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A Qualitative Study of Decision Making by First Time Parents for Their Child's Prekindergarten Year Programming

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**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF DECISION MAKING BY FIRST TIME PARENTS
FOR THEIR CHILD'S PREKINDERGARTEN YEAR PROGRAMMING**

by

Timothy David Cronin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in
Educational Policy and Leadership Studies (Educational Leadership)
in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

August 2013

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Emeritus Carolyn L. Wanat

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies (Educational Leadership) at the August 2013 graduation.

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To
Forrester, Hayden, and Riley

We are like dwarfs standing upon the shoulders of giants, and so able to see more and see farther than the ancients.

Carnotensis (1130)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The need for non-parental childcare has increased in the United States as more mothers enter the workforce. Laughlin's (2010) review of U.S. Census data from the 2005 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) revealed that 63% of prekindergarten children were in some form of "arranged" care. Arranged care is the term used for arrangements parents make for care of their children; when parents do not make arrangements for their children's care, it is referred to as no regular arrangement of care (Laughlin, 2010). According to Laughlin's 2010 review, care for prekindergarten-aged children was divided between arranged care (63%) and no regular arrangement of care (37%). Of the children in arranged care, 65% were cared for by a relative and 55% by a non-relative (Laughlin, 2010). The sum of the percentages was greater than 100 because some children had multiple arrangements for care and were counted twice (Morrissey, 2008).

A number of factors enter into parents' decisions to provide arranged care or no regular arrangement of care for their children. This research focused on the decision-making factors in parents' selection of programming for their child's prekindergarten year. To better understand the choices available to parents, this chapter will examine childcare options for parents, describe state childcare classifications in Iowa, explore historical trends in childcare, state the purpose of this study, and provide definitions of childcare options.

Childcare Options for Parents

The next section examines arranged childcare options for parents. There are two options for arranged care: relative care and nonrelative care. Relative care is care provided by a parent or a nonparent, whereas the two types of nonrelative care are nonrelative in-home care and nonrelative care outside the home.

Relative Care

Relative care can be parental or non-parental (e.g., grandparent, aunt, and sibling). Parental care is called child rearing. Relative care provided by a nonparent is referred to as kinship care. The child rearing section is detailed because a considerable body of research has addressed why parents arrange care or do not arrange care for their children.

Child rearing. Child rearing is defined as parents caring for their own children (Borstelmann, 1976; Dik & Duffy, 2009). The terms “stay-at-home mom” and “parental caregiver” are used to describe child rearing. The reasons parents care for their own children at home include (a) the importance of building the mother and child relationship (Borstelmann, 1976), (b) maternal guilt about using nonparental caregivers for the child (DeSimone, 2001; Elvin-Nowak, 1999; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002), (c) and parents’ religious beliefs (Borstelmann, 1976; Zimmerman, 2000).

Building the mother and child relationship. The role of the mother in child rearing is important because mothers care for their children at home more frequently than do fathers (Bell, 2001) and tend to be the primary caregivers for young children. Traditionally, mothers have been considered better caregivers, whereas fathers have been viewed as the family breadwinners (Zimmerman, Northen, Seng, & Grogan, 1999). Russo (1976) referred to the mother’s desire to be a positive force in her child’s life as the “good mother” complex.

Research has shown that some mothers who work do not feel that they spend enough time with their young children (Elvin-Nowak, 1999; Manetta, 1992; Reid Boyd, 2002; Seagram & Daniluk, 2002; Shaw & Burns, 1993; Wearing, 1996). Even when both parents are employed full time, mothers may still be considered the primary caregivers. Zimmerman (2000) noted that career mothers spend an average of 12 hours per week more than career fathers raising children.

Maternal guilt about nonparental caregivers. Mothers have reported experiencing guilt and stress when other adults care for their children. Manetta (1992)

reported that full-time employed mothers had significantly lower self-concept as mothers than part-time or non-employed mothers. The public perception has been that employed mothers are considered less nurturing and supportive of their children than non-employed mothers (Bridges & Etaugh, 1995). In Gorman and Fritzsche's (2002) study, working mothers described feelings of shame or inadequacy in their role as mothers, and they experienced feelings of conflict when deciding between working with hired care or not working and caring for their own children. Both choices were tied to their self-worth (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002).

Parents' religious beliefs. Historically, strong religious beliefs have been correlated with maternal care of the child (Mason & Kuhlthau, 1989). A belief among some religious organizations is that maternal child rearing is the only way to be a good and loving mother, and such arrangements often are part of premarital discussions (Zimmerman, 2000). Coulson, Oades, and Stoyles (2012) referred to the religious ideal of mothers staying home to raise their children as their divine calling. According to these religious family values, mothers are the primary caregivers for their children (Zimmerman et al., 1999).

Kinship care. Relative or kinship care is the term used to describe a relative, other than the parent, who provides childcare (Fram & Kim, 2008; Ryan, Johnson, Rigby, & Brooks-Gunn, 2011; Santhiveeran, 2010; Uttal, 1999). Kinship care is often provided in the child's or relative's home. According to Hofferth (1991), the use of kinship care as a childcare choice decreased by 50% since 1958 to 21% in 2006, and Laughlin's (2010) review of the 2005 SIPP census data indicated that 32% of children were placed in kinship care. Parents select kinship care because it is convenient (Benin & Keith, 1995; Jayakody, Chatters, & Taylor, 1993; Kuhlthau & Mason, 1996; Parish, Hao, & Hogan, 1991), cost effective (Crispell, 1994; Hofferth, 1991; Kuhlthau & Mason, 1996; Leibowitz, Waite, & Witsberger, 1988), and the type of care that is most similar to parental care (Hertz & Ferguson, 1996; Kuhlthau & Mason, 1996).

Nonrelative Care

Nonrelative care is a term that is often synonymous with childcare. A broad definition of childcare is an arrangement to provide care for a child in the absence of the parent (Chyu, Pebley, & Lara-Cinisomo, 2005; Zigler, Finn-Stevenson, & Marsland, 1995). Nonrelative childcare may be in-home care or care outside the home (Laughlin, 2010).

Nonrelative in-home care. In-home care (Casper, 1996) includes all nonrelative care providers, such as nannies (Fram & Kim, 2008; Leach, Barnes, Malmberg, Sylva, & Stein, 2008), babysitters (Brambach, 2002), and au pairs (Leach et al., 2008). Au pairs are caregivers from a foreign country who receive room and board as part of their compensation (Brambach, 2002). According to Casper, Hawkins, and O'Connell (1994), nanny or au pair care (Brambach, 2002; Fram & Kim, 2008) represented only 5% of all types of childcare selected by parents. Nannies and au pairs often live in the child's home in order to provide constant care.

Nonrelative outside the home care. Childcare outside the home by a non-relative encompasses a wide range of options. Organized childcare facilities include nurseries, preschools, or daycare centers (Casper, 1996). A family daycare provider is a nonrelative who cares for one or more unrelated children in his/her own home (Casper, 1996). Although each state has a regulatory agency in charge of licensing childcare facilities, the participants interviewed in this research were residents of the state of Iowa. Therefore, it is germane to the research to explain the childcare classifications in Iowa.

Childcare Classifications in Iowa

The state of Iowa describes three classifications of non-relative childcare providers: (a) unregistered care provider, (b) registered care provider (referred to as a "registered child development home"), and (c) licensed center or preschool (referred to as a "licensed childcare center/pre-school") (House-Deere, 2002; Iowa Department of Human Services, 2008). Unregistered and registered care providers are classified in

broad terms as family daycare homes, whereas daycare centers and preschools are called licensed childcare centers or preschools (Iowa Department of Human Services, 2008).

Family Daycare Homes

Unregistered care providers may care for children in their own homes without registering with the State of Iowa. Examples of unregistered care providers are neighbors, friends, or self-employed babysitters. The Iowa Department of Human Services requires that childcare providers register if they serve five or more children at the same time. Although all childcare providers must meet state standards to be registered, the main reason that an in-home care provider would seek to become a registered child development home would be to serve five or more children (House-Deere, 2002; Iowa Department of Human Services, 2008).

Licensed Childcare Center or Preschool

Licensed childcare centers or preschools include nurseries, daycare centers, and preschool centers. The terms daycare and preschool are used to define care outside the home provided by a formal organization (Chyu et al., 2005), regardless of educational quality (Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, & Carrol, 2004). However, the implication is that preschools offer an educational component to the programming, whereas daycare centers are not obligated to provide formal instruction to children. A preschool is defined as a center-based program that provides group care and education for young children in classroom settings (Estes, 2004).

In Iowa, the preschool component of the “licensed childcare center/preschool center” was almost entirely a private business until May 10, 2007, when the Iowa Legislature passed House File 877 to provide funding for a public preschool program in Iowa. Governor Chet Culver’s goal was for preschool to be available to 80% of the school districts in Iowa by the third year of the program. Participation has grown each year that the program has been offered. In the 2007-2008 school year, 5,126 children participated. The number grew to 9,676 children in 2008-2009, to 13,666 children in

2009-2010, 19,799 children in 2010-2011, and 20,396 children in 2011-2012, which was over half of the eligible children in Iowa (Iowa Department of Education, 2012).

Historical Trends in Childcare

Three historical trends have acted as driving forces to advance childcare options. They include (a) parents' need for a safe place for their children while they work, and in some cases, as a source of employment for parents as caregivers not only for their own children, but also for other people's children (Gordon & Williams-Browne, 1999); (b) compensatory education to provide additional support for children who are at risk of academic failure (Wiesman, 2009); and (c) public demand for more options for targeted and universal programs (N. E. Rose, 2009).

Parental Need

The origin for many childcare programs has been parental need, which includes care for children while parents work and employment for parents as childcare providers (N. E. Rose, 2009). U.S. history has many examples of parental need driving childcare programs. President Franklin Roosevelt's 1933 Federal Emergency Relief Act authorized funding for nursery schools, which provided childcare and created jobs (Williams & Fromberg, 1992). In 1941, the U.S. Government passed the Lanham Act, which provided childcare for parents who were employed in wartime industries (Haggood, 2008). The first privately funded childcare program was opened at the Kaiser Shipyards in 1943 in Portland, Oregon (Gordon & Williams-Browne, 1999; Hymes, 1995). The Kaiser Shipyards childcare centers were developed to increase employee attendance by providing childcare and meals for employees' children (Hymes, 1995). In the 2 years the centers were open, they served over 3,800 children (Gordon & Williams-Browne, 1999).

Compensatory Education

A second force behind the development of childcare programs has been compensatory education or child saving (McMillan, 1919). Compensatory programs seek

to counterbalance the challenges of poverty in relation to school preparation (Won, Bear, & Hoepfner, 1982). Many early compensatory programs began in England.

Examples of compensatory childcare programs in England. England's early childcare programs were Dame Schools (Grigg, 2005), Charity Schools (Reid, 2010), Sunday Schools (Parr, 2009; Reid, 2010; Snell, 1999), and Ragged Schools (Jeffreys, 2001). Rachel McMillan opened the Nursery School in 1913 in the slums of London to save needy children by providing education and nursing care (McMillan, 1919).

These schools focused on providing education to children in poverty (Cubberley, 2009). Benefits to society included fewer children on the street and more productive citizens as adults (McMillan, 1919). The compensatory childcare programs frequently had a religious theme because sponsoring philanthropic organizations viewed young children in poverty as lacking in spiritual and moral instruction (Beatty, 1995; Cubberley, 2009; Gordon & Williams-Browne, 1999; Nawrotzki, 2005; Shapiro, 1983).

Examples of compensatory childcare programs in the United States. Nursery and infant schools were common compensatory childcare programs in the United States. Infant Schools, created by Jean-Frederic Oberlin in France in 1799 (Singer, Fuller, Keiley, & Wolf, 1998), were first opened in Philadelphia in 1809 by Joseph Neef (Beatty, 1995). Jane Addams' Hull Settlement House operated a childcare in Chicago in 1889 to serve immigrant children of all ages (Kelland, 2011). Abigail Adams Eliot opened the first nursery school in Boston in 1922 (Beatty, 1995). Although there is scant research comparing compensatory childcare programs, nursery schools have been more prevalent in the United States. The U.S. Government has used the term "Nursery School" in census data since 1964 to refer to care of children ages 3 and 4 years who are enrolled in a school (Davis & Bauman, 2011).

Two federally funded programs have provided compensatory education in the United States. President Harry Truman's National School Lunch Act was enacted in 1946 and provided food for school children including those in childcare centers

(Williams & Fromberg, 1992). Head Start (Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, 2002) was developed as a targeted high-quality childcare program.

Two targeted compensatory childcare programs in the United States were the High Scope/Perry Preschool Project and the Carolina Abecedarian Project. The High Scope/Perry Preschool Project began in the 1960s (American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences, 1969; Claus & Quimper, 1992) and the Carolina Abecedarian Project began in the 1970s (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002). Further details regarding these targeted programs will be presented in Chapter 2.

Public Demand for More Targeted and Universal

Program Options

Public demand has advanced childcare programs. As childcare programs with an educational element became popular, they achieved a wider range of acceptance with the public, and therefore, more parents desired these programs for their children (Cascio, 2010). Many childcares started as targeted programs serving at-risk children and later were adopted by the middle class. An example of a targeted childcare program is Head Start, which serves low-income children. Programs have expanded from targeted, small populations to being available universally to all children (Finn, 2009; Wallen, 2002). A universal program is open to the entire population. The public education system is an example of a universal program.

One of the earliest examples of a targeted program desired by middle class parents came from the Pestalozzian Schools in England (Elliott & Daniels, 2005). Similar to many targeted childcare programs, Pestalozzian Schools were designed for children in poverty. Although Pestalozzi's pedagogy was expressly designed for poor children, it became especially popular with wealthy parents. Private Pestalozzian schools were created for upper-class children in England, Spain, and Russia in the 19th century (Beatty, 1995).

The most well-known example of a targeted program becoming universal is kindergarten. Although it began as a targeted program and remains largely voluntary, kindergarten has become an institutionalized part of the American public education system (Beatty, 1995). Margarethe Meyer Schurz started the first U.S. kindergarten in Watertown, Wisconsin, in 1856 as a private program that targeted German-speaking children (Beatty, 1995). Credit for the first English-speaking kindergarten in the United States goes to Elizabeth Palmer Peabody. In 1860, Peabody opened a tuition-based kindergarten in Boston. The first publicly funded kindergartens were started in 1873 in Milwaukee (Beatty, 1995) and St. Louis (Vandewalker, 1971). Because of the influence of German settlers, the programs in Milwaukee were German-speaking kindergartens (Vandewalker, 1971). Susan Blow established a public kindergarten in St. Louis and is often credited with popularizing public kindergarten (Vandewalker, 1971).

Some educational researchers expect preschool for 4-year-old children to follow the same trajectory as kindergarten in becoming institutionalized and publicly funded for all 4 year olds. In a speech to the National Association for the Education of Young Children's annual conference in November 2009, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said, "Early learning is on the cusp today of transformational reform. The dramatic expansion of state-funded preschool programs in the last decade is one of the most significant expansions of free public schooling since World War I, when kindergarten became standard in public schools" (2009).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how parents make decisions to select programming for their children during the prekindergarten year. Research on parent selection of childcare has revealed the choices that parents make and factors that influence parents, but less is known about the parents' decision-making process.

Research Questions

The central question for this research was: “How do parents make decisions to select placements for their children during the prekindergarten year?” The secondary research questions were: “What experiences do parents want their children to have during the prekindergarten year?”, “How do parents get information about programming for the prekindergarten year?”, and “How do parents assimilate information and make a final decision?” The purpose of this research was to capture the stories of parents as they reflected on the decisions they made regarding their child’s prekindergarten year.

Significance of the Research

Researchers have investigated reasons parents select specific childcare options. The previous research on parent selection of prekindergarten programming focused specifically on what parents select, what factors impact the decision making of parents, and when they select childcare. Little research is available to explain the parents’ desires for their child’s prekindergarten year, why parents value some sources of information more than others, and what influences the parents’ decision-making process for programming choices for their child’s prekindergarten year.

The purpose of this research was to explain the decision-making process of parents and to tell the story of how the parents made programming choices for their child’s prekindergarten year.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions were used in this study:

Child rearing- parental care. This definition includes “stay at home mom” and “parental care” (Borstelmann, 1976; Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005; Bridges & Etaugh, 1995; Uttal, 1999).

Childcare- all care outside of parental care. This definition includes in-home care or care outside of the home provided by relatives or nonrelatives. Childcare also includes institutional daycare or preschool (Emlen, Koren, & Schultze, 1999; Laughlin, 2010).

Targeted program- programs offered to a specific demographic of the population. Often children from at-risk backgrounds are targeted for high-quality childcare (Goldsmith & Meyer, 2006; Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006).

Universal program- programs that are available to all children (Cascio, 2010; Wallen, 2002; Zigler et al., 2006).

Compensatory education- educational programs that are designed to compensate for unfavorable developmental or environmental circumstances experienced by young children, particularly those from low-income families (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009)

Preschool- childcare with an educational component (Ross, 1976)

Kinship care- childcare provided by a relative (Fram & Kim, 2008; Uttal, 1999)

Quality preschool program- research includes the following criteria in the definition of quality preschool programs: (a) highly skilled staff, (b) small class sizes and high adult-to-child ratios, (c) language-rich environment, and (d) age-appropriate curricula and stimulating materials in a safe physical setting (Iowa Department of Human Services, 2008).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to investigate the parental decision-making process for a child's prekindergarten year programming. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do parents make decisions to select placements for their children during the prekindergarten year?
2. What experiences do parents want their children to have during the prekindergarten year?
3. How do parents get information about programming for the prekindergarten year?
4. How do parents assimilate information and make a final decision?

Chapter 1 provided background on childcare options for parents, described childcare classifications in Iowa, examined historical trends in childcare, stated the purpose of this study, and provided definitions of frequently used terms.

This chapter begins with details about the information retrieval the researcher used to complete the literature review. The chapter then reviews research on decision-making theory and the parental decision-making process in education, and summarizes O'Gorman's 2007 thesis study entitled *An Even Better Start? Parents Conceptions of the Preparatory Year in a Non-Government School in Queensland*. The chapter ends with a statement on the significance of this research as a qualitative study.

Information Retrieval

The main review of research was completed using the Ebsco Host search engine through the University of Iowa website. Within the search engine, the researcher accessed the following databases: Academic Search Elite, ERIC, and Teacher Reference Center. The searches in Ebsco Host used the following key words: "parent decision-making AND preschool," "parent AND preschool AND decision," and "parent attitudes

OR mother attitudes.” Others searches in Ebsco Host included the following key words: (a) “Change” AND “Formal Childcare Arrangements,” (b) “preschool research” AND “parent decision making,” (c) “parental decision making about childcare,” (d) “childcare use” AND “welfare mothers,” (e) “Change” AND “Formal Childcare Arrangements,” (f) “preschool” AND “economic benefits,” (g) “child rearing” and “childcare,” (h) “nanny” and “au pair,” (i) “decision-making theory,” (j) “decision style inventory,” and (k) “General Decision-Making Style.”

Review of the literature also included the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses search engine using the following key words: “all (parent OR parents OR parental) AND all ((interview OR interviews OR interviewing)) AND all ((parent children OR preschool education)) AND la.exact (“ENG”). Another search included the key words “cabs(preschool) AND (cabs(parent) or cabs(parents)) AND (cabs(decision) or (cabs(decisions) or cabs(“decision-making”)).

The searches revealed 59 articles related to parents’ selection or decision-making process of arranging childcare. The collected data emphasized the lack of research on parent selection of preschool programming. The research that exists is predominately about parent selection of childcare. O’Gorman, Farrell, and Walsh (2004) noted the lack of research about parent choice in selection of preschool in Australia. The research often describes what arrangements parents have selected for childcare and the factors that influenced their decisions, but existing research does not explain how parents made a particular decision. Emlen, Koren, and Schultze (1999) noted that there is a lack of research on what parents value in childcare and how they make their decisions.

Decision-Making Theory

Decision-making style is the basis for decision-making theory and the creation of decision-making inventories (Hunt, Krzystofiak, Meindl, & Yousry, 1989; Rowe & Boulgarides, 1983). The study of decision-making styles is often attributed to Carl Jung and his theory of personalities (Jacoby, 2006). Jung’s theories are based on the belief

that individuals think, perceive, and evaluate the world differently (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Jung & Baynes, 1923).

This next section examines two elements related to decision-making theory. First, Scott and Bruce's General Decision-Making Style (GDMS) Inventory (1995) is described. The rationale for reviewing the GDMS is that data collected from parents about the placement of their prekindergarten child may exhibit characteristics of Scott and Bruce's Inventory, which could then serve as a framework for data analysis. Second, the novice decision maker is described because the parents selected for this research were first time decision makers.

General Decision-Making Style Inventory

S. G. Scott and Bruce (1995) created the GDMS Inventory to classify different styles of decision making. They combined the definitions of Driver (1983), who stated that individuals follow a pattern when making decisions, and Harren (1979), who asserted that individuals make decisions based on how they perceive and respond to a specific situation (Jacoby, 2006; Thunholm, 2004). S. G. Scott and Bruce (1995) defined decision making as "the learned habitual response pattern exhibited by an individual when confronted with a decision situation" (p. 820).

Decision-making styles. S. G. Scott and Bruce (1995) identified five decision-making styles: rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous (Baiocco, Laghi, & D'Alessio, 2009). Rational decision makers collect information and consider alternatives, intuitive decision makers make a decision based on feeling or attitudes and may pay attention to a specific detail, dependent decision makers gather information from other sources (e.g., friends, family, neighbors) to make a decision, avoidant decision makers attempt to avoid decision making whenever possible (Allahyani, 2012; Chermack & Nimon, 2008; Thunholm, 2004), and spontaneous decision makers make decisions as quickly as possible (Hardin & Leong, 2004; S. G. Scott & Bruce, 1995).

Description of the Novice Decision Maker

A novice decision maker is someone who does not have a great deal of background knowledge in making decisions and has limited opportunities to make those decisions in a certain arena. There are many definitions or comparisons of novice and expert decision makers. In education studies, novice and expert teachers have been identified as student teachers and cooperating teachers (Borko & Livingston, 1989; Westerman, 1991). Ericsson and Charness (1994) cited three ways to identify expertise: (a) talent (innate abilities), (b) experience (years of study), and (c) cognition (knowledge and recall). Regardless of measurement standard, most parents do not have expertise in decision making for their child's educational programming.

Parents as novice decision makers. Parents are considered novice decision makers when they make educational decisions for their children (Galotti & Tinkelenberg, 2009). When parents make decisions about their children's education, they make a specific decision (e.g., choosing which school to attend, requesting a specific teacher for their child, or delaying entry into kindergarten) only a few times in their lives, and cannot be considered experts.

The views parents hold regarding childcare arrangements is an example of how parents' and experts' views diverge. Studies have found that parents have a higher opinion of their child's care provider than the childcare experts do (Cryer & Burchinal, 1997; Helburn, 1995), leading childcare experts to devalue parents' opinions (Emlen et al., 1999). Emlen et al. (1999) was told by a fellow researcher that "[Parents are] not expert observers, and they can't go inside and see what we [as childcare experts] view as a quality childcare. They're not an accurate, reliable, or trustworthy source of data" (p. 3).

Emlen et al. (1999) stated that parents have been largely ignored by those who make childcare policies. The authors' rationale for asking parents about their decision-making choices regarding childcare included a desire to take parents seriously in the

matter of childcare selection and to understand what parents value in childcare (Emlen et al., 1999).

Being a novice decision maker does not have negative connotations in this context; rather the opinion of the first time decision maker is valued because it is the focus of this research. Emlen et al. (1999) reported that they were “challenged by an early childhood professional who said with disdain, ‘We already know what quality of care is! Why ask parents?’ That wasn’t intended as a question, but it was a good question to try to answer” (p. 3). In concurrence with Emlen et al., this researcher values the opinions of parents when they choose appropriate care for their children.

The next section of the literature review will examine specific studies on parent decision making in education and related opportunities. Given that none of the decision-making factors work in isolation, this section will be followed by a discussion of a specific matrix of factors that affect decision making and contribute to a parent’s childcare selection. This information will be included in a section called “Interplay of multiple factors in the selection of childcare.”

Parental Decision-Making Process in Education

A general template for the decision-making process for parents in selecting educational opportunities for their children includes identifying the options, gathering information, weighing the options, and making a final decision (Calvo, 2007; Galotti & Tinkelenberg, 2009). Parents continuously gather information as part of the decision-making process through formal and informal channels. Calvo (2007) described this process as cyclical and overlapping in that educational information for their child is constantly received and stored by parents. Formal channels of information include parent nights, school publications, and websites (Galotti & Tinkelenberg, 2009; Zeak, 2006), whereas informal channels include older siblings, friends, neighbors, and personal observation (Chaudry, 2004; Galotti & Tinkelenberg, 2009; Zimmerman, 2000).

Research on the parent decision-making process for childcare has indicated that parents base their decisions on multiple factors and the interplay between these factors (Burchinal, Ramey, Reid, & Jaccard, 1995; Chaudry, 2004; Chaudry, Henly, & Meyers, 2010; Emlen et al., 1999; Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982; Scott, London, & Hurst, 2005). The complexity of the decision-making process was summarized by Leslie, Ettleson, and Cumsille (2000) as a “complex, multi-characteristic consumer decision” (p. 303).

Interplay of Multiple Factors in the Selection of Childcare

Researchers have identified the factors of convenience, availability, affordability, hours of operation, program quality, age of the child, and family need as factors parents consider while selecting childcare. These decisions are in turn influenced by a set of family dynamics that includes employment, transportation, and quality of childcare (Weber, 2011).

Researchers have created models to define the interplay of factors in the selection of childcare. Early and Burchinal (2001) created a model of childcare selection based on demographic information, preferred care characteristics, family income, flexible hours of operation for parents, and parental beliefs, both educational and religious. Johansen, Lebowitz, and Waite (1996) created a framework in which they measured the needs of the child and the parents. The needs of the child were related to the quality of the program, whereas the needs of the parents included hours of operation, location, and cost (Johansen et al., 1996).

Emlen et al. (1999) created a matrix that compared the flexibility of the family situation with the flexibility of the employer and the childcare provider, as well as its impact on the quality of childcare selected. Emlen et al.(1999) found that if there was flexibility in any one of the three areas, then parents were able to select a higher quality childcare. For example, if a parent’s or relative’s schedule allowed them to care for a

sick child, then such flexibility within the family situation resulted in the selection of childcare that parents desired, thus increasing its quality (Emlen et al., 1999).

The next section of the literature review will review O’Gorman’s study (2007) on parents’ selection of a private preschool in Queensland.

O’Gorman’s Research

O’Gorman (2007) interviewed 26 parents whose children were in their last year before formal schooling. This section will review the research questions and themes of the O’Gorman study and the findings of other researchers related to those themes.

Central Questions of O’Gorman’s Research

O’Gorman’s research asked the central question: “How do parents in a non-government school in Queensland view the preparatory year?” In addition, the study included the following sub-questions: “Did these parents choose to enroll their children in non-government preschools because of the availability of full-time provision in these schools? Is their choice influenced by other factors? Will a full-time preparatory year in government schools slow the steady flow towards the private sector?” (O’Gorman, 2007, p. 52)

The 26 interviews ranged from 25 to 60 minutes in length with a majority of the interviews lasting between 30 and 40 minutes. The interviews were held in a convenient location, most often in the child’s school, with the exception of two interviews held in the workplace and three held in the parent’s home. O’Gorman began the interview study with the question, “In a nutshell, how would you sum up your views of prep year at (school’s name)?” (2007, p. 276). The ensuing dialogue, recording of answers, and coding of data led to the following construction of themes that O’Gorman classified into two dimensions and five categories (2007).

Themes from O’Gorman’s Research

O’Gorman classified parental responses into two dimensions: the beneficiary and the temporal. The beneficiary referred to who benefits: parent or child? The temporal

referred to when does the benefit occur: now or in the future? (O’Gorman et al., 2004).

O’Gorman also classified parent responses into five categories in the selection of preschool: (a) parental need, (b) current needs of the child (from a parental viewpoint), (c) specific preparation for kindergarten, (d) head start for elementary school, and (e) the life-long advantages for the child (2007).

Parental need. Parental need referred to the following in O’Gorman’s study: (a) practical features, (b) rigorous curriculum, and (c) a climate that is warm and caring (2007). Many studies have affirmed parent need as an important factor in the selection of childcare (Galotti & Tinkelenberg, 2009; Jang, 2008; Johansen et al., 1996; Kisker, Hofferth, Phillips, & Farquhar, 1991; Noble, 2007; Rodd & Milikan, 1994; Tayler, Perry, & Lennox, 1999).

Practical features. The practical features were based on hours of operation, location, and cost (O’Gorman, 2007). Other studies have found that hours of operation were important for the work schedule of parents (Morrissey & Warner, 2007; Rodd & Milikan, 1994; Sonenstein & Wolf, 1991). Parents who had long or unusual workdays were more likely to select care based on convenience (Camasso & Roche, 1991; Johansen et al., 1996; E. K. Scott et al., 2005) rather than on the quality of care their children receive (Bogat & Gensheimer, 1986; Long, Wilson, Kutnick, & Telford, 1996).

O’Gorman (2007) found that parents desired longer hours of operation because of their work schedules, and they felt that transportation efforts for a half-time program were not a valuable use of time.

O’Gorman (2007) discovered that parents considered the location of the program to be important when arranging transportation for their child. Other studies have shown that location of the childcare was important (Calvo, 2007; Rodd & Milikan, 1994; Sonenstein & Wolf, 1991), particularly for single parents (Peyton, Jacobs, O’Brien, & Roy, 2001), mothers receiving public assistance (Chaudry, 2004), and married fathers (Leslie et al., 2000).

Parents in O’Gorman’s study felt that preschool was more affordable when compared to childcare (2007). Other researchers have shown that the cost of care programs influenced parents in the selection of childcare (Blau & Robins, 1998; Blau, 2001; Jang, 2008; Morrissey & Warner, 2007; Rodd & Milikan, 1994), especially among low income families (Leslie et al., 2000).

Rigorous curriculum. A rigorous curriculum referred to student assessment of learning and reporting of progress (O’Gorman et al., 2004). Individualized instruction and assessment helped to measure the child’s progress (Wong, Cook, Barnett, & Jung, 2008). Parents viewed quality learning experiences for literacy, math, and social skills to be important (Haggood, 2008).

Climate that is warm and caring. Parents in O’Gorman’s study viewed an excellent staff as one that consists of caring individuals who communicate well. Other research has shown that mothers valued the warmth of caregivers (K. K. Rose, 2005), and parents valued communication from the caregiver about their child’s day (Buffardi & Erdwins, 1997; Fuqua & Labensohn, 1986; Jang, 2008).

Current needs of the child. The current or short term needs referred to the child’s current needs. O’Gorman (2007) found that according to parents, the current needs of their child meant a quality preschool program. Parents believed their child’s needs for a quality preschool were met by a program that matched the kindergarten experience in length of the day and curriculum, with a structured, well-disciplined environment (O’Gorman et al., 2004). The findings of the O’Gorman study (2007) were similar to those of other research in which parents viewed the ideal program for their child as one that was individualized for their child, with excellent staff, a positive climate, and a rigorous curriculum (Britner & Phillips, 1995; Fuqua & Labensohn, 1986; Haggood, 2008; Rassin, Beach, McCormick, Niebuhr, & Weller, 1991).

It is important to parents to find a childcare program with a positive climate that includes academic elements, such as reading and writing (Howes et al., 2008; Leslie et

al., 2000), as well as social interactions with other children and adults (Espinosa, 2002) because parents value a childcare environment with a rigorous curriculum (Morrissey, 2008; K. K. Rose, 2005). Parents with higher levels of education and income are more likely to select a program with an academic component (Caldwell, 1997; Leibowitz, Klerman, & Waite, 1992).

Specific preparation for kindergarten. The last year before children begin kindergarten is the preparatory year for school, which includes preparing both academically and socially (Committee for Economic Development., 2006; Howes et al., 2008; Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Daugherty, Howes, & Karoly, 2009; O’Gorman, 2008). O’Gorman (2007) cited four structural elements as preparation benefits for school: (a) exposure to a school-like setting (including full-day services), (b) academic preparation for school, (c) social and emotional skill preparation for school, and (d) exposure to a high-quality program.

Children who entered kindergarten with a larger set of academic and social skills had fewer gaps in their learning and require fewer learning interventions (Committee for Economic Development, 2006). Researchers have found that as children got closer to entering kindergarten, parents were more likely to place them in a structured care center to prepare them for school (Joesch, Maher, & Durfee, 2006; Kisker et al., 1991; Matthews et al., 2006; Matthews, Jang, 2008; Mendez, 2010). Parents viewed the structured care center as having a more academic curriculum, more school-like activities, and social skills opportunities that are needed to be successful in kindergarten (Barnett, Hustedt, Robin, & Schulman, 2004; Clifford, Bryant, & Early, 2005).

Head start for elementary school. Parents in O’Gorman’s study viewed preschool as giving a competitive advantage to their child over his/her peers for their entire time in the primary grades (O’Gorman et al., 2004). These perceived benefits were in the form of increased social skills, academic skills, and preparation that not all children will have experienced (O’Gorman, 2007). Rather than putting children in school simply

because they were old enough, parents who strongly believed that their children needed to enter school both academically and socially prepared viewed preschool as a head start for formal education (Dockett & Perry, 2002; Graue, 1993; Seng, 1994).

A child who is placed in a quality childcare program demonstrates positive long-term achievement through second grade (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001) and has a larger vocabulary in fifth grade (Belsky et al., 2007). A quality childcare program enhances school readiness and language comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000), strengthens language and communication skills (Burchinal, Roberts, Nabors, & Bryant, 1996), and reduces behavioral problems (Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997).

The life-long advantages for the child. Parents in O’Gorman’s study believed that benefits children gained from a quality preschool would remain with them throughout their lifetime (O’Gorman et al., 2004). O’Gorman (2007) found that parents believed that preschool helped the child’s academic focus, created a positive disposition toward learning, and prepared the child for success in general. Parental belief that preschool helps the child in the long term is based on the idea that with a good preparation, children develop a positive view of school, and this view continues throughout their education (O’Gorman, 2008).

The long-term benefits of high quality preschool were well-documented by the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program and the Carolina Abecedarian Project (American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences, 1969; Campbell et al., 2002; Committee for Economic Development, 2006; Finn, 2009; Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993; Votruba-Drzal, Coley, & Chase-Lansdale, 2004; Zigler et al., 2006).

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program. The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program and the Carolina Abecedarian Project were considered to be landmark studies of the impact of quality preschool programs on the lives of the participants (Denton, 2001). The long-term High/Scope Perry Preschool Project established the human and financial

value of high-quality preschool education (Schweinhart, Montie, & Xiang, 2005). The study began in 1962 with the Perry Preschool program in the Ypsilanti Public Schools (YPS; Barnett & Masse, 2007; Schweinhart et al., 2005) and since that time has examined the lives of 123 African Americans born in poverty and considered to be at-risk students (Belfield, Nores, Barnett, & Schweinhart, 2006; Campbell et al., 2008). YPS's method for dealing with student failure was grade retention. David Weikert, special education director at YPS, began the preschool program with the idea that the district needed to provide support before students fell behind (Belfield et al., 2006; Schweinhart et al., 2005). From 1962 to 1967, at ages 3 and 4 years, the subjects in the Perry Preschool Project were randomly divided into two groups (Schweinhart et al., 2005). Subjects in one group received a high-quality preschool program based on High/Scope's participatory learning approach. Subjects in the other group received no preschool program (Barnett & Masse, 2007; Belfield et al., 2006).

The recently published "The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40" (Schweinhart et al., 2005) found that adults at age 40 who were in the preschool program had higher earnings, were more likely to hold a job, had committed fewer crimes, and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who were not in the preschool program (Barnett, 1995; Barnett & Masse, 2007; Campbell et al., 2008; Schweinhart et al., 2005).

The Carolina Abecedarian Project. The Carolina Abecedarian Project was designed to study the impact of educational intervention on the lives of preschool-aged children from low-income families (Barnett & Masse, 2007). Between 1972 and 1977, 57 children in the Carolina Abecedarian Project were assigned to a program that offered the following supports: (a) high-quality childcare from infancy through age 5 years; (b) individualized prescription of educational activities; and (c) activities focused on social, emotional, and cognitive areas of development (Barnett & Masse, 2007; Campbell et al., 2002; Temple & Reynolds, 2007). All the children in the study were born in poverty to

mothers who had not graduated from high school; 25% were living with both parents at the time of birth, and 98% were African American (Campbell et al., 2002; Masse & Barnett, 2002). On average, the children were four-and-a-half months old at the beginning of the intervention (Barnett & Masse, 2007; Campbell et al., 2002). As the children reached the age of 3 or 4 years, the childcare center became a preschool program with areas in the classroom designated for a variety of activities. Teachers were trained to emphasize language development by speaking with children about their daily lives in a developmentally appropriate manner (Ramey & Campbell, 1991).

The Abecedarian findings drew direct links to long-lasting benefits associated with the early childhood programs (Campbell et al., 2002), such as higher IQ scores at age 12 (94 vs. 88) and higher math achievement at age 15 (93 vs. 82). For students in the Abecedarian Program, the special education placement rate was half of the control group (24% vs. 48%) and almost half for grade retention (31% vs. 55%). These students had a lower arrest rate and higher employment at age 21 (Campbell et al., 2002; Pungello, Campbell, & Miller-Johnson, 2000).

Significance of This Research as a Qualitative Study

According to the review of the literature, selection of childcare is not based on one single factor in a family's circumstances, but is the interplay of multiple factors. In the process of selecting childcare placements, parents weigh their own needs with the needs of their children, while acknowledging the importance of flexibility. With this in mind, the current research utilized interviews of parents to better understand the decision-making process of choosing programming for their child's pre-kindergarten year. Calvo (2007) identified that the research methods for investigating parental preferences for schooling fall into three categories: surveys, inferences based on observation, and interviews. Qualitative research allows the interviewer to explore general topics and individual responses (Hoepfl, 1997). This is significant in light of the fact that there is limited research that focuses on the parental selection process (Calvo, 2007).

The literature review highlighted two ideas that this research sought to address. First, there is a lack of significant research on parental choice in selection of preschool and placements in the year directly before kindergarten. The research that exists predominately considers parents' selection of childcare, not their selection of preschool (O'Gorman et al., 2004). Second, the opinions of parents have been undervalued because they have been viewed as non-experts who make childcare decisions based on convenience rather than on quality (Emlen et al., 1999).

This research focused on choices parents made about the prekindergarten year, the year directly before kindergarten, which included more than childcare. The researcher talked directly to parents, discovering the stories of their childcare choices. This research addressed the concerns of Emlen et al. (1999) when they noted the lack of research in which parents are the source of data and are treated as important consumers of childcare.

The following sections of this research include the design and methodology (Chapter 3), the findings of the study (Chapter 4), and the implications and recommendations for further research (Chapter 5).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 will review the research purpose and questions and discuss the rationale for a qualitative study. The chapter will describe site and sample selection, the interview schedule, data collection procedures, ethical considerations, data analysis procedures, and trustworthiness of data.

The purpose of this study was to explore the decision-making process that parents use to make programming choices for their child's prekindergarten year. The interview process asked parents how they received information about prekindergarten programs, and how they took that information, prioritized it, and then made decisions for their child. The central question for this research was: "How do parents make decisions to select placements for their child during the prekindergarten year?" The secondary research questions were: "What experiences do parents want their children to have during the prekindergarten year?", "How do parents get information about programming for the prekindergarten year?", and "How do parents assimilate information and make a final decision?" The purpose of this research was to capture the stories of parents as they reflected on the decisions they made for their child's prekindergarten year.

Rationale for a Qualitative Interview Study

A basic research template consists of three steps: (a) pose a question; (b) collect data to answer the question; and (c) create theory as part of answering the question, which refers to the creation of a narrative that defines the research question (Creswell, 2008). The questions posed by this research were not entirely different from previous research. As discussed in the literature review, previous researchers have studied parental decision making for childcare whereas this research focused specifically on the prekindergarten year. A more substantial distinction of this research was the type of study used to collect the data. This study was qualitative and the researcher conducted in-depth interviews, whereas a majority of the previous research was quantitative.

Because this was a qualitative study, the research findings and summary created a narrative that captured the stories of the parents regarding their decision-making process.

To support the rationale for a qualitative study, this section will compare qualitative and quantitative research, discuss the importance of talking to parents, and end with the justification for selecting an interview study for this research.

There are two types of qualitative research studies: (a) participant-observation studies in which participants are observed and then interviewed, and (b) in-depth interview studies that collect information through interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The researcher used in-depth interviews to collect data for this study. The in-depth interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how the subject interprets his/her experiences within the context of the research query (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This research utilized an interview study to collect information from parents in order to obtain insights on *why* they made certain decisions regarding their child's prekindergarten experience.

Importance of an Interview Study of Parents

Parents are responsible for the selection of their child's prekindergarten experience. Yet, as discussed in Chapter 2, they are often neglected in research because educational experts do not value their opinions (Emlen et al., 1999). Educational researchers often discount the decision-making process of parents because they are considered unreliable and lacking in educational expertise. Researchers believe parents respond with what they think they should say rather than the facts, making them an unreliable source of data. Researchers also feel that parents lack expertise in what constitutes quality childcare. Despite other researchers' beliefs, Emlen et al.'s (1999) rationale for asking parents about their decision-making process regarding childcare choices included trusting parents in the matter of childcare selection and seeking to understand what parents value in childcare.

Rationale for Selecting an Interview Study for

This Research

Using surveys and observations, quantitative studies have examined parent choices; however, quantitative studies are not able to explore general topics and individual responses in the same way as qualitative studies (Hoepfl, 1997). Quantitative studies are able to answer what parents selected and when they selected it, and provide a limited version of why it was selected. Qualitative studies are able to probe these questions more comprehensively. The researcher selected an interview as the data collection instrument rather than a survey or observation. As part of making this decision, the researcher considered the advantages and disadvantages of an interview study. These advantages and disadvantages as well as the interview format will be discussed in the next section.

Advantages of an interview study. The advantages of an interview study include the adaptability of the interview format and the ability to probe into the responses, thereby gaining more information (Creswell, 2003; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Participants can provide historical information that is not readily available in other formats (Creswell, 2003). As a comparison, the responses on questionnaires tend to be limited. Interviewees are more likely to share negative feelings in an interview than in a questionnaire (Gall et al., 2007), thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of their responses. The participation success rate is greater in an interview study because participants are more likely to complete an interview with a researcher than a survey by themselves (Gall et al., 2007).

This research relied on the interview process, which can vary greatly in how it is structured (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative research offers latitude to the interviewer to pursue a wide range of topics, allows for the interviewee to fully discuss the topics (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), and empowers the interviewer to create meaning

from the interviewee's responses (Mishler, 1995). The goal of this interview study was to create a guided conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Disadvantages of an interview study. One disadvantage of an interview study is the difficulty in replicating the results (Gall et al., 2007). Because of flexibility, adaptability, and human interaction, it is challenging to re-create the discourse of the interview (Gall et al., 2007). In addition, interview studies are not the most efficient data collection tool when information is quantifiable.

Creswell (2003) stated that all information obtained in an interview is based on the participant's perception. This information contains the interviewee's inaccuracies, biases, and other non-objective details. It should be noted that the perception of parents is exactly what this researcher wanted to explore, which directly relates to Emlen et al.'s (1999) rationale when they asked parents about their decision-making process regarding childcare choices.

The interview study format. Three types of interview formats are (a) one-on-one interviews, (b) telephone interviews, and (c) group interviews (Creswell, 2003). The instrument used in this research was a one-on-one interview.

These interviews were semi-structured and presented a set of specific, open-ended questions. Focused follow-up questions were asked, which permitted more thorough understanding of the responses, opinions, and reasons behind the opinions (Gall et al., 2007). These questions built upon and explored the participants' responses in order to deconstruct their experiences (Seidman, 2006). The purpose of the research was to capture the stories of parents as they made the decision regarding their child's prekindergarten experience. After the researcher understood the parents' stories about their selection of a prekindergarten program, he was able to synthesize common themes found within the framework of the decision-making process.

Site and Sample Selection

The next section will describe the school district demographics, site selection, and sample selection for this research. The school district chosen for this study was located in an upper Midwest state. The district was 121 square miles in physical size with an operating budget of \$263 million.

At the time of this study, the district was considered urban with enrollment in the top three of the state at 16,000 students in prekindergarten through Grade 12. There were 21 elementary schools, six middle schools, four high schools, and an alternative center in the district. The enrollment for the elementary schools ranged from 151 to 571 students with an average enrollment of 313 students per elementary school.

The district employed over 2750 staff, which included 1292 teachers, 573 teacher associates and technology associates, 69 administrators, 186 secretaries, 171 custodial employees, 219 food service employees, 210 transportation employees, 115 daycare employees, 68 technicians or specialists, and 15 nurses. The district had over 50 National Board Certified Teachers. For this study, the district was given the pseudonym of Sergeant Pepper's School District. All names of schools and people used in this study are pseudonyms. This is detailed in the section entitled "Confidentiality of Participants" found in the last part of Chapter 3.

The School District Demographics

The district's free and reduced (F/R) lunch participation rate was 46.7% for Alternative Kindergarten (AK) through Grade 12. For the district's 21 elementary schools, which enrolled 7,300 students, the F/R participation rate was 51.4% and ranged from 21% to 90%. F/R participation tends to decrease at the middle school and high school levels because students are less likely to report free and reduced lunch needs. This pattern was consistent in Sergeant Pepper's, where the middle school F/R percentage was 47.2 and the high school percentage was 39.6. The district's minority enrollment was 24.2%.

Site Selection

The elementary schools included in this study were Penny Lane Elementary School, Abbey Road Elementary School, and Strawberry Fields Elementary School. The pilot school, also from the district, was named Yellow Submarine Elementary School. Elementary sites were selected by placing the 21 elementary schools in order by F/R participation from highest percentage to lowest percentage. The sites that were included were in the middle of the ranking.

Rationale for selecting these elementary schools as representative of the larger district. These schools were selected as a representation of the median elementary schools based on the F/R percentages. The selection process also included a review of the minority enrollment at each elementary school.

Penny Lane Elementary School. Penny Lane Elementary School served 345 preschool through fifth-grade students. The student population was composed of 56% F/R students, 32% minority students, and 25 English Language Learners representing about 10 different languages. The school had the 10th highest F/R percentage of the 21 elementary schools. The racial/ethnic enrollment was 68% White, 21% African American, 7% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 0.5% Native American. Penny Lane had a Level 1 classroom that served 6% of the school's enrollment. During the recent school year, 131 students moved in or out, which represented a 34% change.

The enrollment over the past 10 years ranged from 301 to 438 students with an average over the last 5 years of 328 students. Penny Lane is located in the northwest quadrant of the school district. The school has observed a shift in the family structures from traditional two-parent homes to more blended families with many children living with extended families such as grandparents or stepparents.

Abbey Road Elementary School. Abbey Road School served 315 students in preschool through fifth grade. The student population was composed of 57% F/R and 24% minority students. The school had the eighth highest F/R percentage of the 21

elementary schools. The racial/ethnic enrollment was 77% White, 14% African American, 6% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 0.5% Native American. Abbey Road had a Level 1 classroom that served 5% of the school's enrollment (12 students). During the recent school year, 37 students moved in or out, which represented a 13% change.

The enrollment over the past 10 years ranged from 221 to 315 students with an average over the last 5 years of 263 students. The boundaries of the attendance area are in the northeast portion of the city. Within the attendance area, the school has moderate income and low income housing, rentals, and apartments.

Strawberry Fields Elementary School. Strawberry Fields School served 391 students in preschool through fifth grade. The student population was composed of 57% F/R and 23% minority students. The school had the ninth highest F/R percentage of the 21 elementary schools. The racial/ethnic enrollment was 73% White, 10% African American, 10% Asian, and 2% Native American. The school's population included 11% English Language Learners. Strawberry Fields had a Level 1 classroom that served 7% of the school's enrollment. During the recent school year, 106 students moved in or out, which represented a 23% change.

The enrollment over the past 10 years ranged from 382 to 462 students with an average over the last 5 years of 396 students. The school's boundaries are located on the northern edge of the district's boundaries. Housing in the school's area ranges from low-income housing in the form of mobile trailer parks, to townhouses and apartment complexes, some of which include subsidized housing. The school boundary also includes some middle- to upper-income single family homes.

Sample Selection

This section focuses on the rationale for purposeful sampling and describes the population selected for this study, the selection criteria for the participants, and the recruitment of participants.

Rationale for purposeful sampling in this study. Purposeful sampling is the most frequently used strategy for qualitative research (Creswell, 2008; Hoepfl, 1997). Purposeful sampling involves a small number of participants and is rich in information, enabling the researcher to gain an in-depth knowledge of central themes of the research (Patton, 2007). Creswell (2007) identified three benefits of purposeful sampling: (a) gaining useful information, (b) gathering data with a more direct or accurate method, and (c) giving a voice to silent participants. The participants selected for this research had to meet specific criteria (discussed in detail in the “Selection criteria of the participants”). Sampling in which the participants must meet specific criteria is considered criterion sampling (Patton, 2007).

This study used the in-depth interviewing strategy defined by Marshall and Rossman (2010). In-depth interviewing strategy is simple and personal, and focuses on the individual’s story (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). In this manner, the sample size was small, and the goal was to hear and explore the stories of the participants.

The participants selected for the study. The study sample included 16 families who were interviewed between November, 2012 and February 2013. It was estimated that 75 possible participants were eligible for this research study. This estimate was based on the three elementary schools’ enrolling 150 kindergarten students and the estimate that half of those children were the oldest child in the family.

All the participants in the study were female. Of the 16 participants, 14 were married with the father in the home and three participants were single mothers. The 16 parent participants represented 18 children. The participants in the study were parents of 10 girls and 8 boys. One participant was the mother of twins, another mother had biological and adopted children who were 4 months apart in age, but they completed the prekindergarten year at the same time.

Five families had at least one parent employed in Sargent Pepper School District. There were three families in which the mother, one in which the father, and two in which

both parents were employees of the district. One family had a sister-in-law (or aunt of the child) who was a preschool teacher for the district. Table 1 details the descriptors for each participant.

Table 1. Participant Descriptors

Participant	Parents in home	District employee	Gender of child (ren)
Interview # 1	Mom	No	Girl
Interview # 2	Mom and Dad	Mother / Father (of child)	Boy
Interview # 3	Mom and Dad	No	Girl
Interview # 4	Mom and Dad	No	Boy
Interview # 5	Mom and Dad	Mother / Father (of child)	Girl
Interview # 6	Mom and Dad	No	Girl
Interview # 7	Mom	Mother (of child)	Girl
Interview # 8	Mom and Dad	No	Girl
Interview # 9	Mom and Dad	Mother (of child)	Boy (biological) and Girl (adopted)
Interview # 10	Mom and Dad	No	Girl
Interview # 11	Mom and Dad	No	Boy
Interview # 12	Mom	No	Boy
Interview # 13	Mom and Dad	Aunt (of the child)	Boy
Interview # 14	Mom and Dad	Father (of child)	Boy
Interview # 15	Mom and Dad	No	Boy
Interview # 16	Mom and Dad	No	Twin Girls

The discussion of sample size reflects the need to interview enough participants to be able to create themes from the responses without having too many responses and unmanageable data (Creswell, 2008). Rather than indicating a specific number of participants, Seidman (2006) set two criteria to determine how many participants are ample in a study: sufficiency of participants and saturation of data. Sufficiency refers to an effective number of participants that represent the whole population, whereas saturation of data refers to enough participant information to represent the population (Douglas, 1985; Seidman, 2006). When these two criteria are met in the collection of data, the researcher has enough participants.

Researchers have been reluctant to cite a specific number of participants needed for a qualitative research study (Douglas, 1985; Patton, 2007). Creswell (2007) discussed a range from one to 40 participants, but similar to Seidman, he stated that high-quality data must be obtained. It is clear that in qualitative research, the quality of data is more important than the number of interviewees. Trigwell (2006) stated that a substantial qualitative interview study includes between 10 and 30 interviews of 30 to 60 minutes in length. When the researcher examined the data from the 16 participants, there were sufficient data to create themes.

Selection criteria of the participants. The participants in this study needed to fulfill the following criteria: They were parents of a current public school kindergarten student who was their oldest child, and they were willing to participate in the research. These criteria produced a population of parents who had already made the decision about their child's prekindergarten year, had made this decision recently, and were first-time decision makers regarding prekindergarten programming.

Recruitment of participants. The participants were recruited through the principals and kindergarten teachers at each elementary school. The parents were given a consent letter that invited them to participate in the study. If the parents were willing to participate, they contacted the researcher by phone or email.

When contacted by the parents, the researcher explained the following: (a) The interview would last approximately 1 hour; (b) the interview would take place in a private location of the participants' choosing, which often was at their child's school; (c) the interviewer would ask parents about the choices they made for their child's prekindergarten year; and (d) the interview was a voluntary process and participants could decline to answer any questions or decline to participate if they changed their minds.

Interview Schedule

An interview schedule is the structure of questions with preset follow-up questions that researchers ask during an interview (Patton, 2007). The structure of an interview schedule begins with small talk that is designed to build rapport and put the participants at ease (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This research utilized an in-depth interview strategy that included open-ended questions so that the participants could share their experiences freely. The goals of the open-ended interview were to establish a territory to explore the participants' decision-making process for their child's prekindergarten year and then to ask open-ended questions to allow the interviewees to take the dialogue in any direction they chose (Seidman, 2006). Truly open-ended interviews allow the interviewees to respond on their own terms (Patton, 2007).

This section will provide a brief description of the procedures of the interview schedule, discuss the pilot study (including the rationale, key learnings, and changes made to the interview schedule as a result of the pilot study), and end with key interview techniques.

Procedures of the Interview Schedule

The interviews were conducted in private rooms at a school or home except for two interviews, which were held in public places (restaurant and outside a gymnasium) at the request of the participant. At the time of the interview, the researcher explained the informed consent document and obtained the participant's signature (see Appendix A).

As part of this explanation, the researcher reminded the participant that the study was voluntary and asked permission to audio record the interview.

The general structure of the interview was to thank the participant, state the purpose of the research, and assure confidentiality (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The semi-structured interview included the following: (a) collecting background information from the participant to build rapport, (b) asking open-ended questions from a predetermined script, and (c) focusing follow-up questions to gather in-depth information from the participant. The interview schedule began with small talk to build rapport and then led to open-ended questions. Depending on the participant's response, the interview might have included a secondary set of questions called the focused questions (which were specific follow-up questions), and if the participant was reluctant to share details, the interview included a checklist of items with which the participant could agree or disagree. The interview schedule is found in Appendix B.

Pilot Study

Researchers who use interviews build into their proposal a pilot study in which they test the interview schedule with a small number of participants (Seidman, 2006). A pilot study is conducted prior to the start of the research in order to practice the interview schedule. After a pilot study, the researcher makes changes based on the discourse of the primary pilot study (Creswell, 2008).

Rationale for a pilot study. After approval from the University of Iowa's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher completed two practice interviews as part of the pilot study. After the pilot interviews were held, the researcher examined the results and modified the questions. The researcher learned whether the interview structures were appropriate for the study and gained insights into the practical aspects of the schedule and the interviewer's performance (Seidman, 2006).

Population of the pilot study. The participants in the pilot study were from a fourth school in Sergeant Pepper's School District, Yellow Submarine School. This

school was ranked 14th highest in the F/R percentages. The participants for the pilot study were contacted through the principal of the school, using the same protocol outlined for the main study.

Key learnings from the pilot study. The key learnings from the pilot study based on participation and responses from the participants included an understanding of the importance of the gender of the participants, the participants' interpretations of prekindergarten programming, their direct and embedded responses, the emergence of themes, and the format of the interview.

Gender of the participants. The two participants in the pilot study were both female. The selection criteria did not request or require the mother to participate, nor did it exclude the father in any manner. The criteria stated that the participants were parents of a current kindergarten child. In the event that both parents were interested in participating, they were invited to be interviewed together.

Interpretation of prekindergarten programming. The participants' interpretations of how they selected the prekindergarten year programming for their 4 year olds were narrow. The two participants referred to factors that influenced their decision-making programming for the prekindergarten year solely in terms of preschool and did not consider daycare or parental care to be a programming decision.

The first participant was given the pseudonym of Marcie. Marcie's child had a daycare provider, but Marcie only discussed the process of enrolling her child in a preschool three half-days per week and did not discuss her daycare provider as a choice that she had made for the prekindergarten year. The second participant was given the pseudonym of Constance. Constance spoke more about the selection of programming for her child's kindergarten year than she did about the prekindergarten year. Constance stated that the compulsory school attendance age in Iowa was 7 years without a requirement that the child attend kindergarten. Constance considered placing her child in prekindergarten for 2 years before enrolling him in kindergarten and also considered 2

years of prekindergarten and then enrolling him directly in first grade. Constance also stated that she put little to no thought into her prekindergarten decision because she was happy with the existing placement and a great deal of thought into the kindergarten year decision. This coincided with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that was written for her child during the prekindergarten year, which impacted her interpretation of her child's needs.

Direct responses and embedded responses. The participants identified their child's best interest as socialization, which was their main concern for the prekindergarten year. Both participants identified the following factors in the selection of a placement: (a) fewer transitions for their child, (b) caring staff, and (c) a child-focused curriculum. The participants did not clearly identify other influences in their decision-making process. However, embedded in the discussion of their decision-making process, both participants referred to reasons or factors that influenced their decision making. Marcie identified transportation as an issue for her in the decision-making process, and Constance referred to her child's unique medical needs, which ultimately were the reason for the IEP, as influencing the decision-making process.

Marcie responded that she did not realistically consider other options because she lacked the ability to transport her child to any preschool outside of the preschool to which her daycare provider supplied transportation. In giving this answer, Marcie also identified that she lacked a support group or system to help her with transportation. Constance's decision-making process was influenced by her child's (pseudonym, Raymond) unique medical needs and the fact that an IEP was written for Raymond during prekindergarten. According to the IEP, Raymond needed an adult Para Educator to be with him during the school day. Based on this recommendation, Constance reported that she considered moving him to a public school for preschool. However, this would have meant another transition for Raymond, and Constance explained that Raymond did not do well with transitions. The private Montessori school where Raymond was enrolled for the pre-

kindergarten year made a commitment to provide extra adults to assist him during the last part of the school year. This commitment and Raymond's needs influenced Constance's decision not to change the placement. The cost of programming also influenced her decision making. Constance indicated that she would have considered homeschooling Raymond if she could have afforded to take another year off. Constance had not been employed for 3 years while she raised her two boys and needed to go back to work.

The emergence of themes. Certain themes emerged during the pilot interviews. Both participants referred to transitions, caring staff, and a child-focused curriculum as factors in the decision-making process. These themes were consistent with findings cited earlier in the literature review. Two themes that were apparent during the pilot interviews were (a) the continuation of the child's 3-year-old preschool program for the prekindergarten year, and (b) what first time parents learned about the decision-making process by experiencing the process with their oldest child.

An unanticipated theme that emerged during the pilot interview was the theme of continuation. Both participants selected prekindergarten programming that was a continuation of their child's 3-year-old program. Initially, this continuation was unanticipated based on the research of Foot, Howe, Cheyne, Terras, and Rattray (2000) and Pence and Goelman (1987), who found that as children approached the age for compulsory school, the parents' views and choices of schools changed, and parents placed more emphasis on preparing their children for school. Based on the view that parents emphasize school readiness as their children approach the compulsory attendance age, the assumption would be that the parents would change the placement for the prekindergarten year; however, a key learning of the pilot study was that parents will choose to keep the child in the same program if they feel that it is effectively preparing their children for school and is continuing their educational growth. The participants identified that the preschools in which their children were enrolled had a multiyear plan to prepare children for the start of kindergarten.

The second key learning theme was that first time parents learn about the decision-making process by experiencing the process with their oldest child. This theme was anticipated and was the rationale for selecting first time parents. Both participants had younger children, and they referred to having more knowledge of the decision-making process for their second child's prekindergarten year placement as a result of previously making decisions for their older child.

Format of the interview. The interviewer also learned that the interviews took about 45 minutes. This included a 10-minute getting to know you and completing the informed consent document, about 30 minutes of interviewing, and 5 minutes of closure. The interviewer also found that it was helpful to have a small checklist of procedural matters on hand at the beginning of the interview to ensure that nothing was skipped.

Changes made in interview schedule or style as a result of the pilot study. The changes made to the interview schedule were to place statements at the beginning of the interview schedule regarding the role of the interviewer, the definition of the term "prekindergarten," and the profession of the interviewer. The changes in the interview schedule also included new questions, an alteration to the order of the questions, and recognizing the importance of language and interpretation in the pilot study.

Statements at the beginning of the interview. The interviewer defined his role as someone who was asking questions and listening to answers. In the pilot interviews, the interviewer engaged in too much conversation with the participants as opposed to asking and listening. The interview schedule also began with a definition of the term "prekindergarten" as the year before a child starts kindergarten. It was essential to establish a common understanding of prekindergarten because the term was used extensively throughout the interview schedule. The interviewer also identified that he was completing this study as a graduate student at the University of Iowa while also serving as an elementary principal in the Sergeant Pepper School District.

New questions and altering the order of the questions. The researcher added questions and changed the order of the interview schedule as a result of the pilot study. The question order was changed to create a more natural progression of questioning; however, because each interview was unique and was guided by the responses of the participant, the order of questions varied for each interview. The new interview questions and order of questions helped to better receive the stories of participants.

In the pilot study, the first question was, “What experiences did you want for your child in the prekindergarten year?” In the revised interview schedule, a new question was added at the beginning of the interview: “Can you tell me some background about your family?” This recall question was added at the start of the interview because it was easy to answer and set the stage for understanding the childcare support available to the participants as provided by relatives who might live in the area.

The next modification to the interview schedule was to move the question, “What option (s) did you select for your child’s prekindergarten year?” The reason for making this the second question in the interview schedule was that the participants in the pilot study both started their interviews by explaining what they had selected for their child’s prekindergarten year as part of their response to what experiences they wanted for their child. Based on these responses, the researcher realized that the participants needed to explain their child’s placement for prekindergarten before they were able to answer more specific questions. As a result, it was natural to start with the easier question, “What prekindergarten year programming did you select?” and then depending on their response, follow up with the question, “What experiences did you want for your child’s prekindergarten year?”

The third question in the revised interview schedule was a new question: “Was your prekindergarten placement choice a full-day or partial-day option?” This change was made as a direct result of the participants’ answers in the pilot study and served two purposes. By having the participants define their child’s placement in its entirety, the

researcher was able to explore two factors: (a) how many hours per week a child was enrolled in a preschool and (b) other care the child received that the parents may have underreported.

In the pilot study, the participants described their selections for the prekindergarten year in terms of preschools that they selected, and they did not report the time the child spent with a caregiving parent or at a nonrelative daycare. The participants seemed to discount or underreport the decision to place a child in parental care, daycare, or kinship care as an option. By asking if the preschool was a full or partial day, the interviewer was able to ask focused questions in order to understand the extent to which parents made certain choices of prekindergarten programs.

The fourth question in the revised interview schedule came from moving another question: “What other options did you consider for your child’s prekindergarten year?” This was followed by a fifth question regarding barriers in the selection of programming: “What, if anything, prevented you from considering other options?”

Another question was added as a result of the pilot study: “How would you describe your decision-making process?” As a checklist question, the participant was given the terms used by Scott and Bruce’s General Decision-Making Style (GDMS) Inventory. This question asked the participants to identify which of the five decision-making styles—rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous—they thought described their decision-making process. Using the list of the decision-making styles, the participants could self-select a description of their thought process. This was important to the researcher because the pilot interview participants reported using more than one of the five decision-making styles in their selection of a placement.

Recognizing the importance of language and interpretation in the pilot study.

An important understanding gained from the pilot interviews pertained to the importance of language and interpretation. This understanding was the result of an email exchange with one of the pilot participants. The second pilot interview was held on November 10,

2012. During the course of the interview, the participant identified that she selected a Montessori School for her child's prekindergarten placement. The child had been at the same Montessori school as a three year old, so this was a continuation of placement. The participant had a much more detailed explanation for the selection of kindergarten as opposed to the selection of the prekindergarten placement. The participant made the following statement:

I guess I knew things about Montessori. I knew his teacher and I trusted that it was the right environment (to continue for the prekindergarten year). It was ... very un-thorough in my decision as compared to my decision for kindergarten.

The researcher responded to this by interpreting and summarizing in the following manner: "It sounds like you went with an intuitive style (of decision-making)."

On January 4, 2013, the researcher received an unsolicited email as a clarification from the participant. In the email, she explained her decision-making process for the prekindergarten year and included the following text:

After I described my process for decision-making, and how I didn't have a backup plan if Raymond didn't get into the Montessori school for preschool, you reflected back, "So it was an intuitive process for you, you just knew it was right?" Its right that I "just knew" Montessori was the right thing, but for me that was a more ideological process. I'm not a very intuitive or emotional person:). I had a set of criteria (students engaged in hands-on, multisensory work; multi-age classrooms, continuity of relationship over three years with an experienced teacher; students self-directed, etc.) and Montessori met them, so I didn't look further.

The researcher responded via email on January 14, 2013. In the text of the email, the researcher wrote the following:

I found your interveiw (sic) to be very helpful in changing my questions and including a mother's intuitive (sic) nature. I am finding that no matter how much research is done, mother's (sic) need to feel good about the place they have thier (sic) child attend.

This email exchange with the participant demonstrated the importance of careful word choice in conducting interviews. When the researcher referred to the participant's intuitive nature, the researcher was thinking about intuitive in terms of Scott and Bruce's General Decision-Making Style which includes five styles (rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous). The mother interpreted his comments as meaning mother's

intuition. The confusion in the discourse can be found the researcher's reference only to a mother's intuitive nature in his email and his failure to explain that intuitive is one of the five inventories found in Scott and Bruce's General Decision-Making Style. In fact, the researcher added a question to the interview schedule that included all five inventories of Scott and Bruce's General Decision-Making Style. The question that was added to the interview was supported by the member check participant process and will be discussed in the "validity of results" section at the end of Chapter 3

On March 28, 2013, 10 weeks after the email exchange, the pilot interview participant sent another email to make clear that the purpose of the January 8, 2013, email was to clarify that her process was not intuitive:

So again, let me try to emphasize: I had a set of criteria for what I wanted in an educational experience for my children: something project-oriented, hands-on, learner centered, etc. Montessori met these criteria. When those were met, I knew I needed to look no further. That was NOT an intuitive decision, in my understanding, but an ideological one.

Even though the participant questioned the researcher's original interpretation of the participant's "intuitive" decision-making style, her concerns are indicative of the significance of a researcher interpreting the word choice of the participants.

Key Interview Techniques

Although a strong interview schedule is important, the techniques the interviewer uses are equally if not more important to the interview process. Seidman (2006) identified eight key techniques or behaviors for the interviewer to follow. The interviewer should (a) listen more, talk less; (b) not presume an answer; (c) avoid leading questions; (d) not interrupt the interviewee; (e) limit interaction and only share occasional experiences; (f) avoid reinforcing participants' responses by saying 'good' or 'bad'; (g) be creative with the interviewees' responses and use the interview schedule as a guide, not a dictation; and (h) tolerate silence from the interviewee. By following these behaviors, the interviewer can increase the quality of information the interviewees share.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures section will detail the recruitment procedures for obtaining participants, the consent process used in gaining permission, how coercion was minimized for participants, the setting of the interviews, the average length of the interviews, and the use of member checks for validity.

Recruitment Procedures for Obtaining Participants

Principals of participating schools identified parents whose oldest children were in kindergarten. The parents were given a consent letter that invited them to participate in the study. If the parents were willing to participate, they contacted the primary investigator by phone or email.

When parents contacted the primary investigator, he explained the following: (a) Participation would consist of a 1-hour interview; (b) the interview would take place in a private location of the participant's choosing, which could be their child's school; and (c) the interviewer would ask parents about what choices they made for their child's prekindergarten year and how they came to their decision. When the participants agreed to participate, the researcher established an interview time and location. The researcher conducted the interviews.

Informed Consent Process

The researcher gave the participant a copy of the informed consent document to read before meeting for the interview. The researcher reviewed the informed consent document with the participant, and if the participant agreed to participate in the study, he or she signed the informed consent document to continue.

Coercion was Minimized for Participants

The primary investigator allowed time for participants to ask questions, explained the right to refuse, and assured participants that they could decline to participate at any time during the study.

Setting of the Interviews

The interviews were held at a school, at their home, over the phone, or at a different location agreed upon by the participants so that they would be comfortable and the location would be convenient. Each school's personnel provided a quiet room in which the interviews could be held. There were five phone interviews, two interviews at the participant's home, four interviews at the school that the child attended, and two interviews in the classroom where the participant worked. One interview each was held at the researcher's school, a local restaurant, and at a school where a child's basketball practice was being held.

Average Length of the Interviews

The interviews averaged 1 hour in length and ranged from 45 minutes to 90 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded with consent of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations for this research included (a) obtaining approval from the University of Iowa's IRB and the local school district before the research began and (b) following the procedures for safeguarding the confidentiality of participants as described in the next sections.

Confidentiality of Participants

The participants in this study were recruited in a private location, and interviews were conducted in a private office at their child's school or in another setting chosen by the participant. The researcher collected only the information needed to conduct the research. The information collected was stored in paper or hard copy records, electronic records, and audio recordings. The procedures for protecting the confidentiality of the participants are described below.

Paper or hard copy records. Because loss of confidentiality is always a threat to privacy, a minimal amount of data were collected from the participants for the purpose of the study. To protect the identity of the families, pseudonyms were used for the names

of the elementary schools, parents, students, and childcare providers (whether a center, daycare home, or relative). Only the researcher knew the identity of the participants and their pseudonyms. In the transcripts of the interviews, pseudonyms were generated by using a Random Name Generator, such as the one found at <http://www.kleimo.com/random/name.cfm>. This random name generator uses data from the U.S. Census to randomly generate male and female names.

The link of information between the names of the participants and the pseudonyms were destroyed at the close of the study. The researcher stored all paper or hard copies of documents in a locked filing cabinet in his home office.

Electronic records. The researcher stored all electronic copies of documentation in a password-protected computer that was not part of a networked system. After the recommended time frame of 3 years, all identifying information will be destroyed by erasing the electronic files. The same procedure for pseudonyms will be used as described above.

Audio records. Audio recordings were made of the interviews with the consent of the participants and were used to transcribe the content of the interviews. The audio recordings were destroyed at the close of the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis procedure used for this interview study was the process known as coding of data. The next section will define the coding of responses, the purpose of coding data, and the mechanics of coding data.

Definition of Coding of Responses

Coding is the process of examining transcripts of data, taking parts of the transcripts, and grouping them with similar responses to create common themes (Creswell, 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Merriam, 2002; Saldaña, 2009; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). The coding process includes (a) sorting data into units and (b) establishing a

category for the material. The next section on coding will discuss the purpose of coding data and the mechanics of coding data.

The Purpose of Coding Data

To make sense of the data, a researcher must be able to organize the concepts and theory found in the data. Transcripts from interviews generate an enormous amount of data. The premise of coding is that it is difficult to examine a series of transcripts and immediately identify the patterns within them (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Auerbach and Silverman (2003) described vast quantities of data as being overwhelming to a degree that they may immobilize the researcher. The purpose of coding is to make sense of the data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2008) and to make the data manageable through reduction (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

The Mechanics of Coding Data

Researchers have different names for the steps in coding data, but the steps are similar in that they move from specific to general in terms of themes and from real to abstract in terms of theory (Saldaña, 2009). Auerbach and Silverman (2003) identified three phases in coding data: (a) making data manageable, (b) hearing what was said, and (c) developing theory. Saldaña (2009) defined the process of coding data into theory with four steps that were similar to Auerbach and Silverman's phases (2003): (a) creating codes from the data, (b) grouping codes together into categories (and reflecting on the categories and creating subcategories), (c) constructing themes or concepts from the categories, and (d) creating theory from the themes or concepts. These steps throughout the process are not necessarily linear, as ideas may change as data are analyzed (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

Making data manageable. In this phase, the researcher takes raw data and creates workable portions (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Saldaña (2009) referred to this step as creating codes from data. As part of this phase, the researcher reviews the central research question and theoretical framework for the study and selects the relevant

text for further analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). This phase includes taking large, broad data and narrowing them (Creswell, 2008). The narrowing of data is a process of small, manageable steps (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). By coding data, the researcher may sometimes summarize and condense the data, not simply reduce them (Saldaña, 2009).

Hearing what was said. The purpose of this phase is for the researcher to group repeated ideas that create broader themes and then group those themes into coherent categories (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Merriam (2002) identified this phase as interacting with the data and distinguishing the significant themes. In Saldaña's (2009) framework, this phase was a combination of (a) grouping codes into subcategories and categories and (b) creating themes or concepts from similar categories. Both Merriam (2002) and Auerbach and Silverman (2003) shared a belief that ideas may change or evolve as data are analyzed throughout all processes of coding data.

Trustworthiness of the Data

For data to be trustworthy, the researcher must work toward validity of results and management of biases. These two areas, as well as the use of member checks to validate the findings, are discussed in the next section.

Validity of Results

Validity in research refers to the accuracy of the data collected. To ensure validity in research, it is important to describe the interview procedure in detail for future researchers (Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2008). Two areas of concern or dangers to validity are (a) the researcher's procedure and analysis of data and (b) the participant's responses to the researcher.

Threats to validity from researcher's procedure and analysis of data.

Creswell (2003) identified two types of dangers to validity: internal and external. Internal validity problems arise when the process or procedures of the interview schedule are not followed exactly across participants (Creswell, 2008). Threats to external validity occur

when the researcher draws incorrect inferences and applies these assumptions to the research findings (Creswell, 2008).

This research followed the same interview schedule for each participant's interview. Adjustments were made to the interviews at the discretion of the interviewer in order to ask more probing questions (Seidman, 2006) and to follow the discursive path determined by the interviewee. By having an interview schedule, the interviewer asked each participant the same questions; however, each interview was unique in that the responses from the participants helped to guide the researcher's order of questions. Seidman (2006) described the instantaneous decisions that an interviewer must make during each interview.

Measures to ensure validity in researcher's procedure and analysis of data.

To ensure validity in this study, the researcher followed these procedures. The researcher utilized multiple data sources, managed biases in the study, used member checks, and transcribed audio records thoroughly.

Multiple data sources. The study had multiple data sources from multiple schools. The participants in the study were drawn from three different elementary schools. The study included 16 participants in order to collect stories from multiple parents.

Managing biases in the study. Biases are found in every human being. At the time of the study, the researcher was a principal in the same school district but at a different school than those from which the participants were recruited for the interviews. As part of the interview process, the researcher described his position within the district to the participants, not to influence the participant's responses but to fully disclose his role as the interviewer. It could be assumed that the interviewer only wanted to hear positive comments about the public schools and that the participants only wished to share positive comments about the schools. The role of the researcher as the principal of an elementary school within the same district was part of the reality of the study.

Use of member checks. The researcher chose three participants to participate in the member check process. Member checks involved the researcher's sharing results of the study with the three participants to confirm whether the researcher's interpretations were valid (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). The process, also referred to as member validation (Krefting, 1990), provided additional insights from the participants and allowed the participants to have a voice in the final product, increasing the reliability of data (Bradshaw, 2001). Participants were asked in the informed consent document if they would be willing to participate in the member check process. The researcher selected participants for the member check based on the content of their interviews and their willingness to participate.

Member checks were completed with three of the participants. The participants were contacted per the informed consent document. When they agreed to participate in the member check, the researcher provided them with a copy of Chapter 4. Chapter 4 at the time was 25 pages but the findings were found on pages 9 through 25 of Chapter 4. The entire Chapter 4 was shared so that the member check participant could read in context. The member check participant was then asked to provide reactions, in person, on the phone, or by email. Member check participants were told that they could agree, disagree, or add new insights to the findings. There were no length requirements for member check reactions.

The member check participants identified with themes that the researcher identified in the chapter. Parents agreed with the themes of parent as a source (intuition) and transition for parents and that some parents had insider information. These themes will be presented in detail in Chapter 4. The following quote demonstrates support for these ideas.

I read the entire chapter. Excellent summary of the interviews and findings. Absolutely fascinating are the themes discussed including intuition and transition for the parent. I also found interesting was the option for wrap around daycare by the school.... Based on being a participant and a reviewer of the information, I agree with your findings.

Transcription of audio records. The audio records were transcribed by the primary investigator. The primary investigator listened to each recording, stopping periodically to respeak the interview into a microphone. The microphone was part of the Dragon Dictate software, which then took the resspoken words and put them in a Microsoft Word document. This was a long and tedious process as the transcription software was not 100% accurate. By going slowly to ensure accuracy, the primary investigator was able to obtain an excellent command of the interview transcripts which aided in the coding. The average length of an interview was 11 pages. In total, the 16 interviews were 182 pages in length.

Threats to validity from participant's responses to the researcher. Seidman (2006) and Weiss (1995) identified the concern of truthfulness or accuracy of the participant's responses. Participants may not respond truthfully because they cannot recall accurately or they want to look good in the interview. The latter is referred to as shading (Weiss, 1995). In this study, a concern for the participants may have been that the researcher was an elementary principal, and participants may have shaded their responses in order to look better as parents in the eyes of the researcher.

Reducing threats to participant response validity. To reduce the threats to participant response validity, the researcher (a) began the interview with a statement that included his job as an elementary principal, but also demonstrated a desire to hear the participant's story and not concern himself with how their story reflected on the researcher or the school district; (b) connected with the participant by creating a natural rapport and telling the participant that his job was to be a good listener and not to dialogue with the participant; (c) sought concrete examples from the participant, which ensured more reliable information (Weiss, 1995); and (d) followed the structured interview schedule and asked all questions, regardless of the participant's earlier responses. Preparation, planning, and structure are critical elements of the in-depth interviewing process (Seidman, 2006). By following the interview schedule, the

researcher asked questions that participants might have already addressed, but by asking the question, the researcher could validate the response as genuine.

Use of interview schedule with repeating questions. This research followed the same interview schedule for each participant's interview. Adjustments were made to the interviews at the discretion of the researcher in order to ask more probing questions (Seidman, 2006) and to follow the discursive path determined by the participant. By having an interview schedule, the researcher asked each participant the same questions; however, each interview was unique in that the responses from the participants helped to guide the researcher's order of questions. Seidman (2006) described the instantaneous decisions that an interviewer must make during each interview. The researcher used the interview schedule as a constant reminder to ask questions and as a tool to remember to ask the repeating questions.

Summary

By using an interview approach, the researcher was able to capture the personal and honest stories behind the parents' decision-making process in the selection of programming for their child's prekindergarten year. The systematic data collection and analysis procedures ensured validity of research findings reported in this chapter.

The following sections of this research include the findings of the study and the implications and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Chapter 4 will include a description of the participants and a summary of the themes that emerged from the interviews. The study included 16 participants whose oldest child was enrolled in kindergarten in one of three elementary schools in the Sargent Pepper School District. In the study, participants were interviewed regarding the programs that their children had attended during their prekindergarten year.

The prekindergarten programs that the children attended included child rearing (parental care), kinship care, family daycare (in-home daycare), licensed child care center (private daycare center), licensed preschool (private preschool), and three options that were offered by the school district: Beginning Kindergarten, state-funded preschool, and district-sponsored preschool with daycare.

When asked about what placement choices they had made for their child's prekindergarten year, participants who provided parental care for their children did not consider parental care as a specific choice that they made; rather, it was a responsibility that they assumed as parents. Participants described the prekindergarten year experience as an opportunity to provide their child with a positive attitude toward compulsory kindergarten through 12th-grade education.

The next section will provide an overview of the participants in the study and will describe the participants, single and dual placements, placement options unique to Sargent Pepper School District, and prekindergarten placement options.

Description of Placement Options

Understanding the placement options begins with a brief description of the 16 participants in the study, all of whom were female. Thirteen participants were married with the father in the home and three participants were single mothers. The 16 participants represented 18 children. One participant was the mother of twins, and

another participant had one biological and one adopted child who were 4 months apart in age and had completed the prekindergarten year at the same time.

Five families had at least one parent employed in Sargent Pepper School District: two families had a mother employed, one family had a father employed, and two families had both parents employed by the district. One family had an aunt employed by the district.

Description of Single and Dual Placements

Participants expressed a desire for their child's prekindergarten year to include an element of preschool instruction. However, not all participants were able to choose a placement for their child that included preschool instruction. Those participants who were able to include a preschool placement often selected dual placements, that is, the same child was in two placements. Eighteen individual children were in 32 different prekindergarten placements. Fourteen of the 18 children were in dual placements.

Of the four children who were in single placements, two attended different daycare centers that, according to the participants, included preschool instruction as part of the day. This type of placement has been titled "private daycare center with preschool instruction" for the purposes of this study.

The other two children who attended a single placement were twins who were cared for by an in-home daycare provider. The twins' mother needed full daycare and wanted a preschool experience for her daughters but could not enroll them both due to cost and transportation issues. Although the participant was happy with the daycare provider and felt that her daughters were getting some preschool instruction, she took an extra step to verify her daughters' readiness for kindergarten. She contacted the local educational agency and asked for information about the skills her children would need to be prepared for kindergarten. She received and administered kindergarten readiness assessments that her daughters passed, and she reported that this addressed her concerns.

Description of Placement Options Unique to Sargent

Pepper School District

Three options were unique to the participants in this study because the options were offered by the Sargent Pepper School District but were not offered in all school districts. These options included Beginning Kindergarten; a district-sponsored, state-funded preschool program; and a district-sponsored daycare. The next section will summarize the district-sponsored programs and then provide a summary of the placements selected for all children in the study.

At the time of this study, the district offered three prekindergarten programs for children: Beginning Kindergarten, district preschool, and district daycare. A child who reached the age of 5 years on or before September 15 of the school year was eligible to attend Beginning Kindergarten. To be eligible for the state-funded preschool, a child had to be 4 years old (children could enroll at age 3 on a tuition basis) on or before September 15. To be enrolled in district preschool with daycare, a child could be 4 or 5 years old.

District-sponsored Beginning Kindergarten. Children who are 5 years old and eligible for kindergarten have the option of enrolling in Beginning Kindergarten. Beginning Kindergarten is a transition program for children whose parents choose an extra year of social and academic development for their children before kindergarten. Although the district suggests this program for children who have a summer birthday, parents make the final decision. Beginning Kindergarten is offered as a morning or an afternoon program, with 2.5 hours of contact time versus the 6.5 hours of contact time offered by full-day kindergarten.

The Beginning Kindergarten program has been offered in the Sargent Pepper School District for over 25 years. Approximately 10% of all eligible kindergarten-age children are enrolled in Beginning Kindergarten. The program's main focus is social and emotional development for children with an additional emphasis on academics. The district does not classify it as a preschool program or a half-time version of kindergarten.

However, for this research, Beginning Kindergarten was considered a prekindergarten program because in the academic year following Beginning Kindergarten, students enroll in kindergarten.

District-sponsored, state-funded preschool. The district also offers a state funded preschool. This program meets 5 days a week for 4 hours a day from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. This program is free of charge to children in the year immediately preceding their kindergarten year. The program has a student-to-staff ratio of 10:1, with no more than 20 students and a certified teacher and teacher assistant in each classroom. The state requires that the certified teacher have preschool teaching certification and a teaching license.

District-sponsored daycare program. The district daycare program provides a full day of care or wraparound care for children who are enrolled in the district's preschool or Beginning Kindergarten programs. Wraparound care is the term often used to describe before and after school care that matches parents' needs. The district daycare is operated by the district and a local hospital, and preference is given to district and hospital employees.

Description of Prekindergarten Placement Options

Participants in this study selected eight different prekindergarten placement options for their children. Placement options were separated into two categories based on their location: in-home placements or out-of-home placements. The three in-home placements included kinship care, in-home daycare, and parental care. The five out-of-home placements included private preschools, daycare centers, and programs offered by the school district. These programs were described in the section on childcare options in Chapter 1.

As shown in Table 2, 14 children had in-home placements and 18 children had out-of-home placements. The 32 different options of prekindergarten placements and how many children enrolled in each type of placement are presented in Table 2:

Table 2. Prekindergarten Placements for Children in the Study

Number of children	Types of placements
	<i>In-home placements</i>
2	Kinship care
6	In-home daycare
6	Parental care
	<i>Out-of-home placements</i>
7	Private preschool
2	Private daycare center that included preschool instruction
3	District Beginning Kindergarten
5	District preschool
1	District daycare

The next section will describe the classifications of parental need for child care. The participants in this study were divided into two groups based on their choice of relative or nonrelative care for their children.

Classifications of Parental Need for Child Care

The two groups were based on whether participants considered care for the child optional or necessary during the day. The first group consisted of participants who placed their children in relative care with preschool. Participants who had children placed in relative (parental or kinship) care considered preschool as an optional placement. The second group was participants who selected nonparental care for their children. Participants who needed a full day of child care included preschool when they were able to make these arrangements. The next section will define the placements for children

based on whether the participants placed the child in relative care with preschool or nonparental care.

Children in relative care with preschool. Participants who had dual placements of relative care and preschool viewed preschool as an optional enrichment activity for the child. This group included eight children who were in either parental or kinship care and who also participated in a preschool program. As a result of their dual placements, these eight children were in 16 placements. The participants who chose parental or kinship care for their child selected a preschool (private or district sponsored) as the second placement. None of the participants selected daycare as a second placement.

Table 3 shows the dual placements for the 8 children in which preschool was optional.

Table 3. Children in Relative Care With Preschool

Types of placements	Individual child placements							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Kinship care	X						X	
Parental care		X	X	X	X	X		X
Private preschool	X	X	X	X	X	X		
District sponsored preschool program							X	X

Children in nonrelative care. The second group included children who required a full day of care because of participant work schedules and who did not have kinship

care options. These participants placed their children in nonrelative care that was outside the home.

All but two of the children who were in nonrelative care attended preschool. As mentioned previously, the preschool programs described in this study ranged from 7.5 to 20 hours per week of student contact. Therefore, participants who placed children in preschool and needed care for a 40-hour work week had to find additional care for their children. In each circumstance, participants needed assistance with the logistics to transport children from preschool to their second out-of-the-home placement.

In Table 4, the 10 children who needed a full day of care and their placement options are listed.

Table 4. Children in Nonrelative Care

Types of placements	Individual child placements									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Private preschool		X								
Private daycare center that included preschool instruction							X	X		
In-home daycare	X	X	X			X			X	X
District Beginning Kindergarten	X			X		X				
District preschool			X	X	X					
District daycare					X					

Beginning Kindergarten was not offered at every elementary school building in the district. As a result the district provided bussing for all Beginning Kindergarten

students who were enrolled at a school that was not their neighborhood attendance area school. The district did not provide bussing for the preschool program. Therefore, participants who selected Beginning Kindergarten were able to receive district transportation to and from Beginning Kindergarten. One participant expressed her appreciation for the bussing services: “Transportation was a really big deal for us. We couldn’t have gone to Beginning Kindergarten without [bussing].”

In the next section, I will examine the themes that emerged from the participant responses.

Themes From Participant Responses

Three major themes emerged from coding of the participants’ responses. These themes included the parental desires for the prekindergarten year, the sources of information obtained by participants about prekindergarten programs, and the factors that influenced the decision-making process. It should be noted that the themes are not mutually exclusive; some of the themes overlap and participant examples may be used in more than one theme. In the next section, parental desires for the prekindergarten year are examined.

Parental Desires for the Prekindergarten Year

Parental desires were expressed in two areas: *positive transitions* and *social interaction*. The following section describes the parental desires for positive transitions.

Parental desire for positive transitions. Participants wanted the prekindergarten year to include or establish positive transitions for their child. Although the participants did not make the same choices for their children’s placements, the rationale behind their placement decisions was to make the transition to kindergarten successful. Participants described three types of transitions: (a) transition into a structured program, (b) transition in location before kindergarten, and (c) transition for parents.

Transition into a structured program. The first transition that participants wanted for their child was a preschool experience that had a structured school

environment, but with less contact time than a regular kindergarten program. Preschool programs offered 7.5 to 20 hours a week of contact time, which provided an intermediate step between no school attendance for 3-year-olds and the 32.5 hours of contact during the kindergarten year. Participants wanted a part-day program to help their child transition to the full-day kindergarten program. As one participant stated: “I wanted to start with the half-time program to get my child ready for the full days of kindergarten.”

Transition in location before kindergarten. The second transition the participants noted were transitions in placement locations for their children in the year before they started kindergarten. Many participants maintained the same placement for their child in the 4-year-old year that the child had for the 3-year-old year. This was done for two reasons: (a) to limit the child's transitions so that the child did not go from one placement as a 3 year old to another as a 4 year old and to a third placement as a kindergartener, and (b) participants considered the 3-year-old placement to be a quality environment for the child's 4-year-old or prekindergarten year. A participant who desired fewer transitions stated: “I felt like transitioning him right before kindergarten was not the best option. I wanted him to be with friends and [with] common faces.”

An exception was two participants who had different ideas about the transition for their child in the prekindergarten year. Although most participants wanted to limit their child's change in placement to one transition from preschool to kindergarten, two participants reported that their children were too attached to their 3-year-old placement, so they chose to change the placement in the prekindergarten year. This meant that their child had two transitions from preschool to kindergarten. Both participants cited situations involving their children being with the same caregiver or placement for multiple years, and they worried that going to kindergarten without experiencing change was not healthy for their children:

My child attended a program for two years and had the same teacher. If he would've gone [to this same placement for his] third year that would've been the same teacher for three years in a row. [I enrolled him in] a

different preschool because I wanted my child to get used to a different teacher before starting kindergarten.

This participant indicated that the change had nothing to do with her perception of the program or the teacher. The participant added that even though she changed placements, she remained friends with the former teacher.

Transition for parents. Participants also wanted a transitional year for themselves. Many participants who cared for their children or had their children in kinship care expressed the desire for their own transitional year. These participants talked about using the prekindergarten year to prepare themselves for having their children in school full time. Using the prekindergarten year as a transition year for participants was a common theme as summarized by this participant:

I'm sending [my child] to a place that is unfamiliar to me. I need to start to trust a new set of people with [my child]. It was a huge, huge adjustment for me. I think as a mom, I grieved for my child growing up.

Participants needed the transition year to ease their fears as parents regarding how their children would adjust at school. One worried participant summarized her fears as follows:

[At the start of school, I had to try hard to] not be worried and fearful and not ask too many questions of him. "Like do you know how to get to the bathroom?"... "Do you know not to leave the building?" [I was worried that about things like if] he runs away from the playground at recess time! What if he decides to walk home because we live so close to the school? All of those things are going through my mind, I had to really calm down and not be nervous and be excited [for my son's sake].

Parent desire for positive social interaction. Participants wanted their child's prekindergarten year to provide positive social interaction. The social interactions that participants wanted included positive interactions with age-like peer groups, new adult authority figures, and experiences in a physically structured school setting. The next section will examine these types of social interaction.

Age-alike peer group interactions. Participants had a desire for their child to be in a larger peer group with children of the same age. Wanting their child to be a member of a larger group of children was common for participants whose children were in

parental or kinship care. When children were in parental or kinship care, they were often the only child being cared for by the adult, and they were often with the same adults all the time. Participants talked about their children needing to experience other adults and children. The following observation captured this feeling of children being in a tiny bubble: “I really wanted her to make friends because she had been in this little bubble [of kinship care].”

When children are in an in-home daycare or a center-based daycare, they are with more children, but the children are not always of the same age. That was why participants also desired a prekindergarten setting that had children of the same age:

I wanted him to be with people of his own age and size, and in a class that was larger than the in-home daycare. At the in-home daycare, he was in a group of five children. I wanted him to be in a larger setting before he got into kindergarten where he would be one child in 20.

Participants wanted their child to have outside experiences with other children who were the same age. This was often accomplished by taking swimming lessons, being in a dance troupe, or engaging in other community-based activities. But during the prekindergarten year, participants also wanted this social interaction in an academic setting, which they felt preschool accomplished.

New adult authority figure interactions. Part of the social experience the participants wanted for their children included being able to be away from their parents and to take directions from other adults. Participants wanted to make sure that their child would accept new adults as authority figures. Participants wanted their child to be able to interact with new adults and referred to this as part of the socialization process for the prekindergarten year. Participants stated listening to the teacher as an important part of social interaction for their child but accepting new authority figures included the child as a rule follower and the prekindergarten year as a practice year for children as stated by this participant: “I wanted him to have to listen to the teacher, to follow the rules, to mind his manners; the main things the kids need for school.”

School setting interactions. Another parental desire for the prekindergarten year was that their child needed to experience the physical structure of a school. Participants discussed the importance of sitting at a desk or table, going out on the playground as a group, walking in a line of 20 to the lunch room, and being able to use public restrooms as schooling aspects that they wanted as kindergarten preparation their children:

[Socialization in a school setting means that] he has exposure to more students than just actually sitting at tables or desks and learning how to operate within the school walls. [It] is using urinals and public bathrooms and [being told] to follow the rules maintained by that school.

During a member check interview with this participant, further insight was gained. The participant stressed that using a public bathroom with a urinal was a big deal for her son. This was largely based on a lack of experience. She stated the following to summarize her son's experiences:

For our family, when our son was a toddler, he typically went to the bathroom with me [his mother] rather than my husband. Most often times, it was based on the sanitary conditions of the men's bathroom. About the time he started preschool, we realized we weren't sure if he knew how to use a urinal.

In review, parental desires were expressed in two areas: transitions and social interactions. Participants viewed the transitions in the prekindergarten year as an opportunity for their child to prepare for the length of the school day, as a chance to maintain or change the placement location depending on their child's needs, and as an opportunity for the participant themselves to adjust to having a child in school. Participants described the desire for social interaction as the opportunity for peer group interactions, accepting new authority figures, and an experience in a school setting.

The next two themes that emerged from participants were sources of information and influences on the decision-making process. In the next section, I will examine the sources of information.

Participant Sources of Information

This section will examine the sources of information that participants used to collect data about placement options for their child's prekindergarten year. The section

will begin with observations from participants about the lack of information from official sources about prekindergarten options and describe how some participants had built-in advantages and disadvantages. This section will also examine criteria for significant sources of information for participants. The final part of the section will examine the four major sources of information that participants collected: (a) friends and co-workers, (b) family members, (c) the child, and (d) the participants themselves. It should be noted that all four sources of information were persons, not newspapers, the Internet, or advertisements.

Lack of information from official sources. Participants reported that they relied on gathering information about prekindergarten programs from informal sources (co-workers, friends, relatives, and social groups) rather than from formal sources. Participants reported that they received little to no information about prekindergarten programs from what they considered to be formal or official sources. Participants thought that they would get information from their pediatrician, the school district, or some other official agency.

This finding was noted by the member check participants. One of the member check participants said:

When I read the part about lack of information, I thought, ‘That’s right, I don’t remember seeing anything come out. I know there was a person who thought the pediatrician should send out the stuff, but I would think the school district would want to advertise through TV channels, mailings, and any other sources they could think of [to get the word out about preschool being offered].

Lack of information about prekindergarten options. The lack of knowledge about prekindergarten programs included limited information on options, timelines, and requirements to enroll. Participants were surprised there was not more notification. One participant summarized her surprise as follows:

I cannot think of one resource that appeared to me through the mail or anything like that. I never got anything about what the laws are for the state [or] if children are required to have preschool, to be honest I still don't know...I had to go out kind to seek the information for myself and I was surprised by that. I know when you leave the hospital the joke is there you're on your own [laughing]. I'm not

sure how people really do [get information about prekindergarten programs] as far as getting to know what to do.

The registration process begins in March for the school year that starts the following August. This was a surprise to many participants, as they did not realize they needed to register their child that early. One participant reported that when she got around to calling in May, there were only two preschools that allowed her to be on a waiting list. Her selection process was very limited, and she actually enrolled in the preschool that called her back and said they had an opening. While she was happy with the preschool that she enrolled her child in, she readily admitted that her tardiness in the process limited her options.

Participants with built-in advantages. There were participants with built-in advantages or disadvantages when it came to finding information about prekindergarten programs. Participants who were new to the area found it especially difficult to locate sources of information. The participants who had a job in the school district or relatives who worked in the school district seemed to have better knowledge of programs offered by the district. This is evidenced by the fact that participants who worked in their district or had relatives in the district participated at a greater rate in the district-sponsored programs including Beginning Kindergarten, district sponsored preschool, and district-sponsored daycare. District employees had insider information about registration dates, registration materials, and programs available for prekindergarten children. One participant credited her sister-in-law for helping her to be prepared for getting her child into the district-sponsored preschool. Her sister-in-law was a preschool teacher for the district and informed her about paperwork and meeting the registration deadlines as described in this quote:

I knew when I got there what the requirements were to get into the program. I knew what documents would be required to get into the program through my sister-in-law. So I knew what to have in hand and that's how I found out when the registration day was, and I was down there bright and early.

District employees had inside information that gave them an advantage when it came to registering for district-sponsored prekindergarten programs. Some district employees had better inside information than others. In fact, the researcher was a district employee as well and learned about district programs through the interviews that he did not know about before. The researcher had a child who was in second grade at the time of the study and participated in the district-sponsored preschool program, but did not know the district also offered wraparound daycare services. Two member check participants who had a connection to the school district (in one family, the father was a teacher in the district, and in the other family, both parents worked for the district) agreed that there were options in the district that they did not know about. The member check participant from a family where both she and her husband were teachers in the district made this comment during her member check interview:

I did not know that the district offered wraparound care to go with preschool or beginning kindergarten. I teach at a new school this year and one day I came to work at 7:45 and there was a bus there. I went and asked what the bus was for and they told me it was to take the kids over to the school that offers beginning kindergarten. That's how I found out that the district offered wraparound care [for prekindergarten aged children].

Significant sources of information. Participants thought of other parents as sources of information. Participants used three criteria when considering if the source of information about a prekindergarten placement was important. Participants considered the following three criteria when selecting other parents as sources of information: (a) Parent/source was someone the parent trusted, (b) parent/source lived in the same school district which ensured the same experience, and (c) parent/source had a parenting style that the participant wanted to emulate.

Source was someone the participant trusted. Trust was very important for the participants. The participants referred to trust in two ways. Participants needed to trust the source and participants needed to trust the care provider. A participant who was

trusted as the source of information because she had older children demonstrates an example of trusting in the source. This type of trust is summarized in this quotation:

My coworker has two older daughters and she remarried and has a younger set of kids. I just had a lot of opportunities to listen to her talk about her daycare experiences.

Participants also needed to trust the care provider. Trust in the care provider occurred when the source of information had a long-term, positive relationship with the care provider. This type of trust is represented by the following quote:

[My coworker] was also mutual friends with our daycare provider so she had known her for years and years and years. It wasn't like a casual thing, so I felt like that recommendation was trustworthy.

Source lived in the same school district. In addition, participants needed their sources to live in the same school district so that the information they received from their source could be comparable. One mom summarized the lack of trust when a parent/source lived in a different school district:

I had friends that lived in [a neighboring school district] and they kept saying, 'you just take him to school and register them when they are four and they get into preschool.' But that is not how it worked in the Sgt. Pepper School District, so I really didn't listen to what they had to say.

Source had a parenting style that the participant wanted to emulate. An important characteristic that participants looked for in their source of information was someone who the participant respected and wanted to emulate in her parenting style. When participants saw children who had desirable qualities, the participant respected the children's parents and the decisions that the parents made. Participants also respected parents who were thorough decision makers. One of the school district employees mentioned that she trusted a fellow teacher's opinion more than other sources. The respect that this participant had for the source of information is represented in this quotation:

I respect her thoughts and values as far as parenting goes. I selected a [preschool] program because that's the program where my coworker had her child. [My coworker] researched everything. I figured if the program was good enough for her daughter it would be good enough for my son.

Types of people who provided information. Four types of people were sources for participants as they gathered information about prekindergarten programs: (a) friends and co-workers, (b) family members, (c) the child, and (d) the participants themselves. In the next section, I will examine why participants valued each source and how they got information from the source.

Friends and co-workers as a source. Friends and co-workers were the most commonly referred to source of information for participants. Included as friends were the current daycare provider or preschool teacher for the child. Recommendations for prekindergarten placements that came from friends and co-workers were received formally and informally. During the member check process, one participant identified the main reason she listened to her co-workers:

They have the same schedule and the same lifestyle that I do. If they can make it [a prekindergarten placement] work then I can too. My friends who don't work at the same place as I do have different schedules and they might make something work that I can't.

An example of a formal recommendation would be one that came from a daycare provider or preschool teacher. Participants referred a daycare providers or preschool teachers as individuals who not only knew what they wanted as parents but also knew what their child needed.

An informal recommendation was one that came to a participant as part of a natural conversation and not as an answer to a direct question. Participants referred to friends who gave them information through word of mouth at swimming lessons, gymnastic practices, and play times. The participants reported that this information was given informally as part of a natural conversation as stated by one participant:

I don't remember who I talked to [about preschool] because [my son] was in gymnastics and swimming lessons. But I would talk to parents [while we were waiting for the lesson to be over], and I found out what their children were into and then I went and checked it out.

Participants form friendships through their children. One of the participants participated in a mothers' group. Mothers' groups are formed as a social opportunity for

children of similar ages and mothers to get together for supportive socialization. Participants who were new to the area were more likely to participate in a mothers' group. One participant referenced that her mothers' group held a "preschool fair" at a local mall and invited different preschool organizations to have a booth set up where the mothers could talk to the people who ran each organization.

Family members as a source. Family members were sources of information for participants. Participants reported that they valued the opinions of their family members with regard to prekindergarten placements because of the following: (a) The family member had older children, (b) the family member cared deeply for the child, (c) the family member worked in the school district, and (d) the family was firmly established in the community.

An information source that had older children and worked in the school district was a valuable source to participants. Participants also valued family members as a source because they felt that the family member cared for their child as much as they did, which is summarized by this participant's reflection: "[I'm] really close with my aunt. She was kind of a single mom; her husband was always off at sea. She wants what's best for my son."

Families that are part of the community are also important. When selecting a private, religious-based preschool, one participant stated: "My husband's family had been [at the church] for like 27 years. We knew was it a good place for our son."

The child as a source. Participants used information that they received from their children in selection of a prekindergarten placement. Participants stated that they observed how other children reacted during an on-site visit to a preschool to determine if it was a place that was a good fit for their child. One participant elected to maintain a child's enrollment in a prekindergarten placement based on the child's interaction with the next year's teacher. The child got to know the prekindergarten teacher during the child's

3-year-old year when they had playtime and the prekindergarten teacher interacted with the child:

The main reason I stayed with it [three-year-old placement into the four-year-old year] was the main teacher he was going to be with was the prekindergarten teacher. She was amazing and I knew he would really excel and that he would enjoy her. And that he would enjoy the opportunity to be in the classroom.

The participant as a source. Participants referred to themselves and their intuition as a source of information. This was often the final and most important source the participant used in selection of a prekindergarten placement. Participants went on-site to see the prekindergarten placement first hand, talked to the director of the prekindergarten placement, and observed their child at the placement.

Participants described their unique qualifications to determine if their child would be successful in a prekindergarten placement. For participants, this was often the intuitive part of decision making:

There was an intuitive piece [in the selection of prekindergarten placement] like, when we were talking or interviewing our daycare provider if we would've felt something wasn't right and we couldn't have put our finger on it, we would have never gone with her [as a placement option].

During the member check process, two participants identified that the intuitive piece was important to their selection of a prekindergarten placement. One member check participant summarized her thoughts in this statement:

There are a lot of times that I use my intuition. There are some decisions that I can look at the facts or data and make a more data driven, rational type decision. We certainly prepared a list of criteria and used rational decision-making strategies, but in the end, I needed to go with my gut [on the placement decision].

The next section will examine how participants went about the decision-making process for choosing care for their child during the prekindergarten year. The section will discuss factors that influenced participants to select or not select a prekindergarten placement. Participants described the intuitive feeling in decision making being a deal breaker. Participants indicated if they did not have a good feeling about the

prekindergarten placement, they did not consider it. Decision making as a theme will be discussed further in the next section of this research.

Influences on the Decision-Making Process

The theme of influences on the parental decision-making process included a discussion of site selection as well as the factors in the decision-making process that influenced participants to select or not select a placement option. First, I will examine the general observations regarding selecting a placement.

Selecting a placement. When describing the decision-making process, participants referred to the fact that when they found a placement option that they liked, they stopped looking. As one participant stated:

[Our daycare was a] natural fit in that we really did like her [daycare provider] and her husband. We sort of put the other options aside, so we never really did interview anyone else. We pretty much interviewed her and no one else. We felt that she was a good fit for us and our family and we felt it would be a good fit for her.

Participants also reported that they stayed with the placement option for their 4-year-old year that their child had for the 3-year-old year. Participants reported that they were happy with the 3-year-old placement and that they stayed with the same placement for the prekindergarten year. Participants said they were happy with the placement and saw no need to change it. Participants cited reasons such as the daycare provider felt like family, the daycare was in a church, and they felt confident about their decision.

Factors in the decision-making process. Participants considered the factors of location, participant impression, logistics, preparation for kindergarten, hours, and cost when selecting a prekindergarten placement. In this section, the researcher will examine what each of these factors meant to participants.

Location. Location was important to participants because they started looking for prekindergarten placements near where they lived. When participants received a recommendation from a friend and then found out it was near their home, they were more

likely to pursue it as an option. Having the child in a placement near their home meant that it was easier for the participant to drop off and pick up the child.

Location as a criterion divided decision making into a dichotomy. Participants decided that the location either worked or did not work for their family. If the participants did not think a location would work, they did not look for ways to make the placement work. Participants considered location early in the decision-making process and it operated as the first tier in the participant decision-making process for prekindergarten placement.

Participant impression. Participants used their first impression about the prekindergarten placement as a deciding factor. Participants appreciated a clean, well-kept environment with friendly and responsive staff. Participants felt that it was important to be welcomed as a visitor to the prekindergarten placement.

The first impression was a reason participants gave to exclude considering a choice. Participants took note of drab, dark, and unclean environments. They also noted if the person who answered the phone was polite or rude. They were looking for a placement that met their needs and their child's needs, which was summarized by this observation from a participant who went on a site visit and excluded the preschool as an option for their child:

I remember not being impressed especially when we saw what they were eating for lunch. It was hot dogs and chips. I mean that's food I wouldn't even feed at my house and here they are eating at the preschool. And then I looked over at my daughter and she was hiding in the doorway. She just wasn't feeling it.

The participant's impression of a placement was a factor that divided decision-making into a dichotomy. Participants decided that they either liked or did not like a placement. If the participant did feel good about a placement, they no longer considered the placement. Unlike "location," the "participants as a source" was applied at different stages of the decision-making process. However, when applied, if participants said that they did not like a placement, they no longer considered it.

Logistics. Logistics referred to the ability to manage all the factors of getting a child to and from placements. Convenience was a factor for participants when managing the logistics of changing from one placement to another. Participants who worked full-time and were not able to leave work during the day were able to register their child for preschool only if they could manage the logistics of transportation for their child from one care setting to preschool and back again. Participants managed this transition with school-sponsored transportation, co-workers who could leave work, relatives who could help with transportation, and daycare providers who were willing to transport the child. One participant selected a preschool that was 30 minutes away knowing that she would be a member of a carpool and would only have to drive one third of the time. In the situation of the four children who were in a single placement, the participants reported their limitation being the inability to transport during the day. The member check participants confirmed that transportation during the day was a critical decision-making factor.

Participants excluded consideration of daycares when the length of the day did not meet their needs. Participants did not want full days, but wanted to have programming every day for part of the day.

Preparation for kindergarten. Participants wanted to prepare their child for kindergarten and selected prekindergarten placements based on this factor. Participants reported getting information from parents of older children as one of their decision-making factors. When parents of older children reported that their child attended a specific prekindergarten placement and then was successful in a kindergarten, this influenced participants to select the same prekindergarten placement.

One participant who used a Montessori preschool stated that she was assured her child would be successful in kindergarten: “[I was told that] nine times out of 10 that the Montessori kids would go into a traditional school and not have any problems.”

Hours of operation. Hours of operation were an important factor for participants as they wanted their child to have a significant experience in preschool. Participants wanted preschool to meet daily for about 3 hours. The district-sponsored preschool met for 4 hours a day, which was satisfactory to the participants who participated in the program. Anything less than 3 hours a day lacked purpose for the participants as noted by this participant's statement on the length of the preschool day:

Three hours was good and we could have done a little more. I don't think we would've done anything less than three hours because by the time I dropped my son off I would have had to turn around and get him and that would've been a waste of time.

Participants excluded daycares when the length of the day did not meet their needs. Participants did not want full days, but wanted to have programming every day for part of the day.

Cost of the program. Cost was important to participants. The fact that the district provided free preschool was cited as a great benefit to participants. The free preschool provided two benefits: It enabled them to save money on daycare costs and ensured that their child was receiving preparation for kindergarten. Cost was a reason the participants gave for not being able to select a site. Although participants wanted the best for their child, they did not consider certain programs because of high cost as noted in this observation: “[The biggest factor] I would say was financial. It was the biggest [factor]; it just seemed like a little much [money] for her.”

As stated in the earlier section on sources, participants did not consider some locations simply because they did not know enough about them. Many of the participants lacked information about the public preschool or had no knowledge it existed and only heard about it when their child went to kindergarten.

Conclusions

In summary, there were three major themes when participants selected a prekindergarten placement, which included the following: (a) parental desires for the

prekindergarten year, (b) sources of information the participants used to gather information about prekindergarten programs, and (c) factors that influenced the decision-making process. The themes overlapped and coincided with each other.

Two factors in the decision-making process that acted as a dichotomy were location and participant impression. When the participant decided against a placement due to location or the participant's impression of the placement, it was eliminated from future consideration. Participants might try to work around other decision-making factors but these were important factors that ended future consideration for a placement.

Participants used the prekindergarten year to prepare their child and themselves for kindergarten. They gathered information from four main sources, but considered their own intuition or opinion as the most important source because they had to feel confident about a placement to select it for their child in conjunction with the belief that they knew their child best and knew his/her needs. Participant decision-making was influenced by the placement's location, logistics, preparation for kindergarten, hours, cost, and first impression received by participants.

Chapter 5 will examine the interpretations and recommendations for this research.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the decision-making process participants used regarding the placement selection for their children during the prekindergarten year. The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section summarizes major themes that emerged from the research. The second section discusses the relation of this research to previous research studies. The third section discusses the limitations of the study. The fourth section identifies areas for further research. This chapter ends with a summary of the study.

Analysis of Major Themes

All interview participants wanted a preschool experience for their children during the prekindergarten year. Parental selections were based on parental desires for the transition to kindergarten, opportunities for social interactions, and practical factors that influenced the decision-making process.

Participants considered a variety of practical factors when selecting a prekindergarten placement. Although location was initially important to participants, a specific location was outside the control of the principal. Participant impressions were also important. Participants gained impressions from many areas including phone conversations, entering the school office, greetings in the hallway, and visiting the lunchroom. While first impressions are certainly important, it should be noted that all the impressions should be consistently positive.

Relation of This Research to Previous Research Studies

The next section provides a comparison of this research to previous research studies noting areas of agreement and disagreement with other research.

Agreement With Previous Research Studies

Several findings were supported by other researchers including novice decision making of participants, desire for structure in the prekindergarten year, parents' high

opinions of their children's care arrangements, and the aspiration that children would be prepared for kindergarten.

The participants' oldest child was in kindergarten at the time of the study. They were novice decision makers when they selected a prekindergarten program. They thought it was difficult to find information about prekindergarten programs. These findings were consistent with a study by Galotti and Tinkelenberg (2009) who stated that parents made educational decisions for their children only a few times in their lives and could not be considered experts.

All of the participants in the study were female. This was in agreement with many research studies cited in Chapter 1 in which the mother was more involved with the child and decisions about the child's care than the father (Bell, 2001; Russo, 1976; Zimmerman et al., 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Participants' desire for structured programs to prepare children for kindergarten was consistent with the research of Joesch et al., 2006; Kisker et al., 1991; Matthews et al., 2006; Matthews and Jang, 2008; and Mendez, 2010. Studies by these researchers also showed that parents preferred enrollment in structured care centers to prepare children for kindergarten.

Participants' satisfaction with their current childcare arrangements was one reason that participants continued placement for 3-year-old children into the prekindergarten year. Participants in studies by Cryer and Burchinal (1997) and Helburn (1995) had positive opinions of their daycare providers, which was shared by the participants in this study as a reason for continuing the placement. Importance of location was consistent with the research of Calvo (2007), Rodd and Milikan (1994), and Sonenstein and Wolf (1991). Calvo (2007) found that parents had a strong preference for schools closer to their home when given school choice options.

During the prekindergarten year, participants reported having concerns that their children were prepared for kindergarten. Parental concern is consistent with other research studies. Foot et al. (2000) and Pence and Goelman (1987) found that as children

approached the age for compulsory school, parents became concerned about specific aspects of kindergarten preparation. In these two studies, participants' views and choices of schools changed as they placed emphasis on preparation. Participants in this study repeatedly echoed this concern with the additional concern about ease of transition.

The importance of positive first impressions about the prekindergarten placement supported other research. Participants needed to feel that the placement was warm and caring (K.K. Rose, 2005) and that there was appropriate communication from preschool personnel about their child's day (Buffardi & Erdwins, 1997; Fuqua & Labensohn, 1986; Jang, 2008). Participants' desire that their children have a positive attitude about beginning school was demonstrated in previous research. O'Gorman (2008) reinforced the importance for a child to develop a positive view of school. According to O'Gorman's research, parents believed that a good prekindergarten year created a positive disposition toward learning in kindergarten and future grades.

All participants wanted their children to attend preschool, but because preschool was not a full day program, the participants who were working time needed flexibility to transport their children from daycare to preschool. Participants arranged transportation for their children through co-workers, school district bussing, relatives, and carpools. Emlen et al. (1999) also found that flexible employers and childcare providers who worked with families' situations had an impact on the childcare selected. Participants in Emlen's study were able to select a higher quality childcare if there was flexibility. In this study, the school district provided flexibility by offering wraparound daycare or transportation. Participants described family members and co-workers who helped with transportation to and from preschool.

Disagreement With Previous Research Studies

In addition to the studies that this study supported, there also were previous studies that this research did not support. Two areas of disagreement with literature were

(a) selecting a preschool based largely on academic concerns, and (b) multiple hindrances limiting access to preschool.

This researcher found that participants were more concerned about social issues (e.g., same-age peers, adjusting to authority figures, experiencing a school-like facility) than they were about an academic focus during the prekindergarten year. In this study one of 16 participants sought a program based on academic readiness for her children. Other participants felt confident of their children's academic preparedness for kindergarten, stating that they were able to prepare their children for school at home. This finding differed from researchers who stated that participants sought out programs based on academic components (Caldwell, 1997; Leibowitz et al., 1992). In fact, some research suggested that participants strongly believed that their children needed to enter school both academically and socially prepared for formal education (Dockett & Perry, 2002; Graue, 1993; Seng, 1994). Although participants in this study did speak about their concerns regarding social issues, there was little discussion on selecting a prekindergarten program based on giving their children an academic head start for elementary school. Participants identified the need for a structured learning environment, but it was not their highest priority, and in context was more about learning how structure works in a school setting than learning the content taught in the classroom. In contrast, the participants in O'Gorman's (2007) research spoke of a formal program that was academically driven.

Participants wanted their children to have a positive attitude toward school and viewed the prekindergarten year as the first step in that journey. The belief that a positive preschool experience gave a child a positive view of education was consistent with previous research (O'Gorman et al., 2004). Contrary to what O'Gorman found, however, participants did not discuss lifetime benefits they thought their children would gain from a quality preschool.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study was that only parents whose children attended public kindergarten were participants. Failure to include parents from private schools was a limitation because preschool selections may have been determined differently in private settings. As noted in the two interviews with participants who selected Montessori schools, the Montessori Schools had educational plans for 3-year-old through kindergarten years. Once parents selected a Montessori school, they may not have made further selections for their children's pre-kindergarten and kindergarten years.

The second limitation related to recruitment of participants. Principals at participating elementary schools selected parents to be interviewed. Use of purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2008; Hoepfl, 1997) resulted in participants who fit Calvo's (2007) description of "activist parents" who were highly involved in their children's education. Participants had prepared for the interviews by thinking about potential questions and answers ahead of time. This is a limitation because views of all parents of kindergarten children are not heard when only activist parents are interviewed. Hearing from nonactivist parents would enhance the study's generalizability.

The third and final limitation of the study was that all participants were female. While mothers talked about going to onsite visits and talking over the decisions with their husbands, there was little evidence to suggest that fathers were involved to any degree in the decision-making process. By including fathers, this study would be able to compare how fathers' beliefs regarding the three themes were similar or different from the mothers'.

Suggestions for Further Research

There are three suggestions for further research. The first suggestion is to address the limitation of the subject population to include participants with children in private kindergarten. By including parents who selected private kindergarten, the researcher would be able to compare the findings of this research in order to identify any similarities

and/or differences between public and private placements for the prekindergarten year. The second suggestion is to include quantitative data collection. A survey tool could be created using the indicators of the three themes of parental desires, sources of information, and factors in the decision-making process. This parental survey could then be part of the kindergarten registration process for the public school system as well as the private school system. More detailed information from parents would aid principals in communicating with parents whose oldest child is starting school.

The third suggestion for future studies would be to include participants whose opinions were not heard in this research. Future researchers could include more schools (public and private), incorporate a quantitative piece to the study, and include a broader parent group: fathers, parents whose younger child is starting school, and non-activist parents. Learning more from a broader parent group would help researchers and principals understand more about what is important to parents and how they make their decisions.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the decision-making process that parents use to make programming choices for their children's prekindergarten year. Sixteen mothers representing 18 children participated in this qualitative study.

Participants described the process of finding a preschool as important and intimidating. As inexperienced decision makers, they wanted to select a preschool to prepare their children for kindergarten. Participants relied on friends, relatives, co-workers, and caregivers to obtain information about preschools. They did not receive information from doctors' offices or the school district. Participants who had connections within the school district, because they either worked there or had a relative working there, had insider information about programs for prekindergarten children.

Participants wanted to give their children an opportunity to be successful in kindergarten. To this end, their decisions about the prekindergarten year focused on

providing positive transitions and social interactions. The transitions included experiences in a structured program, positive transitions in location, and positive transitions for the parents. Social interactions included opportunities with same-age peers, in groups of 8 to 10 children, with new authority figures in a school setting.

Participants were influenced by a number of factors that included impressions of the site, length and location of the program, and ability to provide transportation from one placement to the next. First impressions of a preschool and its employees were significant in participants' decision making. The cost of a program influenced participants' decision making in that participants excluded programs that were too expensive and made arrangements to enroll in free programs. Available transportation and no cost were the biggest aids in making prekindergarten programs work for some participants' situations.

Participants who worked full time faced the greatest obstacles in transporting their children to dual placements. Participants who were able to enroll their children in the school district's preschool program acknowledged that having free preschool provided by the school district made it easier to manage the dual placement daycare for their children.

For all participants in this research, the desire to prepare their children for kindergarten was important but selection of a preschool depended on individual abilities to afford tuition and provide transportation.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: A qualitative study of first time parents when selecting programming for prekindergarten.

Principal Investigator: Timothy Cronin

Research Team Contact: Tim Cronin, cell phone xxx-xxx-xxxx, home phone xxx-xxx-xxxx
Dr. Carolyn Wanat, phone xxx-xxx-xxxx

This consent form describes the research study to help you decide if you want to participate. This form provides important information about what you will be asked to do during the study, about the risks and benefits of the study, and about your rights as a research subject.

- If you have any questions about or do not understand something in this form, you should ask the research team for more information.
- You should discuss your participation with anyone you choose such as family or friends.
- Do not agree to participate in this study unless the research team has answered your questions and you decide that you want to be part of this study.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

This is a research study. We are inviting you to participate in this research study because your oldest child is currently in kindergarten.

The purpose of this research study is to examine how parents make decisions regarding how children will spend their time during the prekindergarten year. We already know about choices that parents make for the prekindergarten year, but less is known about the parents' decision-making process.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?

Approximately twenty-five people will take part in this study at the University of Iowa.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last between forty-five minutes and one hour.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

If you agree to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer questions about your child's prekindergarten year during an interview. The interview will be conducted in a private location.

The topics covered in the open ended interview include how the prekindergarten year went for your child, what choices you considered for your child's prekindergarten year, and how you made the final decision for the prekindergarten year. The interviews should last approximately one hour and will be audio recorded with your consent.

One aspect of this study involves asking participants to volunteer to review the findings of the research to check the validity as well as asking for further expansion on the findings of the researcher. This process is referred to as a “member check”. Member checks involve the researcher sharing results of the study with a few of the subjects to see if the researcher’s interpretations are valid. It is estimated that a member check will take two hours to read the findings and share your reactions and provide feedback. If you give permission, I may call you upon completion to review the findings of my research and ask you to provide feedback as part of a member check.

Yes No I give you permission to contact me regarding participating in the member check process.

AUDIO RECORDING

One aspect of this study involves making audio recordings of the interview. I will use the audio recordings to accurately transcribe your interview. If you do not wish to be recorded but are still willing to participate in the study, I will take notes of the interview by typing it into my computer. The audio recordings will be destroyed at the close of the study.

Yes No I give you permission to make audio recordings of me during this study.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?

There are no foreseeable risks to the participants for being in the study except for the possible emotional strain upon being asked to reflect on the decision-making process that they experienced in creating a programming plan for their child's prekindergarten year.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

I don't know if you will benefit from being in this study. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study because of increased understanding and knowledge of the parent's decision-making process for the prekindergarten year. The findings will be of interest to childcare providers, school officials, and public policy makers as the research will help to increase the understanding and improve the opportunities for the prekindergarten year.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

WHO IS FUNDING THIS STUDY?

The University and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?

We will keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, it is possible that other people such as those indicated below may become aware of your participation in this study and may inspect and copy records

pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

- federal government regulatory agencies,
- auditing departments of the University of Iowa, and
- the University of Iowa Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies)

To help protect your confidentiality, the interviews will be conducted in a private office. All documents and data will be stored in locked filing cabinets and on password protected computers. Pseudonyms will be used in place of names of people and schools. I will only collect the information needed to conduct the research. If I write a report or article about this study or share the study data set with others, we will do so in such a way that you cannot be directly identified.

IS BEING IN THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to be in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, you won't be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

We encourage you to ask questions. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact: Tim Cronin (xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxx-xxx-xxxx). If you experience a research-related injury, please contact Tim Cronin (xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxx-xxx-xxxx) or Dr. Carolyn Wanat (xxx-xxx-xxxx).

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research subject or about research related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Office, 105 Hardin Library for the Health Sciences, 600 Newton Rd, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242-1098, (319) 335-6564, or e-mail irb@uiowa.edu. General information about being a research subject can be found by clicking "Info for Public" on the Human Subjects Office web site, <http://research.uiowa.edu/hso>. To offer input about your experiences as a research subject or to speak to someone other than the research staff, call the Human Subjects Office at the number above.

This Informed Consent Document is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You are not waiving any legal rights by signing this Informed Consent Document. Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subject's Name (printed):

Do not sign this form if today's date is on or after \$STAMP_EXP_DT .

(Signature of Subject)

(Date)

STATEMENT OF PERSON WHO OBTAINED CONSENT

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject's legally authorized representative. It is my opinion that the subject understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

(Signature of Person who Obtained Consent)

(Date)

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Table B1. Interview Schedule

Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed. Please understand that I want to hear your story and that is hard for me. Therefore, if it looks like I want to say something and I don't, please understand that is me "self checking" my opinions so that I can hear your story.		
I will be using the term prekindergarten to describe the year before a child begins kindergarten. For most children this is when they are four or five.		
Open ended questions	Focused questions	Checklist questions
Can you tell me some background about your family?	Can you tell me the family in the house, ages, and your proximity to care giving relatives?	How many caregivers live in the home? What are the schedules of the caregivers?
What option (s) did you select for your child's prekindergarten year?	If they describe something less than full day: Was care provided by a parent, relative, care center, or babysitter?	Did you use the same option for prekindergarten that you used for your child when he/she was three years old?
Was your choice a full day or part day option?	If they use a term like preschool, daycare, or relative, ask them to define the term in their own words.	What combination of options did you use? Parent, Daycare, Babysitter, Relative, Other?
What other options did you consider for your child's prekindergarten year?	If answer is daycare, childcare, or preschool, they will be asked to define the term. What does the term daycare (childcare or preschool) mean to you?	Did you consider care from ...Preschool center? Child care center? Relatives? Neighbor? Nanny, babysitter? Other?

Table B1 (cont)

Open ended questions	Focused questions	Checklist questions
What, if anything, prevented you from considering other options?	As you reflect upon last year, were there factors that limited your ability to consider other options?	Were you limited by
	Was there a program (s) that you wanted for your child but were unable to make work?	Transportation?
		Cost?
		Hours?
		Location?
		(Lack of) Knowledge of options?
		Logistics?
What were the factors that influenced the selection of option (s) for your child's prekindergarten year?	How did you assimilate information regarding prekindergarten programming and make a final decision?	In making your decision, did you consider...hours of operation?
		location?
		cost?
		learning experiences in reading?
		learning experiences in math?
		learning experiences in social skills?
		warm and caring teachers?
		communication of the teachers?
		preparation for kindergarten?
		preparation for school?
		head start for school?

Table B1 (cont)

Open ended questions	Focused questions	Checklist questions
What were the sources of information that you used to gather information about prekindergarten?	Did you value some of the sources more than others?	Did you gather information from your.... Friends?
	Is so, what are were the characteristics of the sources that you valued more?	Neighbor?
		Relative?
		Website?
		TV/Radio?
		Going to visit?
		Telephone call?
		Other?
How would you describe your decision making?	When you are making a decision, do you do anything in particular?	Would you consider yourself to be rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, or spontaneous in making decisions?
What experiences did you want for your child in his/her prekindergarten year?	What do you feel your child should experience in prekindergarten?	Did you wish to have a social experience for your child?
	Which of these experiences was important to you?	Did you wish to have an emotional experience for your child?
		Did you wish to have a academic experience for your child?
		Did you wish for a safe environment for your child?
What makes up a quality prekindergarten experience?	What influences your thoughts on a quality experience?	Does your definition of a quality experience include any of the following: math, reading, social, caring environment, safety, prep for school?

Table B1 (cont)

Open ended questions	Focused questions	Checklist questions
How would you summarize your child's prekindergarten year?	What made this year successful or unsuccessful?	
	How did you measure success for the year?	
In your opinion, what type of options should be available to children for prekindergarten?	Should programs target a specific population or be universal for all children?	Should prekindergarten be...offered through public schools and free to all children?
		offered by private groups (care centers and churches)?
As you reflect, what would you have done differently in the decision-making process?	How would you gather information about your options?	Would you consider other options?
When your younger child is ready for the prekindergarten year, what will you do as you make a decision?		Will you be more likely to ask friends, site visit, read, internet?
What did you learn from this process as a first time parent of a prekindergarten child?		

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