for all students, Massachusetts developed Policy 2525, a 10 year phase-in plan to increase preschool funding and programs throughout the state (Warash, Ward, & Rotolie, 2008). Part of the Legislative Act included one-day training for preschool teachers on the ECERS-R assessment followed by a questionnaire on self-reported changes made to their respective classrooms. According to the researchers, the participating teachers reported changes in 36 of the 43 items on the ECERS-R assessment with the most changes noted in the Space and Furnishings subscale. Warash et al. (2008) concluded that the teachers’ knowledge and understanding of the ECERS-R assessment tool including the rating system increased the teachers’ ECERS-R classroom scores thereby increasing the quality of the overall program.

The Warash et al. (2008) research is important to this dissertation study as the research findings validate the use of the ECERS-R assessment tool to assess the overall quality of preschool programs. The research demonstrates the teachers’ increased knowledge of the assessment tool further increases the teachers’ awareness of what constitutes high quality preschool programs so positive changes can be implemented to foster increased academic and social skills of kindergarten-bound students.

Using ECERS as part of the data analysis process, Hallam, Grisham-Brown, Gao, and Brookshire (2008) developed a program model entitled Assessment, Evaluation and Planning Systems (AEPS) to systematically assess the classroom environment based on the following six developmental areas: gross motor, fine motor,
social communication, communication, adaptive and cognitive areas. Using 26 classrooms for data collection, the researchers noted that there were no significant differences in the ECERS assessments of the pilot classrooms that implemented the project AEPS. However, Hallam et al. (2008) noted differences in the language and literacy development in the pilot classrooms. This study shows the impact teachers’ skills related to assessing, planning and evaluation of students can have on the academic skills although not as significantly impact on the classroom environment.

Sylva, K., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2010) also noted no significant correlation between cognitive skills and classroom environment when assessed using the ECERS assessment.

Sylva et al. (2010) used the ECERS-E assessment and Effective Provision of Pre-School Education studies in ten preschool programs to assess programs deemed “adequate” (average scores of 2.78 on the ECERS) and “good” (average scores of 4.61) quality programs. The adequate quality programs spent more time with physical development and creative activities while the good quality programs participated in activities associated with early reading, active listening and emergent writing skills according to the researchers. Sylva et al. (2010) also concluded that the major difference between adequate and good quality programs were the staff interactions and day-to-day activities within the centers. In the good quality preschool programs, staff interacted with the students more frequently as compared to monitoring of the students without interacting in the adequate preschool centers. Sylva et al also assessed that students in adequate preschool centers spent more time in activities associated with
pretend play, art and music and empty activities (such as standing around and gazing) as compared to the good quality programs engaged in more games, numeric activities and activities associated with exploring, investigating and examining.

The Sylva et al. (2010) research study noted a surprising finding of good quality centers spending less time on creative and physical development activities however it was noted that in good quality programs creative activities are more closely associated with literacy activities and planned structured play. The researchers concluded that preschool programs with frequent staff interactions and educational activities in the cognitive and creative domains yielded preschool students with increased cognitive and social development upon entry into kindergarten (Sylva et al., 2010).

The Sylva et al. (2010) research study is important to this dissertation as it highlights the concepts of staff interactions and day-to-day activities as critical components to quality preschool programs and classroom environments. With the ultimate goal of academic and socially competent kindergarten-bound students, preschool programs must focus on the daily implementation of educational activities including staff who constantly interactive with the students. This study further highlights the role of the classroom environment as rated by the ECERS assessment as a critical factor in the overall preschool experience of kindergarten-bound students.

Utilizing Georgia students from 126 Head Start, private and state funded preschool classrooms, Mashburn (2008) sought to determine the effects of preschool environment quality on the academic, language and literacy development of children
at risk of social and economic disadvantages. The researcher used the ECERS-R assessment, Caregiver Interaction Scale (measures frequency of caregivers display of negative and positive behaviors) and the Assessment Profile (domains of learning environment, interactions, individualizing and scheduling) to collect data and control variables were student gender, ethnicity and family income levels. Students were pretested and post-tested with the Woodcock-Johnson III Test of Achievement, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III and the Expressive Language subtest of the Oral and Written Language Scales to assess their academic, literacy and language development. Mashburn (2008) findings ranked the environments of preschool program as low, medium and high based on the assessment scores. The researcher found low and medium ranked preschool programs yielded disadvantaged students (classified as non white and poor students) with lower academic skills however there were no differences in academic skills in the high ranked preschool program of similar students. The researcher further concluded that high quality preschool programs fostered significantly higher academic skills of both White and disadvantaged students.

The Mashburn (2008) research study is significant to this dissertation as it provides data demonstrating how the quality of preschool programs has a positive effect on the academic skills of kindergarten-bound students. The research study further emphasizes the increased quality of preschool has an even more positive effect on disadvantaged students. These findings are significant as research shows disadvantaged students attend preschool more frequently and contribute to the
achievement gap seen in the later educational years (Mead, 2008). The findings further contribute to the debate of quality preschool programs assisting with the elimination of the achievement gap associated with minority and disadvantaged students.

**Parental Involvement**

Preschool parents are often experiencing the educational system for the first time as preschool parents. This first time experience can lead to future impressions of what to expect in the later years of the educational journey for their children (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, and Thornburg (2009). Parental involvement within all levels of an education system has been shown to have positive effects on the academic success of students (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004). The six types of parental involvement are defined as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community, which can be utilized to strengthen the partnership between schools, parents and the community (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997). Positive parental involvement can affect both the academic skills and social-emotional development of kindergarten bound students.

Parental involvement for this dissertation will relate to two different “concepts”. The first “concept” of parental involvement will be direct classroom volunteering opportunities such as parents assisting directly with students in the classroom, assisting teachers’ with preparing for classroom activities and participating in fieldtrips, attending meetings/conferences and/or assistance with at home projects/homework for educational purposes. The other “concept” for parental
involvement will be related to provision of social resources for parents referred to as collaboration with the community (Epstein et al., 1997). Within the preschool program, social services are support resources for parents related to financial information, networking opportunities, health information and assessments, mental health support and parental education/training that are frequently provided to preschool parents as a part of the overall services of the preschool program. Recent research has focused on the importance of addressing not just the academic needs of the preschool student but also the non-educational needs of the entire family as a preventive method for academic outcomes and life success (Hilado, Kallemeyn, Leow, Lundy, & Israel, 2011). The addition of social services within the preschool program aims to address the non-educational needs of both the child and the family to foster increased student’s school-readiness skills both academically and social/emotional development.

Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, and Kupzyk (2010) utilized an ecological systems theoretical framework to describe the influence of multiple systemic levels during a student’s developmental years before entering school involving microsystemic (closest influence from immediate family members by direct contact), mesosystemic (interactional influence of additional contacts from church, daycare providers, neighbors, etc.) and macrosystemic (environmental support such as culture, political systems, economic patterns, laws, customs and society) on social-emotional competence. The researchers introduced the use of the Getting Ready intervention to foster school-readiness skills in lower socioeconomic Head Start
students by increasing parental involvement. The parental involvement design model emphasized six intervention strategies;

1. Establishing parent-child and parent-professional relationships;
2. Sharing information about child’s progress over time;
3. Developing mutually agreed upon student expectations between teacher and parents;
4. Brainstorming ideas between teacher and parent on methods to accomplish expectations;
5. Observe parent-child and provide feedback
6. Monitor student’s skill development and plans for continued growth.

Sheridan et al.’s (2010) research study implemented intervention strategies primarily including home visits by the Head Start teachers to the student’s home environment occurring at least five times during the school year. The 29 participating teachers had at least a Bachelor’s degree and an early childhood development permit with an average of over nine years work experience in the child development field. Participants included 220 Head Start students from 28 classrooms in the Midwest over a four year period with over 97% of families who received some form of governmental assistance (i.e. welfare, food stamps, housing assistance, Medicaid, etc.) for the control and test sample groups.

Sheridan et al. (2010) hypothesized, when implemented appropriately by teaching staff, the Getting Ready intervention model would enhance school-readiness skills for Head Start students through parental involvement by creating stability of the
students’ social-emotional development. The findings indicated positive gains in the treatment group with interpersonal competence upon entry into kindergarten but no specific findings related to behavioural concerns. Participation of parents in treatment group concluded with enhanced attachment behaviors of students with adults, greater autonomy among students and a reduction in anxiety/withdrawal compared to the control group participants. The results of the treatment group showed an increase in the ability to engage and improve their relationships between parents and students however no differences were observed between the treatment and control group participants regarding behavioral concerns (i.e. aggression/anger, impulse control, etc.). Sheridan et al. (2010) acknowledged the limitations of teacher reported information only regarding student’s social behaviors and the inability to generalize to other settings due to single source data collection. Despite the limitations, the study shows promising results of home visits’ effects on parental involvement as it relates to the student’s social-emotional competence upon entering kindergarten. The researchers highly suggest utilizing the Getting Ready intervention strategies to create a model for utilization throughout the Early Childhood Education field to boost social competence of preschool students through parental involvement.

The influence of parental involvement on students is typically assessed by the improvement of academic skills and not social-emotional development (Serpell & Mashburn, 2012). High levels of parental involvement were closely associated with positive effects on school-readiness skills and social emotional development of preschool students. Utilizing a sample size of almost three thousand students, Serpell
and Mashburn (2012) provided an additional element of research data in which both preschool and kindergarten teachers’ perceptions were analyzed. The research findings indicated increased parent-teacher contact was associated with higher quality parent-teacher relationships and fewer behavior issues. Both preschool and kindergarten teachers reported kindergarten-bound students more socially prepared for the transition as the quality of the parent-teacher relationship increased. The researchers further noted that parent-teacher relationship and frequent contact is extremely important for social-emotional development of poor and minority students to ameliorate disadvantages associated with socioeconomic and environmental risk factors.

Within the social systems theory, parents and caregivers become a factor that influences the student’s behavior and affects the overall preschool environment. With the parents’ increased level of involvement, the preschool students are provided additional adults in which to form positive relationships and the parent-teacher relationship is also positively impacted. These critical relationships thereby could create a more supportive learning environment for students that could potentially increase school-readiness skills and social skills competence.

Additional research sought to understand the relationship between parental involvement, teacher and program outreach efforts on the academic success of preschool students. Utilizing 3,100 Head Start students in both urban and rural areas, the research questions focused on measuring the following concepts:
1. extent of parental involvement at home and in classrooms/preschool centers,
2. extent in which teaching staff solicit involvement in the preschool center and in-home outreach
3. influence of the teaching staff outreach and parental involvement in predicting academic and social development
4. the degree in which preschool center outreach practices predict parental involvement. (Hindman & Morrison, 2011)

The researchers obtained data from 286 classrooms within 222 centers in both the fall and Spring sessions of the part and full day government funded preschool programs with over 75% of the families receiving government financial assistance and/or living below the poverty line. The surveyed teachers had varying levels of formal education (approximately 12% high school graduates, 52% some college/associate degree, 22% Bachelor degree and 15% advanced degrees) with the average work experience in the preschool field of twelve years. Utilizing predetermined assessment tools such as Woodcock-Johnson R-Letter-Word subtest and Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test III to assess the student’s academic progress along with teaching staff and program administrator questionnaires, Hindman and Morrison (2011) hypothesized that there would be regularly implemented parental involvement activities and program center outreach along with small to moderate association between involvement activities/practices and student’s academic and social skills during their preschool years.
Employing a quantitative research design, the first research question related to extent of involvement concluded that Head Start parents read to their child about 3-6 times per week and the most frequently reported parental involvement activities at home were talking, discussing letters and words, playing together while telling stories, working on crafts and playing sports were less frequent in both the Fall and Spring testing periods. For the school involvement activities, classroom observations and volunteering for activities were the most frequently reported activities while preparing newsletters and serving as a home visitor for other parents was the least utilized school involvement activities. The second research question related to the extent of school outreach found between 2 to 16 different parental involvement opportunities with the most popular being the request of parents to serve as classroom aides, help clean the preschool center and participate in curriculum development. While preschool centers noted ample opportunities for parental involvement being provided, there was still concern about the overall effectiveness of the outreach efforts with approximately 50% of preschool centers rating themselves as largely unsuccessful and 30% rating moderately successful with recruiting parents for involvement activities. The third research questions ranked the students’ vocabulary, decoding skills and approaches to learning as it relates to the level of parental involvement and found a positive relationship between the higher levels of parental involvement and academic skills. Consequently, parents who read more often to their children demonstrated stronger vocabulary skills and students with parents who volunteered more frequently demonstrated gains in their decoding skills. The fourth research question related to
whether preschool center outreach efforts and student’s skills were predictive of family involvement and the results demonstrated that preschool centers that employed multiple methods to solicit parental involvement had greater success in the fall and spring assessment periods.

Hindman and Morrison (2011) revealed its limitations related to self reporting of data collection from program teaching staff and administrators, lack of classroom observations to valid claims of academic skills (decoding skills and vocabulary gains) and the need to gather information from other sources such as education coordinators and family service workers who work directly with the families. The two academic skills of vocabulary and decoding skills showed gains with the increased parental involvement however; the researcher could not hypothesis that additional academic areas would be improved with parental involvement. The researcher noted that specific at home activities such as reading would increase school-readiness skills but parental involvement activities such as attending parent meetings would probably not foster academic and/or social development gains. The researchers do however provide empirical data that dispels the recurring myth of low parental involvement and home-school connection from minority and low socioeconomic families. The research population consisted of almost 65% below poverty line and almost 73% receiving public assistance with the final results consistently demonstrating high levels of parental involvement in home activities and classroom events. As these findings are inconsistent with previous research studies, the researchers highly recommend additional studies to determine why the selected Head Start parents engaged in
activities at a higher level, specific outreach efforts were effective and methods to duplicate those successful parent involvement practices.

Despite the studies’ limitations, Hindman and Morrison (2011) recommend a model is drafted to increase parental involvement in lower socio-economic status and minority families. With 65% survey participants below poverty and almost 73% receiving public assistance, high levels of parental involvement were noted. Additional analysis of the recruitment methods and engagement strategies employed for this study could provide additional guidance for other community based organizations and education programs seeking to drastically increase the different types of parental involvements.

The importance of parental involvement and the provision of services to increase school-readiness skills were researched utilizing 843 preschool students from three to five years old in Illinois state preschool programs (Hilado, Kallemeyn, Leow, Lundy, & Israel, 2011). Using the mixed methods research design, the researchers utilized web-surveys of parents, teachers and administrators to test their hypothesis of programs that offer more resources have higher levels of parental involvement. The quantitative data demonstrated the social resources offered by the program positively affected the parental involvement in the program. The data further showed that the relationship between the parents (or family members as participants in the social services) and program staff also positively affected parental involvement as parents reported feeling more connected and willing to participate based on their connection with the overall program and program staff. The surveyed participants (i.e. parents,
teachers and program administrators) also reported that the ongoing and frequent assessment and reassessment of the program and the provisions of social services increased parental involvement as the services and resources were tailored to the specific needs of the parents. Per administrators, these ongoing assessments eliminate the misuse and waste of funds on non-effective social services or community resources.

The qualitative portion of the Hilado et al. (2011) research study provided anecdotal information from parents, teachers and administrators regarding parental involvement and school-readiness skills. Parents commented that the strong the relationship with the program staff, the more likely they would participate in school events, meetings, community events or accept community referrals for additional services. Teachers further commented that many families are burdened by other environmental stressors such as unemployment, mental health concerns and other family obligations so the lack of parental involvement does not constitute unsupportive or uncaring parents. Administrators commented on the continuous need for professional development regarding the importance of relationships and strategies for building and maintaining relationships for all program staff. Utilizing the mixed methods, the researchers captured both the anecdotal and quantitative information supporting the hypothesis of parental involvement increasing with the increase of additional social services and community resources within the preschool program.

The influence of a father’s involvement in a single mother household may also contribute to the academic and social-emotional development of preschool students
(Flouri & Malmberg, 2012). The research study assessed almost one thousand children in female headed households in four different countries to determine the impact of a non residential father figure on the child’s behavior and temperament that may influence the child’s later years in the educational setting. Using a longitudinal study model during a 12 month period, Flouri & Malmberg (2012) obtained data from mother’s self reporting questionnaires and temperament rating scales demonstrating a very weak relationship between young children’s temperament and social behavior related to the involvement of non-residential fathers. The researchers further noted that due to the studies’ limitations of mother’s self reporting information related to the non-residential involvement of the fathers, lack of child reported measures due to the children’s ages and very weak findings, future research could be utilized to determine the impact on cognitive skills of non-residential fathers with minimal contact for preschool students (Flouri & Malmberg, 2012).

The parent’s gender as it relates to academic achievement is extremely relevant since there has been a 62% increase in single-father figure families in the United States since 1990 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2008). Lee, Kushner, and Cho (2007) further studied the impact of same gender headed households on academic achievement and concluded that the only positive correlation is higher achievement for girls in father-headed households who actively participate in the school activities. This increase is attributed to fathers being more task oriented and concrete versus female headed households focus of accept, holistic and less demanding atmosphere.
Following the social learning theory that children learn gender-specific behaviors from observing and modeling their same-sex parent, researchers dispelled the myths that same-sex headed households cause deficits in the self-image of their children (Rossi, 1995). Despite the notion within the social learning theory that students observe, model, and imitate to learn their behavior, social, and life skills, these findings encourage the increase of parental involvement despite the child’s or parent gender.

For kindergarten-bound students, the transition from preschool to kindergarten should include tremendous parental involvement to aid in a successful transition period. Research concluded that parents receiving government aid participated significantly less in transition activities than families not receiving government aid (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007). This participation included annual meetings, monthly communication, visits to kindergarten classroom, meeting the kindergarten teacher. Of the surveyed parents, 80% desired more communication with the future kindergarten teachers, information about academic expectations and socially appropriate behaviors.

Wildenger & McIntyre (2010) also had similar results when researching the practices of kindergarten transition from preschool. Most parents (52%) responded that their child had successfully transitioned to kindergarten while 16% experienced extreme concerns during the transition period. The surveyed parents further noted that the lack of information from the kindergarten teacher about academic expectations and information on their child’s current level of skills greatly affects their level of involvement although there is a desire to play a larger role in the preschool and
kindergarten years. Furthermore, within the social systems theory, parental involvement can greatly influence the students’ behaviors and interactions within the preschool setting. This involvement could potentially affect the school-readiness skills and social competence of kindergarten bound students.

**Conclusion**

There is substantial research related to the effects of preschool teachers’ level of education on the critical factors impacting the school-readiness skills of preschool students. The research studies are varied on the impact of this critical variable with some research studies demonstrating positive effects on school-readiness skills of higher educated preschool teachers while other research studies relate the increase of student outcomes to the impact of the various other contributing factors. Utilizing a predetermined assessment tool, this dissertation study will seek to provide empirical data related to the preschool teachers’ education levels of teachers in the Sacramento California area on the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. The findings may determine whether the education levels in the local area affect the critical factors that impact school-readiness skills. Additional information will be provided in Chapter 5 regarding the implications of the previous research studies and the findings of this dissertation study.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This dissertation will explore the effect of preschool teachers’ level of education on the critical factors impacting school-readiness skills of preschool students. In this chapter, the researcher will provide information about the research approach, selected choice of research design, and rationale for the chosen research approach. Additional information related to the research question will be provided, including the setting, population sampling, and data collection procedures. The data analysis section will describe the method utilized to analyze the quantitative data. The chapter will also provide information related to the role of the researcher, limitations of the dissertation study, and the rights of the participants.

Research Design

This dissertation will utilize a quantitative research approach to analyze the effects of preschool teachers’ level of education on the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. This research paradigm employs investigating the relationship between numerous variables that are both independent and dependent. Data is typically in numeric format and can be analyzed using statistical procedures (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative method seeks to examine the answers to questions by collecting data from participants that can be translated into statistical data and percentages. The quantitative method relies on objective and numeric data to test
hypothesis in social science experiments that can be generalized to a larger population (Babbie, 2012).

This dissertation will analyze the preschool students’ assessment information, from the Desired Results Development Profile-Revised (DRDP-R), to determine their overall academic achievement. The assessment information will analyze the preschool students’ school-readiness skills including academic skills, social skills and independence skills. For data analysis, the numeric assessment scores will be ranked by the four ability levels: exploring, developing, building, integrating levels. The final research analysis will determine how the assessment scores correlate to the teachers’ level of education and whether the students’ achievement gains are influenced by the higher levels of teacher education.

This research paradigm was chosen due to the desire to examine the difference between the three teacher groups and the academic gains of kindergarten-bound students. The data for this study will be collected through the pre-existing assessment titled the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R). This researcher has determined that the quantitative approach will sufficiently measure the topic due to the numeric values obtained from the assessment tool.

The major variable of this study will be the level of preschool teacher education. The preschool teacher education levels will be: teachers with Bachelor degrees, teachers with Associate of Arts degrees; and teachers with state-issued child development permits. The other variable of preschool students’ school-readiness skills will be assessed with predetermined academic tests. The two variables will be studied
together to determine if one variable has a significant impact on the outcome of the other variable, either positively or negatively. The additional factors of student-teacher relationship and the preschool environment will also be assessed within the three teacher groups as it relates to influencing the school-readiness skills.

**Research Questions**

The effects of preschool teachers’ level of education on the school-readiness skills for preschool students will be examined utilizing a quantitative research approach. Using this research design, the following research question will be answered:

The research questions that will be evaluated by this dissertation are:

1. Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Bachelors degree, Associate of Arts degree and Child Development permit) regarding teacher work experience on school-readiness skills as assessed on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment?

2. Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Bachelors degree, Associate of Arts degree and Child Development permit) regarding education level on school-readiness skills as assessed on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment?
Setting

The setting for this dissertation study will be various public preschool programs within the local school districts in Sacramento County including District 1, District 2, District 3, District 4 and District 5. The final participant selection will be based on the willingness of teachers to participate in the study. The local school districts are all kindergarten through 12th grade school districts who also serve preschool students and adult learners. For example, District 1 encompasses 120 square miles of the northern part of Sacramento County and serves almost 27,000 students, with approximately 1,000 preschool students in the 22 preschool programs. District 3 is a Head Start and state preschool agency serving students from birth to five-years old. With over 100 Early Head Start centers (birth to three years old) and Head Start programs (3-5 years old) located throughout the Sacramento County area, the agency serves approximately 6,700 infants, toddlers and preschool students.

All participants will be from the Sacramento County area which was founded in 1850. Located in the central valley of the state and serving as the state capitol, Sacramento is the fourth largest city in California encompassing 994 square miles. The total population in 2010 was 1,417,259 people in the eight areas of the County cities with the following racial makeup: 57.5% White, 15.4% African American, 1.0% Native American, 14.3% Asian, 1.0% Pacific Islander, 9.3% other races, 6.6% from two or more races and 21.6% Hispanic or Latino of any race.
Table 1

_Sacramento County Population by Areas_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SACRAMENTO</td>
<td>1,417,259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CITRUS HEIGHTS</td>
<td>83,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELK GROVE</td>
<td>152,652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOLSOM</td>
<td>72,139</td>
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<tr>
<td>GALT</td>
<td>23,654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISLETON</td>
<td>805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RANCHO CORDOVA</td>
<td>64,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACRAMENTO (City of)</td>
<td>466,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unincorporated Sacramento County</td>
<td>553,863</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Figure 1. Sacramento County Racial Makeup of Population in 2010_
Sample

The participants for this dissertation will be preschool teachers employed within District 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. The study will include approximately 50-60 preschool teachers from the Sacramento County area and will be based on how many invited preschool teachers chose to participate in the research study. The selected participants will be from state and federally-funded preschool programs to ensure similar demographics of their preschool students and classroom assessment requirements. Stratified random sampling selects participants from a subpopulation of the total population (Vogt & Johnson, 2011). This sampling technique will be utilized to ensure that the preschool teachers are eligible to participate based on the predetermined criteria. The criteria for inclusion will be that all participants must be current preschool teachers working with students between the ages of three to five-years-old in a public preschool program. To be eligible for participation, the chosen participants must meet one of the following selection criteria:

1. Preschool teacher with a Bachelors degree from an accredited college or university
2. Preschool teacher with an Associate of Arts degree from an accredited college or university
3. Preschool teacher with a current Child Development Teacher permit issued by the State of California Commission on Teacher Credentialing
**Instrumentation/Materials and Data Collection**

This study is to determine the effects of preschool teachers’ level of education on school-readiness skills of preschool students in the Fall 2012 school year. The data collected for this study will be obtained from a pre-existing assessment tool. As part of the funding requirements for state and federally funded preschool programs, teachers are required to complete the DRDP-PS assessments for their students. Each district has a process for training their teachers on how to assess their preschool students and accurately rate the students’ skills based on the four ability levels: exploring, developing, building, integrating levels. The training process includes an overview of the assessment tool, examples of the various ability ratings and refresher information on the revisions associated with the assessment tool. The assessment tool provides descriptors for each ability level so teachers are provided guidance when assessing students.

Table 2

*Developmental Levels of Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised*

| Integrating level | Students are able to communicate the “how” and “why” of actions and events; consider the needs and feelings of others; propose activities and solutions that work for themselves and others; cooperate with adults and peers to plan activities and solve problems; understand and use language to explain, predict, compare, or summarize real and imaginary events and activities and for complex social purposes; know most letters, show understanding of the text; show awareness that sounds makeup language; solve simple subtraction and addition problems; coordinate multiple movements with balance, strength, or control; and communicate why practices and rules are important. |
| Building level | Students are able to express their feelings and acknowledge the feelings of others; engage in play that is increasingly complex and cooperative; develop close friendships; relate to adults to share experiences and get information; understand and use language to refer to real and imaginary experiences and for social purposes; show increasing understanding of stories and books; write some letters to communicate meaning; use a variety of strategies to learn about objects and solve problems; count, sort, and order objects; use complex movement skills in play and activities; independently complete simple routines; and apply rules in a variety of situations. |
| Developing level | Students are able to engage in play and communicate about play with peers; initiate cooperative activities with adults; show increasing knowledge of print; use familiar strategies to solve problems; know some letters and numbers; sort and count small quantities of objects; copy patterns; use movement skills in a variety of settings and tasks; and begin to complete routines and follow rules on their own. |
| Exploring level | Students show awareness of the feelings and physical differences of self and others; engage in play; use language to describe self, others, events, and stories; enjoy interacting with familiar adults; engage with and respond to literacy activities; recognize symbols, shapes, and patterns; make basic movements with confidence; cooperate in completing routines; and follow guidance from adults about rules and routines. |

The process of different teachers with different training practices completing the DRDP assessment tool will be a limitation of this dissertation, the inter-rater reliability. The inter-rater reliability is the process of agreement between raters. The teachers as raters are described as the process by which teachers rate similar students with the same assessment of the abilities (Lobbestael, Leurgans, & Arntz, 2011). Each program is responsible for collecting and developing action plans for their assessments that are classroom-specific and agency specific. This researcher will be utilizing this data for the quantitative study. The data will be collected by the researcher with visits to the school district’s Child Development offices. All data will be collected from the preschool programs within Sacramento County.
Preschool Teachers’ Level of Education

Information about the preschool teacher’s level of education will be obtained from a survey in which the teacher’s level of education will be self reported by teacher. In an effort to obtain additional data and increase homogeneity of the participant group, the survey will also ask about the teacher’s gender, number of years working with preschool students and the year the education level was obtained (i.e. graduation year or year permit originally obtained).

School-readiness Skills

Desired Results Developmental Profile – Preschool. In the late 1990s, the California Department of Education (CDE) began their quest for an outcomes based system based on feedback from practitioner and researchers wanting to systematically assess the academic and the social competence of all children. By the 2000, the Desired Results system was implemented with the following four components: children are personally and socially competent; children are effective learners; children show physical and motor competencies; and children are safe and healthy. Seeking to assess those four areas, the Desired Results Developmental Profile was created and revised in 2001 to include the measures that assess English Learners and the English Language Development domain.

In 2010, the Desired Results Developmental Profile – Preschool edition was created to assess the academic and social competence of three to five-year olds. This assessment tool is widely utilized in California’s public preschool programs and the California Department of Education requires every program to complete the
assessment twice per year as a condition of obtaining their state funds. The assessment tool is divided into seven developmental domains (i.e. self and social development, language and literacy development, English language development, cognitive development, mathematical development, health and physical development). Within the domains, there are 43 measures that align with the overarching domain. For example, in the social-emotional domain the measures include relationships with adults, conflict negotiation and impulse control. The preschool teacher or assessor rates the student’s abilities based on the four development level of exploring, developing, building and integrating. Through the use of teacher observation, anecdotal notes and collaboration with others, the teacher assesses each preschool student. The goal of integration denotes a level of skill mastery for the preschool students of the respective measure within the domain.

The Desired Results system also has assessments for infant/toddler (DRDP-I/T), preschool students with Individualized Education Plans (DRDP Access) and school age children (DRDP-SA) as well as a Desired Results for Families that include the following two components: families supporting their children’s learning and development and families achieving their goals. These two additional components must also be assessed by preschool programs through the use of parental surveys, feedback mechanisms and parental input systems. Most preschool teachers are focused on ensuring their preschool students will be ready in both the academic and social competence areas when they enter kindergarten and the DRDP-PS is a vital
assessment tool that systematically documents the student’s progress toward academic success and social competence.

The Desired Results Developmental Profile-PS (DRDP-PS) will be utilized to collect data regarding school-readiness skills. The DRDP-PS is used by preschool teachers to assess academic skills and social-emotional development of their preschool students. The assessment tool is completed for each preschool student by preschool teachers three times per school year with the assessment report providing individual student data as well as overall classroom scoring data. The tool has seven domains: Self and Social Development, Language and Literacy Development, English Language Development, Cognitive Development, Mathematical Development, Physical Development and Health) incorporating the forty three measures. Each measure is assessed by the developmental levels of exploring (numeric value of 1), developing (numeric value of 2), building (numeric value of 3) and integrating (numeric value of 4). This quantitative data will be utilized by the researcher as part of the research to determine the effects of preschool teachers’ level of education on the critical factors that impact school-readiness skills of preschool students.

Data Analysis

For this study’s research questions, the ANOVA method, will be utilized with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

The ANOVA data analysis method will be utilized for the following research questions:
1. Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Bachelors degree, Associate of Arts degree and Child Development permit) regarding teacher work experience on school-readiness skills as assessed on the five domains of the Developmental Profile Results Developmental Profile-R (DRDP-R) assessment?

2. Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Bachelors degree, Associate of Arts degree and Child Development permit) regarding education level on school-readiness skills as assessed on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment?

The ANOVA method is an inferential statistical method that measures the differences between three or more groups. This research analysis method measures variance between three or more groups such as the teacher groups in this dissertation. This research analysis method aims to depict the differences between the groups that are actual differences and not related to the any sampling errors. These groups are considered independent groups and the results are based on actual significant differences where there is only one independent variable. For method, the independent variable is the teachers’ level of education. For the ANOVA method, it is best for the groups to have equal representation (i.e. the same number of teachers in each group) to ensure the results can be accurately measured. For this study, the ANOVA research method will include the practice effect in which the participants are permitted to perform the task for an initial assessment and then again at a later assessment. In this
dissertation, the teacher groups will be assessed in the Fall semester based on the same six domains of the school-readiness skills assessment.

The ANOVA method will be utilized to measure the variance between the three teacher groups: preschool teachers with a Bachelors degree, preschool teachers with Associate of Arts degrees and preschool teachers with state-issued Child Development Teacher Permits. The paired sample t-tests will be utilized to check for the significant differences between the three teacher groups. The three paired samples T-test will be conducted to determine whether or not there is a significant difference between the six domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R).

Reliability and validity are important concepts in this dissertation research study. Validity is the extent to which the research is based on facts or evidence and able to be justified (Vogt, & Johnson, 2011). Within the concept of validity, external, and internal validity are also measured as a part of sound research evaluation. Internal validity is the extent to which the results can be accurately interpreted and external validity is extent to which the results can be generalized. For this study, the selection of participating teachers by the eligibility criteria of having Bachelors degrees, Associate of Arts degrees or state-issued Child Development Teacher permits will create selection bias due to the pre-defined participation perimeters. Due to the sample size and setting of Sacramento County only, the external validity will be a limitation of the study as the research findings may not be generalized to other populations and/or settings.
Reliability is the dependability of the research process to consistently examine the data and the findings be similar or the same. Internal reliability is the consistent use of the same data collection and analysis process throughout the research process. Reliability will be increased by the use of pre-existing assessment instruments (i.e. ECERS, DRDP-PS and CLASS assessments) to collect data. These assessment tools have been utilized and tested for reliability and validity during their initial development and in previous research studies.

**Role of the Researcher**

This researcher is a Principal and Head Start Director in District 1 for approximately four years. The primary work site serves over 250 preschool students within the state and Head Start preschool programs and has seven preschool teachers eligible for participation in this research study. This researcher is the immediate supervisor of the possible participants and will attempt at every level to separate the roles of researcher and Head Start Director when collecting and analyzing the data. Participating teachers from the researcher’s work site will be advised that participation is strictly voluntary and will not affect the evaluation progress or any other aspects of their employment status.

Prior to the current position, the researcher was an Early Childhood Education Coordinator within the District 1. In this role, the researcher assisted all preschool sites throughout the district with tasks such as lesson plan implementation, classroom management techniques, facilitating parent meetings and trainings. Additional teacher participants will be solicited within District 1 and might have previous contact with
the researcher in the previous role of ECE Coordinator. The additional participants and the researcher may have occasional contact during Early Childhood Education meetings, department trainings and whole group activities but the researcher will not be their direct supervisor. Great care will be taken to ensure participants are aware that participation is strictly voluntary in this dissertation study to examine the effects of preschool teachers’ level of education on critical factors that affect school-readiness skills of kindergarten bound students.

Conflict of Interest

The participating preschool teachers will be advised of the research benefits (i.e. knowledge of how the critical factors impact their students’ school-readiness skills) and the researcher hopes that the information will incite teacher to participation as fiscal compensation will not be provided. The researcher will avoid conflict of interest by utilizing preschool teachers from the other districts first instead of District 1, the researcher’s current employer. If 50-60 preschool teachers can be solicited from the other school districts and District 5, then the preschool teachers within District 1 will not be asked to participate. The researcher does not personally know, work with nor have any evaluative power over any of the possible participants from the invited participants in the Districts 1, 2, 3, 4 or District 5. The use of other school districts and District 5 will alleviate the possibility of conflict of interest for this research study. If solicitation of the other school districts and District 5 does not yield 50-60 voluntary preschool teacher participants, the researcher will solicit preschool teachers within District 1. The participants will be advised within the written consent forms that their
participation will neither adversely impact their employment status nor their performance evaluation within District 1. All invited preschool teacher participants will be advised that their participation is strictly voluntary and can be terminated at any time.

**Protection of Participants**

The researcher will take all necessary precautions to protect the preschool teachers participating in this study. All rules and procedures established by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at California State University, Sacramento will be adhered to strictly. The necessary approval from the IRB will be obtained prior to the collection of any data from the preschool teachers in the Fall of 2012. The process to protect participants will include written approval from the Superintendents of the school district, written consent forms for the participating preschool teachers, pseudo names and confidential storage of all data collected in the dissertation study.

**Conclusion**

Chapter 3 presented the methodology for this dissertation study of the effects of preschool teachers’ level of education on the critical factors that impact school-readiness skills of kindergarten bound students. Within this chapter the various approaches to research were discussed and the quantitative approach was deemed most appropriate due to the numeric values of the collected data as well as the desire to examine casual relationships and differences between two variables. Within the setting of Sacramento County, California, the sample will about 50 preschool teachers within District 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 providing empirical data on their levels of education and
school-readiness skills. The data for this dissertation study will be collected utilizing pre-existing instruments such as DRDP-PS school-readiness assessment. Additional data will be collected utilizing surveys from the preschool teachers to capture information about parental involvement, level of education and demographics information. The data analysis method will be a Pearson correlation to determine the relationship between the participating preschool teachers’ level of education and the critical factors of student-teacher relationships, parental involvement and the classroom environment.

Within this chapter, the role of the researcher was also discussed as well as the limitations of the dissertation study that includes smaller sample sizes, specific setting and possible bias from the self-reported data of the participating preschool teachers. The methods to protect participants during the dissertation research process are also included in this chapter.
Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

This research focused on the impact of preschool teachers’ education levels on the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. The selected preschool teachers have earned an Associate of Arts degree, a Bachelors degree or a Masters degree from an accredited community college or university. The preschool teachers are all currently employed and working in preschool programs with students from age 3-5 years- old. The setting for this research is located within the five school districts in the Sacramento County region. The school-readiness skills were based on the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment tool. This research-based assessment tool is utilized to measure preschool students’ growth in academic and social skills. The findings in this research were intended to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Associate of Arts degree, Bachelors degree and Masters degree) regarding teacher work experience as reflected in school-readiness skills as assessed on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment?

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Associate of Arts degree, Bachelors degree and Masters degree) regarding
education level as reflected in school-readiness skills as assessed on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment?

**Descriptive Characteristics**

**Preschool Teachers’ Education Level**

The preschool teachers’ education levels are divided into three separate categories. The scaled score of “1” is assigned to preschool teachers with an Associate of Arts degree. These teacher participants have completed approximately 60 college units from an accredited community college to earn this respective degree. The scaled score of “2” is assigned to preschool teachers with a Bachelors degree. These teacher participants have completed approximately 120 college units from an accredited college and/or university. The scaled score of “3” is assigned to preschool teachers with a Masters degree. These teacher participants have completed approximately 180 college units from an accredited college and/or university. Preschool teachers within these three groups had various majors such as Early Childhood Development, Psychology, Liberal Arts and Human Development.

Table 3

*Education Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>Bachelors degree</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>Associate of Arts degree</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Masters degree</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Work Experience

The preschool teacher participants were also asked about their work experience within the Early Childhood Education field. For this research, work experience was defined as paid employment within a preschool setting involving students between the ages of 3-5 years old. As a part of the survey process, the preschool teacher participants self-reported the number of years worked within the field. The scaled score of “1” is assigned to preschool teachers with zero up to 6 years and 11 months of work experience. The scaled score of “2” is assigned to preschool teachers with 7 years and more of work experience within the Early Childhood Education field. From the collected data, the work experience of preschool teachers varied from 1 year to 30+ years.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Experience</th>
<th>1.00</th>
<th>0-6 years 11 months</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>7 years+</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Desired Results Developmental Profile Revised (DRDP-R) Domains

Domain 1. The school-readiness skills are assessed based on the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment tool. The first domain is the Self and Social Development (SSD) domain which measures the self regulation, conflict negotiation and social interpersonal skills of the preschool students. Examples of skills within this domain are playing side-by-side with other friends, seeking the
assistance of a familiar adult, and recognizing one’s own name when sung in a song.

The following table shows the measures within Domain 1 of the DRDP-R:

Table 5

**DRDP-R Domain 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ● Identity of self  
| ● Recognition of own skills and accomplishments  
| ● Expression of empathy  
| ● Impulse control  
| ● Taking turns  
| ● Awareness of diversity in self and others  
| ● Relationships with adults  
| ● Cooperative play with peers  
| ● Socio-dramatic play  
| ● Friendships with peers  
| ● Conflict negotiation  
| ● Shared use of space and materials |

**Domain 2.** The second domain is the Language and Literacy Development (LLD) of the DRDP-R assessment tool. This domain measures the preschool students’ abilities related to verbal language expression, comprehension skills, phonological awareness and ability to follow verbal instructions. Examples of skills within this domain are: remembering daily routine without assistance; verbally expressing statements for refusal or requesting adult assistance; and the ability to follow two to
three-step instructions. The following table shows the measures within Domain 2 of the DRDP-R:

Table 6

*DRDP-R Domain 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Comprehension of meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Following increasingly complex instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Expression of self through language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Language in conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Interest in literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Comprehension of age-appropriate text, presented by adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Concepts of print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Letter and word knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Phonological awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Emergent writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Domain 3.** The third domain of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised is the Cognitive Development domain. Within this domain, the preschool student’s ability to problem solve, memory skills and initiative are measured.

Examples of skills within this domain are engaging in an unfamiliar activity, mixing paints together to see the effects and attempting several ways to fit puzzle pieces together. The following table shows the measures within Domain 3:
Table 7

**DRDP-R Domain 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Cause and effect  
• Problem solving  
• Memory and knowledge  
• Curiosity and initiative  
• Engagement and persistence |

**Domain 4.** The fourth domain of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised is the Mathematical Development domain. Within this domain, the preschool student’s ability to identify shapes, count numbers and form patterns are measured. Examples of skills within this domain are counting and grouping items, identifying differences between shapes and measuring the length of items. The following table shows the measures within Domain 4:

Table 8

**DRDP-R Domain 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Number sense of quantity and counting  
• Number sense of mathematical operations  
• Classification  
• Measurement  
• Shapes  
• Patterning |
**Domain 5.** The fifth domain of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised is the Physical Development and Health domain. Within this domain, the preschool students’ fine-motor skills, balance and gross motor abilities are measured. Examples of skills within this domain are tearing paper into small strips, stringing large beads to make a necklace and walking on tiptoes. The following table shows the measures within Domain 5:

Table 9

*DRDP-R Domain 5*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Gross motor movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fine motor skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal care routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Healthy lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal safety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Developmental Levels**

The domains are assessed with three different rankings of exploring, developing and building. The scaled score of “1” is assigned to the exploring level. The exploring level is assigned to preschool students who have not yet mastered the basic levels of the particular skill. The scaled score of “2” is assigned to the developing level. The developing level is assigned to preschool students who are
progressing toward mastery of the basic levels of particular skills. The scaled score of “3” is assigned to the building level. The building level is assigned to preschool students who have mastered the particular skill and complete it with ease and confidence. These developmental levels were assigned to measure the school-readiness skills of the preschool students by their respective preschool teachers. The classroom overview of the DRDP-R assessment tool is utilized to measure the students’ school-readiness skills based on the preschool teacher’s education levels.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

The preschool teachers’ education level and school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students were collected using the DRDP-R assessment tool and surveys. The collected data is analyzed utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). For the first research question, the researcher conducted the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to assess the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students based on the education levels of the preschool teachers for Domains 1-5. The paired samples T-test was selected to evaluate whether the group means on the dependent variable differ significantly from each other.

The results indicate there was no significance between the preschool teachers’ education levels and the following domains:
Table 10

Research Question #1 Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self and Social</td>
<td>2.012</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Language &amp; Literacy Development</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cognitive Development</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mathematical Development</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Physical Development &amp; Health</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.536</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the preschool teachers’ education level and five domains of the DRDP-R assessment tool. There was not significant difference in the scores of Self and Social Development Domain 1 (M=2.012, SD=.64, df=80, p=.677). There was not significant difference in the scores of the Language and Literacy Development Domain 2 (M=1.77, SD=.64, df=80, p=.35). There was not significant difference in the scores of the Cognitive Development Domain 3 (M=1.93, SD=.63, df=80, p=.609). There was not significant difference in the scores of the Mathematical Development Domain 4 (M=1.78, SD=.65, df=80, p=.557). There was not significant difference in the scores of the Physical Development and Health Domain 5 (M=2.36, SD=.64, df=80, p=.536). According to the quantitative data, preschool students consistently ranked in the
developing level despite the education level of the preschool teachers. These results suggest that preschool students’ are not adversely or positively affected by the level of the preschool teachers’ education levels.

For the second research question, the ANOVA method was also utilized to compare the school-readiness skills of preschool students based on the work experience of the preschool teachers for Domains 1-5.

The results indicate there was no significance between the preschool teachers’ work experience and the following domains:

Table 11

*Research Question #2 Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self and Social</td>
<td>2.012</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Language &amp; Literacy Development</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cognitive Development</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mathematical Development</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Physical Development &amp; Health</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.593</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the preschool teachers’ work experience and five domains of the DRDP-R assessment tool. There was not significant difference in the scores of Self and Social Development Domain 1 (M=2.012, SD=.64, df=80, p=.114). There was not significant difference in the scores of the Language and Literacy Development Domain 2 (M=1.77, SD=.64, df=80, p=.833). There was not significant difference in the scores of the Cognitive Development Domain 3 (M=1.93, SD=.63, df=80, p=.352). There was not significant difference in the scores of the Mathematical Development Domain 4 (M=1.78, SD=.65, df=80, p=.784). There was not significant difference in the scores of the Physical Development and Health Domain 5 (M=2.36, SD=.64, df=80, p=.593). According to the quantitative data, preschool students consistently ranked in the developing level despite the work experience of their preschool teachers. These results suggest that preschool students’ are not adversely or positively affected by the years and months the preschool teachers’ have worked.

**Research Question Findings**

This section addresses the results of the research as they relate to the two research questions. The first research question was:

Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Associate of Arts degree, Bachelors degree and Masters degree) regarding teacher work experience on school-readiness skills as assessed on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment? For this research question, the researcher compared the preschool teachers’ education levels to
the five domains of the DRDP-R assessment. Utilizing the one way analysis of
variance (ANOVA), the results did not show any significant differences between the
preschool teachers’ education levels and the five domains of the school-readiness
skills assessment.

The second research question was: Research Question 2: Is there a significant
difference between three teacher groups (Associate of Arts degree, Bachelors degree
and Masters degree) regarding education level on school-readiness skills as assessed
on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-R (DRDP-R)
assessment? For this research question, the researcher compared the work experience
of the preschool teachers to the five domains of the DRDP-R assessment. The
researcher utilized the one-way ANOVA analysis method and the results did not show
any significant differences between the work experience of the preschool teachers and
the five domains of the DRDP-R assessment.

**Qualitative Research Design**

The quantitative research method did not yield any concrete findings on the
impact of preschool teachers’ education levels on the acquisition of school-readiness
skills of kindergarten-bound students. In an effort to further analyze the two research
questions, the researcher gathered additional data utilizing the qualitative research
method. Qualitative research methods are typically utilized in social science to
determine the relationship between variables as interpreted by the participant’s
opinion and viewpoint (Creswell, 2009).
Grounded theory will be the theoretical framework for the qualitative portion of the dissertation. Grounded theory implies that the researcher will explore events and activities through the view of participants. The major characteristics of this theory are multiple stages of data collection, the comparison of data, and sampling of different groups to determine the similarities and differences of the information (Creswell, 2009). This dissertation compares the different teacher education levels with the different ability skills and achievement success of the preschool students based on assessment data. The dissertation also investigates preschool teachers’ perceptions about whether or not their work experience is a factor in teaching school-readiness skills.

The constant comparative method described by Merriam (2009) as comparisons of one set of data to another to determine differences and similarities will also be utilized within the analysis procedure. This will include the open coding of the data then the utilization of another round of data analysis to seek additional themes or categories. This process of theme analysis continues until major categories have been developed and all the data fits into those main categories.

Merriam (2009) describes the three types of interviews such as highly structured/standardized, semi-structured and unstructured/informal that can be utilized when interviews are used to collect data. For this dissertation, the researcher utilized the semi-structured interviews permitting more flexibility with the questioning and a variety of types of questions. The semi-structured format permitted additional
gathering of data instead of simply asking the predetermined interview questions without any differentiation from the interview protocol.

With the use of qualitative research method, the types of questions utilized in interviews are also critical to the collection of quality data. Merriam (2009) describes the six types of questions that can be utilized during the interview process. For the teacher interviews, this researcher utilized two types of questions: opinion and value; and knowledge. The first type was the opinion and values questions. Aimed at eliciting the participants’ believes about school-readiness skills, benefits of preschool programs and factors for quality preschool programs. The other type of question was knowledge questions. These types of questions inquire about the interviewees’ factual understanding of particular concepts such as the definition of school-readiness skills and overall kindergarten readiness for all students. The purpose of the knowledge questions where to ascertain how informed the participants were on specific topics related to preschool and kindergarten topics.

**Participants’ Background Information**

**Teacher 1**

This female participant is currently employed as a full time preschool teacher in District 1. She has worked with preschool students for almost 14 years in public school settings only. The participant has work experience in the Sacramento area only. The participant has a Bachelors degree from California State University, Sacramento and a Masters degree in Early Childhood Education from an online program.
Teacher 2

This female participant is employed as a full time preschool teacher in District 1 with over 12 years of work experience. The participant has worked with preschool students in both private and public preschool settings in the Sacramento area and Texas Head Start programs. The participant has a Bachelors degree in Early Childhood Education and plans to work on a Masters degree.

Teacher 3

This female participant is employed as a full time preschool teacher with over 5 years of work experience. The participant has only worked in public preschool settings in the Stockton, CA and Sacramento area. The participant has a Bachelors degree in Early Childhood Education from California State University, Sacramento and does not plan to pursue any additional degrees.

Teacher 4

This female participant is currently employed as a full time preschool teacher with over 18 years of work experience. The participant has worked only in public preschool settings in the Sacramento area. The participant has an Associate of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education from American River College in Sacramento. The participant is planning to pursue a Bachelors degree within the next two years.

Teacher 5

This female participant is currently employed as a full time preschool teacher with 14 years of work experience in the Sacramento area only. The participant has worked in both public and private preschool settings as well as operated an in-home
family daycare center. The participant has an Associate of Arts degree in Liberal Studies and does not wish to pursue any additional degrees.

To further examine the impact of preschool teacher education levels on the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students, each participant was asked the following six questions:

1. What are school-readiness skills?
2. How does your education level affect students’ acquisition of school-readiness skills?
3. What other factors contribute to increased school-readiness skills?
4. What factors contribute to quality preschool programs?
5. What are the benefits of preschool programs?
6. Are kindergarten-bound students academically and socially prepared upon entry into kindergarten? Why or why not?

The participants were individually asked the interview questions and the responses were audio recorded. The researcher also took written notes during the interviews to ensure all relevant information was captured. After the interviews, the researcher transcribed the responses to determine the relevant themes for each question. Below are the reoccurring themes for the six interview questions.

**Question 1: What are school-readiness skills?**

All participants reported that school-readiness skills are concepts that preschool students need to know when they enter kindergarten. All participants further reported that the skills can vary within different preschool programs and classrooms.
All participants further reported that teaching school-readiness skills to their kindergarten-bound students is their primary goal as preschool teachers. The participants reported that school-readiness skills included but is not limited to the following skills: recognizing first and last name, counting to thirty, identifying colors and shapes, recognizing lower and upper case letters, knowing letter sounds. One participant reported that as a teacher her goal is to teach her students not only their letter sounds but the beginning stages of blending the sounds together to make words.

During all five interviews of the preschool teachers, the responses noted skills related to all academic concepts. None of the participants referenced any social competence skills such as taking turns, listening or making friends as part of the desired school-readiness skills for kindergarten entry.

**Question 2: How does your education level affect the acquisition of school-readiness skills?**

The responses to this particular question varied greatly among the participants. Teacher 1 (Masters degree) and Teacher 2 (Bachelors degree with plans to get Masters degree soon) both responded that education is a very important part of their current career. Both Teacher 1 and 2 reported that their educational degrees greatly impact their effectiveness as teachers. Both participants state that the course work and educational knowledge obtained in college provides the foundation for how to be an effective teacher, learn great techniques to impact how their students learn and methods to create supportive learning environments for their students.
Teacher 3 (Bachelors degree) acknowledged that obtaining a Bachelors degree has improved the techniques and strategies utilized in the classroom to teach preschool students. When asked if additional education such as a Masters degree would impact the ability to teach school-readiness skills for kindergarten-bound students, the participant denied that additional education beyond a Bachelors degree was necessary. The participant stated that educational program at California State University, Sacramento included a wide variety of courses that provided a sound foundation of theoretical and practical knowledge for aspiring preschool teachers.

Teacher 4 (Associate of Arts degree) denied that the educational degree improved her teaching ability. Per the respondent, the course work did not demonstrate how to apply the theoretical framework to real-life situations so the community college courses were not beneficial. The participant further reported that the course work neither prepared her to be a good teacher nor did the coursework provide insight into how to handle atypical situations with children or parents. The participant further reported that the work experience and working with veteran teachers who provided guidance/mentoring was more beneficial than the Associate of Arts degree. The participants stated she will reluctantly obtain a Bachelors degree within the next two years only because of the Head Start requirement for preschool teachers to obtain a Bachelor degree. The participant denied that obtaining the Bachelors degree will enhance any teaching strategies or increasing the school-readiness skills learned by kindergarten-bound students.
Teacher 5 (Associate of Arts) – The participants denied that the Associate of Arts courses plays a significant role in the kindergarten-bound students obtaining school-readiness skills. The participant states that the Associate of Arts degree was obtained when transitioning from the private preschool setting to the public preschool programs to increase fiscal compensation. The participant states that the in-home daycare setting with the practical and hands-on approach provided the best teaching of strategies and methods to educate preschool students. The participant denied that obtaining additional degrees could enhance her teaching ability and does not wish to return to school due to her older age.

**Question 3: What other factors contribute to increased school-readiness skills?**

All five participants initially responded that parental involvement greatly increases school-readiness skills for all preschool students. The participants reported that if the home to school connection is strong, then the parents greatly assist with getting the preschool students ready for kindergarten and beyond. The participants state that typically students with involved parents include having the parents volunteer in the classroom, having parents attend classroom meetings and conferences, and having parents review academic work on a regular basis. Asked how they increase parental involvement in their classrooms, the participants noted such things as weekly newsletters, telephone calls, parent conferences and home visits to communicate effectively with the parents.

Two of the participants also reported that a supportive learning environment also affects school-readiness skills. Both participants’ referenced higher Early
Childhood Environmental Rating Scales (ECERS) scores, age-appropriate materials, constant positive praise and having high expectations for all students also contribute to increased school-readiness skills for all students. The two participants stated that students learn more effectively when they are in classrooms with a positive atmosphere including the physical setting with caring staff.

The researcher noted that none of the participants initially noted teacher-student relationship as a factor for increased school-readiness skills until the researcher specifically asked the about the impact on kindergarten-bound students. When asked, all five participants acknowledged that their relationship with the student is also a critical factor that contributes or hinders school-readiness skills. The five participants report that listening to students, learning their various interests, and being consistent with routines, rules and expectations assist with relationship building for students; thereby, increasing the opportunity for students to obtain the necessary school-readiness skills for kindergarten.

**Question 4: What factors contribute to quality preschool programs?**

The answers for this particular question varied amongst the five participants. Teacher 1 reports that quality preschool programs must have highly qualified teachers to be a successful program. The participant reports that higher educated teachers foster increased school-readiness skills due to their knowledge of theoretical frameworks and coursework related to strategies to best serve students. This participant further reports that quality preschool programs must also provide a supportive learning environment. Lastly, this participant reports that ongoing professional development is critical for
programs to keep staff abreast of the latest trends and information in the Early Childhood Education field. Teacher 2 reports that communication is the most important factor that contributes to a great preschool program. This participant describes effective communication as a two-way street between students-teachers, teachers-parents, parents-administration as well as teachers-administrators. The participants reports that lack of communication in preschool programs creates hostile and unhealthy learning environments for all involved parties. The open-door policy provides an opportunity for all stakeholders to collaborate and make improvements if needed, the second participant reports.

The last three participants noted the importance of parental involvement for successful preschool programs. While these three participants noted parental involvement, the avenues for involvement varied amongst the participants’ responses. One of the participants noted that parents should be involved at the classroom level with input on teachers’ lesson plans, classroom volunteer opportunities, parent conferences and home visits. The other two participants noted involvement should be at the administrative level including the bigger decisions related to personnel decisions and overall program functions. These three participants cited parents as the first teachers of their children and the need to partner with school staff for a successful program and transition to kindergarten and beyond.

**Question 5: What are the benefits of preschool programs?**

The participants reported preschool programs help students get ready for kindergarten and later school years. All five participants stated students with preschool
experience usually perform better academically in their later years. All participants noted that academic skills acquired in preschool programs are beneficial for later years; however, none of the participants reported any information about the benefits of the social skills (i.e. listening, sharing, developing friendships, etc.) acquired in preschool programs. All participants noted the short-term benefits of preschool programs, but none of the participants noted the long term societal benefits of decreased crimes, higher salaries and less use of the social services and criminal justice systems.

**Question 6: Are kindergarten-bound students academically and socially prepared upon entry into kindergarten? Why or why not?**

All of the participants attributed this question to their classrooms and their preschool students, rather than as a global question applied to any kindergarten-bound students. All five participants stated that majority of their students entering kindergarten have vast skills that will assist with a successful transition to kindergarten. All five participants report that they work with their four-year-old students entering kindergarten exclusively on the academic skills such as letters, numbers and name recognition. The five participants state that if the kindergarten-bound students are not sufficiently progressing, communication with the parents and extra support is always provided. One participant stated that her only goal for kindergarten-bound students is getting them ready for kindergarten and beyond.

The participants were asked about the social and academic preparation of kindergarten-bound students overall. Three of the participants stated that if students
attend preschool then typically the students are ready both academically and socially for kindergarten. One participant reported if students do not attend preschool but have learning environments at home with parents who provide academic guidance then kindergarten-bound students can also be prepared. Teacher 3 reports that she is not sure about the school-readiness skills of students aside from her classroom experience. She further reports she has only worked in the Early Childhood Education for five years and does not have any knowledge about the research or latest trends for kindergarten-bound students.

**Analysis**

This dissertation assessed the impact of preschool teachers’ education levels on the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. The researcher utilized both quantitative and qualitative data to examine the two research questions. The analysis of the quantitative data concluded no significance between the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment tool and the three teacher groups of teachers with Associate of Arts degrees, Bachelor degrees and Masters degrees. Based on the education levels of the preschool teachers, the data did not reflect any increased school-readiness (academic or social skills) based on the preschool teachers’ education.

The school-readiness skills were also assessed based on the work experience of the preschool teachers (1 month-7 years versus over 7 years) and the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students did not increase with the increase of work
experience. The findings reflect no significance between the work experience of preschool teachers and the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students.

   Based on the quantitative data for this dissertation, neither the preschool teachers’ education levels nor work experience directly affected the school-readiness skills of the kindergarten-bound students. The preschool students performed at the developing level on the DRDP-R assessment despite the lower or higher education levels of their respective preschool teachers. The preschool students were also not directly affected by the years of employment from the preschool teachers. Whether preschool teachers worked less than seven years or more, the majority of the preschool students still performed at the developing level on the assessment tool.

   Based on the analysis of the data, the results reflect no significance difference for the first research question related to the impact of preschool teachers’ work experience on the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. As evidenced by the data, whether preschool teachers work seven years or less, preschool students consistently perform at the developing level in the five domains of the DRDP-R assessment. For the second research question, the results reflect no significance difference between the education levels of preschool teachers’ and the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. As evidenced by the data, preschool students perform at the developing level whether the preschool teachers have an Associate of Arts degree or higher level Masters degree.

   The literature review in Chapter 2 provided research supporting the notion of higher educated teachers (Early et al., 2007) and research concluding no differences in
students’ skills (Jacboson, 2007) based on the education level of preschool teachers. Additional reviewed literature noted the need for additional analysis of other possible contributing factors such as teacher-student relationships, classroom environment and parental involvement (Tal, 2010; Vue et al., 2008). Based on the contrasting research conclusions, this researcher will outline recommendation in Chapter 5 for further research to seek further analysis of the impact of preschool teachers’ education levels on the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students.

Within the systems theory described in Chapter 1, the preschool teachers’ education level on the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students were assessed as part of the overall education system. The school-readiness skills and education of the preschool students were assessed as a larger part of their future learning experience in their kindergarten years and beyond.

The social systems theory also described in Chapter 1 assessed the individual’s reaction toward the environment in which interactions occur. In this dissertation and the qualitative data collected, assessed the personality, believes and ideas of the teacher participants based on their respective educational levels. The five teacher participants’ provided anecdotal and subjective information on their perceptions related to the definition of school-readiness skills, thoughts about other contributing factors for quality preschool programs, benefits of quality preschool programs and perceptions of the school-readiness of kindergarten-bound students.
Conclusion

This chapter outlined the data collected and analysis utilized to answer the two research questions related to the impact of preschool teachers’ education levels on the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. The researcher utilized both quantitative and qualitative research methods to analyze each domain of the school-readiness skills assessment tool related to the three teacher education groups. Through the use of school-readiness skills data based on preschool teachers’ education level and personal interviews of five teachers, the chapter provided details of the findings for the two research questions.

Through the use of quantitative data, the findings did not show any significance between the three teacher groups and the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R). The quantitative data further showed no significance between the work experience of the three teacher groups and the five domains of the school-readiness skills assessment tool. The qualitative data provided additional insight and analysis of the six interview questions. Despite the varied educational levels, the interview responses were similar from the five teachers. The overall findings will be further discussed in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The final chapter of this dissertation will provide a comprehensive summary of the research findings for both the quantitative and qualitative data. The data will be interpreted to conclude the final results to the two research questions of whether preschool teachers’ education levels or work experience affects the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. This chapter will also provide recommendations for future research and future policy implications in the Early Childhood Education field. Lastly, this chapter will conclude with future research opportunities related to analyzing the possible factors that increase the school-readiness skills (academic or the social competence) of kindergarten-bound students.

This dissertation assesses the impact of preschool teachers’ education level on the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. The preschool teachers are divided into three education groups based on the teachers’ self-report of their education. The researcher originally classified the three teacher groups as follows: teachers with state-issued child development permits only, teachers with Associate of Arts degrees from community colleges, and teachers with Bachelors degrees from accredited colleges and universities. The researcher collected information from 83 preschool teachers in Sacramento County and there were not enough teachers with child development permits to form a group for data analysis. After the collection of data and based on the self-reported information, the teacher groups were changed to the following three groups: teachers with Associate of Arts
degrees, teachers with Bachelors degrees and teachers with Masters degrees. The teaching participants were also divided based on the work experience of one month to seven years compared to more than seven years.

After the establishment of the three teacher groups, the researcher utilized the assessment ratings from the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) to assess the school-readiness skills. The assessment tool provided information on the following five domains: Self and Social, Language and Literacy Development, Cognitive Development, Mathematical Development, Physical Development and Health. The three developmental levels utilized are exploring, building and integrating levels. Utilizing the ANOVA research method, the three teacher groups were assessed based on the education levels as well as their work experience.

To develop a more thorough understanding of the research topic, the researcher obtained qualitative data by interviewing five teachers from the three teacher groups. The following questions were asked of the interview participants:

1. What are school-readiness skills?
2. How does your education level affect the acquisition of school-readiness skills?
3. What other factors contribute to increased school-readiness skills?
4. What factors contribute to quality preschool programs?
5. What are the benefits of preschool programs?
6. Are kindergarten-bound students academically and socially prepared upon entry into kindergarten? Why or why not?
The quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analyzed to determine the overall findings related to the impact of preschool teachers’ education levels on the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students.

**Research Questions**

This dissertation addresses the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Associate of Arts degree, Bachelors degree and Masters degree) regarding teacher work experience on school-readiness skills as assessed on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment?

Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference between three teacher groups (Associate of Arts degree, Bachelors degree and Masters degree) regarding education level on school-readiness skills as assessed on the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment?

**Summary of the Findings**

Assessing the three teacher groups, the findings determined no significance between the school-readiness skills based on the education levels of the preschool teachers or the years of work experience. The findings concluded that preschool teacher education levels did not significantly impact the academic or the social competence of the kindergarten-bound students in the respective Sacramento County public school setting. The findings further concluded no significance between the number of work years and the school-readiness skills of the kindergarten-bound students. Furthermore, the length of employment by the preschool teachers within the
Early Childhood Education settings did not impact the increase school-readiness skills. According to the quantitative data, significance was not found between the variables of education levels and work experience related to the impact on the school-readiness skills of the kindergarten-bound students within the three teacher groups.

The qualitative data provided varied responses from the participants related to school-readiness skills. The first question related to the definition of school-readiness skills. All participants responded that school-readiness skills were academic concepts related to preparing students for kindergarten and later educational years. All of the teacher participants further responded that school-readiness skills were specific concepts such as recognizing first and last name, counting to thirty, identifying colors and shapes, recognizing lower and upper case letters, knowing letter sounds. The researcher noted that the initial responses of the participants involved academic concepts and did not emphasize any social skills such as listening, empathy for others, taking turns or sharing concepts.

The second question inquired about how the teachers’ education level affected their student’s school-readiness skills. The responses were varied from all five participants. Three of the teacher participants noted that obtaining their college degrees contributed to their abilities as effective preschool teachers while the two teacher participants denied their formal education contributed to increased school-readiness skills of their students. Teachers 1 (Masters degree) and Teacher 2 (pursuing a Masters degree soon) further acknowledged that increasing their education level to a higher level increases their ability to effectively teach preschool students. Both
participants noted that their formal education assisted with learning the necessary strategies, instructional techniques and theoretical knowledge to support the development of their three-to-five year-old preschool students. While Teacher 3 (Bachelors degree) acknowledged the importance and impact of the formal education, the participant was adamant that additional schooling, such as a Masters degree, would not positively affect the acquisition school-readiness skills of the preschool students. Teachers 4 and 5 (Associate of Arts degrees) denied that the community college experience enhances their teaching abilities. Both teachers related their effective teaching strategies to real-life work experience rather than the coursework obtained at the community college level. Both participants reported no desire to obtain any additional degrees and denied that the higher education degrees would enhance their abilities in the preschool setting.

The third question inquired about other factors that contribute to increased school-readiness skills. The initial responses of all five teacher participants were the importance of parental involvement. The teacher participants noted that their preschool students tended to perform better academically and socially when the parents were involved on a regular basis. All of the participants noted that parental involvement included volunteering in the classroom, attending classroom meetings, participating in parent conferences and home visits and reviewing the students’ homework daily. Upon further inquiry from the researcher, the participants also noted supportive learning environments and teacher-student relationships also positively affecting the school-readiness skills of their preschool students.
The fourth question addressed the factors that contribute to quality preschool programs. Participants noted that effective teachers, two-way communication between all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers and administrators), parental involvement and shared decision-making processes with parents contribute to quality preschool programs.

The fifth question inquired about the benefits of preschool programs. All of the participants noted the short-term benefits of improved academic performance in future years, but the social competence skills obtained in preschool were not noted by the teacher participants. The teacher participants also did not note any of the long-term benefits of preschool experience such as higher graduation rates, higher income levels, lower crime rates and less use of the social services justices (i.e. criminal justice and human assistance departments).

The last question addressed the overall academic and social preparation of kindergarten-bound students. The participants answered this particular question initially about their respective preschool students and noted that majority of their four-year olds would successfully transition into kindergarten due to the skills and experience in the preschool setting. All participants responded with information about the academic skills of their kindergarten-bound students, while social skills were not initially noted. When asked about the preparedness of kindergarten-bound students globally, the participants noted that typically students with quality preschool experiences should transition into kindergarten with the necessary skills to succeed. One teacher participant noted that students without preschool experience but
supportive learning environments at home and involved parents could also obtain the critical skills to prepare for a successful kindergarten transition.

**Interpretation of Findings**

This dissertation assessed the impact of preschool teachers’ education levels on the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. The researcher utilized both quantitative and qualitative data to examine the two research questions. The analysis of the quantitative data concluded no significance between the five domains of the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) assessment tool and the three teacher groups of teachers with Associate of Arts degrees, Bachelor degrees and Masters degrees. Based on the education levels of the preschool teachers, the data did not reflect any increased school-readiness (academic or social skills) based on the preschool teachers’ education.

The school-readiness skills were also assessed based on the work experience of the preschool teachers (1 month-7 years versus over 7 years) and the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students did not increase with the increase of work experience. The findings reflect no significance between the work experience of preschool teachers and the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students.

Based on the quantitative data for this dissertation, neither the preschool teachers’ education levels nor work experience directly affected the school-readiness skills of the kindergarten-bound students. The preschool students performed at the developing level on the DRDP-R assessment despite the lower or higher education levels of their respective preschool teachers. The preschool students were also not
directly affected by the years of employment from the preschool teachers. Whether preschool teachers worked less than seven years or more, the majority of the preschool students still performed at the developing level on the assessment tool.

Due to the small sample size of 81 preschool teachers and participants employed in Sacramento County only, the findings cannot be generalized to the larger population, however, the findings concluded that neither the preschool teachers’ education levels nor work experience have a direct effect on the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. This quantitative data shows that despite the education level of preschool teachers and their work experience, preschool students are acquiring both academic and social skills for successful kindergarten transition.

The qualitative data provided more in-depth information on the common themes, reoccurring factors and perceptions that contribute to the following concepts:

1. Definition of school-readiness skills;
2. Perceptions of how preschool teachers’ education level affects school-readiness skills;
3. Additional factors that contribute to increased school-readiness skills;
4. Contributing factors to quality preschool programs;
5. Benefits of quality preschool programs; and
6. Perceptions of kindergarten transition for preschool students

The first question found that school-readiness skills are typically defined by preschool teachers as academic concepts. Although the concept of school-readiness skills are usually both academic and social skills, the participants initially only noted
academic skills. In assessing school-readiness skills, it is customary for teachers to focus on skills that can be easily assessed with quantitative or objective results versus concepts such as sharing and listening that are more subjective skills.

The second question reflected the difference of opinions from the participants on the effects of their education levels on school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. Depending on their education levels, the participants’ views were varied on the importance of formal education and the critical need for additional education degrees. The findings reflected no real consensus on the impact of the preschool teachers’ education levels on preschool students as some participants viewed formal coursework as important while other participants noted work experience as the most important factor. The varied results from this question can be contributed to the different educational pathways each participant engaged in and the motivation for seeking educational degrees. For example, the participants with Masters degree or seeking a Masters degree deem the formal coursework as an avenue for learning new instructional techniques, while the Associate of Arts degree participants deem hands-on work experience as the method to obtain new strategies. These varied responses from preschool teachers with different education levels demonstrates the need for an aligned preschool teacher preparation program which the researcher will discuss further in the recommendation section of this chapter.

The responses from the qualitative data for question three illustrated the importance of parental involvement as all participants responded similarly. As the researcher noted in the literature review of Chapter 2, parental involvements is
frequently noted as an important factor in the successful kindergarten transition of preschool students and in students’ educational journeys. The alignment of the literature with the participants’ responses indicates parental involvement as a vital factor to increasing the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students.

The responses to question four include high quality teachers, effective communication, supportive learning environment and parental involvement as factors that contribute to quality preschool programs. Although diverse responses from the teacher participants’, the responses are supported by the literature review in Chapter 2 in which parental involvement, environment and teacher-student relationships are noted as three of the critical factors for quality preschool programs. The literature review supporting the teacher participants’ responses provides additional evidence of common themes when seeking contributing factors to quality preschool programs.

The benefits of preschool programs were interpreted by the teacher participants as short-term benefits only. The responses noted the academic advantages of the kindergarten-bound students however the participants did not initially note any of the long-term societal benefits. As preschool teachers providing the fundamental skills to their preschool students to improve the societal contributions, the participants should be knowledgeable about the value of their teachings. Additional resources should be utilized so preschool teachers recognize the impact on society and articulate the importance of preschool to all involved stakeholders. The participants’ responses conclude that additional information and global discussion of the long-term benefits of preschool programs should be further researched and explored globally.
The responses to the last question of kindergarten-bound students being academically and socially prepared when entering kindergarten were similar with preschool teachers noting their students being academically prepared. It can be concluded that the participation in preschool services typically are successful in the transition to kindergarten due to the skills and concepts learned during the preschool experience.

This dissertation is guided by the systems theory in which interrelated parts work together to achieve a particular goal (Bess & Dee, 2008a). The quantitative data reflects the notion of preschool as an entity within the larger K-12 and P-16 educational systems. Preschool is a smaller part of the larger systems that continue to focus on educating and preparing the youngest students for later success in their future academic years. Within this dissertation, the actual preschool classroom is also a part of the elementary school in which the goal continues to be educating preschool students.

Within the classroom the social systems theory influences the attitudes and believes of the key stakeholders that contribute to the acquisition of school-readiness skills (Banathay, 1996). These key stakeholders of teachers, administrators and parents contribute both positively and negatively to the environment that supports the learning of school-readiness skills. The stakeholders beliefs, guidance, interactions and opinions related to the academic and social skills of the preschool students affect the overall acquisition of school-readiness skills. The qualitative data reflected varying opinions of the importance of formal education, the importance of social skills
acquired in preschool settings as well as opinions about the readiness of kindergarten-bound students based on the background of the particular teacher participant. These two theories were the framework for which the dissertation research questions and data were assessed for the final outcomes.

**Recommendations for Action**

After a review of the quantitative and qualitative data utilized to assess the impact of preschool teachers’ education levels on the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students, the researcher has the following two preliminary recommendations: developing a standardized definition of school-readiness skills, comprehensive list of abilities, alignment of preschool teacher preparation programs and developing the role of the DRDP-R assessment tool assessor.

In an effort to increase the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students, a concrete definition of school-readiness skills and comprehensive list of skills would benefit the Early Childhood Education field. For this dissertation, the researcher utilized the definition of school-readiness skills as students’ abilities upon entry into an official kindergarten class which include academic abilities, social capabilities and motor skills (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center). In collecting data for this dissertation, the researcher found multiple definitions of school-readiness skills which included but was not limited to academic, social, fine and gross motor skills.

For example, the National Association of Educating Young Children (NAEYC, 2004) describes school-readiness skills as “involving more than just children. School-
 readiness, in the broadest sense, is about children, families, early environments, schools, and communities. Children are not innately “ready” or “not ready” for school. Their skills and development are strongly influenced by their families and through their interactions with other people and environments before coming to school. In addition, the Office of Head Start (2008) describes school-readiness skill as “children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life.” Children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children’s learning, and schools are ready for children. These are two examples of descriptions of school-readiness skills as each state’s Department of Education also provides individualized definitions. The varying definitions create confusion on which particular skills are being referenced when addressing school-readiness skills in articles, assessment tools and articulation purposes.

This researcher highly suggests that the United States Department of Education, in collaboration with the leading programs in the Early Childhood Education field such as Head Start and the National Association of Educating Young Children (NAEYC), develop a streamlined definition that could be adopted and utilized in the preschool arena nationwide. A possible nationwide definition of school-readiness skills could be “the engagement of students, families and the community to provide students with the necessary skills, motivation and guidance for current and lifelong learning to be success in all school, career and life experiences”. The aligned definition would create an universal description for future use in articulating about preschool related topics. This streamline definition would ensure researchers, policy
makers and all key stakeholders are discussing the same concepts when referencing school-readiness skills.

In addition to the streamlined definition, the development of a comprehensive school-readiness skills checklist would also benefit the Early Childhood field. When researching school-readiness skills for this dissertation, the skills varied greatly with the inclusion or exclusion of academics, fine and gross motor skills as well as social competence skills. For example, the Parenting Guide (Cedoline, 2011) lists the following skills for kindergarten-bound students:

- Academic skills (write name, count to ten, recognize shapes, read high frequency words, identify lower and upper case letters and name colors)
- Social skills (listening to adults, following simple instructions, sharing items with peers, taking turns and showing empathy for others)
- Gross motor skills (riding a tricycle, jumping up and down, hopping on one foot, and bouncing ball)
- Fine motor skills (holding pencil, cutting with scissors, pasting with glue, zipping and tying shoe laces)

This researcher is recommending that the Department of Education in collaboration with key stakeholders such as the 50 State Education Departments develop a comprehensive school-readiness skills lists that include academic, social, fine and gross motor skills. While it is customary to focus on the academic skills, the fine, gross and social skills should also be included in the comprehensive skills lists so kindergarten-bound students are prepared in all areas for future success.
The comprehensive skills lists would specifically detail the abilities the preschool students would acquire before entering kindergarten. The comprehensive list would ensure kindergarten-bound students begin school with the basic fundamentals and would ensure that preschool programs are all focused on teaching their preschool students the same or similar skills. The following is a list of school-readiness skills that could be acquired before kindergarten entry:

1. Name recognition
2. Upper and lower case letter recognition
3. Rote counting 1-20
4. Recognition of 1-20 numbers out of order
5. Recognition of 6 shapes (circle, square, triangle, diamond, crescent, rectangle)
6. Recognition of 9 colors (black, white, red, yellow, green, brown, purple, blue, orange)
7. Ability to take turns and share items with peers
8. Ability to focus and listen to short story
9. Ability to follow 1-2 step directions
10. Ability to show empathy for peers and adults
11. Ability to hold scissors and pencil in palmer grip
12. Ability to be independent in self care practices (wipe nose, put on jacket, wash hands, etc)
13. Ability to run, jump and bounce balls
With the alignment of the school-readiness skills list, the assessment tools could be streamlined to measure the mastery of the fundamental skills. The assessment results could be compared for greater analysis of the readiness of kindergarten-bound students both statewide and nationwide to provide a clearer picture of the effectiveness of the current preschool practices and programs.

The additional recommendation is the alignment of preschool teacher preparation programs as the teacher participants’ opinions on the formal education process varied greatly. The current requirement for preschool teachers varies nationwide with the need for child development permits (12 units) to Bachelors degrees (120 units) for the classification of preschool teacher. This researcher recommends that the job description and educational requirements of preschool teachers is aligned nationwide. With input from the Federal Department of Education and key stakeholders such as higher education administrators, Office of Head Start, NAEYC and K-12 administrators, a minimum requirement for the education level for preschool teachers should be established for nationwide certification as a preschool teacher. The alignment of the education requirement would permit a centralized job description and expectations for preschool teachers. Preschool teachers in Texas would be similarly educated and trained like teachers in Iowa for alignment nationwide.

In aligning the educational requirements, the preschool teacher preparation programs at the community and university level would also have to be aligned. Since the data from this dissertation did not support the notion of higher educated teachers
contributing to improved school-readiness skills, the key stakeholders would have to determine whether an Associate of Arts degree or Bachelors degree would be the educational minimum for preschool teachers. At either higher education setting (community college or university setting), the required coursework would include a balance of Early Childhood information courses, lab work for onsite work experience as well as general education requirements (Math, Science, English, etc).

This researcher suggests the following 60 unit preparation program for preschool teachers at the community college level:

Table 12

*Potential Coursework for Preschool Teachers’ Preparation Programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th># of units</th>
<th>Course description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Arts, Anthropology, Spanish, French, Italian, Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Composition</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Analytical Thinking</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Psychology, Geography, Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Physics, Chemistry, Geography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/Behavioral Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sociology, History, Anthropology, Psychology,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Institutions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>History, Political Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic/Multicultural Studies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Art History, Psychology, Humanities, Biology, Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dance, Fitness, Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Development Skills</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Business, Speech, Sociology, Nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Basic child development practices and concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance concepts of Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Additional child development practices, developmental learning theories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This proposed preschool teacher preparation program includes a greater emphasis on hands-on experience with a balance of courses related to information and daily implementation of the preschool classroom. The proposed coursework would lead to an Associate of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education degree at the local community college. The preschool teachers would be nationally certified as preschool teachers with the earned degree therefore the specific state-issued child development permits would not be needed.

With the proposed preparation program, Bachelors degrees in the Early Childhood Education level would be for preschool teachers desiring to become
Preschool Center Administrators, preschool researchers/analysts or in higher level positions within the Early Childhood Education field.

The use of the DRDP-R assessment tool requires the training of preschool teacher to understand the tool and the method for assessing students correctly. The assessment tool requires the collection of work samples and anecdotal notes to support the various student rankings. The process of training to use the DRDP-R is typically done by watching videos, rating vignettes and an overview of the assessment tool. The variations within the training create differences in the final rating of the students. This researcher suggests having a neutral person within the preschool program assist with the student rating to possibly eliminate the subjectivity created by teachers assessing their own children. The neutral assessor could review the teachers’ rating and evidence that supports the ratings to ensure the rating within the preschool program are consistent and aligned with the intent of the assessment tool.

The subjectivity of the teachers’ rating and the assessment tool continues to be a limitation within this dissertation. As each teacher has their own experience, training and personal effects that contribute to the rationale for rating, the differences create an opportunity for scores to be misconstrued. Without the alignment of the rating system for the DRDP-R assessment tool, any data related to the assessment tool may be viewed as too subjective to generalize to larger populations. It is highly suggested that states utilizing the DRDP-R as an assessment of preschool students develop a fundamental training process and continue streamlining the process of rating students as exploring, developing, building and integrating rankings.
This researcher highly recommends the development of a standardized school-readiness definition and skills checklist along with the alignment of preparation programs nationwide. The adoption of these two critical recommendations will further assist with collecting data nationwide to critically assess the Early Childhood Education field as a critical factor in closing the achievement gap in the public education system.

**Policy Implications**

This dissertation assesses the impact of preschool teachers’ education levels on the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. In Chapter 1, the researcher discussed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 in which the highly qualified teacher is defined as a kindergarten through 12th grade teacher (United States Department of Education, 2004). The federal law does not address education requirements for preschool teachers nor are there any federal requirements for defining highly qualified preschool teachers. In aligning with the previous recommendations of this researcher, it is highly suggested that the educational requirements for preschool teachers is aligned nationwide with a college level preparation leading to a centralized Early Childhood Education degree.

After the recommendation is implemented, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 should be amended to include preschool teachers as part of the Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) definition within the federal law. The revision of this federal law would include preschool teachers as a part of the overall educational system and seek to include the preschool system as an integrated part of the public school system.
Within the revised federal law, the requirements to obtain an Associate of Arts for the title of Preschool Teacher would be established and the classification of preschool teacher would be clearly defined nationwide for both public and private preschool programs. This policy implication is vital to addressing the achievement gap as preschool teachers would be included in the articulation process and seen as a viable resource to eliminating the achievement gap. The improvement of preschool teachers’ education provides the earliest possible interventions for young preschool students to obtain the necessary skills to transition successfully to kindergarten and for future success in their later years.

The inclusion of preschool services with the K-12 school system would also encourage the key elementary and secondary stakeholders to begin recognizing their preschool colleagues as like-minded counterparts within the education field including articulation meetings for successful transition purposes. The inclusion of preschool in the federal law would clearly define the education requirements and further provide standards for the hiring process within school district’s Human Resources Department.

Another policy implication to further the discussion of this dissertation topic is the development of common core standards for preschool. With the adoption of the common core for the K-12 system, it is highly recommended that common core standards are developed for preschool. While standardized testing has been widely critiqued for students, (especially younger students), it could be considered with strategic procedures for the assessment of preschool students to achieve the learning objectives. The adoption of preschool common core standards would provide
nationwide guidance on the recommended learning objectives for preschool students. The common core standards for preschool could align with the established common core standards in both English Language Arts and Mathematics. Each state could adopt the preschool common core standards and implement the standards within their respective area, as well as provide quantitative data to contribute to the assessment of the preschool programs nationwide. This policy implication aligns with the researcher’s recommendation for a standardized definition of school-readiness skills and a comprehensive list of school-readiness skills with the academic, social, fine motor and gross motor skills to assess programs nationwide with the same data and assessment tools.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

This dissertation assesses the impact of preschool teachers’ education levels on the acquisition of school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students within the Sacramento County area only. The researcher highly suggests additional research projects to assess the additional factor of teacher-student relationships that may contribute to improved school-readiness skills. In the future research, additional assessment tools such as the CLASS (measuring teacher-student relationships) and qualitative data from teacher and student would provide more in-depth information on the positive value of the teacher-student relationships on the school-readiness skills. As teacher-student relationship were identified in the literature review in Chapter 2 and the qualitative data from this dissertation, the information obtained from future
research may provide additional information that could positively increase the school-readiness skills of preschool students.

This researcher also suggests the development of an innovative assessment tool that measures the classroom environment for aspects of support, nurturing and being appropriate for increasing school-readiness skills. As referenced in the literature review of Chapter 2, the environment includes the physical location, outdoor areas, materials and supplies as well as language development within the classroom. This newly developed assessment tool could include the following concepts to assess the preschool environment:

1. Behavior Management (system for redirection, promoting positive behavior, decreasing negative behavior, classroom management skills, interference of negative behaviors on instructional time)

2. Space and furnishings (furniture, room arrangement, specific learning centers, outdoor space)

3. Peer-to-peer interactions (promotion of social play, group play, peer conflict resolution, effective communication)

4. Teacher-student interactions (use of student-led activities, welcoming/accepting strategies, balance of positive praise with appropriate redirection)

5. Cultural Awareness (use of cultural materials to increase acceptance, provisions for special needs students, integration of various cultural practices into schedule)
6. Parental Involvement (welcoming strategies, opportunities for classroom participation, opportunities for assisting aside from classroom, shared decision making powers at various levels within agency, facilitation of parent meetings/trainings)

7. Technology (use of television, computers, SMART Boards, hand-held electronics to enhance curricular topics)

The assessment tool could use a scaled ranking system of 1-5 to examine the extent in which classrooms are providing a rich, supportive learning environment that promotes the learning of skills for kindergarten and beyond.

This researcher also suggests further research on the value of parental involvement on the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students. The additional research should capture a qualitative aspect of ideas from the preschool parents as well as qualitative information from preschool teachers on how to increase parental involvement in preschool programs. A quantitative survey for parents and teachers would also provide beneficial information on the impact of parental involvement on the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students.

Lastly, this researcher further suggests replication of this particular dissertation topic on a larger scale than Sacramento County. As the Desired Results Developmental Profile-Revised (DRDP-R) is the widely utilized assessment tool for school-readiness skills in California, this research project could be assessed with all of the public preschool programs in California. The additional research would provide a larger sample size of teacher participants and the data findings that could be
generalized to different settings and populations. With the larger sample size, the results may provide more in-depth information about the effects of the education levels as well as if there is a significant relationship between education levels and school-readiness skills.

The Researcher’s Reflections

This researcher selected the topic of preschool teachers’ education levels and school-readiness skills due to the recent impact of the Head Start education requirements impact at the researcher’s school site. With the adoption of the education requirements, the Office of Head Start at the federal level is requiring 50% of the preschool teachers nationwide to obtain their Bachelors degree by September 2013 (Office of Head Start, 2008). Thus, the researcher was interested in determining if findings in Sacramento County were consistent with the notion that higher-educated teachers contribute to increased school-readiness skills, as this was not typically the case at the researcher’s work site.

With over four years of experience as the Head Start Director at the work site, the researcher noted that the preschool teachers with less formal education and more work experience typically produced better assessment results for kindergarten-bound students. While this researcher values the importance of obtaining an educational degree and the solid theoretical background provided by participating in higher education, the benefits of hands-on experience and field work cannot be underestimated when attempting to determine the factors that contribute to effective preschool teachers. Furthermore, this researcher continues to advocate for a balance of
formal education with a blend of work experience for the most effective teacher in the preschool classrooms.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Participant Consent Form
Participant Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in research which will be conducted by Tabitha Eaden Thompson, a doctorate student in the Educational Leadership program at California State University, Sacramento.

The study will investigate the impact of preschool teachers’ education levels on school-readiness skills for kindergarten bound students. You will be asked to complete a survey regarding your education level and work experience. The surveys may require up to 5-10 minutes of your time. You will also be asked to provide copies of the DRDP-PS assessment data for your preschool classroom for the Fall 2012. No identifying information will be utilized on the surveys or the assessment data and an assigned number will be used for confidentiality purposes.

Some of the questions on the surveys may seem personal but you may choose to not answer any questions. You may complete as much or as little of the survey as you wish.

You may gain additional insight into factors that affect school-readiness skills for kindergarten bound students or you may not personally benefit from participating in the research. It is hoped that the results of the study will be beneficial for teachers, educational leaders and any other stakeholders hoping to improve the academic and social development of students.

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

All results obtained in this study will be confidential. Your students’ individual performance will not be collected and only the collective results of the entire classroom will be collected and analyzed. All data collected will be stored in a locked file cabinet by the researcher and destroyed no later than May 2014.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Tabitha Eaden Thompson at (916) 566-3485 or by e-mail at Tabitha.Thompson@Twinriversusd.org. My Faculty Advisor Lisa William-White can also be contacted at (916) 278-7778 or by email at Lywwhite@csus.edu.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to decide at a later time to stop participating. Your participation in this research study does not have any effect on your employment status nor the performance evaluation process. The researcher may also end your participation at any time. By signing below, you are saying that you understand the risks associated with the research and agree to participate in it.

_______________________  ______________________
Signature of participant      Date

_______________________  ______________________
Signature of Witness          Date
APPENDIX B

District Support Request Letter
August 23, 2012
Re: Support of Dissertation Research Study

Dear School Superintendent, Early Childhood Education Director or Designee:

This letter is a request for the support of [name of school district or private preschool program]'s assistance with my Dissertation research study I am conducting as part of the Educational Leadership doctoral program at the California State University, Sacramento under the supervision of Dr. Lisa Williams-White. The title of my dissertation project is “The effects of preschool teachers’ education levels on the critical factors affecting school-readiness skills for kindergarten bound students”.

The purpose statement for this research study is to examine whether preschool teachers’ level of postsecondary college experience has an effect on critical factors that contribute to school-readiness skills of academic achievement and social/ emotional development. The critical factors have been identified as student-teacher relationships, environment and parental involvement. The targeted audience for this research study is all involved stakeholders in the education field. The information from this research study can be utilized by education policy makers and education advocates to solicit additional funding for preschool teachers’ credentialing and training programs. The results of the research study maybe utilized by preschool administrators and school districts’ Human Resources Departments to determine what educational requirements will be established for their preschool teaching staff to increase social competence and academic success.

It is my hope to connect with preschool teachers with Bachelors degrees, Associate of Arts degrees and Child Development Teacher permits who are currently employed within your agency and invite them to participate in this research study. I believe that the potential preschool teacher participants within your agency will have the required educational levels and assessment information needed to conduct this dissertation research study. During the course of this study, I will be meeting with willing preschool teachers and obtaining their classroom assessment information (ECERS, CLASS and DRDP-PS classroom scores) for the Fall and Spring semesters. Individual students’ assessment scores will not be collected but the whole classroom assessment information will be analyzed based on the varying teachers’ education levels. At the end of this study, the dissertation project and data findings will be shared with the varied stakeholders and all of the preschool teacher participants.
To respect the privacy and rights of the [school district or private preschool program] and its participants, the participants’ names or any other identifying information will not be utilized during the research process. Participants will be assigned numbers instead that will be utilized during the research process. To solicit participation, I will provide the [name of organization] with information flyers to be distributed to possible participants at your discretion. My contact information will be contained on the flyers. If a preschool teacher is interested in participating they will be invited to contact me to discuss further details and their participation in this study. I appreciate all of your efforts to assist with solicitation of possible participants.

Participation of any preschool teacher is completely voluntary. Each preschool teacher will make their own independent decision as to whether or not they would like to be involved. All participants will be informed and reminded of their rights to participate or withdraw at any time during the research process. Preschool teachers will receive an information letter including detailed information about this study and an informed consent form.

If the [name of organization] wishes the identity of the organization to remain confidential, a pseudonym will be given to the organization. All notes, data and assessment information collected will be retained in my home office and locked in a secure cabinet with myself only having access. All information related to this research study will be confidentially destroyed no later than May 2014. There maybe minimal risk of psychological harm associated with feelings of guilt or embarrassment related to the assessment data of their classroom. All participants will be provided the telephone contact information of (916) 875-1055 for the Sacramento County Health and Human Services Adult Mental Health Department for any psychological concerns.

If you have any comments or concerns resulting from participation in this study, please feel free to contact me or my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Lisa Williams-White at (916) 278-7778, Lywwhite@csus.edu.

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at (916) 566-3485 or by email Tabitha.Thompson@Twinriversusd.org.

I hope that the results of my dissertation study will be beneficial to the [name of organization], to your teaching staff, families and the research community within the Early Childhood Education field. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance with this dissertation project.

Yours sincerely,
Tabitha Eaden Thompson
Doctorate Student
Educational Leadership Program
California State University, Sacramento

Faculty Advisor
Dr. Lisa William-White
Associate Professor
Department of Bilingual and Multicultural Education
California State University, Sacramento
6000 J Street
Sacramento, CA 95819
916-278-7778
APPENDIX C

School District Permission Form
Re: Agency Permission Form

(I) We have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Tabitha Eaden Thompson, a doctorate student in the Educational Leadership program at the California State University, Sacramento under the supervision of Dr. Lisa William-White, Associate Professor in the Department of Bilingual and Multicultural Education Department at the California State University, Sacramento. (I) We have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to our questions, and any additional details (I) we wanted.

(I) We are aware that the name of our agency will only be used in the dissertation study and any publications that come from the research with our permission.

(I) We were informed that this agency may withdraw from assistance with the dissertation project at any time. (I) We were informed that study participants may withdraw from participation at anytime by advising the researcher via telephone, email or written correspondence to the telephone number, email address or mailing address provided by the researcher.

(I) We have been informed this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the Internal Review Board (IRB) of the California State University, Sacramento and that questions (I) we have about the study may be directed to the researcher, Tabitha Eaden Thompson at (916) 566-3485 or by email Tabitha.Thompson@Twinriversusd.org and Dr. Lisa William-White at (916) 278-7778 or by email Lywwhte@csus.edu.

(I) We were informed that if (I) we have any comments or concerns with this study, we may also contact the Internal Review Board at CSUS at (916) 278-7565.

Student Researcher
Tabitha Eaden Thompson
Doctorate Student
Educational Leadership Program
California State University, Sacramento
Faculty Advisor
Dr. Lisa William-White
Associate Professor
Department of Bilingual and Multicultural Education
California State University, Sacramento
6000 J Street
Sacramento, CA 95819
916-278-7778

(I) We agree to help the researcher recruit participants for this study from our preschool programs

□ YES □ NO

(I) We agree to the use of the name of the agency in the dissertation or publication that comes of this research.

□ YES □ NO

If NO, a pseudonym will be used to protect the identity of the organization.

Director Name: ____________________________ (Please print)

Director Signature: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________
APPENDIX D

Teacher Participant Survey
Teacher Participant Survey

Effects of preschool teachers’ level of education on the school-readiness skills of kindergarten-bound students

Preschool teachers’ level of education

1. Do you have a Bachelors degree? No____Yes____
   If yes, what is your major?________________________

2. Do you have an Associate of Arts degree? No____Yes____
   If yes, what is your major?_______________________

3. Do you have a state-issued Child Development Teacher permit?
   No____Yes_____ 
   If yes, which one?
   _____Assistant Child Development permit
   _____Associate Teacher permit
   _____Teacher permit
   _____Master Teacher permit
   _____Site Supervisor permit
   _____Program Director

4. What is your gender? Male _____ Female_____

5. How many years have you been working in a paid position for a private or public preschool program serving 3 to 5 years old students? _______
   0-3 years_______
   4-6 years_______
   7-9 years_______
   10-12 years____
   13-15 years____
   15+ years_______
APPENDIX E

Qualitative Interview Questions
Qualitative Interview Questions

Tabitha Eaden Thompson, Dissertation

1. What are school-readiness skills?
2. How does your education level affect the acquisition of school-readiness skills?
3. What other factors contribute to increased school-readiness skills?
4. What factors contribute to quality preschool programs?
5. What are the benefits of preschool programs?
6. Are kindergarten-bound students academically and socially prepared upon entry into kindergarten? Why or why not?
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