

1-1-2010

The need for universal preschool in America

Claudia Delgado

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

The Need for Universal Preschool in America

A Thesis Submitted to the

University Honors Program

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree

With Upper Division Honors

Department Of

Teaching and Learning (TLRN)

By

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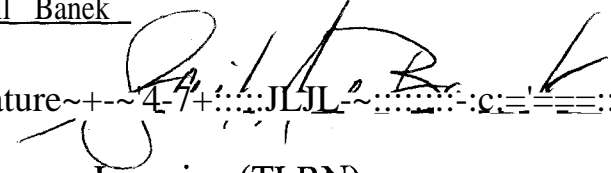
May, 2010

**University Honors Program
Capstone Approval Page**

Capstone Title The Need for Universal Preschool in America

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Date of Approval ((- / 7 - 6 LJ

HONORS THESIS ABSTRACT SUBMISSION FORM

AUTHOR: Claudia Delgado

THESIS TITLE: The Need for Universal Preschool in America

ADVISOR: Gail Banek

ADVISOR'S DEPARTMENT: Teaching and Learning (TLRN)

DISCIPLINE: Early Childhood Studies in Education

YEAR: Senior

PAGE LENGTH: 30

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Yes

ILLUSTRATED: Yes

PUBLISHED: No

LIST PUBLICATION: N/A

COPIES AVAILABLE: HARD COpy

ABSTRACT:

There is currently a problem regarding the amount of children without Pre-Kindergarten -due to the lack of income or knowledge about the importance of an early education. Research shows how detrimental it is for children not to take advantage of a time in their lives when their brains are rapidly growing. The lack of an education to nurture their development reduces their success in life -especially if they come from harsh family conditions such as poverty, domestic violence, or if these children were born with special needs. The Universal Preschool program would provide ALL children with this important education.

I chose to write a research paper to support the benefits of a Universal Preschool program. This information is useful for parents, for current and future teachers. With the

expectations of children rising and the standardized testing of children, this knowledge would be helpful to improve their achievement. . I researched Universal Preschool in works of writing by early childhood professionals, surveyed students on and off-campus, and interviewed preschool and kindergarten teachers. Lastly, I created a sample unit of activities implemented in preschool that would develop all areas of growth. I hope my research helps parents and teachers realize the important for the Universal Preschool movement..

The Need for Universal Preschool in America

A pre-kindergarten education is not publicly funded; it is solely paid for by the parents who can afford to give their children an early education. The problem with this is that many children cannot take advantage of a high quality preschool education because of the lack of money. In the state of Illinois, it is not mandatory for children to attend preschool or kindergarten. From the time of birth to the age of six children stay at home, attend a childcare center, or a Pre-Kindergarten class at a school district. Children of parents who do not know about the importance of an early education also miss out and are not adequately prepared for kindergarten or first grade. It is unfair that these children lack the opportunities to learn and develop to their maximum potential while those who attended preschool, are more competent, and ready for future schooling. Establishing a Universal Preschool Program and mandating a pre-kindergarten education in the United States would greatly improve child success in education. A Universal Preschool Program would publicly fund every child's preschool education the same way it is for kindergarten through 12th grade. This would allow *all* children the opportunity to have a high quality preschool education no matter what income a child comes from.

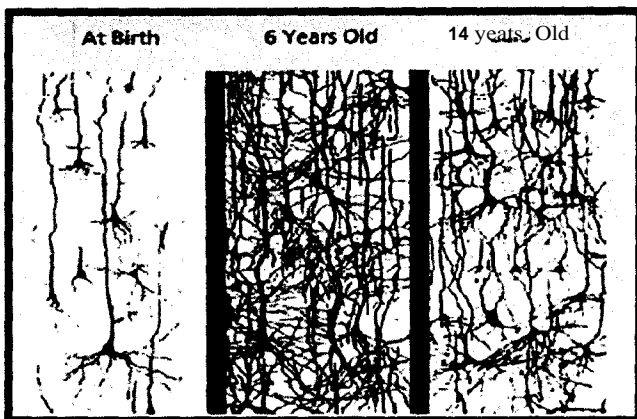
Why is it that the richer keep getting richer, whether it is monetary, or rich with opportunities in life? The opportunities for Yale and Harvard Alumni are far greater than for the alumni from a non-Ivy League university. Should the quality or opportunity of an education depend on how much a family can afford? Today, this same problem exists for families of preschool-aged children. According to the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, the average cost of a preschool education for a four-year old in Illinois is

around \$6,806. Low-income families can be eligible for their child to attend an at-risk preschool classroom or a Head Start program at little to no cost to them. However, there are many families who are not eligible for this program and do not send their child to pre-kindergarten because of the lack of money. This paper will serve to support a Universal Preschool program and a mandatory pre-kindergarten education. I will support why an early education is crucial and will describe how it would be constructive to children in all areas of development, the gains for children that are commonly overlooked, and why an early education at a pre-kindergarten classroom greatly surpasses an education at home or at a childcare center.. In addition, I will include my personal research in this field. I will include my findings through student surveys and teacher interviews I created and use my experience as a clinical student at an at-risk center to support this movement. . In the end, I will include a sample unit of activities that would support the growth in all areas of development for children.

An early education is crucial

The first years of a child's life are the most crucial time to learn. We have all heard the phrase, "Children are like sponges," -the reason being because of a child's *plasticity* of the brain. In the Child Welfare Information Gateway (CWIG) article, "Researchers use the term plasticity to describe the way the brain creates, strengthens, and discards synapses and neuronal pathways in response to the environment. . The brain's 'plasticity' is the reason that environment plays a vital role in brain development" (CWIG, 2001). After birth, children have the potential to produce many more neurons and create connections or synapses in order to build a useful brain. When children are provided with hands-on learning experiences that child "builds a web of knowledge" in his or her brain. Every time a child learns a new concept, a neuron connects to make a synapse and adds a little bit more to the web. However, as children age, these unused

neurons die off rapidly. Below is a diagram of neurons (the long lines) and synapses (the black dots between the lines). At six years old, you can see that the brain contains many neurons and synapses. At 14, it is evident that the unused synapses have deteriorated.



This explains why it is easier for children to pick up a new language at a younger age. The old quote, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," also comes into play. Having a preschool education provided to everyone

would ensure that children get the chance to learn and take advantage of their brain's full potential. To further support this idea, the Educational Policies Commission (EPC) states, "Research shows clearly that the first four or five years of a child's life are the period of most rapid growth in physical and mental characteristics and of greatest susceptibility to environmental influences. The postponement of an educational contribution by society until children reach the age of six generally limits the flowering of their potential" (EPC, 1966, p. 3).

Benefits for all children

Universal Preschool would help jumpstart all children's areas of development: social, intellectual, emotional, and physical. An article in *Time Magazine* explains the importance of the development of these areas, "'Today we are asking kids to meet higher standards, in K through 12,' says American Federation of Teachers president Sandra Feldman. ' But if we don't prepare them earlier, then they're not going to meet them" ' (Morse et al., 1998). Preschool would not only help them meet these high standards, it would also enrich their life, future schooling, and career.

A preschool education can help children develop socially by allowing them to interact and develop their relations with fellow classmates and adults at an early age. Preschool is often a child's first opportunity to build social skills and make friends outside the home. Preschool will often open the doors to socialize through play dates and birthday parties. In the classroom, children will learn how to initiate play with peers, how to share, and wait for their turn. In the Early Childhood Studies program, we learned that children are born thinking that they are the center of everything. This is called egocentrism. According to the Educational Policies Commission, with a preschool education, every child will learn to "balance his egocentricity with a concern for and responsibility towards others" (EPC, 1966, p. 9). A Pre-Kindergarten education will also form the first understandings of the expectations in society. The Pre-K classroom offers a sense of community, and respect through classroom jobs and rules. Children learn simple tasks such as setting the table and raising their hand before speaking. All of these actions help the classroom run smoother and the child to respect others. Children learn that they have the ability to contribute to their classroom community and that they also have a right to be respected as well as to respect others. Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) states in *The Illinois Learning Standards* that children in preschool will develop skills to "understand and follow rules, use the classroom environment purposefully and respectfully" and behave in the preschool classroom setting. The preschool curriculum helps teach children to begin to "manage classroom transitions and adapt to changes in routines" (ISBE, 2004). These classroom expectations serve as preparation for the code of conduct adults need to have in society.

The intellectual development of a child through Universal preschool is by far the greatest gain. As was mentioned above, preschool would help children develop their brain's plasticity by "targeting and educating children at a time when their minds are growing and developing the

fastest." It has been shown that "high quality [pre-kindergarten] programs have produced short-term gains in cognitive functioning and longer-term gains in school achievement and social adjustment" (Greene, 2006). In addition, this early education would help prepare students for future schooling. The Educational Policies Commission (1966) states that a Pre-Kindergarten education would promote curiosity, growth of language, and generate readiness for the intellectual activities that will come in later years. Children will practice solving problems, observe and listen, handle concepts and experience the joys and pleasures of learning. When learning becomes fun and engaging at an early age, children will be motivated to perform better and take learning into their own hands. Preschool would expand a child's experiences and offer the child more background knowledge for them to base new information in the future. In Georgia, where Universal Preschool is implemented, they have seen the positive effects in children's intellectual capabilities. "When the initial class of Georgia four-year-olds reached first grade, they logged higher test scores than kids who had not gone to Pre-K" (Morse et al., 1998). In addition, Caralee Adams in the *Scholastic Administrator* stated, "Preschool can dramatically improve the quality of education that all kids receive. Research has shown positive effects on learning and development in both small and large scale public programs -and preschool effects don't vanish over time" (Adams, 2009).

A Pre-K education would help children develop emotionally as well. According to the Illinois Early Learning Standards, children will develop a positive self-concept; they will demonstrate eagerness and curiosity as a learner, exhibit persistence, and creativity in seeking solutions to problems, and show initiative and independence in actions. Children will also use appropriate communication skills when expressing needs, wants, and feelings (ISBE, 2004). A preschool education provides children with many opportunities to choose what they want to play

with, whom they want to play with, and how they are going to do something. Children constantly create new things and get positive feedback from teachers and peers. Children get a sense of accomplishment, for example, when they paint or draw or build something out of nothing. They take pride to show that they can read, write, help, or succeed in something. Pre-Kindergarten can be a place where children feel safe and nurtured. Many parents go out into the workforce leaving their children in day cares or at home with babysitters. Many times the amount of interaction with the caregiver is minimal. At a preschool classroom, children will get the chance to interact with others, be challenged, and motivated to learn. Teachers provide as much one-on-one time with the children and acknowledge everyone as a unique individual. The Educational Policies Commission found that, "The emotional goals of early education include promotion of children's sense of security and self-respect; there are no more important prerequisites to learning, happiness, or mental health. A child must find that the school is a congenial place. He must frequently have a sense of accomplishment, a sense that he is able to learn by himself, and to help others. He must feel respected and valued" (CEPC, 1966, p. 9).

In addition to the growth of emotional well being, a Pre-Kindergarten education would benefit children in their physical development. ISBE also states in *The Illinois Learning Standards* that children will, "engage in active play using gross and fine motor skills, coordinate movements to perform complex tasks, follow simple safety rules when participating in activities, and participate in simple practices that promote healthy living and prevent illnesses" (ISBE, 2004). Children are required to wash their hands before and after each meal, and after using the restroom. This is part of a preschooler's daily routine. Children also learn to pick up after themselves and wipe down their tables. A Pre-kindergarten center provides children many intervals of outside play. Children can run, yell, jump, climb, and do other things to release all

the extra energy that young children have and crave to use. Children are provided with sturdy playground equipment, grassy areas, and sidewalks to play on. Bikes, hula-hoops, balls, and other play equipment are available for children to develop and strengthen their large muscles. At the same time, children are also provided with rests such as naptime and quiet time such as using the classroom library or being read to by the teacher. In addition to physical rest and development, preschoolers are also provided with healthy snacks and/or meals throughout the day to keep them well nourished. Children receive well-balanced meals with juice, milk, and water to drink at high quality preschool centers. Students are never offered pop or foods containing high levels of sugar. They introduce children to new types of food and encourage children to experiment and eat vegetables and fruits. Many preschool centers screen children with hearing and vision tests in order for parents to provide their children with the appropriate needs.

Benefits for disadvantaged children

In addition to the general population of children, a preschool education would help those that are most commonly overlooked: children from low socioeconomic backgrounds and children with disabilities. According to Isabel Sawhill a writer for the Brookings journal, "The most effective programs create savings to the government of \$13,000 to \$19,000 per child above the cost of the pre-school programs themselves. The best results come from programs that begin early, include children from the most disadvantaged homes, and provide intensive education and other services over a lengthy period" (Sawhill, 1999). A preschool education would be very advantageous to these children and it would pay itself off in the end. Universal preschool would allow more funding of at-risk centers for children with both special needs and for children from low socioeconomic statuses.

The implementation of Universal Preschool would highly foster the education of financially disadvantaged children. In the *Journal of Law and Education*, Wilson Greene states, "Many children from low socio economic backgrounds enter primary school with no preschool education. Ironically, these are the very students that need a solid foundation to compete with other students" (Greene, 2006). It would be of no surprise to find out that these children lack variety and quantity of resources such as educational toys and books in their life. They may also lack opportunities for educational experiences such as field trips to the zoo, museums, and learning centers -all, which cost money. Children of low socioeconomic backgrounds may also have very little quality playtime with their working parents. A preschool education would provide these children all the resources, experiences, and interactions needed to develop them in all areas. It is a shame that our nation does not publicly fund a preschool education. "Although the United States was among the first industrialized nations to offer 12 years of free public education to rich and poor alike, it still does not ensure that poor children receive the preschool experience necessary to get ready for school.. Evidence indicates that the most at-risk children are least likely to attend preschool" (Zigler et al., 2006, p. 69). Preschool education is obviously too expensive for some parents. At-risk programs like Head Start are available to only families living in poverty as defined by the government, "To be eligible for Head Start, children must live in homes that are below the federal poverty threshold (\$18,244 for a family of four in 2002). Although the law does allow 10 percent of slots to be open to children from families with higher incomes, this is rarely possible" (Zigler et al., 2006, p. 69). The limited eligibility leaves some families *still* not able to provide an early education for their child(ren). Often, these same children are left with babysitters, family members, or even at day care centers, where mothers still have to payout of pocket in order to work and make money for the family. It is a vicious

cycle. Publicly funding preschool would "kill two birds with one stone." Parents can leave their children at preschool, allowing their child to get stimulated in all areas of development, and be taken care of at no cost to the parent.

Many studies have proven that the absence of a preschool education for children from low socioeconomic families is most detrimental. Sawhill explained the following:

Because of their family environments, too many children come to school ill prepared to learn. They lack language skills, social skills, and motivation. In Oxford, Mississippi, for example, Superintendent John Jordan reports that 5-year-olds sometimes arrive in kindergarten not knowing their own names -only nicknames. Almost all experts agree that a preschool experience is one of the most effective strategies for improving later school performance. (Sawhill, 1999).

Studies conducted by researchers and child development professionals have discovered the many areas of improvement that a pre-kindergarten education can provide children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. These changes and improvements do not end at the academic level -it will continue to affect the quality of their life. The authors of *A Vision for Universal Preschool Education* explain the positive impacts for these children. "In the past two decades, many studies have shown that preschool attendance has short- and long-term positive effects on a variety of school and social competencies such as academic achievement, need for remedial education and social services, delinquency, educational attainment, and economic well-being into adulthood" (Zigler et al., 2006, p. 39). The *High Scope Perry Preschool Program* and *Chicago Child-Parent Centers* are two very commonly cited and well-known projects that have proven these positive effects. These studies provided high-quality education enrichment to children in low socioeconomic living. The class sizes ranged from 17-22 children, focused on language and cognitive

skills, and provided well-qualified teachers. Perry Preschool and Chicago Child-Parent Centers were half-day programs serving children from 3 to 4 years old. Below are the data and findings researchers collected from these studies.

TABLE 3.3. *Adjusted Means or Percentages for Program and Comparison Groups on Key Outcomes for Cost-Benefit Analysis*

Outcome	Perry Preschool	Abecedarian	Child-Parent Centers
Original sample sizes (program, control)	58,65	57,54	989,550
Sample recovery for high school completion (%)	94	95	87
Special education services by age 15/18 (0/0)	15 vs. 34	25 vs. 48	14vs.25
Grade retention by age 15 (%)	ns	31 vs. 55	23vs.38
Child maltreatment by age 17	n/a	n/a	7vs.14
Arrested by age 19	31 vs.51	ns	17vs.25
Highest grade completed by age 21/22 (mean)	11.9 vs. 11.0	12.2 vs. 11.6	11.3 vs. 10.9
High school completion by age 21/27 (%)	71 vs. 54	70vs.67 (graduation)	66vs.54
Attend college by age 21/22 (%)	33 vs. 28	36vs.14 (4-year)	24vs.15
Employed at age 21/27 (%)	71 vs.59	70 vs. 58 (teen mothers)	n/a
Monthly earnings at age 27 (\$)	1219vs.766	n/a	n/a

Note: For Perry, special education is for "educable mental impairment" (EM1) placement by age 15. Ages for educational attainment and employment are 27 for Perry; 21 for Abecedarian, and 22 for Chicago. ns = not Significant; n/ a = not available.

The end results proved that a preschool education is very fulfilling, "Across all studies, preschool participation was associated with a 31 percent reduction in grade retention, a 50 percent reduction in special education placement, and a 32 percent reduction in high school dropout rates"

(Zigler et al., 2006, p. 39). If these are the results for children from financially disadvantaged families, imagine the outcomes for the all children.

For children with unidentified special needs, a preschool education would enable teachers and parents to detect a disability or impairment early on. This is extremely important. Early detection is very crucial to helping these children perform to their full potential. For children with special needs, this takes even more time. If a disability or impairment were detected in preschool, their chances of getting services and intervention earlier in their life would be greater. Teachers can work with children at the preschool age instead of kindergarten or first grade. They can provide these students with explicit instruction, modeling, and guidance to fit their needs so that these children can also come to kindergarten with a familiar understanding of what is

expected. A year can really make a difference. A preschool education for these children would enable them to interact with typically developing students -an experience these children need. Typically developing students can familiarize themselves with children with special needs. They need to get educated in order to have compassion and respect for these students. They can be of great help to scaffold and enrich their education. In the *Journal of Law and Education*, Wilson Greene provides another reason why implementing a Universal Preschool program would help children with special needs, "With increased funding to preschools, more resources would be available to help schools educate handicapped children who are unable to learn at the remedial preschool level.. With more funding available, more programs explicitly catering to handicapped children will become available, thus creating a truly least restrictive learning environment" (Greene, 2006). Universal preschool would certainly allow more funding to be placed and used in desperate areas. More programs for children with special needs are needed. Publicly funding a preschool education would force the state or country to make their schools up to par for children with special needs.

A preschool education surpasses childcare and staying at home

As was stated before, many children enter kindergarten unprepared. Making preschool mandatory and publicly funding it would enable children to get the preparation necessary to avoid falling through the cracks. Before kindergarteners start the year, they are expected to be able to recognize basic letters and numbers, listen and pay attention, have enthusiasm toward learning, have solid oral language skills, show independence and play well with others, and show strong fine-motor skills. (Parlapiano, 2007) An online article by Evelyn Ngeow (2008) in *Scholastic Parents* asked kindergarten teachers from around the country about other expectations. Overall, students should be able write their first name using upper and lowercase

letters, count to ten, classify objects according to their size, shape, and quantity, and speak using complete sentences. Children should be able to recognize some common sight words like "stop" and identify rhyming words. They should also be able to repeat their full name, address, phone number, and birthday, manage bathroom needs, dress themselves, follow directions, clean up after themselves, and easily separate from parents. Kindergarteners are expected to do many things, and these skills are hard to practice and develop without a preschool education to prepare them. Kindergarten teacher, Kim Oliver Bumim of Silver Spring, Maryland states that, "If quality preschool were available to all students, she could spend less time in remediation and have fewer reading group levels. When kids try to squeeze in too much during kindergarten to catch up they may burn out, she adds" (Adams, 2009). A preschool education provides children a head start in order to perform alongside their peers rather than behind them without the need for remedial programs or burning out.

Childcare centers and staying at home will not help develop the skills expected before kindergarten. Staying at home inhibits children from interacting or receiving stimulating experiences. Parents and caregivers may not have the time or energy to provide high quality educational experiences at home. The main form of entertainment, especially if there are not any siblings, is television. There is an extreme lack of peer interaction, which is also important for learning. If the parent is a stay-at-home mom, she might play and stimulate her child but not on the same level as Pre-K.. Being a stay-at-home mom is a full-time job: preparing dinner, running errands, doing household chores, and taking care of basic child needs are all just some of the things that are carried out throughout the day. There is not enough time in a day to do all of this on top of providing an educationally challenging and stimulating environment on top of one-on-one interactions. The skills expected from children before starting kindergarten are skills that a

preschool education constantly builds and develops through daily routines and transitions.

Teachers and preschools work to develop and support a curriculum that will help with most of these skills.

Childcare centers are not educationally motivated; the ultimate goal is to provide care and entertainment while the parent is away. Kim Bumim tells *Scholastic Administrator* that, "In the first few weeks of kindergarten, [she] could see recognizable learning gaps between students who were in substandard day care versus those in quality preschool" (Adams, 2009). The teaching credentials for this type of setting are not as demanding or high quality as the credentials expected for elementary and pre-kindergarten teachers. "Unlike some private nursery schools, where teachers may have only a high school diploma, most public pre-kindergarten teachers undergo the same rigorous certification as elementary school teachers" (Morse et al., 1998). Subpart D of *Part 407 Licensing Standards for Day Care Centers* from Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS), state that the minimum requirements of childcare lead teachers are: "One year (1560 clock hours) of child development experience in a nursery school, kindergarten, or licensed day care center and 30 semester hours of credits from an accredited college or university, with six credit hours in courses related directly to child care and/or child development, from birth to age six" (DCFS, 1998). The quality of instruction and teacher credentials at a childcare center is not sufficient. Two years of college is all it takes to be a lead teacher of a day care center. The bottom line is that if Pre-kindergarten were to be publicly funded with the Universal Preschool program, all children would be able to receive a high quality of instruction from teachers with outstanding credentials. There is no doubt that there are Pre-kindergarten programs that are more high quality than others are. Universal Preschool would help further the quality of instruction to students and raise teacher credentials at all Pre-

Kindergarten centers. Funding would be appropriated within each state to make sure all prekindergarten centers have everything they need to provide students with high quality instruction.

My Research

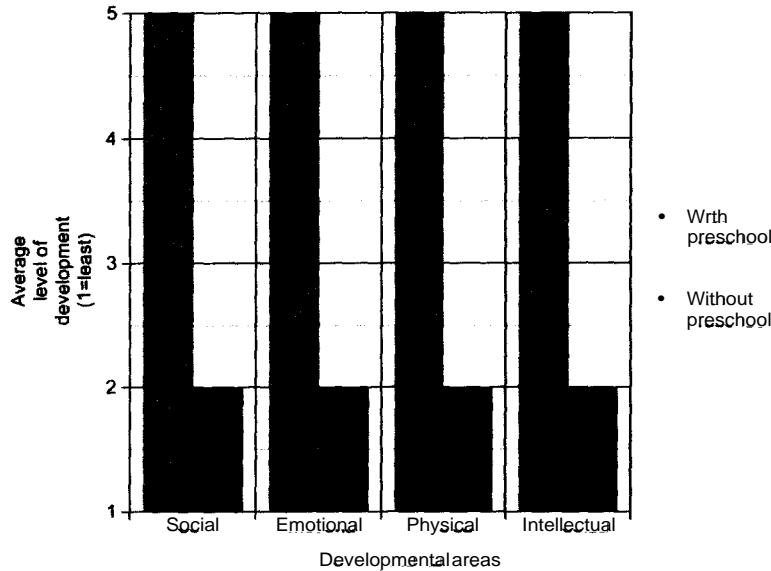
In an effort to bring my investigative research to life, I decided to carry out my own study to support the information that plenty of books, articles, and journals provided. It is one thing to read about the positive effects of a pre-kindergarten education in works of writing by accredited professionals in the field, and another to witness and experience the positive effects firsthand. For my study, I first created surveys for college students to answer and passed them out using many means of distribution. Second, I interviewed pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers based on their own experiences and professional opinions. Lastly, I included my own clinical experience at an at-risk preschool to support why a Pre-Kindergarten education is crucial to the development of children. I hope that the results of many studies done by professionals in the field of education along with my findings will help raise awareness to parents and caregivers alike about the importance of Pre-K and provide a nudge toward the support of the Universal Preschool Movement.

As a student that had a pre-kindergarten education, I can honestly say that it has affected me for the best. I feel that I am more prepared and have given it credit for my success in academics and life. I wanted to see if other students who have had a Pre-Kindergarten education felt the same way and how if their attitudes and successes differed from those who did not attend preschool. I started by creating surveys for students in high school and college. I stood out in public places on the NIU campus such as the library, Neptune hall, and Holmes student center. I also distributed them to my classmates in my early education program, to high school students at

a tutoring center, and to past and current members of the Lambda Sigma Sophomore Honors Society and Mortar Board Senior Honors Society. I also created these surveys on *Survey Monkey* and sent them via Facebook to my friends. In total, I handed out at least 100 surveys to students. My overall goal from these surveys was to find the correlation between having a preschool education and their grades, attitudes, and involvement in school. Questions asked whether or not they attended preschool, the grades they have, the grades they earned in previous years, their involvement in extra-curricular activities, and if they viewed their earliest school years as positive or negative. What I found in my own study supported what was stated in all the journals, articles, and books I read. For example, I found a college student who did not attend preschool, had a 2.9 cumulative GPA, and was a 7th year senior. I also found a student who graduated high school, but did not continue to college. I noticed that this person's grades were low mostly all through his/her school years. This person also did not attend preschool. In the end, he/she stated that the teacher never motivated him/her enough. As a result, she/he never saw a point in school and what was being taught. Conversely, for the college student who attended preschool, his/her GPA was 3.95 out of the 4.0 scale, was 21 years old, and was in several extracurricular activities such as the president of a community service organization on campus. I found that out of the estimated 100 surveys completed about 85 attended preschool and 15 did not. In general, of the students who went to preschool, 90% viewed their early experiences as positive, earned high grades (mostly A's and B's), and were highly involved in academic activities. Of the students who did not attend preschool, roughly 20% thought their previous years of schooling were positive. These students had poor attitudes toward school and their grades ranged from mostly B's and C's to mostly D's and F's. Attached at the end of this report are a few examples of surveys completed by students who did and did not attend preschool.

The second part of my research consisted of teacher interviews. I interviewed pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers at several school districts to see what the performance at kindergarten was for those students who did not attend preschool. The goal of the Pre-Kindergarten teacher interview was to see how a socioeconomic status affects the quality of performance, the skills that preschoolers usually leave kindergarten with, and the greatest improvement areas teachers notice by the end of the school year. The goal of the kindergarten teacher interview was to find out if teachers could see the drastic difference of academic performance and development from those who went to pre-kindergarten and those who did not. I met with some teachers on a personal level to discuss my questions. For other teachers from farther districts, I distributed my surveys via email using *Survey Monkey*. Most of the school districts I was familiar with and others I researched to get a variety of socio-economic statuses, demographics, and locations. I ultimately wanted to capture the success of preschool education and/or the need of pre-k from different school districts within a 60-mile radius from Dekalb. The school districts I contacted and visited included Bensenville 2, Joliet 86, Paw Paw 271, River Grove district 84.5, Naperville 203, Aurora 204, Rockford 205, Dekalb 428, and Plainfield 202. I found that the majority of students who did not attend preschool performed well under those who attended. Below is a chart that demonstrates the teacher opinions of child performance with and without preschool in relation to academic, intellectual, physical, social, and emotional growth. They were asked to rate children's development from least to greatest, one being the least. Overall, for children with preschool education, their development in all of these areas were rated the highest. Compared to kindergarteners without preschool, their average of ratings received from teachers fell at two, one away from least developed.

Preschool and the Development of Children



One of the questions asked, "What is the discrepancy, as far as achievement, between those with preschool education and those without it?" The teacher at District 204 with children primarily from low socio economic

backgrounds, stated that, "Students with preschool know the concept of sitting and listening (for the most part). If children come from no structure, it is hard and sometimes takes a long time (Christmas) for them to get into the routine. I always tell the parents that they know if their child can count, write their name, say the ABC's, etc. [parents] know if their child needs to go to preschool. (IT CAN BE VERY EXPENSIVE)." A teacher in District 203 with children from middle socio economic statuses commented that the, "Difference [is found] in their handwriting, scissor use, etc. [Children without preschool know] at least half as many letter and sound recognition [and have a] greater inability to follow multiple directions." Attached at the end is a copy of the interview questions. I asked teachers.

During my junior year of the Early Childhood Studies Program, I had to participate in a clinical experience for eight weeks. I was placed at an at-risk preschool education center in the west side of Rockford. "At-risk" means any child who lives in a harsh environment, has a health condition, or harmful experiences that will put them at-risk for academic failure. There were 18 students total with two teachers in the classroom. The majority of the children in this class came from very rough backgrounds. Two of the children were placed in part-time special education

programs. All students came from families with issues regarding foster home placement, parent(s) in jail, domestic violence, and/or poverty. This program emphasized good health and nutrition habits, expressing feelings, making good behavior choices, as well as being independent and interacting well with other peers. This program worked to involve families as much as possible. An early education for at-risk students is very crucial to their development. .

The students' progress could be seen in the many forms of assessment this center used. The main assessment piece was the *Work Sampling System of Illinois*, which included a developmental checklist, a portfolio, and a written summary report. This was presented to parents two times a year. My cooperating teacher showed me one of the many portfolios she developed for each student throughout the year. The work-sampling portfolio captured many areas of development such as their personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematical and scientific thinking, social studies, fine arts, and physical development. . It provided assessment results and showed significant developmental progress, especially in intellectual development. . My cooperating teacher expressed that if these students were to be deprived of a Pre-Kindergarten education, their performance in kindergarten and in the future would be devastating. She also stated, "The harmful experiences these kids have in their lives, whether it's living in poverty, domestic violence, or drug abuse, really *does take* a big toll, and consequently, impedes their academic success in the future." These children need all the help that they can get. Luckily, the state helps families provide such an education to their children. By universalizing preschool, we would ensure that ALL students would be provided a preschool education that would help reverse the effects an unhealthy household/environment has had on the child. Mandating preschool would even support children who secretly live in a violent/abusive home and are not considered at-risk..

In conclusion, preschool should not only be mandated it should be universalized throughout the United States. The movement for Universal Preschool should be supported. Publicly funding a preschool education can help create and maintain high quality preschool programs and services available to children. An early education is very important. Universal preschool could help parents see the importance of enrolling their child to attend preschool. An early education can help all areas of children's development, children from low socio-economic statuses and those who have disabilities. A preschool education would also help meet kindergarten standards and elementary school expectations, important to success in future grades. A preschool education is something that will affect all children throughout their schooling in positive ways. Having an early education can only advance a child greatly. Not only have professionals in the field of education supported an early education and the Universal Preschool movement, I have also been able to replicate the same findings through my own study. With my student surveys, teacher interviews, and my experience at an at-risk preschool, the effects of a preschool education have proven to be very valuable. I have learned the effects of preschool at a personal level. As a student who has had a preschool education, I can say that it has equipped me with many skills and opportunities to perform successfully in academics and in life to my fullest potential.

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<http://thevivacious7.wordpress.com/2007/05/15/making-connections-helping-children-build-their-brains/> (diagram of brain synapses and neurons)
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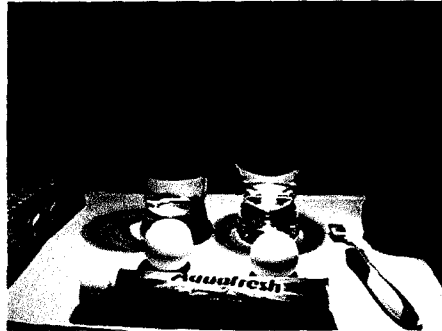
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A sample unit of teacher directed activities and games

The following are examples of teacher-directed activities. A Preschool education definitely provides children with many instances of unplanned, spontaneous, and incidental learning and development. Sample unit includes some activities and games common in the preschool setting that helps exercise all areas of development in children such as physical, social, emotional, and intellectual.

Physical

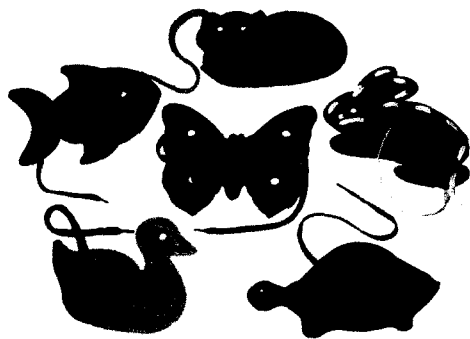
***Egg in coke experiment:** This activity teaches children about healthy eating habits and taking care of their bodies.



Materials: Coca-Cola, two eggs, Toothpaste, Toothbrush, one glass, or jar

Procedures: Place an egg in the glass or jar and pour coca-cola into the glass and let it sit for one whole day. The next morning, take it out observe the difference that took place. Compare to the egg that has not been in coca-cola. Explain to the children that how much sugar and acids soda has and how it can harm their teeth. Use the toothbrush and toothpaste to remove the discoloring and get the egg back to its original color. Explain how the toothpaste protects the eggshell from the acid and how it does the same to your teeth.

***Lacing activity:** Develops fine motor skills and allows children to practice tying their shoes in a fun activity. Many educational stores sell this learning tool; however, it is very easy to make these using only a couple of materials. Many templates are available on-line.



Materials: shoelaces, scissors, hole puncher, sturdy cardboard, and template.

***Movement:** Movement activities are a part of every Pre-Kindergarten classroom's morning routine. Movement activities help children exercise and get rid of some of the early morning jitters before asking children to sit still for circle time, quiet reading, etc. There are hundreds of movement activities with actions available online. The supplementing songs are adapted from

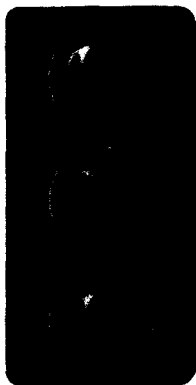
classic children songs and others are created for unique movement activities. Below is one example.

"Exercise to the alphabet Stretch your body right and left Follow me do like I do, say the letter, The letter sound,, and a word too	O-o-oxygen P-p-power (Do scissors) Q-q-quick R-r-reach S-s-super T-t-tough
(March in place) A-a-action B- b-baseball C-c-catch D-d-dive (Do arm circles) I-i-incredible J-j-jog K-k-karate L-I-Iap	(walk in place) U-u-under V-v-victory W-w-winner X-x-extreme
(Do washing machines) M-m-muscle N-n-never-never - give up	(Jog in place) Y-y-yes Z-z-zoom

Materials: CD player, CD with song, large area inside classroom

More lyrics and songs are available at; <http://www.songsforteaching.com>

*"Red light, Green light" game: This helps promote children's development of their gross motor muscles and teaches children about safe practices.



Materials: Open outdoor space, red and green ping pong paddles (optional), entire classroom

Procedures: In this game, one person plays the "stoplight" and the classroom will try to touch him/her. All children form a line about 15 feet away from the stop light. The stop light faces away from the line of kids and says "green light!" The kids are allowed to move towards the stoplight. At any point, the stop light may say "red light!" and turn around. If any of the kids are caught moving after this has occurred, they are out. Play resumes when the stop light turns back around and says "green light." The stop light wins if all the kids are out before anyone is able to touch him/her. However, the first player to touch the stop light wins the game and earns the right to be "stop light" for the next game.

Social

***Board games:** There is a variety of board games available at preschool. Children can play with peers while practicing social skills such as taking turns and sharing. Board games are a popular selection for children and are easily accessible and encouraged during free centers. While board games are also available at home, preschool centers provide a place for many children to interact and develop relationships with classmates.

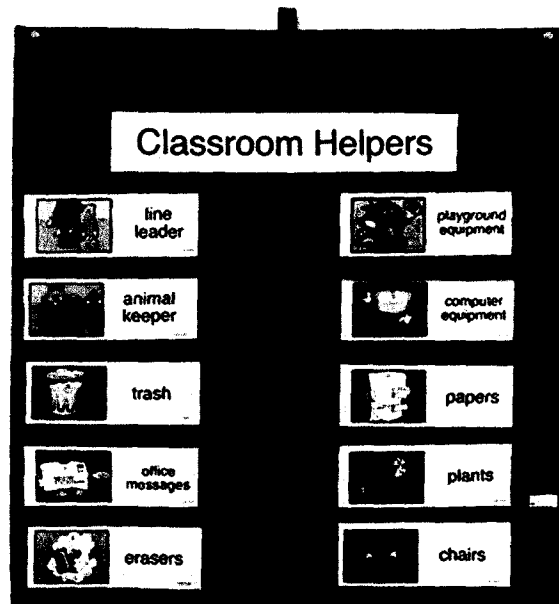


***Simon Says:** This game is efficient in developing good listening skills and the ability to follow directions -necessary components for preschoolers, kindergartners, and up.



Procedures: Teacher will stand at the front of the room facing the entire class. Students will have to use their listening ears in order to know when to mimic "Simon." Common phrases are "Simon says touch your toes" and "Simon says turn around." Teacher will try to trick students by acting out the commands for the children while making sure to say commands without "Simon Says."

***Classroom jobs:** This activity will help build a sense of community and responsibility in the classroom. Everyone will help with classroom jobs. These jobs help prepare students for expectations in class, at home, and within society (careers). Teacher will help children think of ways classmates can all help to keep their room tidy and organized. Children will learn about the importance of their job. Jobs will be rotated weekly. The selection of classroom jobs is part of the morning routine.



Materials: Job chart with pictures (made or store bought) and name cards or tongue depressors with students' names.

Emotional

***Self-portraits:** This project emphasizes the special qualities in all of us, raises self-awareness, and self-concept, helps children see the uniqueness and appreciate their differences and the difference in others. This is very helpful for children from different cultural backgrounds to learn acceptance.



Materials: multicultural paints (in skin color shades), yarn in different colors, small objects (buttons, scraps of cloth, plastic shapes, beads, glitter, etc), markers, crayons, colored pencils, pencils, tacky glue, large white butcher paper, scissors, camera, and construction paper.

Procedures: Teacher will gather all the children during morning meeting in the circle area. One by one, children will come up and find the right shade of paint that matches their own skin color. Teacher will take a Polaroid picture (preferably) of each child. Then she will outline their bodies on butcher paper, which the children will cut along the lines. Students will work to decorate their bodies to resemble themselves using any of the materials available; Yarn for hair, buttons for eyes. When they have completed, they will put their names on them and take turns telling complimenting each other about what makes them special.

***Conflict Resolution Table:** This center in the classroom is useful for developing problem solving skills, sharing and expressing their own feelings, needs, and wants, which are all crucial to healthy emotional growth.



Materials: Small table, four chairs, paper, markers, pencils, hand puppets.

Procedures: Whenever a problem or dispute arises in the classroom, rather than giving time-outs or removing child from their location, children will be asked to go to the "peace table" to work out the situation themselves. Children can draw what happened and share their work to one another and to the mediator (teacher). Puppets are available for children to use and act out the problem. Children will apologize and/or come to an agreement for dispute. Children will make a plan of action and contract to avoid a "next time."

Intellectual

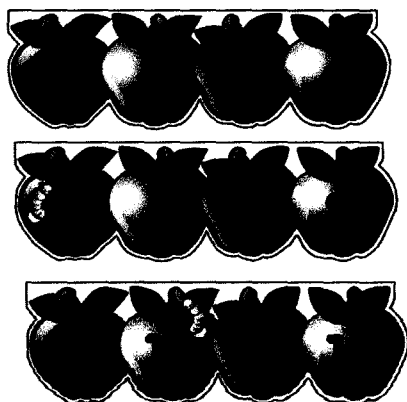
Math

Math is very much a part of daily routine for preschoolers. Below are a few of the activities that engage children to use concepts related to math. These activities are in addition to the manipulatives available to these children in the classroom, such as blocks, ramps, counting bears, puzzles, and playdough, which allow children to divide, multiply, and learn basic geometric concepts such as translation, area, and shapes.

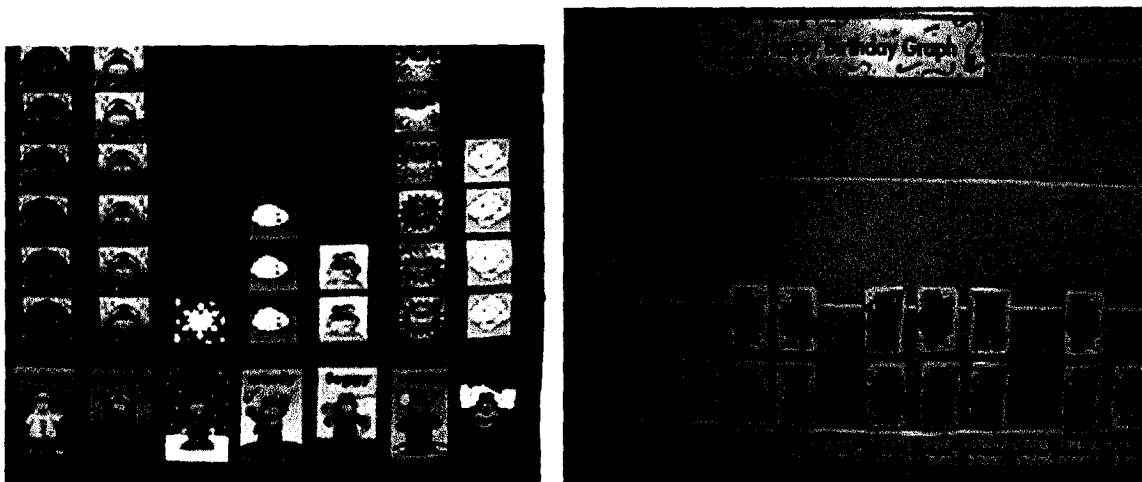
***Setting the table:** During snack and lunchtime, children are often given the task of setting the table. This task requires children to count the number of students in order to find out the number of tableware pieces to set the table. This also develops children skill in one-to-one correspondence and cardinality.



***The calendar:** The calendar is a very important aspect of the preschool curriculum. Children practice counting skills, sequence, and patterns. Children count the number of days they are in school and count the days until the date. (For example, if it is October 10, children count as they point to the days until they get to the number ten in the calendar) With the calendar, preschoolers learn about the number of days in a week and number of months in a year. Children also learn about sequence when they review the days in the week and the months of the year. In addition, they learn the sequence of numbers. Students are also given the opportunity to learn about basic patterns such as ABA patterns. The days in the calendar alternate with patterns such as a day with a red apple and a day with a green apple.



*Graphs of birthdays and of weather: Another part of the morning routine is to check the weather. Students then graph this to compare the weather most predominant throughout the week or month. Students' birthdays are also displayed or created. These are children's earliest experiences of making graphs.



Language arts:

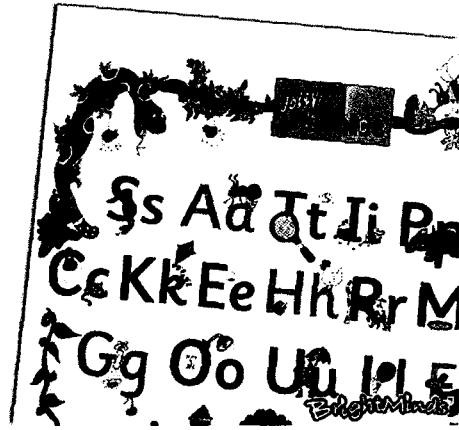
*Name Writing: Develops children's ability to write their name, and begin to make controlled hand movements in order to write letters and words. Children in preschool often practice writing their name by signing in at the beginning of each day and throughout the school year during art projects.

Chris
Mackenzie

Materials: highlighter, notebook, paper, shaving cream, sand, paint, etc.

Procedures: Teacher will write child's name in highlighter and place these journals at their desks. When children come in to the classroom, they will sign in in their journals before moving on to any other task. Other activities include placing shaving cream, paint, sand, etc to trace and write their names.

*Jolly Phonics: helps develop phonemic awareness and provides the foundation for reading and writing language. This activity involves body movements that help reinforce the sound of each letter.

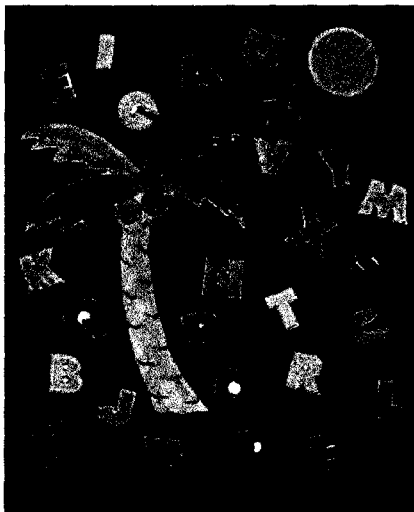


Materials: Jolly phonics program, large representations of the alphabet letters (magnet or felt). Below are the gestures for some of the alphabet letters. More are available at <http://www.jollylearning.co.uk/>

Procedures: (below is a sample of some of the actions taken from <http://www.jollylearning.co.uk/>)

- s Weave hand in an s shape, like a snake, and say ssssss
- a Wiggle fingers above elbow as if ants crawling on you and say a, a, a.
- t Tum head from side to side as if watching tennis and say t, t, t.
- i Pretend to be a mouse by wiggling fingers at end of nose and squeak i, i, i.
- P Pretend to puff out candles and say p, p, p.
- n Make a noise, as if you are a plane - hold arms out and say nnnnnn

***Stories/felt board:** Children are read to at least once every day in preschool. Reading activities engage in active participation help them practice listening skills, and teachers often create fun supplements and games that make reading fun and spark interest for them to read on their own. Such activities include story-felt boards, puppets, etc. Not only do felt boards provide children a visual representation of the story being read to them it is a fun and interesting alternative to movies, and television shows. These felt boards are available for children to play with during free play centers.



Student Survey

1) Did you attend preschool? (Circle one) Yes or **(R)**

~ If you circled 'No', indicate the grade level you first started education. (Circle one)

Kindergarten First Grade Other: _____

2) What is your current cumulative GPA? N.A.

3) How old are you? ~f~'

4) What is your grade level? (Specify if 2nd year senior, etc) High X:hxJ 6tud\Qt.e.

5) How were your grades in... (Mark with an 'X')

	A's and B's	B's and C's	C's and D's	D's and F's
Elementary:		X		
Middle School:			X	
High School:			X	
College:				NA

6) Think of your earliest school years ...

Do you view your experiences positively or negatively? Why?

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OMf w.h~\(+JQJ 1: !:.'D3 tt\J~ ta\Xib:-->+.

7) Please list any extracurricular activities, scholarships, awards below.

j~A

Student Survey

1) Did you go to preschool? (Circle one) Yes or **No**

~ If you circled 'No', indicate age you first started education. (Circle one)

3 4 5 **V** Other: _____

2) What is your current GPA? 3.0

3) How old are you? 19

4) What is your grade level? (Specify if 2nd year senior, etc) 11th

5) How were your grades in... (Mark with an 'X')

	A's and B's	B's and C's	C's and D's	D's and F's
Elementary:			X	
Middle School:		B-		
High School:		B		
College:	A			

6) Think of your earliest school years ...

Do you view them positively or negatively? Why?

My earliest school years were negatively
it was hard for me to fit in.

7) If you attended preschool, do you think it prepared you for future schooling?

Why or why not? _____

Student Survey

1) Did you go to preschool? (Circle one) Yes or **(R)**

~ If you circled 'No' indicate the age you first started education. (Circle one)

3 4 **0** 6 Other:-----

2) What is your cur~/GPA? d.J

3) How old are you? ~y,--

4) What is your grade level? (Specify if 2nd year senior, etc) 11th

5) How were your grades in... (Mark with an 'X')

	A's and B's	B's and C's	C's and D's	D's and F's
Elementary:	X			
Middle School:	X			
High School:	X	X		
College:	X	X		

6) Think of your earliest school years...

Do you view them positively or negatively? Why?

positively-very much so! There were awesome learning experiences, both planned and unplanned, in school and out. Also made many friends-social skills.

7) If you attended preschool, do you think it prepared you for future schooling?

Why or why not?

Student Survey

1) Did you go to preschool? (Circle one) Yes or G

~ If you circled 'No', indicate the age you first started education. (Circle one)

3 4 5 6 Other: _____

2) What is your current GPA? 3.0

3) How old are you? 20

4) What is your grade level? (Specify if 2nd year senior, etc) 1st year senior

5) How were your grades in... (Mark with an 'X')

	A's and B's	B's and C's	C's and D's	D's and F's
Elementary:	X			
Middle School:		X		
High School:			X	
College:	X	X	X	

6) Think of your earliest school years ...

Do you view them positively or negatively? Why?

Negatively: my teachers didn't care about my grades or progress, so in turn neither did I.

7) If you attended preschool, do you think it prepared you for future schooling?

Why or why not? I do not think so. I did not attend preschool.

Student Survey

1) Did you go to preschool? (Circle one) **Yes** or No

7 If you circled 'No', indicate the age you first started education. (Circle one)

3 4 5 6 Other: _____

2) What is your current GPA? 3.90

3) How old are you? 21

4) What is your grade level? (Specify, if 2nd year senior, etc) ~ 4

5) How were your grades in... (Mark with an 'X')

	A's and B's	B's and C's	C's and D's	D's and F's
Elementary:	X			
Middle School:	X			
High School:	X			
College:	X			

6) Think of your earliest school years ...

Do you view them positively or negatively? Why?

positively ~ because I learned a lot ~ from my teachers and friends ~ and I had fun

7) If you attended preschool, do you think it prepared you for future schooling?

Why or why not? ~ Yes, it did prepare me for future schooling in terms of experimenting with different materials and interacting with peers.



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* 1. What school district are you from?

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* 2. What SES level do most of the children in your class come from?

Low Middle High

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* 3. What is the predominant racial/ethnic composition of your kindergarten classroom? (choose all that apply)

Hispanic/Latino

Caucasian

Asian/Pacific Islander

African American

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* 4. How many children are in your classroom? (both AM/PM)

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* S. How many of those children came from preschool?

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*6. On a scale from 1-5, (1 being the lowest) how developed are the children who attended preschool...

1 2 3 4 5

Socially?

Emotionally?

Physically?

Academically?

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*7. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being the lowest) how developed are the children who DID NOT attend preschool...

1 2 3 4 5

Socially?

Emotionally?

Physically?

Academically?

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*8. What skills are expected from kindergarteners? (are they according to learning standards? How many?)

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*9. What is the discrepancy, as far as achievement, between those with preschool education and those without it?

You have a basic account. To remove the limits of a basic account and get unlimited questions. [upgrade now!](#)

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Preschool Teacher Survey ~

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*1. What school district are you from?

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*2. What SESlevel do most of the children in your class come from?

Low

Middle

High

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*3. How do you determine if the students are ready for kindergarten?

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***4. What skills should they leave preschool with?**

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*** 5. Do you take note of quantitative data?**

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6. If so, what kind?

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*** 7. What are the greatest improvement areas you notice by the end of the school year?**

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***8. How do you show progress to parents? How often?**

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Thank you for completing this survey. I really appreciate your help with my Independent Study Project. Have a nice day! :)

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