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A Historical Perspective of the Development of Prekindergarten and the Evolution of Quality Elements

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A Historical Perspective of the Development of Prekindergarten and the Evolution of
Quality Elements

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Achievement Gap.....	1
Purpose of Study.....	2
Brief History.....	3
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
Current State of Pre-Kindergarten.....	8
A French Perspective.....	11
State Programs.....	13
Georgia.....	13
North Carolina.....	14
Universal Pre-Kindergarten Defined and Analyzed.....	16
Elements of Quality.....	21
Considerations for Universal Pre-Kindergarten.....	23
Future Directions for Quality: The Teachers.....	28
CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS.....	32
REFERENCES.....	35

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of Quality Elements**

Catherine C. Cross

ABSTRACT

This is a historical study of preschool nationally and partly internationally with a focus on elucidating the development of quality elements. The study traced the beginnings of prekindergarten and how the programs have evolved to their current state.

The study contains a look at the current state of prekindergarten programs within the United States and how the differing states measure their programs. The use of the word “quality” is examined as it relates to how programs are designed and implemented. The study also examined several states that have been acknowledged as the front runners in prekindergarten education services.

The international perspective included a look at France and how they have implemented their early childhood program. This section looked at some of their standards for their program and the requirements for their teachers.

The final part of the study drew conclusions as to how best to proceed when making policies for prekindergarten programs in the United States, taking into account the many perspectives.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Achievement Gap

There is a significant achievement gap in elementary schools in the United States between children of differing socio-economic classes. This gap is evident as children enter kindergarten and widens as they advance through elementary school, thus threatening to permanently disadvantage those students who start behind the others. According to Laosa universal access to both elementary and secondary schools is a reality but does not necessarily include equal quality among schools (2005). This is where the term achievement gap comes from: “it is a reference is to the well documented, persistent association of educational achievement to socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity” (Laosa, 2005, p., 2). Universal Pre-kindergarten may be part of the solution to this quality dilemma, because an earlier start may help children achieve more when they reach elementary school. “Emerging research evidence suggests that universal programs have potential for improving the school readiness of low-income and minority children as well as those from higher income and non-minority families” (Laosa, 2005, p. 1). The concept is to see that all children are more equally prepared by having access not only to school programs, but to quality programs as well.

According to the Progressive Policy Institute’s Sara Mead, opening the door to preschool would help close what she refers to as the preparation gap. In her article entitled "Open the Preschool Door, Close the Preparation Gap," (2004) she discusses how

preschool has helped students improve not only their academic skills, but their social skills as well. Mead notes in her article that this trend is particularly noticeable in disadvantaged children. These children are the least likely to attend a preschool program and are more often in daycare setting rather than preschool settings. “Among children entering kindergarten in the fall 1988, less than one half from the most disadvantaged families- 47 percent- had ever attended preschool, including Head Start or daycare centers” (Mead, 2004). The call for more organized universal prekindergarten programs, with an emphasis on quality, is a key to the Progressive Policy Institute’s call for an increased awareness of policymakers to enhance the experience that all children should receive from pre-kindergarten.

Purpose of Study

Determining the elements that distinguish a successful program from one that is less successful is important in establishing a pre-kindergarten program that meets the objective of better preparing children for elementary school. This paper looked at pre-kindergarten from a historical perspective and examined how the concept of quality is developing and where future goals may lead. Research about the history to include how prekindergarten has come into being and how it has adapted to current needs in our society. Quality will be looked at through the different views and how these views ultimately come to the same conclusions for promoting good quality preschool programs.

Brief History

The importance of pre-kindergarten emerged in the 1800's with the need for daycare for young children whose mothers worked in factories. Because it was essential that children be kept safe, and off the streets, many working class neighborhoods founded daycares. The idea of having a safe haven for our youngest members of society grew during World War II when many women went to work in the factories while the men were away at war. Daycares were set up to provide children with a secure environment and to take care of their basic needs (Marks, 1943). This need was addressed by “a national program which was under the Day Care Section of the U.S. Office of Defense Health and Welfare Services to co-ordinate and integrates the child-care programs of the several federal agencies co-operating in the programs” (Marks, 1943). Money for these programs was provided through the Lanham Act, which was amended in “1942 to include funds for child care facilities for children of working mothers rather than mothers on home relief” and was to be used to supply teachers and other workers to help keep the nursery schools open (Future of Children, 2004; Marks, 1943).

When World War II ended, many people felt that federal funding for daycare programs was an important need that should continue. Eleanor Roosevelt wrote “many thought they (the centers) were purely a war emergency measure. A few of us had inkling that perhaps they were a need which was constantly with us, but one that we had neglected to face in the past” (Future of Children, 2004). The daycare concept continued to evolve, and some developed naturally into preschools. The idea of preschool was

distinctive from daycare because it provided children not only with basic care, but also gave them a chance to learn some basic academic skills. This concept was expensive, in part because many of the federal grants providing the funding were not renewed after the war ended (Phillips & Zigler, 1987). Also, during the 1940's and 1950's a smaller percentage of women worked outside the home and required a place for their children than is the case today (Phillips & Zigler, 1987).

In the early 1960's Head Start was established to help preschoolers become better prepared to enter elementary school. The program was developed during a time when the United States was fighting a war on poverty, and a Congressional Committee determined one battlefield was to help children in poverty receive a head start on their schooling. This was our nation's first attempt at making school a level playing field (Zigler, 2000). Now, as we enter a new millennium, we as a nation are beginning to discover the significance of a quality preschool education for all students (Neuman, 2003, Barnett & Hustedt, 2003).

In 2001, a new set of educational reforms were signed into law. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was proposed to deal with many of the new issues that the United States was facing concerning the quality of education for the nation's children. A primary focus of this new legislation was to address the youngest of school members, and to improve their abilities to achieve in elementary school.

Several assumptions underlie the logic of the NCLB. The law makes a bold and important statement that all children are able to learn what the schools have to teach. It acknowledges how the importance of highly qualified teachers is in significantly improving children's achievement and of research based methods – using “what works” to more efficiently and effectively teach reading and math skills (Neuman, 2003, p. 287).

The basic concept is to attempt to narrow the achievement gap that currently exists between socio-economic groups. Ground zero for closing the achievement gap has been designated as pre-kindergarten programs. Neuman notes, “[a]lthough in all likelihood the gap will not be erased entirely, it can be reduced substantially through high quality pre-kindergarten programs that acknowledge that many children do not enter school adequately prepared” (2003, p. 288).

This initiative of adequately preparing children can be seen with the Head Start program, that was specifically designed to ensure that the poorest of our children would have a safe environment in which to grow and learn (Zigler & Styfco, 2000). Head Start now serves more than 800,000 children and is seen as an “investment in children that is intended to help them through the rest of their lives”(Garces, Thomas and Currie, 2002). The idea has continued with various pre-kindergarten programs funded both by local and federal governments. “Policy emerges from need. It is a response to a problem. The value and appropriateness of a policy depend on the underlying assumptions and intent of those who frame it and the extent to which the policy defines the problem correctly” (Rust, 2003, p. 154). The call for quality in the pre-kindergarten program is a way for us to ensure that our children receive a program that is appropriate and addresses their needs effectively.

Currently in the United States approximately three-fourths of all four year olds attend some type of daycare or preschool program, the highest percentage of attendance ever. With more families where both parents must work to support themselves, the percentage will steadily increase (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003, p. 54). The new dilemma for these parents is the amount of money necessary to send their children to one of these

programs, and the quality of education the child receives there. While there are many programs in place to help those with lower incomes, and while parents of higher socioeconomic status are able to pay for their child's preschool, many in the middle class are still unable to attain preschool for their children. Here NCLB attempts to help, by proposing the nation prepare all children by instituting the idea of affordable pre-kindergarten for all.

Universal pre-kindergarten is an attractive way to ensure that all families have equal access to the preparation for elementary school. Universal pre-kindergarten has the not insignificant challenge of merging both public and private resources to provide a sound education for the nation's four year olds. Many states have already begun developing these programs, and are in the early stages of evaluating the effects the programs have on elementary school success. Florida is now joining the list of states that have universal pre-kindergarten in place. In Fall 2005, the people of the state of Florida passed a constitutional amendment that reads,

Every four year old shall be offered a high quality pre-kindergarten opportunity by the state no later than the 2005 school year. This voluntary early childhood development and education program shall be established according to high quality standards

It is crucial for Florida to decide its definition of a quality program. The simple facts are, universal pre-kindergarten programs must be made up of both private and public resources to make the program viable. This combination of resources must provide an affordable preschool experience while ensuring a high level of quality and achievement is in the program. The goal of this paper was to look at pre-kindergarten from a historical

perspective and examine how the concept of quality is developing and where future goals may lead.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Current State of Pre-Kindergarten

“We believe that the United States needs an early childhood educational system that is public, accountable for high standards, sufficiently funded to include all children who need it, and comparable to the early childhood education systems of high –achieving industrialized nations” (AFT, 2002, p. 3). Thus begins the call for the advent of universal pre-kindergartens for the United States, a call that has come into fruition in the No Child Left Behind Act signed into law in 2001 and has roots that date back into the day nurseries of the 1830’s. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has always been a strong support system for teachers and has now broached the subject of early childhood education to build a strong foundation for the youngest members of our society. The problem currently facing our nation is that, of the eight million children who participate in some form of preschool, most attend programs that either are missing basic elements of quality or simply do not address them at all (AFT, 2002,p. 3).

“The problem of availability is likely to grow worse as mothers of young children join the work force in record numbers” (AFT, 2002, p. 3). The problem for most current programs is to meet the new demands of promoting school readiness, with what has been deemed as a quality program. Many children from disadvantaged backgrounds or from families without the means to send them to preschool are going to be left to daycare

centers unable to prepare them for elementary school. “Unprecedented numbers of children start public kindergarten with major delays in language and basic academic skills” (Ramey & Ramey, 2004, p. 472). The AFT addresses this problem by calling on states to introduce universal pre-kindergartens to cover the current gaps in preschool programs. The AFT notes that there are signs of progress among the states in creating high quality programs and striving to make these programs available to all. “Today, 43 states offer some type of preschool program for children under age five although few provide sufficient funds to cover more than a fraction of the eligible children” (AFT, 2002, p. 6). This commitment to early childhood education shows that the public believes that the place to start is with our youngest citizens. Four states so far have started universal pre-kindergarten programs that show real promise in fulfilling the needs of students. Florida has recently joined the list and is currently working on its definition of a sound universal pre-kindergarten program.

In 2006 the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) published its report on the current state of pre-kindergarten. According to NIEER, the “total enrollment in state-funded pre-k rose to 942,766 children in 2005-2006, including 805,807 at age 4 translating into the biggest numbers seen as yet for pre-kindergarten enrollment. This means that state preschool education serves 20 percent of the 4-year-old population in the U.S.” (NIEER, 2006). NIEER has also done a study of the quality of the programs of the 38 states that currently have some form of state funded pre-kindergarten. The study is based around ten quality standards believed to be most important to helping children succeed during and after pre-kindergarten. These standards are

1. early learning standards
2. teacher degree
3. teacher specialized training
4. assistant teacher degree
5. teacher in-service
6. maximum class size
7. staff-child ratio
8. required screening/referral and support services
9. meals
10. required monitoring (NIEER, 2006)

NIEER found that Alabama and North Carolina met all 10 the quality components and that Arkansas, Illinois, Oklahoma, Tennessee, the Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program in Louisiana, and New Jersey's "Abbott" program met nine of these standards (NIEER, 2006).

NIEER points out that as their analysis of pre-kindergarten programs has continued, they find more states are beginning to develop policies to help them meet even more of the quality standards set forth by the NIEER. "The number of state initiatives meeting fewer than five benchmarks decreased from 15 to 11" (NIEER, 2006). NIEER firmly believes that by "establishing standards in state-level policy, states can require that programs provide children with a high-quality education" (NIEER, 2006).

In the NIEER *Preschool Matters* from December/January 2006, the journal looked back at their four years of studies of the quality of preschools in the country. The Pew Charitable Trust has made it its mission to advance the idea of preschool as a way to

help close the school readiness gap. The focus for their program is on education, but has broadened to include items such as health and social and emotional development. The Pew Trust believes that progress has been made,

every year there are more than 3,000 news stories on major preschool policy and practice issues, as tracked by daily clipping service offered by Pre-K Now. In 2004, 15 states increased funding for preschool, by just over \$200 million. In 2005, 26 states did so, raising their early education investments by more than \$600 million. This is truly becoming a movement (Urahn & Watson, 2006).

A French Perspective

A very successful example from France “is called the 'Ecole Maternell' and the name of this school system, available and free to all young children in France, suggest its underlying philosophy - a place where children are both schooled and nurtured” (Cooper & Neuman, 1999, p. ix). Cooper and Neuman discuss in their summary for their book *Ready to Learn* the reasons for looking to France for ways to improve our prekindergarten experiences here in the United States. The authors point to the many ways in which the social trends in America are changing and are becoming increasingly comparable to the French way of life. The authors refer to the quiet revolution that has begun in the United States preschool programs and the need to look at other countries that mirror our own for ways to build a strong prekindergarten program.

A study by Cooper and Neuman (1999) found that the French have discovered a way to make pre-kindergarten a meaningful place for learning and a way to better prepare children for their next years of school. The school provides education to 2.5 million children and is where everything starts, according to the Minister of Education. The idea is to provide well-rounded care that combines both education and care under one roof for

eight hours a day (Cooper & Neuman, 1999, p. xii). The preschool programs are a highly structured national system that is supported by a national curriculum. The curriculum is further broken down to serve different age groups and to provide focus on socialization, as well as math and language skills (Cooper & Neuman, 1999). “The American delegates were impressed by the French system’s universal accountability, consistent quality, rigorous teacher training and streamlined system of funding and governance”(Cooper & Neumann 1999, p.xii).

The researchers found five key areas from the French system that can be applied to the United States. They were as follows:

1. Promote preschool for every child
2. Clarify national, state, and local roles and responsibilities
3. Train and adequately pay teachers of young children
4. Develop core principals for early childhood programs
5. Respond to the needs of children and families

The adequate pay for teachers is part of what helps to make this system so successful. Teachers in the 'Ecole Maternell' make less than what the average American counterpart makes at the beginning of their career. This is offset however by the excellent benefits that accompany the job such as health and retirement. These teachers at the end of their careers often make more than they would if in America. The last item listed about responding to the needs of children and families could be described as one of the core principals. The system that is place in France is designed to encompass the family as a whole. “There is a recognition in France of the need for close integration of care and education. So increasingly, wraparound services are available and heavily subsidized.

They are viewed as part as especially important for kids whose parents' work day is longer than the school day and for those who come from backgrounds in which French is not the language used at home (Kamerman 1999 p.30).

As you will see, many of these ideas have been used to help influence the universal pre-kindergarten programs currently being formed in the United States.

State Programs

Several states have become leaders in the universal pre-kindergarten programs. These states have had programs in place long enough to have started longitudinal studies to evaluate the programs' success in preparing their students for kindergarten. These states are discussed below to illustrate some of the best that the United States has to offer among the universal prekindergarten programs.

Georgia

“In 1995, Georgia introduced the first statewide universal Pre-K program, a model that offers a free preschool education to all 4 year old children regardless of family income” (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003, p. 54). Soon after Georgia began its pre-kindergarten program, New York and Oklahoma followed, all with the same plan to offer a free public preschool program to all students who were four years old. “Recent research has shown that preschool education is a sound investment academically, socially, and economically” (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003, p. 55). The research base has come from the Head Start, High/Scope Perry preschool program and the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers that have been in operation for many years. These programs have been involved in numerous

longitudinal studies which show their potential to have a long lasting effect on children and their families. The purpose of a universal pre-kindergarten program is to “throw a wider net than that of Head Start, which began as a weapon in the War on Poverty and never grew into the entitlement program it was supposed to become” (Maeroff, 2003, p. 6). This Universal Pre-kindergarten Program would include all families, not just those of low income or those viewed as having a specialized need for preschool, such as children with learning delays.

North Carolina

North Carolina has implemented a program called Smart Start, although not labeled exclusively as a universal pre-kindergarten; the idea seems to be working. Smart Start started with the mission of making sure all children start school healthy and ready to be successful. The local community is responsible for planning on how to best meet their own communities need, improve and expand existing programs for children and families and design and implement new programs. The program was established in 1993 as a partnership between the state, local governments and service providers to better serve the community (Bryant, Maxwell, Taylor, Poe, Peisner-Feinberg, & Bernier, 2003). The program started on a small scale that included twelve partnerships. In recent years it has evolved to encompass the whole state. There have been three studies conducted by the State of North Carolina to evaluate the quality of the program, the last published in 2003.

All studies asked the questions:

1. Has the quality of child care improved over time?
2. Does center participation in Smart Start funded activities predict quality?

The first two studies found that participation in the Smart Start program activities was significantly related to the quality of these programs (Bryant, Maxwell, & Burchinal, 1999; Bryant, et al., 2002). The first two studies were done with the same population that was considered for the third study as explained below.

The third study was more extensive. In this study, Bryant and a team of researchers set out to find if the program answers the following research questions:

1. Has the quality of child care improved over time?
2. Does center participation in Smart Start funded activities predict quality?
3. Do preschool children attending higher quality child care programs have better skills than children attending lower quality programs?"

The latest study was designed to look at both questions of quality along with the question of children having better skills. Although the other two studies did look at the skills the children had upon entering school, they did not directly link them to students being enrolled in a quality program. The study was conducted with 110 preschool child care programs that were a part of the previous studies of child care quality between 1994 and 1999. The settings for the programs included both rural and urban settings. In all, 512 preschool children were assessed on their language, literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills. "The assessment for social and emotional skills was done with the Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliot, 1990) and language and math skills were assessed during one on one activities with children, including the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test III (Dunn & Dunn 1997), the Applied Problems subtest of the Woodcock Johnson (1989), a literacy assessment (Concepts About Print, Zill & Resnick,

1998) and four tasks that asked children to identify letters, numbers and colors (Bryant, Maxwell, & Burchinal, 1999; Bryant, et al., 2002).

The results found in this study showed that the children did in fact have better skills when enrolled in centers that participated in the Smart Start program. The researchers also evaluated how quality affected outcomes, and found that the programs of higher quality made more of a difference in how well the children were prepared when entering school.

Universal Pre-Kindergarten Defined and Analyzed

“In 2002 The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAYEC) governing board adopted a set of policies, based on the recommendations of the National Commission for Accreditation Reinvention, to guide the next era of NAYEC Accreditation” (NAYEC, 2005, p. 84). As a part of these policies NAYEC had a quality component: “to evaluate the quality of the program and accredit those programs that substantially comply with NAYEC criteria for high-quality programs” (NAYEC, 2005, p. 84). NAYEC went on to say that its policies were based on three fundamental beliefs related to the quality concepts in early childhood programs. The three beliefs are as follows from the NAYEC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria:

1. Quality is a complex attribute of program life that is both shaped and experienced by many people, especially children, families, teaching staff, and administrators.
2. Quality is a dynamic attribute that requires ongoing attention and willingness to change- including change through development and learning- as program participants (children, families, staff) change.
3. Programs need the capacity to sustain and improve quality over time (2005).

The accreditation process that NAYEC has designed to address the ability of programs to meet a level of quality is built into the 10 NAYEC Early Childhood Program Standards. This process helps those programs establish and maintain a high level of quality.

Universal pre-kindergartens should also be well aware of the issue for child care needs that extend past the proposed academic time. The idea is to develop a program that illustrates what quality looks like. According to the National Research Council (NRC), high quality must incorporate the whole child and prepare students to meet the demands of formal schooling (Maeroff, 2003, p. 2). This quality should involve "looking at the current body of research that provides insights in cognition and has a focus on other developmental needs of young children. One reason for the ongoing discussion about developmental consequences of child care is that different child care parameters – quantity, quality, and type of setting – typically have been in isolation or in only limited contexts" (Ramey & Ramey 2004, , p. 134).

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD, 2002) examined the effects of early childcare on children's functioning at the age of 4 and half years. The NICHD proposed a longitudinal study to examine two basic questions; "Are early child-care experiences positively or negatively related to child functioning prior to school entry? And if so, are statistical effects sufficiently large enough to be meaningful?" (NICHD, 2002, p. 136). The focus on the effects being meaningful is a new perspective for this type of study. Most studies before were unable or unwilling to look at this piece of the puzzle.

The NICHD looked at how the quality of the childcare program affected the children enrolled. According to the authors researchers such as Burchinal et al., 2000,

Goelman and Pence, 1987, Howes and Stewart, 1987, McCartney, 1984, and Vernon-Fegans, Emmanuel and Blood 1997 have found that there is a positive relationship between child-care quality and children's linguistic, cognitive, and social functioning (NICHD, 2002). The researchers found that the higher the quality of the program, the more positive the effect on the child's learning. The NICHD studied two different types of childcare settings: children who were in centers and those who received care in a home setting outside of their own home. The children for the study were recruited through hospital visits shortly after birth in 1991 at ten locations in the United States. There were 5,146 children who met the eligibility requirements, of that group a conditionally random sample of 3,015 were selected for phone interviews. After those interviews a total of 1,364 became the group that was used for this study.

The quality of care the children received was measured through the use of the Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment (ORCE). The ORCE is based on observations of 44 minute cycles, each broken into four 10 minute observation periods. Observation is based around the child's behavior, activities, and interaction with the caregiver or other people (NICHD, 2002). It was found through the use of this evaluation instrument that higher quality of care in the center or home based care had a positive effect on children. The study also found that the child will function at a higher level when exposed to a quality program versus a program been found to be of lower quality using the ORCE. According to the NICHD "children whose child care was in the highest third of quality obtained higher scores on tests of pre-academic skills and language than did children whose child care was in the bottom third" (NICHD, 2002, p. 155). The study also showed that students who stay in quality pre-kindergarten programs will continue to

improve and will predict better performance on measures of cognitive and linguistic functioning (NICHD, 2002, p. 157). The sum total of the study stated that the better the quality, the better prepared a child will be for the start of Kindergarten.

“The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the United States include a wide range of part day, full school-day, and full work-day programs under educational, social welfare, and commercial auspices” (Kamerman & Gatenio, 2003, p. 1). These programs are responsible for all the current daycare taking place in the United States today. The goal of the ECEC is to integrate the various types of programs into a less fragmented system. The problem the ECEC is consistently running into is the varying degrees with which the programs agree on the basic tenets of a program. There has been some success beginning in the 1990’s, but with the advent of universal pre-kindergartens there will be an even greater need for a more standardized way of measuring a program. The ECEC has noted that “research demonstrates that early learning experiences are linked with later school achievement, emotional and social well-being, fewer grade retentions, and reduced incidences of juvenile delinquency and that these outcomes are all factors associated with later adult productivity” (Kamerman & Gatenio, 2003, p. 12). The sooner the programs are put into place, the better off all pre-kindergarten students may be.

The ECEC in the United States was part of a twelve nation study on the subject of early childhood education and policies. This study was undertaken by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that originated with the Marshall Plan at the end of World War II. The idea began in 1988, and the book *Early Childhood and Care in the USA* was written to talk about the policies that were observed during the

study. “The OECD held meetings with early childhood experts who developed a common framework of topics and questions to be addressed in each country. The OECD established a precise process for conducting the reviews across participating countries” (Karp 2003). The review tried to accomplish the following tasks:

1. Distinguish among and investigate the contexts, major policy concerns and policy responses to address the concerns within the participating countries.
2. Explore the roles of national government, nongovernmental organizations, and other partners and the institutional resources devoted to planning and implementing services at each level.
3. Identify feasible policy options suited to the different contexts.
4. Evaluate the impact, coherence, and effectiveness of different approaches ECEC policy and practice.
5. Highlight particularly innovative policies and practices.
6. Contribute to the Indicators of education Systems project by identifying the types of data and instruments that need to be developed in support of ECEC information collection, policy making, research, monitoring, and evaluation (Karp 2003).

The team from the United States found that quality ranged from low to high. The hope from the researchers who participated in the study is to help make lasting policy changes to help the quality of early childhood to improve.

Elements of Quality

“Despite differences between the various stakeholders, however, almost all stakeholders appear to agree on some basic elements” (Cryer, 2003, p. 31). The following lists the various areas that the stakeholders are in basic agreement on according to Cryer:

1. Safe Care - making sure the environment presents no hazards to children’s safety
2. Healthful Care - clean environment where measures are taken to keep the environment sanitary and care is given to the child’s overall health.
3. Developmentally Appropriate Stimulation - children are able to make choices for their own activities and have opportunities to learn from a variety of methods and resources.
4. Positive Interactions with adults
5. Encouragement of individual emotional growth - children are able to operate as independent individuals.
6. Help children and with the help of both environmental guidance and support from adults (2003).

These aspects seem to be where professionals from early childhood can find a common background. Even with these areas as broadly defined as they are, there needs to be an effort to take them into consideration and build a program that shows how these would work as measurable standards. According to Ramey and Ramey (2004) certain experiences are essential to helping a child become successful during their early years of school. These are broken down into: “encouraging exploration, mentor in basic skills, celebrate developmental awareness, rehearse and extend new skills, protect from

inappropriate disapproval, teasing, and punishment, communicate richly and responsively, and guide and limit behavior” (Ramey & Ramey, 1999b, p. 145). Many of these are very similar to what Cryer has found through her studies and also expand some of the points to make an even more complete picture of an appropriate pre-kindergarten.

Cryer also makes the case that stakeholders must be a part of making sure the program contains quality. The argument here is that who better than the parents and their children to decide if a program is working for them. If the children seem to be happy and engaged while at their preschool, is this not a measure of quality? It has been proven in the research that, yes, this is a valid argument. Peisner-Feinberg and Burchinal (1995) determined that when the quality of a program is high, the children who participate in the program demonstrate more positive feeling about their school experience than those who are in a lower quality program. Evaluating the quality all of the different programs could be done through the use of the families as a valuable resource.

Two definitions of quality are widely used by the ECEC: process quality and structural quality.

Process quality consists of those aspects of an ECEC setting that children actually experience, such as teacher-child and child-child interactions; the types of spaces, activities, and materials available to children; and how everyday personal care routines, such as meals, toileting, and rest are handled (Cryer, 2003, p. 37).

Structural quality consists of the framework that allows process quality to occur - factors that influence the processes that children actually experience (Cryer, 2003, p. 38).

These definitions will allow researchers to measure the amount of quality taking place in a program. The definitions of quality provided by the ECEC have been relatively stable since the 1970's. The basic premises have already been agreed upon. The challenge now

is to implement the definitions to help us provide a quality program. These definitions help to align with those in the North Carolina Smart Start by measuring the amount of quality being put into the program. In Smart Start studies the researchers were evaluating the process quality of their programs by looking at the scores children received from the evaluative instruments. The structural quality can then be looked at as being good or poor when based around the children's ability to show increasing skill levels on the tests.

“The competencies that children demonstrate as they come to school are the most immediate and obvious indicator of the complex process of development-in-context that has produced a certain degree of school readiness over time” (Pianta, 2002, p. 3). The more quality a program possesses, the better the children are at meeting academic success. There are three areas to be considered when looking at what skills a child requires in order to be a successful student. These three areas are social-emotional, behavioral, and academic skills that comprise what is believed to be a high quality pre-kindergarten classroom (Pianta, 2002, p. 3). Each of these areas can be broken down into categories, but for the purpose of the proposal they will be looked at as complete components.

Considerations for Universal Pre-Kindergarten

In November 1999, a conference entitled “Early Childhood Learning: Programs for a New Age” was co-sponsored by the Laboratory for Student Success and the National Center of Education in the Inner Cities at Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education (Wang & Reynolds, 2000, p. 2). The goal of this conference was to provide a place to discuss growing concerns over universal

programs for preschoolers and to discuss the level of quality needed to help these children succeed. It was a place where early childhood professionals could meet to express the needs of all interested parties, children, families, and communities. The conference set about to identify the various resources available to educate our children and how to combine these resources into programs for success. During the conference “several key areas emerged from the work groups, including: providing universal access to day care, improving the quality of professional development, and increasing parental involvement” (Wang & Reynolds, 2000, p. 3).

“Child care quality can be defined by structural regulable characteristics and by processes or experiences” (Vandell & Pierce, 2000, p. 3). The experiences are those given by the caregivers and those the child has within the setting of the daycare center. “Recent research provides strong indications that child care quality in both structural regulable and process terms has significant and positive effects on children’s cognitive development, language skills, social competence, behavioral adjustment, and work habits” (Vandell & Pierce, 2000, p. 3). Vandell and Pierce also talk about the longitudinal research done in recent years that shows that quality has a continued positive effect on children’s skills into the early stages of elementary school. The positive effect of these quality programs is still being researched. The authors write about the continuing need to improve the studies that are being done in order to focus on the quality of the program itself. Vandell and Pierce discuss one study done by Lamb in the Handbook of Child Psychology which was a comprehensive review of child care research. He conclude that children who experienced high quality care did better in measures of cognitive development when compared to peers who may not have had this advantage(Vandell &

Pierce 2003). However, many in the field are hopeful that the preliminary studies continue to show positive results.

Head Start, a program in existing since the 1960's, has been an excellent source of information about what changes should be made to better educate our youngest students. "Head Start is effective. As a comprehensive child development program, head Start provides education, health, nutrition, and social services to children and families through direct services or referrals"(Barnett 2002). The program primarily works with low income families to provide a support system for both the child and their family. Head Start had a rocky start and the information first reported by the program suggested that it did not have lasting results on the child's academic success. Head Start has since been revamped and it has been suggested that the program, although not helping children gain IQ points, has had a positive effect on their school lives. "The widespread misunderstanding about Head Start results from the failure to consider the full range of cognitive and academic outcomes as well as flawed research methods that generate faulty conclusions"(Barnett 2002). Despite early problems, Head Start has become what some have called a very reliable method for helping disadvantaged children receive the preschool experience they need.

Boyer (1991) speaks about how it might be used as a model to help bring about a more universal program. He speaks about making this program available to anyone who not only needs childcare, but also wants their children to be able to receive a good start in school. Speaking on the behalf of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, he addressed the subject of quality from the standpoint that everyone is entitled to receive it and that we are one of the last of the industrialized nations to assume control

over our preschools to make them a place where our children can learn and grow. The foundation completes the idea of a universal program by saying that preschool and daycare should complement one another. The barriers between care and education should be broken down to form a more seamless way of taking care of our children. This would provide all aspects of the definitions provided by the ECEC as far as process and structural quality go. The aspects of all parties being willing to work towards the same end would give the program the buy in that is needed to address the issues of quality. This statement from Boyer is important because it helps to show where the first ideas for Universal Pre-Kindergarten started to come from. The basis of his idea is that everyone should attend a pre-kindergarten program and that as an industrialized nation we should be moving toward this goal of having open access to all.

“Americans tend to see pre-kindergarten as a downward extension of formal education and more readily support it from public coffers” (Maeroff, 2003, p. 9). This view needs to be addressed when looking at the issue of universal pre-kindergarten. The issue of child care will be greatly intertwined with how programs need to be put together for greatest success. The child care issue is of huge concern and the reality is that children can only spend a certain amount of time in a structured program, no matter the quality offered. Children will also need childcare provided for them when parents are not able to be there at the end of the pre-kindergarten education part of the day. The structural and process quality must be maintained to help form a seamless bond between the end of the school day and the start of the child care part of the day.

The other issue to keep in mind is: why do some preschools fail? According to Ramey and Ramey (2004), preschools fail for four specific reasons. First, many programs

cannot provide the training teachers need to be successful in the classroom. Second, many programs often do not provide enough time for children to learn and only operate for a certain number of hours per day and months per year. Third, many programs that do not work are more remedial, rather than focusing on ways to prevent failure from happening, thus making learning experiences very limited in nature. The final reason for failure is that many programs, although well intentioned, focus on helping the families more than they focus on the development of the child. These same programs do not offer the direct teaching needed to help these children grow in academic areas. This is not to say that researchers dismiss the importance of families. Family is a very important part of the child's life and the help a family can provide can prove the best help of all. The objective here is to make sure that all parts of the child's environment work together to form a cohesive unit.

“The fact is there are excellent procedures available to observe and document the quality and amount of preschool education and child care” (Ramey & Ramey, 2004, p. 488). The question still remaining is how to make sure that programs currently being put into place meet the standards we wish for our children to achieve. We know from the research presented above that it is possible to extend child care programs into quality academic programs, and that many academic programs could be extended to include needed child care. Now, it is just a question of the quality of these programs. Most programs can meet some of the needs of our children; now it is a question of finding the right combination.

Future Direction for Quality: The Teachers

The historical perspective shows that the evolution of pre-kindergarten from the nursery school to the current state has been a long and winding road. The path shows us that, out of need, society developed a way to look after the youngest members and then furthered that idea to include making sure that everyone has equal opportunity to participate and succeed. The question now facing the early childhood community is how to develop the high level of quality that all stakeholders would like to see. All children need to be prepared to enter elementary school and now we are seeing the early childhood community beginning to agree on what high quality programs look like. Both NIEER (2006) and NAEYC (2005) agree that programs should have well trained teachers and programs focused on developing the whole child through a well planned out curriculum. Everyone can agree that the better prepared the teachers, the better the program -- and thus, the better the child will do during progress through school. The goal of pre-kindergarten is to give every child a firm footing in the basics so as to allow each to make the most of the learning experiences that will be offered in elementary school.

As this theme of quality continues, the next place to focus is on teacher development. Teachers both prepare the children and designing the programs used. As a pre-kindergarten teacher I know that I make decisions daily on which book to read and what concepts to teach. I am also responsible to make sure the children get the appropriate amount of play and social interaction each day. I decide if a child needs extra support, and then find the way to provide it. I rely daily on my education and training to help me make these important decisions that affect how well my students will do in the future. Support for the idea of preparing teachers well comes from many sources within

the early childhood community. One of the biggest supporters for improvement in the education of early childhood teachers comes from the National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC). According to the NAEYC, “research shows that when early childhood professionals are well prepared, children are likely to experience warm, safe, and stimulating environments that lead to healthy development and constructive learning” (NAEYC, 2005). Out of this research NAEYC has developed a position on standards for programs that prepare early childhood professionals. NAEYC (2005) has identified the following five core standards that educators should master:

1. Promoting child development and learning- knowledge of different theoretical positions in child development. Knowledge of biological, environmental, cultural, and social influences impacting children’s growth. Knowledge of the developmental milestones for children and knowledge of current research.
2. Building family and community relationships- knowledge of the diversity of family systems, traditional, non-traditional and alternative family structures, family life styles, and the dynamics of family life on the development of young children. This also includes a knowledge of different community resources, assistance, and support available to children and families.
3. Observing, documenting, and assessing- knowledge and application of developmentally appropriate child observation and assessment methods.
Teaching and learning- knowledge and application of different curriculum

models, standards for high quality programming and child assessment practices.

4. Becoming a professional- knowledge of laws, regulations, and policies that impact professional conduct with children and families. This also includes a knowledge of professional organizations and resources associated with early childhood education.

NAEYC's purpose for proposing core standards for educators is to ensure that all teachers of young children are appropriately prepared to work with their students.

NAEYC is currently developing accreditation practices for associate degrees as well as its already established recognition of baccalaureate programs. This approval, although not required, would provide a stable guide by which to measure teachers entering the field of early childhood education. NAYEC recognizes the importance of the associate degree program, which lends credence to the idea that a well developed program would be able to prepare well prepared teachers who do not wish to seek a four year degree. The states follow the NAYEC lead are trying to ensure that all of their teachers are qualified to teach in their prekindergarten programs. In a study done in 2005 by Gilliam and Marchesseault looked at who is teaching our youngest students. The researchers took a sample of 3,898 prekindergarten teachers who are responsible for a state-funded prekindergarten classroom. The researchers used telephone interviews to obtain information from the prekindergarten teachers, the informant was the lead teacher in the classroom and was responsible for the day to day activities. The respondent's were asked what degree they had earned and about having a Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate. The teachers were also asked if they held state certification and if so, in what

areas. “12.8% of preschool lead teachers across the nation reported a High School Diploma or GED (HSD/GED) as their highest degree at the time of the survey, 14.1% had an Associate’s Degree (AA), 49.4% had a bachelor’s degree (BA), and 23.6% had obtained a Master’s Degree or higher (MA+)”(Gilliam & Marchesseault 2005) “It is interesting to note that of the 10 state systems with the most highly educated teachers, 9 locate over 75% of their classrooms in schools”(Gilliam & Marchesseault 2005). This study does show that most teachers do at least meet the minimum requirements for teaching prekindergarten.

Researchers (Rhodes & Hennessy 2000, McCarthy, Cruz & Ratcliff 1999 Early, et al., 2007) find a benefit to training, especially when it involves teaching specifics in early childhood areas. The same researchers find that teachers who have either formal college degrees, such as a bachelor’s in early childhood education, or basic training in programs such as Child Development Associate(CDA) which is designed to teach the basic principles of working with young children, are better able to relate to children’s individual needs and provide more developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Therefore, a trained teacher will add to the quality experience we wish pre-kindergarteners to have before entering school.

The ideal combination of talent and skill is what we seek in pre-kindergarten teachers. There is something to be said for a person’s natural affinity to relate to young children; such persons, with proper training, can reach the goal of educating our children in a quality program. The core value of early childhood education is to do the best job possible in making sure our children have all the basics for success, not only for the world of school, but for the one that exists outside the school doors.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

The history of early childhood education shows how hard people are willing to work to help young children grow into successful adults. The evolution of what began as daycare, a place where children could go during the day while their parents worked, to the new universal pre-kindergarten that provides opportunities for all children to receive a head start on their education, is amazing. The universal pre-kindergarten has been designed to capture all elements of both care and education. Such an environment has long been available only for the most in need or those who could afford outside care for their children. The idea that we can and should allow all children the opportunity to succeed shows how far as a society we have come to acknowledging that early childhood education is not only helpful, but necessary.

The idea of quality that has come along with the development of the new programs has helped to focus the ideas and create some terrific programs. Excellent examples can be seen in Georgia (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003) and North Carolina (Bryant, Maxwell, Taylor, Poe, Peisner-Feinberg & Bernier, 2003). Although these programs are based on different ideologies, the programs share the same intent of preparing all children for school. Studies of these programs (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003) (Bryant, Maxwell, Taylor, Poe, Peisner-Feinberg & Bernier, 2003) have proven that they benefit society in the long run. These types of universal pre-kindergartens lower the need for remedial and specialized education and help children be more emotionally and socially ready for their

school years. Studies from North Carolina and Georgia continue to show that these students consistently do well in school and are able to adapt to new situations more readily.

NIEER studies (NIEER 2006) on the state of preschools show the effort that has been made by different states to keep growing their programs despite growing pains. The number of states without programs keeps shrinking while the number of states that implement successful programs keeps growing. The willingness of states to implement their own calls for quality shows that they are listening to the professionals in early childhood education and the people in their state who are the daily users and financial backers of the programs. The state of Florida has made great effort to turn its Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program into a quality educational setting. Despite their growing pains, Florida's commitment to quality is seen on the My Florida website (www.myflorida.gov), where they define a high quality program as one with the following qualities:

Positive interactions between students and teachers

Good communication

Daily opportunities for language reasoning and problem solving

Teachers and staff that are well educated and compensated- this includes teachers who hold bachelor's degrees in early education and salary that is comparable to regular public school teacher

Active parent involvement

Low child-staff ratios

Supervision and evaluation of staff with opportunities for professional growth

Well equipped facilities suited to the needs of young children

Sufficient toys, books, and materials (“Recognizing,” 2008)

These ideas are being put into practice. As a teacher in the VPK program, I see the commitment being made to quality in these classrooms. We meet all of these standards. I have been given many opportunities to be a part of the growing process. Through my opportunities to teach the program I love, which began with my studies at USF, I have watched the universal pre-kindergarten program make a real difference for my students. They are confident and do well academically in kindergarten. I know that without the VPK program, some of these students would have been woefully unprepared for kindergarten and may have been left behind.

We still need to continually work to make sure that all pre-kindergarten programs continually challenge our students and their teachers keep improving. The result will be quality education for all, just the way it was meant to be.

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