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A comparison of the objectives of parents and teachers for the preschool program

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A comparison of the objectives of parents and teachers for the preschool program

Abstract

During the last decade the number of children attending preschool has increased dramatically. In 1967, 6.8% of three year olds and 21.3% of four year olds were enrolled in school as compared to 20% of three year olds and 41.9% of four year olds in 1976 (Bureau of Census, 1). Several factors have contributed to this growth. There is an increasingly popular attitude among parents of preschoolers that learning experiences provided by families can be beneficially supplemented by an organized preschool experience. This is somewhat an outgrowth of our increasingly achievement-oriented society. Parents hope to give their children a good start at an early age. Changes in family structure and roles also have had their impact. When both parents are employed, some functions which were traditionally associated with the family become functions of preschool or day care programs.

A COMPARISON OF THE OBJECTIVES OF PARENTS
AND TEACHERS FOR THE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

A Research Paper

Submitted to

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

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the Preschool Program

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CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

During the last decade the number of children attending preschool has increased dramatically. In 1967, 6.8% of three year olds and 21.3% of four year olds were enrolled in school as compared to 20% of three year olds and 41.9% of four year olds in 1976 (Bureau of Census, 1).

Several factors have contributed to this growth. There is an increasingly popular attitude among parents of preschoolers that learning experiences provided by families can be beneficially supplemented by an organized preschool experience. This is somewhat an outgrowth of our increasingly achievement-oriented society. Parents hope to give their children a good start at an early age. Changes in family structure and roles also have had their impact. When both parents are employed, some functions which were traditionally associated with the family become functions of preschool or day care programs.

Benjamin Bloom states in Stability and Change In Human Characteristics (1964) that the early environment is vitally important to the young child. It is at this time that learned behaviors are most lasting, it is the period of most rapid growth, and it is this set of early learning experiences upon which later development is based.

It seems crucial to assess the impact that preschool education has on the developing child. Many questions are being raised about early childhood education. What kinds of experiences do children have in various

preschool settings? What are parent objectives and teacher objectives for preschool education? What implications will preschool education have for the kindergarten program? These are only a few of the questions currently being raised.

This study considered the relationship between parent and teacher goals for preschool education. An attempt was made to determine if parents and teacher perceive a similar type of preschool setting for children.

Teachers often think it is their sole responsibility to set goals and make all important decisions regarding a child's education. It is recognized that there is a great deal of overlap with what the child learns at home and at school during the preschool years. "Setting goals seems to be a procedure in which parents should be involved, in which their ideas should be respected and taken into account by teachers when they are planning classroom activities." (Butler, 2)

Statement of the Problem

The present study was designed to compare parents' perceived objectives and procedures for preschool education with teachers' perceived objectives. Several factors relating to philosophy, curriculum, and environment were considered. Areas of agreement and disagreement among parents, among teachers, and between parents and teachers were assessed. Results were considered to provide a basis for evaluating programs and improving communication between parents and teachers.

Hypotheses to be Tested

The major research question was: What is the relationship between the objectives of parents and teachers for the private preschool program in a small midwestern community?

The hypothesis derived from the question was:

Ho: There is no significant difference in the objectives parents expect from preschool education and the objectives teachers consider important.

One subhypothesis was generated from the major research question:

Ho_a: There is no difference in parental preference and teacher preference for a highly organized setting or an informal setting.

Assumptions

It was assumed that teachers have objectives for their preschool programs. Although these objectives may not be written down, a basic philosophy of early childhood education is held by most teachers. It was assumed also that parents have an idea of what the preschool should do for their child.

Another assumption being made was that parents representing all three private preschools would be of similar social class.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study. Since no public preschools were included in the study, the majority of parents involved were middle class or upper middle class. Most teachers are middle class so there may be more agreement between teacher and parent expectations in terms of valued behavior than if greater class differences were apparent. Another limitation is that of geographic location. All parents and teachers questioned resided in a small midwestern community. Thus the degree to which the findings of this study can be generalized to other early childhood education programs is somewhat limited.

The use of a questionnaire has certain limitations. Parents may have expressed socially acceptable objectives or what they felt the teacher might see as acceptable goals for preschool education rather than their own. Some parents may not have well-defined expectations for the preschool program because they have not been questioned about it previously.

Statements on the questionnaire may have been misinterpreted, too vague, or not specific enough to provide useful information. It is difficult to design an instrument which is thorough, easily understood, and useful to the researcher.

Definitions of Terms

Day care center. A program whose main purpose is to provide care for children of working parents, usually for a full day, which may provide specific learning experiences also.

Montessori preschool. A school designed by Dr. Maria Montessori for three to six year olds which emphasizes learning through the senses by the use of manipulative materials at a rate corresponding to the individual child's interests and needs.

Objective. A goal or aim or final intention, in this case for the preschool program.

Preschool. A school designed to provide learning experiences usually for a half-day program for children before they enter kindergarten.

Private preschool. Preschool operated by religious organizations or private individuals.

Public preschool. Preschool operated by elected or appointed officials and financed with public funds.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Little has been written comparing the objectives of parents and teachers for the preschool program. A few studies have been made to assess parent expectations of preschool education. Other related literature deals with attitudes of teachers toward parent education and involvement in the preschool program. Since this is somewhat beyond the scope of this study, it will not be discussed here. A review will be given of these two topics: 1) comparison of the objectives of parents and teachers for the preschool program, and 2) parent expectations for the preschool program.

Objectives of Parents and Teachers

A research project in England (Tizard, 1977) was conducted in six nursery schools to determine the relationship between parent and teacher objectives for preschool programs. The majority of the fathers in all the schools were manual laborers. When parents were interviewed, they most often mentioned learning to get along with others as the primary objective for preschool programs. In fact, parents had difficulty relating what their child was learning apart from social skills.

Teachers, however, listed advances in pre-mathematical and language skills and opportunities to learn through play as gains from preschool attendance. Another important discovery was made about teacher attitudes toward parents. "It was clear they had not 'sold' their concept of nursery education to the parents; indeed most of the staff commented that they

thought the parents appreciated but did not understand the work they were doing with children." (Tizard, 3)

A more recent study conducted in Australia by Ebbeck (1980), attempted to seek the following information from parents and teachers: 1) the most important reasons for children attending preschool; 2) the most important skills for children to acquire to become effective contributing members of society; and 3) the role of parents in the preschool program. Results related only to areas one and two are available. A total of 250 parents and 50 teachers were surveyed.

Ebbeck found that both teachers and parents felt that social, emotional, and self development were the most important purposes for preschool. This conflicts with the commonly held opinion of preschool teachers that parents don't understand the value of these aspects of the preschool program.

When asked to rank the skills needed by children for the future, teachers and parents both ranked thinking skills and getting along with other people as the number one and number two skills respectively. Both groups ranked the ability to read well and talk well in the top five skills.

The aim of a study by Winetsky (1978) was somewhat different from Tizard's (1977) and Ebbeck's (1980). Winetsky compared the behavioral expectations for self-direction or conformity of parents and teachers of children in preschool settings. The effects of role, social class, or ethnicity were explored to explain any differences. The Educational Activities Index, in which pictures were used to depict self-direction and conformity, and a personal data questionnaire were used in a single

interview session. Subjects were from public and private schools in the San Francisco Bay area. This community was selected because of the variety of ethnicity, culture, and social class.

Differences in expectations of self-direction and conformity for children in preschool settings were apparent between teachers and parents unless the parents were Anglo, middle class, or both. Preferences among teachers were similar.

This study is somewhat limited in scope because it deals with only one type of behavior. However, it produced an awareness of how role, social class, and ethnicity affect perceptions of desirable behavior.

More inclusive in scope is a study conducted by Elardo and Caldwell (1973) in Arkansas. They were concerned with the common accusation that teachers in early childhood education programs impose their values, usually white middle class, upon children, disregarding values of parents.

The purpose of this study was two-fold. An assessment was made of the degree to which a) parents and professionals, and b) paraprofessionals and professionals differ or agree on values for young children in pre-school programs.

Information was gathered using a seventy-five item interview form given to 44 parents, 27 teachers, and 37 teacher aides. The findings indicated that there was very little difference between expectations of paraprofessionals and professionals, and that there were no significant discrepancies between parents and teachers. Of interest, however, are the areas of expressed differences. Teachers showed more preference for creativity and flexibility than parents. A greater difference in opinion

was noted in the acceptance of aggressive behavior. Parents believed children should defend themselves aggressively by "fighting back" when necessary.

Parent Expectations for Preschools

The second area of literature explored was that of parent expectations for the preschool program.

A study was undertaken in Australia by Alexander (1979) to examine parent expectations for the preschool program at the beginning of the year and their perceptions at the conclusion of the year. A random selection of parents was made from five types of preschool programs: cognitive, competency, contemporary, behaviorist, and home-based. An interview format was used to ask specific questions and to allow for open discussion as well. Parents were asked to comment on cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and school-related objectives.

In the open discussion period of the interview, parents most often expressed a desire for their children to become better able to cooperate and get along with others. They expected the preschool program to initiate some skill teaching and prepare their children for "formal" schooling.

The structured part of the interview revealed that parents rated high attention skills (listening, concentration) and socialization skills. Some emphasis was given to content, such as color recognition and left and right discrimination, with a lesser emphasis on traditional content, such as writing and reading. Areas receiving the lowest rating were psychomotor, body maintenance, divergent thinking, and play activities. The other aspect of Alexander's study compared parent expectations at the

beginning of the preschool program with parent perceptions of their child's attainment of those skills at the conclusion of the program. Parent ratings of the effects of preschool were below what they had expected; however, they were quite high and most priorities were achieved.

The purpose of Buford's (1975) study was to examine the objectives of parents for early childhood education. Questionnaires were administered to 219 parents from parent-teacher organizations in Oklahoma.

Results were affected by four variables: age, size of community lived in for major part of life, number of children in the family, and socio-economic status. Parents thought that: 1) health needs of children should be met in early childhood education; 2) psychological development and emotional growth were seen as the most important areas for concentration in early childhood education; 3) physical care was given the least emphasis; and 4) developing a positive self-image was the single most important goal but one which parents thought teachers most often failed to do.

Summary

In summary, the findings of the comparative studies between parent and teacher expectations for preschool education are basically similar. Tizard (1977) concludes that parents specify social skills; whereas teachers specify academic or school-readiness skills as the prime goals for preschool. There is agreement, however, between Winetsky (1978) and Elardo and Caldwell (1973) that there is little difference between expectations of parents and teachers for preschool education. Buford (1975), Alexander (1979), Tizard (1977), and Ebbeck (1980) found agreement among parents concerning goals. It is important to remember, however, that

that Winetsky (1978), Buford (1975), and Ebbeck (1980) all noted that differences among parents, as to expectations, may vary according to social class, economic status, and other variables.

CHAPTER III: DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of the investigation was to compare parent and teacher goals for preschool education and identify selected areas of agreement or disagreement. This chapter notes hypothesis and subhypothesis to be tested and describes the subjects, instrument construction, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques.

Hypotheses

The following hypothesis was derived from the major research question:

Question: What is the relationship between the objectives of parents and teachers for the private preschool program in a small midwestern community?

Ho: There is no significant difference in the objectives parents expect from preschool education and the objectives teachers consider important.

General associated questions contributed to the major question. From there a subhypothesis was derived.

Ho_a: There is no difference in parental preference and teacher preference for a highly organized setting or an informal setting.

Questionnaire items were categorized as to whether they would be characteristic of an informal or structured environment of learning. That is, an attempt was made to determine to what extent parents and teachers desired an informal or structured atmosphere for the preschool setting and if any significant differences were evident between teachers and parents. Items number 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, 13, and 14 were thought to reflect an informal

environment. All other items, 2, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12, were related to a structured setting (see Appendix C).

Description of Sample

Three preschools in the Cedar Falls, Iowa, area were selected and consented to participate in this study. A variety of preschools was chosen to examine any differences among the programs.

The Montessori Preschool was an incorporated preschool governed by a board of directors and served approximately eighty children. In this study forty-four parents were asked to provide information. There was a 54.5% return, or twenty-four responses were received. There were four teachers at the Montessori school. One teacher responded to the questionnaire before these data were compiled and two responded after the analysis had been made.

Jack and Jill Preschool, a privately owned preschool, had a total enrollment of one hundred seventy-six. Parents of thirty-eight of these preschoolers were asked to respond to the questionnaire (one questionnaire was sent home with each child). Nineteen responded for a 50% return. The staff at Jack and Jill was composed of eight teachers and the director. All nine individuals completed the questionnaire.

The third preschool which participated was St. Luke's Preschool. This school, directed by a board, some of whose members are also members of the St. Luke's Episcopal Church, was housed in the church. However, children did not have to belong to the church to attend the preschool. Their enrollment was nineteen. All parents were asked to participate in this study. This was the school with the highest rate of return, 68.4%, or thirteen parents. Both teachers at St. Luke's Preschool answered the

questionnaire. They chose to send a letter to parents before this survey was undertaken to explain the nature of the research.

All three preschools represent primarily middle class and some upper class families. Tuition at Jack and Jill and St. Luke's is comparable. However, rates for the Montessori Preschool are somewhat higher.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire located in Appendix A was used to assess parent and teacher objectives for preschool education. An attempt was made to include items concerning self-help skills, cognitive skills, physical development, social and emotional development, and other more general items. Usually specific behaviors were stated to create a better understanding of the exact meaning intended by the researcher. Certain items in the questionnaire dealt with the role of parents in the preschool program to determine the feelings of teachers and parents toward parent education and participation as objectives of the preschool program.

Also included in the questionnaire for parents were several background information questions regarding age, occupation, and number of children in the family. Teachers were asked their age, occupation of spouse, number of years of teaching experience, and their completed level of education. The questionnaire was piloted by teachers and parents before using it with the subjects of this study.

Data Collection

Questionnaires were mailed directly to parents of the St. Luke's Preschool as requested by the teachers. However, at Jack and Jill and Montessori, the questionnaires were sent home with the children. Parents of children from all three preschools returned the survey by mail.

The Likert Method of Summated Ratings was used to measure opinion in this study. Percentages were calculated for each question. A number value was assigned to the various responses strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. For example, if an individual strongly agreed with item one, a value of 2 points for an informal atmosphere was assigned. Or if they had strongly disagreed the point value would have been -2. Using that method, group means were calculated.

Next an attempt was made to discover if there was any statistically significant difference between parent and teacher preference for informal and structured environment. A t-test was used to determine if there was any difference between parents and teachers for informal or structured environment.

To determine if among-groups variance was not substantially greater than the within-groups variance for the informal and structured environment, an f-test was used.

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This study was undertaken to compare parent and teacher goals for preschool education and identify areas of agreement and disagreement. An item breakdown sheet (see Table 1) was used to summarize percentage responses for each questionnaire item.

Both teachers and parents were positive in their response to item one: "The preschool teacher should be concerned with individual needs of children even if it means providing for individual instruction time." When combining strongly agree and agree ratings, 91% of the parents and 100% of the teachers were in agreement with the item.

The strength of disagreement with item two: "The preschool environment should be a structured, highly organized atmosphere, rather than an informal setting with a variety of materials available for children to use," was reflected in combining disagree and strongly disagree to find 82% of parents disagreeing and 92% of teachers disagreeing. Only 12% of the parents agreed with this item.

There was agreement by 95% of the parents and 92% of the teachers with item three: "Learning to talk about feelings is as important as learning to control one's behavior." Only four individuals responding to this item were undecided or disagreed.

Item four dealt with the most important purpose of preschool education as stated: "Probably the most important goal for preschool education is to help the child see himself as likeable and capable." There was close agreement as represented by 88% of parents agreeing and 91% of teachers agreeing to the item.

Number and Percentage of Groups Responding by Category to Individual Items

| Item | Response | N=24 Montessori Parents | N=19 Jack & Jill Parents | N=13 St. Luke's Parents | N=56 Parents Combined | N=12 Teachers |
|--|----------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| 1. The preschool teacher should be concerned with individual needs of children even if it means providing for individual instruction time. | SA | 71% (17) | 26% (5) | 46% (6) | 50% (28) | 58% (7) |
| | A | 25% (6) | 63% (12) | 38% (5) | 41% (23) | 42% (5) |
| | U | 4% (1) | 5% (1) | 15% (2) | 7% (4) | |
| | D | | 5% (1) | | 2% (1) | |
| | SD | | | | | |
| 2. The preschool environment should be a structured, highly organized atmosphere, rather than an informal setting with a variety of materials available for children to use. | SA | 4% (1) | 5% (1) | 15% (2) | 7% (4) | |
| | A | 4% (1) | 11% (2) | | 5% (3) | |
| | U | 12% (3) | | | 5% (3) | 8% (1) |
| | D | 50% (12) | 68% (13) | 54% (7) | 57% (32) | 67% (8) |
| | SD | 30% (7) | 16% (3) | 31% (4) | 25% (14) | 25% (3) |
| 3. Learning to talk about feelings is as important as learning to control one's behavior. | SA | 42% (10) | 74% (14) | 62% (8) | 57% (32) | 42% (5) |
| | A | 46% (11) | 26% (5) | 38% (5) | 38% (21) | 50% (6) |
| | U | 8% (2) | | | 4% (2) | 8% (1) |
| | D | 4% (1) | | | 2% (1) | |
| | SD | | | | | |
| 4. Probably the most important goal for preschool education is to help the child see himself as likeable and capable. | SA | 42% (10) | 58% (11) | 69% (9) | 54% (30) | 58% (7) |
| | A | 38% (9) | 36% (7) | 23% (3) | 34% (19) | 33% (4) |
| | U | 12% (3) | 5% (1) | | 7% (4) | 8% (1) |
| | D | 8% (2) | | 8% (1) | 5% (3) | |
| | SD | | | | | |
| 5. Children in the preschool setting should learn to accept and not question discipline. | SA | 4% (1) | | 8% (1) | 4% (2) | |
| | A | 25% (6) | 26% (5) | 54% (7) | 32% (18) | 25% (3) |
| | U | 17% (4) | 11% (2) | 15% (2) | 14% (8) | 17% (2) |
| | D | 42% (10) | 42% (8) | 15% (2) | 36% (20) | 58% (7) |
| | SD | 12% (3) | 21% (4) | 8% (1) | 14% (8) | |

| Item | Response | N=24 | N=19 | N=13 | N=56 | N=12 |
|---|----------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------|
| | | Montessori Parents | Jack & Jill Parents | St. Luke's Parents | Parents Combined | Teachers |
| 6. <u>More</u> effort should be made to provide opportunities for children to learn to get along with other children than to learn to sit quietly and complete a teacher-directed activity. | SA | 30% (7) | 21% (4) | 15% (2) | 23% (13) | 42% (5) |
| | A | 50% (12) | 63% (12) | 38% (5) | 52% (29) | 58% (7) |
| | U | 12% (3) | 11% (2) | 31% (4) | 16% (9) | |
| | D | 8% (2) | 5% (1) | 8% (1) | 7% (4) | |
| | SD | | | 8% (1) | 2% (1) | |
| 7. Learning to dress oneself, pour juice, and put toys away are skills <u>less</u> important for the preschool teacher to teach than learning to write their names, cut, or copy a circle, square, and other designs. | SA | | | | | |
| | A | 4% (1) | 11% (2) | 8% (1) | 7% (4) | |
| | U | 8% (2) | | 8% (1) | 5% (3) | |
| | D | 58% (14) | 53% (10) | 54% (7) | 55% (31) | 67% (8) |
| | SD | 30% (7) | 36% (7) | 31% (4) | 32% (18) | 33% (4) |
| 8. It is <u>more</u> important for children in the preschool program to learn colors, how to count, and the letters of the alphabet than how to climb, hop, and catch a ball. | SA | | | | | |
| | A | 12% (3) | | | 5% (3) | 8% (1) |
| | U | 8% (2) | | 8% (1) | 5% (3) | |
| | D | 55% (13) | 79% (15) | 54% (7) | 63% (35) | 58% (7) |
| | SD | 25% (6) | 21% (4) | 38% (5) | 27% (15) | 33% (4) |
| 9. If a child is capable and interested, the preschool teacher should teach the child how to read. | SA | 25% (6) | | 15% (2) | 14% (8) | 8% (1) |
| | A | 58% (14) | 21% (4) | 8% (1) | 34% (19) | |
| | U | | 16% (3) | 15% (2) | 9% (5) | 17% (2) |
| | D | 17% (4) | 58% (11) | 62% (8) | 41% (23) | 75% (9) |
| | SD | | 5% (1) | | 2% (1) | |
| 10. One prime goal for the preschool program is to prepare the child for kindergarten. | SA | 30% (7) | 26% (5) | 31% (4) | 29% (16) | 17% (2) |
| | A | 36% (9) | 68% (13) | 62% (8) | 54% (30) | 67% (8) |
| | U | 4% (1) | 5% (1) | | 4% (2) | |
| | D | 30% (7) | | 8% (1) | 14% (8) | 17% (2) |
| | SD | | | | | |

| Item | Response | N=24 Montessori Parents | N=19 Jack & Jill Parents | N=13 St. Luke's Parents | N=56 Parents Combined | N=12 Teachers |
|--|----------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| 11. Children at the preschool should spend <u>more</u> time in organized activities where their activity is directed by the teacher than in free choice activities where the child chooses what to do. | SA | | 16% (3) | 15% (2) | 9% (5) | |
| | A | 12% (3) | 36% (7) | 23% (3) | 23% (13) | 8% (1) |
| | U | 4% (1) | 16% (3) | | 7% (4) | 17% (2) |
| | D | 63% (15) | 26% (5) | 54% (7) | 48% (27) | 58% (7) |
| | SD | 21% (5) | 5% (1) | 8% (1) | 13% (7) | 17% (2) |
| 12. Members of the preschool staff should plan specific activities to promote parent education about once every eight weeks. | SA | 12% (3) | 11% (2) | 15% (2) | 13% (7) | |
| | A | 50% (12) | 47% (9) | 23% (3) | 43% (24) | 58% (7) |
| | U | 25% (6) | 37% (7) | 23% (3) | 29% (16) | 17% (2) |
| | D | 12% (3) | 5% (1) | 38% (5) | 16% (9) | 25% (3) |
| | SD | | | | | |
| 13. Parents should be allowed to call and schedule a visit to the preschool on most any day rather than visiting during a special visitation day or week. | SA | 30% (7) | 26% (5) | 31% (4) | 29% (10) | 67% (8) |
| | A | 54% (13) | 32% (6) | 54% (7) | 46% (26) | 33% (4) |
| | U | 4% (1) | 21% (4) | | 9% (5) | |
| | D | 12% (3) | 16% (3) | 8% (1) | 13% (7) | |
| | SD | | 5% (1) | 8% (1) | 4% (2) | |
| 14. Parents and teachers should work cooperatively to determine goals for the preschool program. | SA | 33% (8) | 26% (5) | 23% (3) | 29% (16) | 25% (3) |
| | A | 63% (15) | 58% (11) | 54% (7) | 59% (33) | 67% (8) |
| | U | 4% (1) | 11% (2) | | 5% (3) | 8% (1) |
| | D | | 5% (1) | 15% (2) | 5% (3) | |
| | SD | | | 8% (1) | 2% (1) | |

There was less consistency of opinion regarding item five, "Children in the preschool setting should learn to accept and not question discipline." Of the parents responding, 36% agreed, 14% were undecided, and 50% disagreed. Teachers, too, varied in their responses. However, 58% disagreed with the item.

The sixth item, "More effort should be made to provide opportunities for children to learn to get along with other children than to learn to sit quietly and complete a teacher-directed activity," was agreed with by 100% of teachers. Parents opinions varied more--10% disagreed, 16% were undecided, and 75% agreed.

Both teachers and parents disagreed with item seven, "Learning to dress oneself, pour juice, and put toys away are skills less important for the preschool teacher to teach than learning to write their names, cut, or copy a circle, square, and other designs." There were 87% of parents disagreeing and 100% of teachers disagreeing.

Item eight was also rated similarly by parents and teachers, both between groups and among members of each group. Of the parents, 90%, and of the teachers, 91% disagreed with the statement, "It is more important for children in the preschool program to learn colors, how to count, and the letters of the alphabet than how to climb, hop, and catch a ball."

Teachers (75%) disagreed with this item: "If a child is capable and interested, the preschool teacher should teach the child how to read." Parents were less consistent in their opinions as reflected by these figures: 48% agreed with the statement, 41% disagreed with it.

Again, however, there was general agreement between teachers and parents for item ten: "One prime goal for the preschool program is to

prepare the child for kindergarten." Eighty-three percent of parents agreed and eighty-four percent of teachers agreed.

There was disagreement with item eleven: "Children at the preschool should spend more time in organized activities where their activity is directed by the teacher than in free choice activities where the child chooses what to do." The percentage of parents disagreeing was 61% and teachers, 75%. There were 32% of the parents who agreed with the statement.

Parents expressed the most indecision (29% undecided) concerning the next item: "Members of the preschool staff should plan specific activities to promote parent education about once every eight weeks." Of the parents, 56% agreed with the statement, as did 58% of the teachers.

All teachers agreed with item thirteen: "Parents should be allowed to call and schedule a visit to the preschool on most any day rather than visiting during a special visitation day or week." Seventy-five percent of the parents agreed.

Both parents (88%) and teachers (92%) agreed with the last item: "Parents and teachers should work cooperatively to determine goals for the preschool program." Only 7% of the parents disagreed.

Group means and standard deviations were calculated for informal and structured environment (see Table 2). The t-test revealed that there was a significant difference (at the .01 level) for both parents and teachers in their preference for an informal or a structured environment (see Table 3). Both groups indicated strong preferences for the informal environment.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations of Informal Environment
and Structured Environment Scales by Groups

| Group | Informal Environment | | Structured Environment | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------|------------------------|------|
| | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. |
| Montessori N=24 | 8.21 | 3.55 | 3.04 | 2.93 |
| St. Luke's N=13 | 6.31 | 3.68 | 1.69 | 2.69 |
| Jack & Jill N=19 | 6.53 | 1.95 | 1.84 | 2.46 |
| Combined Parents N=56 | 7.20 | 3.20 | 2.32 | 2.74 |
| Teachers N=12 | 8.08 | 1.73 | 3.67 | 2.96 |

Table 3
Differences Between Informal and Structured Environment
Perceptions by Groups

| Group | Informal Environment | | Structured Environment | | t-value ^a |
|-----------------|----------------------|------|------------------------|------|----------------------|
| | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | |
| Parents (N=56) | 7.20 | 3.20 | 2.32 | 2.74 | 8.67 |
| Teachers (N=12) | 8.08 | 1.73 | 3.67 | 2.96 | 4.46 |

^aSignificant at .01 level.

Results of the analysis of variance indicated differences between teachers and parents regarding preferences for an informal or structured environment were not significant. See Tables 4 and 5 following.

Table 4

Analysis of Variance of Mean Differences on the
Informal Environment Objectives

| Source | Sum of Squares | d.f. | Mean Squares | f-value |
|---------|----------------|------|--------------|------------|
| Between | 50.709 | 3 | 16.90 | 1.95 N. S. |
| Within | 553.73 | 64 | 8.65 | |
| Total | 604.439 | 67 | | |

Table 5

Analysis of Variance of Mean Differences on the
Structured Environment Objectives

| Source | Sum of Squares | d.f. | Mean Squares | f-value |
|---------|----------------|------|--------------|------------|
| Between | 40.00 | 3 | 13.34 | 1.74 N. S. |
| Within | 489.59 | 64 | 7.65 | |
| Total | 529.59 | 67 | | |

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study was undertaken to analyze the relationship between objectives of parents and teachers for the private preschool program in a small midwestern community. Previous studies have found that there is little difference between the goals of parents and teachers for the preschool program. Some studies, however, noted that expectations may vary with economic status, social class, and other variables.

The parents and teachers in this study agreed on the objectives of preschool education. Both parents and teachers preferred an informal rather than a structured learning environment.

The only questionnaire item which produced responses indicating much difference of opinion was item nine, "If a child is capable and interested the preschool teacher should teach the child how to read." Forty-eight percent of the parents agreed, forty-one percent disagreed, and seventy-five percent of the teachers disagreed. This is an issue which preschool teachers need to discuss with parents. Both parents and teachers need the opportunity to express their thoughts concerning this issue. Each case needs to be analyzed individually so that the child's natural growth and development is encouraged and there is cooperation and understanding between teacher and parents. Ebbeck explains the teacher's role this way: "The role of the professional in meeting parents' expectations on one hand and providing guidance on another, is a complex one. The teacher, as a professional, must meet the parent beyond the half-way mark. He/she cannot be cloaked in professional mystique but must be prepared to view things as

well from the parents' perspective. Mutual understanding, respect, and support are vital for parents and teachers." (Ebbeck, 4)

The findings of this study, that parents and teachers are in agreement with the objectives for the preschool program, provide a positive basis for increased communication and cooperation between parents and teachers in the preschool setting. It is generally accepted that parents have a very important role in their child's education. The success of a preschool program is dependent upon parent support and acceptance and in turn the child's experiences at home can be effectively enriched by a sound preschool program. Teachers should articulate their goals in specific terms so that parents will understand the relationship and purpose of the various activities that the children experience at preschool. In turn parents should be encouraged to discuss what personal goals they have for their child.

It is discouraging to note that in general private nursery schools have little parent involvement. Research by Radin (1972) has shown that when parents are actively involved children have benefited more than if only children participated in the program. "Programs that enable parents and teachers to work together and share this task are much more likely to succeed in creating an environment for the child that is responsive to unique developmental needs." (Nedler and McAfee, 5)

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APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER TO PARENTS

Box 194
Belmond, Iowa 50421
January, 1981

Dear (Parent)

Enrollment in private preschools has increased dramatically in the last few years. Much information is being sought as to the impact of preschool education on children.

I am a student at the University of Northern Iowa conducting a study to determine teacher and parent objectives or goals for preschool education. The preschool your child attends has been asked to participate in this study. I would like to ask your cooperation in giving your ideas about preschool education by filling out the enclosed questionnaire. You need not write your name on the form so information you supply will be confidential. However, I will be glad to send you a summary of the findings if you write your address on the return envelope.

Please complete the enclosed survey and return by March 9 in the stamped, addressed envelope. Thank you for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Marcia Akin

Encl.

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER TO TEACHERS

Box 194
Belmond, Iowa 50421
January, 1981

Dear (Teacher)

Enrollment in private preschools has increased dramatically in the last few years. Much information is being sought as to the impact of preschool education on children.

I am a student at the University of Northern Iowa conducting a study to determine teacher and parent objectives or goals for preschool education. The preschool in which you teach has been asked to participate in this study. I would like to ask your cooperation in giving your ideas about preschool education by filling out the enclosed questionnaire. You need not write your name on the form so information you supply will be confidential. However, I will be glad to send you a summary of the findings if you write your address on the return envelope.

Please complete the enclosed survey and return by March 9 in the stamped, addressed envelope. Thank you for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Marcia Akin

Encl.

APPENDIX C

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Please provide this information:

Mother:

Father:

Age: 20-24___ 25-29___ 30-34___
35-39___ 40-45___ Older___

Age: 20-24___ 25-29___ 30-34___
35-39___ 40-45___ Older___

Last completed level of schooling:
High School___ College B.A. ___
M.A. ___ Beyond M.A. _____

Last completed level of schooling:
High School___ College B.A. ___
M.A. ___ Beyond M.A. _____

Occupation: _____

Occupation: _____

Here are some statements about preschool education with which some people agree and some disagree. Please indicate your opinion by circling the letter that corresponds to your agreement or disagreement with each statement:

SA-STRONGLY AGREE A-AGREE U-UNDECIDED D-DISAGREE SD-STRONGLY DISAGREE

- - - - -

1. The preschool teacher should be concerned with individual needs of children, even if it means providing for individual instruction time. SA A U D SD
2. The preschool environment should be a structured, highly organized atmosphere, rather than an informal setting with a variety of materials available for children to use. SA A U D SD
3. Learning to talk about feelings is as important as learning to control one's behavior. SA A U D SD
4. Probably the most important goal for preschool education is to help the child see himself as likeable and capable. SA A U D SD
5. Children in the preschool setting should learn to accept and not question discipline. SA A U D SD
6. More effort should be made to provide opportunities for children to learn to get along with other children than to learn to sit quietly and complete a teacher-directed activity. SA A U D SD

-2-

7. Learning to dress oneself, pour juice, and put toys away are skills less important for the preschool teacher to teach than learning to write their names, cut, or copy a circle, square, and other designs.
SA A U D SD
8. It is more important for children in the preschool program to learn colors, how to count, and the letters of the alphabet than how to climb, hop, and catch a ball.
SA A U D SD
9. If a child is capable and interested, the preschool teacher should teach the child how to read.
SA A U D SD
10. One prime goal for the preschool program is to prepare the child for kindergarten.
SA A U D SD
11. Children at the preschool should spend more time in organized activities where their activity is directed by the teacher than in free choice activities where the child chooses what to do.
SA A U D SD
12. Members of the preschool staff should plan specific activities to promote parent education about once every eight weeks.
SA A U D SD
13. Parents should be allowed to call and schedule a visit to the preschool on most any day rather than visiting during a special visitation day or week.
SA A U D SD
14. Parents and teachers should work cooperatively to determine goals for the preschool program.
SA A U D SD

Comments:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION!

APPENDIX D

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Please provide this information:

Age: 20-24___ 25-29___ 30-34___ 35-39___ 40-45___ 46-50___ 51-55___
56-59___ 60-65___

Last completed level of schooling: High School___ College B.A. ___
M.A. _____ Beyond M.A. _____

Total number of years teaching experience: _____

Here are some statements about preschool education with which some people agree and some disagree. Please indicate your opinion by circling the letter that corresponds to your agreement or disagreement with each statement:

SA-STRONGLY AGREE A-AGREE U-UNDECIDED D-DISAGREE SD-STRONGLY DISAGREE

- - - - -

1. The preschool teacher should be concerned with individual needs of children, even if it means providing for individual instruction time. SA A U D SD
2. The preschool environment should be a structured, highly organized atmosphere, rather than an informal setting with a variety of materials available for children to use. SA A U D SD
3. Learning to talk about feelings is as important as learning to control one's behavior. SA A U D SD
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6. More effort should be made to provide opportunities for children to learn to get along with other children than to learn to sit quietly and complete a teacher-directed activity. SA A U D SD

-2-

7. Learning to dress oneself, pour juice, and put toys away are skills less important for the preschool teacher to teach than learning to write their names, cut, or copy a circle, square, and other designs. SA A U D SD
8. It is more important for children in the preschool program to learn colors, how to count, and the letters of the alphabet than how to climb, hop, and catch a ball. SA A U D SD
9. If a child is capable and interested, the preschool teacher should teach the child how to read. SA A U D SD
10. One prime goal for the preschool program is to prepare the child for kindergarten. SA A U D SD
11. Children at the preschool should spend more time in organized activities where their activity is directed by the teacher than in free choice activities where the child chooses what to do. SA A U D SD
12. Members of the preschool staff should plan specific activities to promote parent education about once every eight weeks. SA A U D SD
13. Parents should be allowed to call and schedule a visit to the preschool on most any day rather than visiting during a special visitation day or week. SA A U D SD
14. Parents and teachers should work cooperatively to determine goals for the preschool program. SA A U D SD

Comments:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION!