Effects of a Preschool Parent Enrichment Programme
On Children and Their Parents

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Abstract

This study evaluated a preschool parent enrichment programme to assess if child and parent involvement in the programme facilitated the children's subsequent school adjustment. Also examined were the programme's effects on parent-child relationships. Participants were 56 Junior-Senior Kindergarten and Grade One students from one elementary school. Parent participants were 12 parents from the preschool parent enrichment programme, 6 parents whose children had attended other preschool programmes, and 6 parents whose children had remained at home prior to school. Five elementary teachers and both nursery school teachers from the parent enrichment programme also participated. Measures used included the Florida Key to assess children's inferred self-concept as learner and four subscales (relating, asserting, coping and investing), and interviews to assess parent and teacher perceptions. Findings indicated that there was little difference between parent and teacher perceptions about children who had attended a preschool programme. Both groups showed improved social, emotional, and behavioural skill development, together with increased self-esteem, and the ability to cope with separation from their parents. This enabled children to make the
transition from preschool to primary school more successful. Children from the parent enrichment programme were not readily identifiable in terms of the profile promulgated for disadvantaged children. The Florida Key showed a main effect for the coping subscale, indicating that children from the parent enrichment programme may show more confidence in their abilities, and seek assistance from teachers than children who had no preschool experience. The parent enrichment programme appeared to have the biggest impact on the parents. Parents reported improved relationships with their children, increased confidence and self-esteem, as well as improved parenting and general life skills. The implications for short-term gains for children from this type of programme are better readiness for school, more positive self-esteem, improved social behaviour, and a higher achievement motivation. The long-term gains for children are predicted to be fewer special education placements, less grade retention, and a lower dropout rate from school. The short-term gains for parents are better social support networks, greater self-confidence, better interactions with children, and improved parenting skills. The long-term benefits may be an increased motivation to continue education, gain employment, and less family breakdown and abuse.
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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

Introduction and Background

The Project Head Start programme was developed in the United States in the mid sixties in response to efforts to alleviate the effects of poverty on preschool children (Schiamberg, 1988). The programme generated considerable interest in preschool intervention programmes, and subsequent studies showed their benefits to disadvantaged children. Compared to their peers, disadvantaged children who experience programmes such as Head Start develop better skills and behavioural patterns (Hawk, 1967; Hunt, 1967; Weikart, Rogers, Adcock, & McClelland, 1971). However, as Bronfenbrenner (1974) said, the gains in skill development and behaviour could be negated unless efforts were made to offer parent support at the same time.

In Ontario, Canada in the late seventies, elementary teachers, social workers and public health nurses voiced concerns about the number of failure-prone children entering Grade One after their Kindergarten year. In response to the concerns
expressed by schools, health, and social service agencies, a report was commissioned to conduct a needs assessment of disadvantaged preschool children. The report found that these children appeared to come from families disadvantaged by geographic isolation, economic deprivation, and a lack of social support systems. A typical profile of these children often showed developmental delays in social, emotional, language, and fine motor skills, as well as low self-esteem, and behavioural problems. The lack of school readiness of these children was attributed to the effects of being disadvantaged, rather than their cognitive abilities (Jordan, 1978).

In response to the findings of the needs assessment and the U.S. preschool intervention literature, the Jordan report (1978) recommended that a preschool programme should be established for disadvantaged children in conjunction with an education programme for parents. As a result, the preschool parent enrichment programme was established within an elementary school in a neighbourhood with a high proportion of disadvantaged families to try to meet the needs of these families.
The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the preschool parent enrichment programme in terms of parent and teacher perceptions about how parent-child involvement in this programme affected children's adjustment to the school system. Also examined were the programme's effects on parent-child relationships. The programme was designed to encourage children's positive, constructive self-concept development and help parents to recognize their role in assisting their children through cooperation with the preschool programme.

The nursery school was licensed to permit 24 children to attend a half-day programme. This meant that 24 children could attend in the morning, and 24 different children could attend an afternoon programme regularly five half-days a week. Door-to-door van transportation was provided. Children were selected if the family qualified for social service benefits (see definition of terms), and if the family lived in the catchment area for the nursery school. Every parent was required to participate, at least once a month, by...
providing supervision for children on the van and assisting the nursery school staff in the classroom. This experience was intended not only to encourage parental commitment and involvement in the programme, but also was intended to provide opportunities for parents to practise playing and communicating with children. Parents could also observe skills modelled by trained staff.

The objectives of the programme were similar to other cooperative preschool programmes. In other words, the centre provided educational opportunities in an enriched environment, with parents involved in the classroom. However, there were additional services provided that made this programme different. At least one parent per family was required to attend weekly parent group meetings while his or her preschool child attended school. The group meeting aimed to alleviate social isolation through peer support, and to provide parents with training in life skills and parenting skills. The group coordinator also provided families with parental counselling and consultation on an individual basis and liaised with community agencies to supply essential services for children. For example,
children were screened within two weeks of starting the programme and developmentally delayed children who needed intervention were referred for therapies such as speech pathology for lack of age-appropriate speech. One other difference from other programmes was that the programme was located in a public school with close liaison encouraged between both systems. The programme was expected to influence both the child and parental transition from a preschool programme to the elementary school system.

One reason for the study was to gauge from the teachers' perspective if students embark on a school career with positive and realistic self-concepts with respect to learning in the school environment. The self-concept was examined by measuring the inferred self-concept as learner of students in Junior-Senior Kindergarten and Grade One using the Florida Key (Purkey, Cage, & Fahey, 1987). Teachers were interviewed to gain their perspective on interactions between themselves, students and parents. In addition, they were asked to comment on the impact of the preschool intervention model from their point of view. Parents were asked to complete a brief questionnaire
outlining demographics, information, and opinions pertinent to their children's preschool experience. Parents were invited to volunteer for interviews to provide more detailed accounts about their parent-child preschool involvement. Teachers and parents were interviewed to provide different sources of information about the effects of the preschool parent enrichment programme.

This research design combined a qualitative approach using the technique of triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with three sources of validity to study relationships, namely parent questionnaires, parent and teacher interviews, together with a quantitative method (Florida Key), to examine specific group differences.

Definition of Terms

Disadvantaged families in this context meant families who qualified for the preschool parent enrichment programme by qualifying for Regional Social Service Purchase of Service Agreements, based on a means test to establish levels of disposable income.
Academic achievement referred to student scholastic performances measured by good or poor grades in school.

Inferred self-concept was an external judgement of children's self-concept formulated by teacher observations, based on student behaviours, verbalization, and interactions.

Negative self-concept referred to a self-system which focuses on negative, destructive, or counterproductive beliefs, attitudes and opinions.

Nursery School Assistant Programme (NSAP) referred to a structured ten-week training course for parents. Nursery school teachers modelled skills and behaviours appropriate for young children and supervised skill practice for parents. The teachers also taught parents suitable curricula for use with preschoolers.

Parental involvement in preschool programmes was defined as one or both parents accepting responsibilities within the preschool setting, thus playing an integral role with the educational
environment. This commitment must be consistent although it could be continuous or intermittent. A parent was required to attend weekly parent training sessions.

**Positive self-concept** referred to a self-system which focused on positive, constructive, and realistic beliefs, attitudes, and opinions.

**Professed self-concept or self-report** was the aspect of self which an individual was willing, able to reveal, or tricked into disclosing about him or herself (Purkey, Cage, & Fahey, 1987).

**School success** in the context of this study referred to students' abilities to understand themselves, relate to others and cope effectively with school learning. This may or may not equate with academic achievement.

**Self-concept** was defined as "the totality of a complex, organized and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be
true about his or her personal existence" (Purkey, 1990, p. 6).

**Self-concept as learner** was defined as "that part of a person's global self ... all the attitudes, opinions and beliefs that a person holds to be true of his or her personal existence ... that relates most directly to school [learning]" (Purkey, Raheim, & Cage, 1983, p. 53).

**Theoretical Assumptions**

The theoretical framework for this thesis encompasses theories of the development (Erikson, 1963) or construction (Kelly, 1955) of the self. The philosophy of the preschool parent enrichment programme was based on Erikson's personality development theory. In Eriksonian terms, if children experience an inconsistent and unstable environment and perceive their relationships as confusing and irregular they fail to develop a basic sense of trust which is the foundation of their sense of identity (Erikson, 1963). The programme developed regular, consistent routines, and encouraged parents to develop predictable schedules.
at home also. Staff, policies, and programme design reflected opportunities that fostered independence and initiative in children. Parent involvement included skills training, modelling by staff and chances to practise in the nursery school to encourage them to facilitate curiosity, exploration, problem solving, and decision making by their children. The Erikson model suggested that these activities may assist children to develop a sense of trust, autonomy, and a willingness to initiate behaviours during their preschool years. The model appeared to provide a useful framework for the integration of continuing parent and child development within their social milieu, and a sound basis for children to develop a positive sense of self in relation to their world. According to Bannister and Fransella (1980), Kelly’s personal construct psychology "is an attempt to understand the way in which each of us experiences the world, to understand our ‘behaviour’ in terms of what it is designed to signify and to explore how we negotiate our realities with others" (Kelly, 1955 p.38). A construct was defined as any discrimination a person can make at either a verbal or non verbal level. In theoretical terms, this study
sought to comprehend whether parents who had been involved with their children in a specialized preschool programme construed their reality in ways different from equivalent families who had not had this experience. Parent reality was defined in terms of the parent-child relationship, parents' perception of their child's preparedness for school, and their perception of both their own and their child's relationship to the child's teacher. Similarly, the constructions of the teachers could change in regard to their liaison with the preschool programme and their subsequent involvement with children and their families.

According to Bannister and Fransella (1980), Kelly presented his personal construct theory as an alternative to other theories, such as that of Erikson (1963). In fact, there are many similarities between the theories of Erikson and Kelly. Although Kelly used the word person rather than self, and Erikson referred to the concept of identity formation, both theorists viewed self-concept as an evolving process rather than an entity. Erikson talked about identity formation as a "continuing process of progressive differentiations and crystallizations which expand self-awareness and
self-exploration" (Burns, 1982 p. 19), whereas Kelly's fundamental postulate said "a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which they anticipate events" (Kelly, 1955, p. 46). They both viewed these processes as ongoing rather than geared to an end-product. Erikson presented a psychosocial model in which he acknowledged that identity was formed as a function of the individual's interaction with others and the world. Kelly, on the other hand, focused on the construction process and the mutual interplay and impact of each individual's construing upon each other. In this sense construction was a social process. They were both interested in how individuals related to themselves, others and their world, but Erikson focused on formulation of a self-identity, whereas Kelly was more concerned with self-comprehension. As an extension of psychoanalytic theory, Erikson's model postulated that the process of identity formation was partly an unconscious one. Kelly also recognized that the process of construction had a level of unawareness embedded in the dynamics of making constructions between self, other and the world.
Self-concept theories have been criticized on the basis of difficulty of valid measure. Wylie (1979) in her comprehensive review of literature prior to 1960, was critical of self-concept studies on the grounds that a confusing range of self-referent constructs was inadequately defined and that studies lacked good methodology. Whereas there has been criticism based on methodological concerns, there has also been significant support for self-concept research. For example, today many researchers believe that self-concept is a fundamental component of human personality development (Chapman, 1988; Marsh, Byrne, & Shavelson, 1988; Purkey & Novak, 1984; Silvernail, 1987). Furthermore, it is generally accepted that self-concept is learned, dynamic and organized, and that self-concept develops from continual interaction with the environment (Purkey, 1990).

This study focused on the development of self-concept during the preschool years. This is the period during which, according to Erikson, the child needs to achieve a sense of trust, autonomy, and initiative. Kelly's personal construct theory provided a framework within which to comprehend how people compare
themselves to others, both in personal and professional relationships, particularly in the school environment.

The thesis is organized as follows. Chapter One introduces the problem and discusses the theoretical framework for the study. It also outlines the terminology used in this study. Chapter Two cites studies which relate to self-concept development and examines the value of interventionist programmes, parent education, sex differences, and teacher expectations that are influential environmental factors in self-concept development. Chapter Three outlines the methodology, the questions to be considered by the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the research, and a discussion of validity and study limitations. Terms are defined and the coding scheme for the interviews are discussed as well as the instrumentation. Chapter Four includes the results and preliminary discussion as the study focuses on research interviews. Chapter Five continues the discussion and concludes with study limitations, recommendations, and implications.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review cites studies that examine the value of preschool education in enhancing positive self-concept development. It also analyzes research that indicates that parent education may be a necessary factor to sustain children’s continuing positive self-development, particularly with disadvantaged families. Literature related to gender issues and teacher expectations is also discussed.

The Value of Preschool Education

Early childhood researchers agree that the first five years of life are crucial, and many theorists focused on the emergence of a sense of self as paramount (Cooley, 1902; Erikson, 1963; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Rogers, 1951; White, 1975). Given that the sense of self does not evolve in a vacuum, it is important to examine how the environment affects development, and how environmental influences function
either to enhance or inhibit the development of a positive self-concept. Providing experiences to stimulate children's curiosity and exploration at this early stage may initiate children's "sense of value and self-worth as a human being" (Purkey, 1970, p. 30). If for example, children lack situations to practise skills, or become involved in cooperative play they may be denied opportunities to evaluate themselves or be evaluated by others (Schiamberg, 1988). Children may develop negative self-concepts if they do not have feedback about their experiences in terms of competency and adequacy.

Early childhood programmes have study guides and curricula designs to encourage the development of positive self-concept (Barbe, Milone, Lucas, & Humphrey, 1980; Eliason & Jenkins, 1986; Spodek, Saracho, & Davis, 1987). Consequently, children who experienced a programme designed to enrich their environment, should be expected to have increased opportunities to develop a positive self-concept.

Negative self-concepts are not necessarily developed by children who do not have a preschool educative experience outside the home. On the
contrary, Purkey (1970) acknowledged that parents and the home environment contributed a vital role in self-development. The literature suggested, however, that in a less than ideal world where stable and consistent relationships in a warm, inviting atmosphere are not always reliably available, preschool education could offer an opportunity to enhance positive self-concept development (Lazar, Darlington, Murray, Royce, & Snipper, 1982; McCartney, 1984; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1986; White, 1985-86; Wright, 1983). In the best of circumstances then, preschool education may be beneficial for all children, and become particularly important when the home environment is less than optimal.

Since the early seventies, the benefits of preschool education for economically disadvantaged children have been documented well in the Head Start literature (Weikart, Epstein, Schweinhart, & Bond, 1978). The Head Start project was conceived to offer one year of preschool education to socioeconomically deprived children to allow them to enter elementary school on a more equitable basis with their advantaged counterparts. However, Haskins (1989), in a recent
review of studies on the efficacy of early childhood education, concluded that the immediate gains by children in terms of school performance, as measured by grade retention and special education, were gradually eroded as children proceed through public school. He questioned the large public investment in Head Start programmes over the long-term. Haskins' review ignored the long-term psychological gains which justify continued public expenditure. For example, studies by Berrueta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein, and Weikart (1984) indicated that Head Start participants showed long-term gains by having more positive achievement attitudes and self-worth in their higher grades. These students were more likely to enroll in postsecondary education, have reduced rates of delinquency, and lower incidence of pregnancy.

Lee, Brooks-Gunn, and Schnur (1988) evaluated the success of Head Start in comparison with other preschool programmes and no preschool and concluded that although children in Head Start projects made significant short-term changes, they remained behind their peers in terms of cognitive abilities after their one-year experience. The researchers acknowledged that
children may have made other unspecified gains, but there was no emphasis in their review on children's development of self-concept. As discussed earlier, positive self-concept development is important and therefore it should have been evaluated in a project review. Recipients of the Head Start projects may be children most likely to benefit from opportunities to develop positive self-concepts.

In their report on the lasting effects of early education on children from low-income families, Lazar et al. (1982) concluded that while children were less likely to repeat grades or require special education classes, their success rate in terms of scholastic gains was not significant over time. The researchers suggested, however, that future emphasis should not only be placed on evaluating the preschool programmes themselves but examining the mother-child interactions and public school policies in regard to disadvantaged children.

It was important to note that the research literature under discussion reflected the economic and social situation in the United States and therefore must be interpreted with caution when making
comparisons with Canadian families. However, Wright (1983) showed significant gains in intellectual and cognitive abilities, problem-solving styles and social competence among Canadian disadvantaged preschoolers when they were exposed to compensatory preschool education. She noted that although one year in such a programme encouraged considerable gains, two years appeared to be more effective in terms of social abilities as well as academic achievement. Again, the cognitive and social gains were emphasized, rather than psychological gains.

To summarize the evaluation of literature on preschool education for disadvantaged children, it appeared that social and cognitive gains were clearly present in the short-term. To sustain these gains it appeared that preschool education was a necessary but not sufficient condition. For long-term gains the literature suggested that preschool programming needed to be augmented with more parent-child involvement and greater emphasis on the transition from preschool to elementary school and the subsequent school relationship with disadvantaged families. Although researchers acknowledged the importance of positive
self-concept, they failed to reflect that importance in their reviews of preschool education for disadvantaged children. According to Clarke-Stewart and Fein (1983), evaluative research on preschool education is difficult because it is hard to separate and control all the variables. This should not deter researchers from developing new evaluative measures to review programmes from a broader perspective.

The Value of Parent Education

As stated earlier, it has been argued that positive effects on children who were disadvantaged by socioeconomic or emotional deprivation only persist if there are parallel improvements in children's families (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). A study by Portes and Dunham (1984) for their report on a consortium of preschool programmes looked at efforts to normalize the positive development of two-year-old children. The researchers found that positive development in the children correlated with training the mothers to improve their sociocognitive skills. Lazar et al. (1982) concluded that involvement in preschool education helped parents
develop more positive attitudes toward their children as learners in conjunction with improved achievement in the children themselves.

A British report by Tizard (1977) indicated that parents who lacked social, educative skills and lacked confidence in their own abilities were often reluctant to offer assistance in nursery school education. This unwillingness to help was often interpreted as disinterest by the school which served to further undermine parents' confidence in their ability to help their children. A study by Beveridge and Jerrams (1981) examined the effects of parental assistance on children's language skills. Parents were trained to help children at home, and in nursery school. It was found that the children's language development improved significantly and the parent participation improved the parent-teacher dialogue and parental attitudes toward the school.

The studies discussed indicate that parental involvement can influence child development, particularly in the areas of psychosocial, emotional, and language development. These results support the theoretical assumption that children did not make sense
of their world in isolation. Indeed, particularly in the early formative years the interaction of the child with a significant other, usually the mother, is a critical factor in self-concept formulation. Samuels (1977) provided a literature review relating child self-concept to child rearing and concluded that lack of parental attention, lack of affection, lack of consistent guidelines and discipline policies, together with family tensions had an adverse effect on children's self-concept. The discussion so far, indicated that parents have an important role in guiding children's development. Many parents need assistance in order to fulfill that role.

There was evidence to suggest that many current parent education programmes failed to meet the needs of disadvantaged families. Most programmes made provision to subsidize low-income families, but they failed to provide a method of transportation or a motivation for regular attendance and they assumed that parents have well-developed organizational skills to plan schedules. Sutton (1980) argued that traditional structured group study and discussion groups assumed that parents were articulate, proficient readers, capable of thinking
abstractly, and had well-developed social skills. With hard to reach families, this approach was shown to be inadequate. An expanded group discussion format, which included many life skill issues and involved peer support over a prolonged period of time, proved to be effective in assisting parents to gain greater competency in their parenting role and feel better about themselves as parents.

There is further evidence of the inadequacy of conventional parent education programmes for disadvantaged families obtained by Wolfe and Marion (1986). For example, they found a high failure rate in attendance for parent training programmes when the typical family profile presented a single female-headed household living on social support. The programmes offered were not always relevant to the needs of sole-support mothers. Often the issues and problems with children were different compared with two-parent families. The courses did not always make allowances for parents with limited resources in terms of time, money, and social-emotional support from other people. These mothers often felt alienated from other parents.
whose needs and circumstances were very different from their own.

The preschool parent enrichment programme under review in this study offered a model designed to meet the needs of not only children, but also the parents. The programme may answer the criticisms made by Sutton (1980) and Wolfe and Marion (1986) about existing parent education programmes and offered an alternative more in tune with the needs of disadvantaged families who needed additional support and advocacy services.

Positive Self-Concept as an Antecedent to School Success

The literature review thus far has established that self-concept is affected by experiences including preschool, and that preschool experiences may play a crucial role in formulating a positive self-concept. It was therefore not surprising that a positive correlation between self-concept and subsequent academic achievement has been shown (Beane & Lipka, 1984; Purkey, 1970; Wattenberg & Clifford, 1964). In a comprehensive review of studies that examined the
relation between self-concept and achievement in nursery and elementary schools, Samuels (1977) concluded that a positive self-concept enhanced academic achievement. The research reviewed suggested that children with positive self-concepts related better to other people and sought their approval to affirm themselves and their abilities, accepted responsibility for their potential as achievers, had confidence in their own abilities and showed a willingness to risk in new experiences. As Brookover (1967, cited in Purkey, 1970) declared, abilities are not of paramount importance in early school achievement, but rather, student attitudes govern children's achievement.

The significance of these findings from the perspective of this study was that they suggested school achievement may be affected by how students construed their reality in relation to themselves, others, and the classroom situation, rather than by abilities and intellectual factors. From a Kellyan perspective, if students had developed a positive repertoire of constructs, then they were more likely to succeed in school. A positive repertoire of constructs
meant that students had developed a wide and varied range of constructs which validated rather than invalidated their experiences. From an Eriksonian perspective, if students had developed a sense of trust in others and themselves, had been encouraged to take responsibilities and demonstrate autonomy, and had shown initiative through risk-taking and exploration they were more likely to continue these successful strategies in school.

The literature indicated that students who do not succeed in school unfortunately develop increasingly negative self-concepts as they progress through school with all the attendant social problems as well as the stigma of academic failure (Griffore & Bianchi, 1984; Harper, 1990; Purkey, 1970; Silvernail, 1987). These findings suggested that the school system in its present form not only failed to successfully assist underachieving students, but in some cases, may also have discouraged students from succeeding in school. When students perceived themselves as ineffectual learners they tended to give up easily and avoided new challenges (Covington, 1984). According to Harper (1990), this decline continued, correlated with the
length of experience in school unless students were encouraged to develop in the affective domain as well as the cognitive. They also confirmed another reason for endeavouring to have students enter the educational system with a positive self-concept.

Sex Differences

Extensive literature reviews indicated that there are sex differences in self-concept, or in school achievement (Burns, 1982; Purkey, 1970; Samuels, 1977). Studies suggested children are socialized to conform to sex-role stereotypes where male characteristics were more valued than females characteristics. There appeared to be a stronger relation between self-concept and achievement in males than in females, but the reasons for this relationship varied. Bledsoe (1967) argued that boys perceived the attainment tests as more important than girls. Burns (1982) suggested that some self-concept scales contained items more widely accepted by boys and that there may have also been a socialization factor. He also stated that boys in Western societies were socialized to value academic
progress, whereas girls were taught to focus on relationships. Flynn (1984) proposed that boys evaluated their performance more realistically than girls.

Several studies inferred that male underachievers in school were more vulnerable to evolve negative constructions in regard to their peers, teacher, and the classroom environment. In a study by Baum (1969, cited in Purkey, 1970), males were found to have more negative self-concepts than underachieving females. Good and Brophy (1972) found that teachers expressed concern for low-achieving females but rejected low-achieving males, and Burns (1982) suggested that the predominance of female teachers failed to give males sufficient access to male teacher models. He also stated that female teachers tended to reflect societal sex-role stereotypes and rejected males who were non-conforming to their stereotype. This view was shared by Samuels (1977).

The literature reviewed on sex differences indicates that underachieving males are less likely to ask for or receive assistance in school than females. The males appear to have a more negative view about
their lack of progress than females because they have been socialized to value themselves in terms of achievement; therefore they are reluctant to seek help because they see themselves as failures. The problem is compounded, as teachers appear less likely to offer help to underachieving males, particularly if the teachers are female. It seems that males are more vulnerable than females to develop negative concepts about themselves and the elementary school system.

Teacher Expectations

In a survey of many studies looking at teacher expectancy effects, Burns (1982) concluded that teachers have considerable influence in shaping children's self-concepts. Ultimately, children make their own constructions but teacher beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and behaviours are part of children's experience in shaping their reality. As Purkey (1970) noted, studies indicated that teachers need to understand themselves and have positive self-concepts before they can be accepting of and helpful to students. Teachers also need to provide students with
an atmosphere of success rather than failure. Purkey meant by this that teachers should encourage students in all endeavours rather than being limited to a preoccupation with achievement. Grades should not be the only criteria for a successful education; there should also be encouragement for the efforts of learning. In theoretical terms, students would be more likely to make positive constructions about their abilities and interactions in the classroom if the teacher focused on positive reinforcement rather than placing an emphasis on student shortcomings during the process of learning.

In a review of teacher expectations in the classroom, Good (1981) noted that the influence of teachers on student perceptions was more significant at the elementary level than at the secondary level. Moreover, the research indicated that the low achievers with the least adaptive capacity were the most vulnerable to wider variations in teaching behaviour as they progressed through the school. Good inferred a passivity model as a coping mechanism for low-achieving students to deal with the teaching style they encountered. He suggested a self-perpetuating cycle in
which students avoided seeking help and so developed poor skills and remained low achievers. As the students failed to elicit help, the teachers were reinforced to continue using a nonproductive teaching style; and so the cycle continues.

These observations have implications for this study. Children who embarked on school careers with negative self-concepts already established may be more likely to adopt the passivity model that Good suggested and become failures in school.

It is important to stress that the focus of this study was not on student academic achievement nor on success as measured by grades or performance. School success or achievement in this context refers to development of successful learning strategies or positive adaptation to an educational environment.

The literature review suggested that if children have opportunities to stimulate and enrich their environment during their early formative years they seem more likely to develop positive and useful constructs about themselves and their relationships with significant others. This background equips them to cope more successfully with school. This process
seems contingent on the commitment and cooperation of the most significant other, usually the mother. If children have mastered positive relationships with adults other than parents, they are more likely to make a smooth transition to involvement with a teacher. Studies by Good and Brophy (1972) and Good (1981) suggest that disadvantaged males with low self-concept may benefit most from enriched opportunities in their preschool years; conversely, disadvantaged males may be the most failure-prone without it.

Rationale

The literature is clear on the merits of preschool education. However, studies carried out, predominantly in the United States during the last two decades, have been concerned with cost-benefits in terms of effectiveness to justify public investment (Haskins, 1989). The educational merits have been evaluated in terms of social, physical and intellectual skills (Berrueta-Clement et al., 1984). The merits of evaluating a preschool education in terms of assessing children's psychological preparation for their
transition to school has not been addressed systematically. It is arguable that the larger and more fundamental educational issue is that children begin school with positive self-concepts and a set of metacognitive strategies to cope with school learning.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Overview

This section begins with a rationale for the methodology because a multimethod approach was used. The problem is stated as a series of research questions that were studied by both a qualitative and quantitative method. The sample selection is outlined and both the interview and the Florida Key checklist that were used as measures are discussed. Pilot testing these instruments is also included together with the method of data collection and recording. Information about the data processing and analyses of both statistical and qualitative components of the study are discussed. Finally limitations and methodological assumptions conclude this chapter.
Description of Research Methodology

The method used for this study was parent questionnaires, parent and teacher interviews, and a teacher-administered checklist as a measure of children's inferred self-concept as learners. This triangulation approach strengthened the contextual validity of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In using different sources of information it broadened the scope of the study, lessened the distortion of input from a small sample, and allowed for increased confidence in interpretation.

Children were not tested and interviewed directly for a number of reasons. A less intrusive method was chosen, given that social, emotional, and self-esteem issues were areas of concern in a group of children already identified as possibly disadvantaged. An observational measure based on actual classroom experience is grounded in real events and was more useful than tests administered under controlled but artificial conditions. This study was not concerned with academic achievement, rather with adjustment to
school, and so standard performance measures were inappropriate. Tests are often unstable in young children (Samuels, 1977), and educators expressed a lack of confidence in their use. The reasons for using an inferred measure instead of self-report with children under seven years old, are discussed later when the benefits of using the Florida Key are outlined (see Florida Key p. 42). Teachers' perceptions were important as they influenced the way in which teachers related to children and conversely influenced the children's responses. The parent's perceptions were a major contributor to the overall picture, given that the home environment could be a key factor in children's adjustment. Therefore a multidimensional approach generated a broader and richer picture than a unidimensional method.

Research Design

The fundamental qualitative questions that this study sought to answer were: From the perspective of the parents and teachers, did it make any difference to children's ability to cope with elementary school to
have experienced the preschool parent enrichment programme? Again, from the perspective of the parents and teachers, did it make any difference to parents’ ability to cope both with their children’s adjustment to school and to life in general?

These issues were assessed by interviews with parents whose children have been enrolled in the programme, interviews with their preschool teachers and subsequent elementary teachers.

The quantitative component of the study comprised measuring children’s inferred self-concept as learners using the Florida Key (see Florida Key, p. 42) and questionnaires administered to the parents.

Research Questions:

1. Were there differences in self-concept as learner, or the four factors which comprise the self-concept as learner, namely asserting oneself, relating to others, investing or willingness to risk, and coping academically, between children who have experienced different types of preschool?
2. Was there a difference in self-concept as learner between children who have experienced a preschool programme with parental involvement and those whose parents had no involvement?

3. Was the difference in children’s self-concept as learner dependent on the length of time they were enrolled in a preschool programme?

4. Were there sex differences in children’s self-concept as learners, or between the four factors: asserting, relating, investing, and coping?

**Selection of Subjects**

**Sample**

This study measured Junior-Senior Kindergarten and Grade One children in one school whose parents consented to participate in the study. This population represented an area or cluster sample for schools in a small town urban area. It was also a convenient sample, given that the school was a catchment area that was likely to represent the three levels of preschool type: children with no preschool or daycare experience,
preschool parent enrichment programme, and other preschool experience. In addition, participants would be eager to cooperate in such a study, having already expressed an interest in it.

Instrumentation

Interviews

The parent interview was designed as structured, nondirective questions, as previous experience has demonstrated that most parents from this programme needed some guidance in how to express their opinion. The questions needed to prevent responses influenced by the interviewer. For example, in order to generate comments about children’s preschool experiences, Question One asked: "Tell me about your child’s experience in nursery school" (for parent interview guidelines, see Appendix A).

This open-ended question was designed to encourage any response. In order to ensure that specific areas of interest for this study were covered and parents had permission to make negative comments, they were also
asked: "In what ways, if any, did your child change?; In your opinion, what benefits were there for him/her?; In your opinion, what drawbacks were there for him/her?" The parent interview guide was written for use with both preschool programme groups. For the interview with parents in the children at home group, in Questions 1-6, the phrase "nursery school" was replaced by "your child's experiences before going to school." In Questions 9-11, the word "programme" was changed to "your child's experience prior to school." This was to ensure that all three group interviews followed the same guidelines.

The only other verbal input by the interviewer was to probe for further clarification by comments such as, "Can you tell me more about that," or further commentary was encouraged by the interviewer repeating the last phrase. If the interviewees asked for clarification about questions, the standard response was "whatever that phrase means to you," which ensured that comments reflected the interviewee's perspective rather than the interviewer's.

The structured interview could have meant repetition of some comments. However, if observations
were given which meant subsequent questions had already been answered, then a prefacing remark was made to acknowledge existing commentary. A check was then made to see if more information could be added to give a more complete picture.

The elementary and nursery school teacher interview guides were structured in a similar way to the parent guide to keep the format as standard as possible (see Appendix B and C).

Sequencing effects were minimized by conducting the interviews after teachers had completed the Florida Key checklists.

Florida Key

As described previously, Wylie (1979) cautioned against indiscriminate use of self-concept measurement tools without revision and retesting on the grounds of poor reliability and validity. Subsequently, selection of appropriate tools was made with caution. A major factor considered was the issue of inferred self-concept versus professed or self-report.
Samuels (1977) reviewed a number of studies using both methods and concluded that inferred self-concept measurement had greater validity for young children given the verbal and written skill immaturity evidenced in children below the age of seven. In addition, Burns (1982) was critical of self-report as reliant on individual awareness, adequacy of symbols for expression, willingness to cooperate, social expectancy, individual feelings of personal adequacy, and concerns over coercion.

There is evidence to support the view that individuals do not behave independently of how they perceive themselves, and that observation of behaviour provides valuable information to alert teachers as to how students feel about themselves (Borowitz, Hirsch, & Costello, 1970; La Benne, 1968). This is particularly useful for young children whose repertoire of communication skills may be limited. The literature reviewed suggested that for young children an inferred self-concept measure was preferable to self-report.

The Florida Key is an instrument used to measure the inferred self-concept as learner (see Appendix D). It was developed in Florida from teachers' observations
of student behavioural characteristics which they believed identified students with positive, realistic self-concept as learners (Purkey, Cage, & Graves, 1973). It comprises a 23-item questionnaire which is rated by the teacher on a 0-5 point scale when a teacher-student relationship had been established for a minimum of 6 weeks. Its advantages are that it is simple and quick to administer without special skill or training. Teachers not only obtain an overall score of students' self-concept as learner, but also the four factors of the Key — relating, asserting, investing, and coping — can be scored and identified independently, to pinpoint specific aspects of self-concept as learner which could be enhanced.

The main disadvantage is that the Florida Key is primarily designed to measure inferred self-concept as learner in relation to school achievement in terms of specific academic content areas of learning, for example, reading or math acquisition. It has been used in this study with a broader interpretation. School achievement at the Junior-Senior Kindergarten and Grade One level is viewed as the students gaining successful mastery of the strategies necessary to succeed in
school. In other words, achievement in students in early grades is viewed in terms of acquisition of the skills of learning rather than the mastery of specific subject areas. Therefore caution must be shown in interpretation of results. The emphasis on process rather than on content, means that children identified as having low self-concept as learners could be interpreted as failure to cope with school work tasks unrelated to their own experiences.

The Florida Key is validated for use with students from Grade One through Six. However, Clawson and Paterno (1987) used this measure successfully for Kindergarten and Grade One children in their investigation of reading achievement by sex. They selected the Florida Key for its better reliability, validity, and clarity for interpretation, in comparison with other measures. Given the lack of availability of an appropriate tool for Junior-Senior Kindergarten children in this area of self-concept study, the Key was used with caution.

For the purpose of this study the Florida Key was used as a more objective systematic method for teachers to examine their intuitive feelings about their
students' self-concept and to offer an alternative method to examine students' ability to adjust to school. The data collected were viewed only as a useful adjunct to the qualitative research.

Several studies established an index of reliability of 0.84 through analyses of variance procedures. Coefficients of reliability using split-halves procedure ranged from 0.62 to 0.92. In 1979, after surveying 47 images of the Key, slight wording modifications were made. The revised instrument was used in an extensive Australian study with an index of reliability of 0.86 which compares favourably with the original North American version (Fahey, 1983). With Cronbach's alphas, 0.90 for the total test and the alphas ranging from 0.81 to 0.61 on the four factors within the Key, the estimates show that the coefficients are appropriate to show reliability for the scale which infers self-concept as learner. The revised version (Purkey, Cage, & Fahey, 1987) used in this study has been the preferred instrument in several studies during the last decade allowing increased confidence in its reliability (Clawson & Paterno, 1987; Harper, 1990; Weeden, 1984).
Pilot Testing

Administration of the Florida Key was explained to the five teachers participating in the study. They were then asked to complete checklists on two imaginary children and describe their scoring procedure. This allowed the researcher to verify that the administration procedures had been correctly interpreted.

The interview guides were tested on three families who were not part of the study but matched the group criteria to make sure that the format made sense and tested the research questions to be asked in this study. Pilot interviews with parents were tape recorded, and the parents found this technique threatening and inhibiting. Therefore, handwritten notes were the preferred method for recording subsequent interviews.

Data Collection and Recording

Questionnaires with consent forms were distributed to all 107 Junior, and Senior Kindergarten and Grade
One children in an elementary school. This number included 20 children who had attended the nursery school-parent enrichment located within the school. Fifty six questionnaires were returned, indicating a 52% overall return rate, which is higher than the average 40% return rate described earlier. There was a 100% return rate for children from the parent enrichment programme, which substantiated the earlier prediction that families with a vested interest in the study would be more likely to respond.

Questionnaires were returned on 20 children from the preschool parent enrichment programme. These forms represented 18 families because two families had enrolled two children in the programme. Twelve of these 18 families offered to be interviewed. Seventeen parents who had not been in the programme offered to be interviewed. Ten were from other preschool programmes, and seven from parents whose children had remained at home during their early years.

All 12 parent enrichment programme parents were interviewed and six parents from each of the other two groups were selected to be a comparison group by as close a sex match as possible. The at home group
comprised four females, two males, and the other preschool group was three females, three males. All interviewees were given the option of being interviewed at home, school, or another place of their choice, and they all chose to be interviewed in their homes. All interviews were conducted after the teachers had completed the Florida Key checklists to avoid sequencing effects as described earlier.

The five teachers were asked to complete Florida Key checklists on the participating children in their class after the researcher verified that they understood correct administration procedures (see Pilot Testing p. 46). Teachers only had the test information that was available on the form. They were naive to the subscales and scoring methods (see Appendix D). They were given one week to complete the checklists and it was suggested that they chose times away from the classroom when they could concentrate on their task without distractions. When the forms were collected, three teachers indicated that they had been completed in the evenings, and two teachers said before morning school. The children's names were written on the forms by the researcher to assist the teachers and avoid
errors of testing incorrect subjects. One hundred and seven checklists were administered with 37 completed by the two Grade One teachers, 38 by the Senior Kindergarten teacher, and 32 by the Junior Kindergarten teacher.

Data Processing and Analysis - Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using a multivariate analysis of variance design with alpha at 0.01 level of significance, because of the multiple comparisons. The predictor variables between subjects were sex, type of preschool experience and the length of time in preschool. The dependent within subject variables were the overall self-concept as learner score as measured by the Florida Key, and four subscales, namely asserting, coping, investing, and relating.

Data Processing and Analysis - Qualitative

This study was predominantly a qualitative one relying on open-ended interviews with teachers and parents. In order to construct some useful information
from the data collected, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) constant comparative method was adopted. This method was first described by Glaser and Strauss (1967, cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to provide a systematic way to ground theory. This method allows researchers to organize and systematize common elements in responses and provide an objective report about subjective data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) used the same first two stages to systematically process data. In essence the process involves the following. In the first stage the responses were divided into units of information, with every new piece of information being compared to existing information to identify different units of information. This process Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as "unitizing" (p. 344). The second stage involves grouping theses units into categories. In this stage any new information was checked, and if necessary, new categories were generated. The details of the two-stage process are described in the coding scheme.
Coding Scheme for Interviews

The coding scheme for this study was based on the constant comparative method by Lincoln and Guba (1985) previously described (qualitative data processing). The first stage involved reading an interview. The handwritten notes had subsequently been typed to enable another rater to check the coding. No editorial changes were made to alter the raw data. Every piece of separate information was recorded on a card. This process identified different units of information.

In the second stage, each unit related to similar content was grouped together to form a category. A category could consist of one unit if it did not link to another unit. A set of categories was developed for each of the four areas of questions within the interview. The four areas are described at the end of the coding process.

Three parent interviews were content coded using the described method. Every time a new category was created, all previous units were reexamined to confirm their original coding or change it. A second rater
independently coded the same three interviews. There was general agreement for the categorization scheme, although some minor revision was made to the number of categories. In other words, a rigorous three-step process was followed. Categories of information were developed, they were checked by an independent source, and they were reexamined when new information did not fit existing categories.

The parent interviews were designed to elicit parents' perceptions in four general areas: (1) changes in the child during the preschool years as noted by the parent (Questions 1-6), (2) parent perceptions of preschool experiences either in an organized programme or at home (Questions 1-11), (3) the perceived impact of the preschool experience on the parent (Questions 9-11) and (4) comments related to both the parents' recollection of their own school experience and their observation of their child's elementary school experience (Questions 12-15). There is an overlap in the questions related to the first two areas, to enable parents to make general comments about preschool experiences, as well as specific remarks about their children. The structured nature of the interview
provides neutral probes designed to encourage interviewees to consider all aspects of their involvement with their child during the first few years.

The remaining 21 parent interviews were coded using the method described. New categories resulted in all interviews being reviewed. This lengthy and painstaking process was designed to reduce subjective interpretation of responses and avoid missing any comments. Categories used in each question area are presented in Table 1 (see p. 55). Descriptors for the categories are listed with examples taken from actual interviews in Appendix E.

Reliability of Interview Coding

A third rater independently rated 11 interviews. Each of the five sets of interviews were shuffled and spread out face down. The rater selected a one third sample from each set for verification. This sample size was in accord with accepted practice (Covell & Abramovitch, 1987). The interviews that were verified were as follows: 4 of the 12 enrichment programme
Table 1
Categories of Information Within the Four Areas Comprising the Parent Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent perception of child changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less self-control; more socialized; more control of behaviour; cope with separation; increased self-confidence; improved skill development; increased negative behaviour; missed socialization with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Note:</strong> The table is organized to reflect the categories of information within the four areas comprising the parent interview. Each category is listed with some of the specific items or aspects that fall under each category. The information is structured to provide a comprehensive view of the areas of interest, including parent perceptions of child changes, preschool experiences, the impact of preschool on the child, and perceptions about school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
parents, 2 of the 6 parents from other preschool programmes, 2 of the 6 at home parents, 2 of the 5 elementary teachers, and 1 of the 2 nursery school teachers. The reliabilities were derived from the number of category agreements divided by the total number of categories, and multiplied by one hundred to give reliability in percentages. For parent perception of child changes, the intercoder agreement was 95%, parent perception of preschool experiences 83%, parent perception of the impact of their child’s preschool experience on themselves 93%, parent perception of school 91%.

As previously stated, parents were interviewed in their own homes using the structured interview guideline to assist them to share their thoughts and comments. It should be reiterated that as previously discussed, the interview was designed for parents to offer unsolicited comments within neutral guidelines. For example, parents were asked about the benefits and drawbacks of their children’s experiences in school or at home, and these questions may or may not generate comments about behaviour. A crucial aspect of the study from a Kellyan perspective was to gain some
insight into differences of how people construct their reality, and therefore it was necessary that parents had the freedom to offer ideas about what was important to them in terms of evaluating their children's experiences, without leading questions. It should be noted that examples quoted from actual interviews contain formal language which is not usually associated with the general public, particularly families who may qualify for the enrichment model. This demonstrates that parents incorporated language that they learned through the programme into their routine vocabulary. They were encouraged to add any information that was not covered by the questions (see Appendix A).

Limitations

Administration of the Florida Key as a measure of children's self-concept as learner was a numeric approach within the multimethod design of this study. According to Brewer and Hunter (1989), results from different methods of data collection may reduce the methodological bias.
External Validity

This study was an examination of past events to study associative relationships. As such it was an ex post facto design with limitations on causal statements. The independent variables were not manipulated and therefore there was a lack of control of the variables. Sample selection was confined to Junior-Senior Kindergarten and Grade One in the school in which the model programme was located in order to study the transition of children and their families changing from one system to another. Therefore, the generalizability of this sample to a wider population was limited. Individual students were not randomly assigned but selected based on informed consent to participate. Teachers were allowed to practise completion of the Florida Key checklist in a pilot test supervised by the researcher to minimize the threat to external validity posed by incorrect administration (see Pilot Testing).
Internal validity

Children in Grade One would have been influenced by nearly three years of learning and experiences from both the home and school environment through the normal maturation process. As the gap widened between the student preschool experience and the number of years in school the possibility of intervening variables confounding the effects is increased. These variables include family breakdown, family constellation changes, health issues, family mobility, peer pressure, and school experiences.

According to Wright (1983), disadvantaged families are more likely to experience these variables; therefore, children from these families may be more vulnerable to such confounding effects. Historical effects were not a factor as the study used a single measure. Testing should not have been a threat to children as the instrument required an inferred measure by the teacher. Teachers may have known or recalled which children entered school from the preschool parent enrichment programme, which could have influenced their perception of children's self-concept as learner. In
order to minimize attention focused on this specific group of children, teachers were requested to complete the Florida Key checklists prior to teacher interviews. There was a threat of teacher bias, but examining the issue of teacher perceptions was addressed in the qualitative component of the study.

The Florida Key is an instrument which has documented reliability and validity, and has been used in a number of studies during the past 17 years (details can be found in the Instrumentation section). Every effort was made to include all Junior-Senior Kindergarten and Grade One children for evaluation. Any children excluded from the study was because of parental refusal to participate in the study. Equivalency of groups could not be assured but group selection was contingent on demographic information received from families. A single measure eliminated experimental mortality as a threat to internal validity. Experimenter bias was minimized as the teachers completed the inferred self-concept measure in the absence of the researcher and with no knowledge of scoring procedures. The researcher subsequently scored the tests without observation of the students. This
double-blind procedure helped to reduce contamination as the teachers were naive to the self-concept factors and the researcher scored the completed checklists independently. Demographic information was obtained independently.

Qualitative Component

Parents needed to complete a brief questionnaire in order to group students according to predictor variables. In addition, an attitude scale also elicited their opinions. According to Best and Kahn (1986), the return rate of questionnaires is often less than 40% unless the respondents have a vested interest in the research. In this study, many families were interested in the outcome, particularly families who had been associated with specialized parent enrichment programmes, and therefore the 52% return rate reflected the expectation of a higher rate of return.

Given the target population, literacy skills could have influenced the return rate for questionnaires. Therefore parents were encouraged to complete questionnaires as they collected children from school
in the Junior-Senior Kindergarten grades to improve the return rate. All the questionnaires were distributed and collected by the teachers. The researcher subsequently acted on the consensual data. The questionnaire was short, simple and factual with a Likert-type scale for opinions and provision for open comments (see Appendix F).

There were several limitations in terms of reactive measurements effects (Webb, Schwartz, & Secrest, 1966, cited in Brewer & Hunter, 1989). The Hawthorne effect may have induced changes in teacher/student interactions and perceptions because of scrutiny caused by involvement in the study. There may have been measurement-induced changes if teachers reexamined their perceptions and responses to children as a result of being sensitized to issues which may have influenced children's ability to respond to the school system.

There were possible interviewer effects as the researcher-interviewer was previously the programme coordinator who worked with families registered in the programme and liaised with the elementary school teachers. Although the researcher-interviewer bias may
have affected parents' and teachers' reactions and the study's objectivity, there were several advantages to having an interviewer known to participants. The researcher had complete familiarity with all aspects of the preschool parent enrichment programme and was also an experienced field interviewer which could have enhanced the quality of the interviews with both parents and teachers. The communication may have been more open as the interviewer had already established a working relationship with the interviewees. A bond of trust previously had been created as parents were used to frank, non-judgemental discussions in a group format, and also to personal interviews in their own homes. If they felt threatened or uncomfortable, they would have been unlikely to volunteer to participate in the study.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION

Overview

As this study used a multimethod design, for greater clarity the quantitative and qualitative results will be presented separately. The statistical analysis of the Florida Key data will be outlined, followed by more detailed analyses and discussion of the parent, teacher, and nursery school teacher interviews. In spite of the high intercoder reliability (see Qualitative Data Processing) the imprecise nature of coded interviews warrants the inclusion of interview examples to substantiate the findings. Preliminary interpretation and discussion are justified in this chapter to put the results into a contextual framework. Chapter Four concludes with a summary of the results to connect the wealth of data provided by the interviews.

Analysis of the Florida Key Checklist

An initial examination of the data indicated that the number of subjects who had attended the preschool
parent enrichment programme for more than one year was too small for the length of time in a preschool programme to be used as a predictor variable. In addition, the variable of no preschool experience was confounded with time in nursery school; therefore, the length of time in preschool was dropped as a predictor variable. Mean scores on the Florida Key by preschool type are presented in Table 2 (see p. 66).

Separate two-way ANOVAS (gender by preschool type) were performed on the overall self-concept as learner and the four separate factors (subscales) of asserting, coping, investing, and relating. The level of significance used was 0.01 because of multiple comparisons.

There were no main effects or interactions involving sex (all Fs <1). There was no effect of the type of preschool experience on overall self-concept as learner, or the subscales on asserting, investing, or relating.

A main effect of the type of preschool experience was obtained on the subscale of coping (F (1, 50) = 5.19, p < 0.01. A t test of differences among means (critical difference = 0.31) showed that the main
Table 2
Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for the Florida Key Self-Concept as Learner, and its Subscales, on Children's Preschool Experience; Parent Enrichment Model (1), Other Preschool Programmes (2), Home Preschool (3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Florida Keys With Subscales</th>
<th>1 (n=20)</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>2 (n=14)</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>3 (n=22)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall self-concept as learner</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asserting</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping</td>
<td>2.45*</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significance at <=0.01. \[F(1, 50) = 5.19\]
effect was accounted for by a significant difference only between the preschool parent enrichment programme and at home preschool experience.

The main effect of coping indicates that students who have participated in the preschool parent enrichment model may be better able to cope with school. According to Purkey, Cage, and Fahey (1987) high scores on coping are reflected in children showing more confidence, pride, interest, and involvement in their school work.

Analysis of Parent Interviews

It should be noted that the percentage of parent responses presented in Figures 1 to 4 was preschool parent enrichment model (n=12), other preschool programmes (n=6), and at home preschool experience (n=6). These small sample sizes meant that any inferences should be treated with caution.

For the sake of brevity, the preschool parent enrichment programme will be referred to as the parent enrichment model in the results and discussion.
Parent Perception of Child Changes (see Figure 1)

Self-Centred, Socialization, and Separation From Parents

Parents of children in both the preschool parent enrichment model and other preschool programmes commented on the experience giving their children opportunities to be less self-centred, more socialized to interact with their peers, and better able to cope with separation from them. There was little difference between the preschool parent enrichment model (75%) and other nursery schools or daycare (83%) for less self-centred behaviour, and the ability to cope with separation (model, 92%; other programmes, 83%). All parents interviewed from any preschool programmes agreed that their children demonstrated an increased ability to socialize with their peers. Parents made comments such as, "He has changed socially; Before he did not like to communicate with others, there was a barrier between him and other people." The importance of early social experiences is illustrated in this study. The parents recognize the value of social
Parent Perceptions of Child Changes

Figure 1. Parent Perceptions of Child Changes.
interactions and the effect in helping their children develop trust and relationships with other people. Although both groups with preschool experience agreed that programme involvement had given their children opportunities to socialize, some parents in the enrichment model said that the programme provided their children with their only chance to be with other people, especially their peer group, as illustrated by this poignant example: "He learned to play by himself and others and accept being with people because he was an only child alone with me, and I was alone without anybody around." A similar observation could be made about children learning to separate from parents.

Both preschool groups viewed nursery school as helpful in assisting children to leave their parents for a period of time, but the enrichment model parents viewed the involvement as essential. Two examples are: "They (the staff), helped us separate comfortably, our bonding is close but not suffocating. Before we were like one person just bonded together, and he couldn't manage on his own"; "He couldn't have accepted school without it (enrichment model), he was soft and shy and would have been lost if he'd gone from me to a big
group of children." The group who stayed at home gave no indication that their children became less focused on themselves which is not unexpected given that the majority of parents in this group (67%) also commented that their children had missed socialization with their peer group by staying at home. The missed opportunity for children to socialize seemed to be the major regret that parents expressed about not sending their children to nursery school. Some at home parents (33%) however, did say that their children’s social skills increased through contact with cousins and playing with neighbours’ children.

Behaviour

Most parents (83%) in the preschool parent enrichment model commented that their children had gained more control over their behaviour; for example: "He learned that a temper tantrum wouldn’t fix things." Parents in other preschool programmes (67%) saw fewer gains in this area. The difference between the two groups may be attributed to more attention being paid to behaviour issues in the parent enrichment programme.
through parenting classes and training in the nursery school. A similar interpretation could be attributed to the at home group, in that behaviour was not an issue unless there was a problem, and therefore not mentioned during the interview. This might explain why no parents whose children had remained at home during the preschool years made positive comments related to behaviour, although some (33%) talked about increased negative behaviours; for example: "She was so manipulative, she learned to play me like a fiddle, and would act up whenever I needed to do something."

**Skill Development**

The only category in which consensus was obtained from parents from other preschool programmes (100%) was in improved skill development, whereas most but not all parents (83%) in the parent enrichment model made this comment. Most comments parents made about their children's skill development in relation to preschool programmes were in the context of the provision of an enriched environment. Programmes could provide a broader range of toys, equipment, and field trips than
an individual family, and more importantly, a group of playmates. This environment gave children opportunities to practise skills and learn from modelling. Some parents (33%) whose children remained at home equated the home environment with enriched opportunities for their children. They felt that the close contact and amount of time that they could spend with their children fostered their child’s development.

**Self-Confidence**

All the parents in the preschool parent enrichment model talked about their children’s increased esteem and self-confidence as a result of their nursery school experience in comparison with other programmes (83%) and home-based parents (33%). Most parents from the preschool groups indicated that increased self-esteem and confidence were the most important legacies from their preschool programmes. For example, one parent from the enrichment model said "He started becoming his own person, able to do his own thing, doing things for himself ... he would have been scared and shy without that, it helped him get prepared for school." This
result seems to corroborate the literature that positive self-concept is an important prerequisite for school entrance. What is striking in this example, is that this child would have been a typical candidate for a failure-prone profile without his nursery school experience. Most parents whose children stayed at home did not mention confidence or esteem. This could mean that they were unaware of these concepts, or did not think they were salient; but the point to note is that parents did not identify esteem or confidence as one of the criteria for children’s preparation for elementary school.

Parent Perceptions of their Children’s Preschool Experiences (see Figure 2)

Preschool Environment

Parents in both the parent enrichment model and other preschool programmes unanimously identified that their children had been involved in programmes of high quality with committed staff who provided an enriched environment, and the experience had been a positive one
Figure 2. Parent Perceptions of Children's Preschool Experiences.

- Parent Perceptions

- Cooperative support
- Peer interaction
- Enriched environment
- Staff qualities
- High quality environment
- Positive parent/child experience
- Stable consistent environment
- Assistance to special needs children
- Favourable comparison with other programmes
- Parent education
- Parent socialization
- Parent self-development

% Parent who Responded
for both parents and children. Only 50% of parents whose children had remained at home felt that the at home preschool experience had been positive and stimulating for their children. Some parents from the parent enrichment programme (33%) identified assistance for special needs children as an important service offered in their programme, which was not a major consideration (17%) with parents in other programmes. Providing a stable and consistent environment was important to parents from other preschool programmes (50%), whereas only a few (17%) parents involved in the model programme or who stayed at home mentioned this aspect. Most parents (92%) in the model programme commented on the cooperative support given to them, in comparison with 67% in other programmes. When asked for comparison with other preschool programmes, most parents (83%) felt their chosen programme compared favourably, and a majority of parents (67%) in the enrichment model felt the same way.

The majority of parents in the preschool groups seemed satisfied with their programme in terms of giving their children a preschool education. There was a sense of giving their children a good start, whereas
half the parents in the at home situation either regretted having their child with them before school or had mixed feelings about the benefits of keeping their children at home. One young single mother who lived in a rural area when her child was young and did not have access to a preschool programme said:

She missed out as I was isolated, had no money and couldn't take her places, and I resented her. OK, she had my company, but she had my hostilities too. I didn't know what to do with her, and had no one to help me deal with this child.

Although this family is a clear example of one who would have benefitted from the parent enrichment model, caution must be exercised against generalizing this experience to other families who kept their children at home. This study interviewed 6 parents which is a small sample size.

The only negative comment about the preschool environment was that children sometimes witnessed negative behaviours which they imitated subsequently, but this remark was made in the context of being an infrequent problem. What is surprising is that no one mentioned an increased frequency in health problems,
particularly respiratory infections, with young children who attend nursery school or day care. The reasons could be that health issues were not associated with programme attendance, not regarded as negating the benefits, or parents felt uncomfortable disclosing drawbacks. Overall, it appears that the benefits of a preschool programme outweigh the costs from the general tone of the interviews.

**Peer Interaction**

There was complete agreement from parents who had been involved with any preschool programme that the experience had given their children opportunities to play cooperatively with boys and girls their own age. Some parents (33%) who stayed at home said that their children had similar opportunities.

This finding is not surprising given that socialization was identified as one of the most salient factors in children’s preschool experience. Parents made comments such as, "Just being with other children and being able to play with them," and "She was able to play, get along and share with others."
Parent Education

Many parents (58%) involved in the parent enrichment model described the programme as providing them with opportunities to enhance their own education, although most of them (92%) talked in terms of self-development, compared with (33%) parents in other programmes. The difference between the enrichment model parents and other preschool parents in terms of identifying nursery school as an educational opportunity is not unexpected given that the programme was designed to meet parental needs in this way. One parent said: "We learned about children in parent group, then saw it in the nursery school, and then I knew what to expect and what not to expect." Parents who stayed at home (17%) viewed this experience in the same way, although 33% perceived the at home experience as a chance to enhance their personal growth. There will be more discussion about parent perceptions about themselves in the next area, but it is interesting to note that parents commented on their own educational development as an integral part of the preschool experience. This is an encouraging sign that parents
may recognize knowledge and training contribute to better parent-child relationships.

Parent Perceptions of the Impact of their Child's Preschool Experience on Themselves (see Figure 3)

Global Perception

Parents who selected other preschool programmes (67%) saw themselves as having a personal choice in making their decision; for example, "I chose to send her to nursery school as something for her, even though I stayed home those early years." This was similar from parents who chose to keep their children at home (50%); for example, this mother said: "I have no regrets about not putting her in a programme, I had the time for her and she didn't need it." Some parents in the enrichment model (33%) saw themselves as having options in selecting their programme. This example illustrates a young mother who acknowledges the benefits of the programme, but feels some resentment with her involvement: "I guess for me the nursery school met my needs when I was having a bad time. I
Parents who responded to the survey indicated an increased awareness of their child's development. They also reported learning skills of child management and better relationships. Parental self-development and return to education were less emphasized in their responses.
felt that I was not like the others, but it was what I needed then."

**Parent/Child Relationship**

Most parents from the parent enrichment model (92%) felt that their involvement in the programme had helped them to develop a better relationship with their child. Parents in other programmes or at home (67%) did not identify this as a factor. Parents in the model programme clearly felt that they lacked competency in their parenting role, and without assistance the parent-child bond would suffer as evidenced by the following examples: "I became less frustrated with him as he learned to amuse himself more, and to respect that adults like me had to be listened to"; "I wanted to know more about them (her children), to understand them better, I felt a better parent when I was shown I was doing things right"; "He got help with learning and I did too, so we understood each other better. He progressed, and I could see it, and we got closer together." Model programme parents (92%) commented on their greater knowledge of child
development through participation in the programme as compared to parents who experienced other programmes (50%). Most of the model programme parents (83%) viewed the opportunities to learn and practise skills of child management as important, whereas this was of little importance to other parents (17%). The learning and skill practice identified by the enrichment model parents as salient is expected given that this is in line with the programme objectives.

Half the parents (50%) who stayed at home with their children expressed guilt with their choice. The guilt feelings stemmed mainly from the parents feeling that they had deprived their children of peer interaction; for example, "She missed out on playing with other kids." Some of this guilt also seemed to indicate a parent dependency on the child for companionship as illustrated in the following excerpt: "She was my friend, we did everything together, she had my attention all the time. It hurt to feel pushed aside when she wanted other children." Few parents in the enrichment model (8%) expressed these thoughts, and a few (17%) parents who sent their children to other programmes felt guilty about their decision. Half the
parents who stayed at home mentioned their difficulty in separation when their children went to school because they had not dealt with that experience earlier; whereas no parents from other preschool programmes made similar comments, and only a few (8%) from the enrichment model. Parent-child separation not only affects children adversely, but also influences parents. Parent responses were exemplified in comments such as, "The first day she clung to me, then left me, and it was me that went home crying. It took a while for me to get used to it." and "It was difficult for me to let go."

Parent as Adult

The majority of parents in the parent enrichment model (92%) saw their involvement as an opportunity to develop themselves in terms of improved skills, knowledge, and esteem. Parents in other programmes did not see this as so important (33%). Some parents at home (17%) viewed having their children with them as an opportunity for personal growth. These categories, particularly in the realm of self-esteem, showed the
biggest contrast among the three parent groups. The parents from the enrichment model saw their participation in the programme as an important part of their self-development. There are several examples taken from the interviews to substantiate this claim: "The Nursery School Assistance Programme was most important, it made me feel good about myself. I was surprised that I could do it and then show others. The programme gave me more confidence ... it was nice to be needed." Another parent said, "I am indebted to the programme, it still influences my life, the whole thing gave me confidence to be a parent"; "As a person I've changed and feel better about myself, I felt important, liked, and accepted. Without the programme I wouldn't have done that."

One example stands out as a clear illustration of the theories underlying this study and warrants more extensive exploration.

I was there as often as I could. I learned from the nursery school and parent group too, better communication skills, better self-esteem, more confidence in myself, and that other people have similar problems, that I was not alone. Without
the programme I would not have learned to advocate for myself. As a person it made me a self, parts that are me, not just a mother, there is a me as an individual ... there was no one there for me, I was just a girl, then a wife, then a mother. I would never have gone back to school and bettered myself, the encouragement from the programme and the staff really made the difference.

From a Kellyan perspective, this mother had found that her involvement in the model programme had enabled her to shape herself in ways other than her expected roles as daughter, wife, and mother. Her personal constructs would have changed as she decided to gain more education and developed a career. In Eriksonian terms, although personality stages are formulated during childhood, they are reevaluated and redefined throughout life in response to new experiences. As this mother developed trust in the staff who encouraged her, she in turn acquired more trust in herself and her abilities, which led to greater autonomy and initiative as shown by her decision to return to education. Self-concept theory would recognize that this parent
has an increased sense of herself in terms of confidence, esteem, and "sense of value and self-worth as a human being" (Purkey, 1970, p. 30).

As stated earlier, most parents from the enrichment model commented favourably about the impact of their involvement on themselves, although not all were as clear as this mother.

Some parents (33%) from the enrichment model said they had returned to formal education as a result of their involvement and this view was also expressed by some parents from other programmes (17%). Many parents (enrichment model (75%), and other programmes (50%)) felt that preschool programmes gave them opportunities to socialize with other adults.

Although both preschool groups saw opportunities to socialize, there was a difference in their expressed needs. Parents in the other group gave the impression that the social aspect added to the mosaic of their regular lifestyle. For example, one parent said, "Taking the position of nursery school president, I got to socialize a lot more with other parents." This mother is suggesting that taking an official position with the programme gave her an extra chance to have
contact with other parents. This is not the case with parents from the enrichment model. Many of them suggested that they were dependent on the social aspect for contact with other parents as evidenced by these quotes: "I used to clean at night so I could go to group and nursery school in the day. People listened to me and smiled, and it made me feel good and important. It was my only way to meet people." "It was good for me as I did not get out before. I lived in this city for two and a half years and I knew six people. Through the programme I made a few friends." "I didn't like Canada much before coming to group [meetings], I kept myself to myself. Before I felt crazy or nuts and just lay down in the house. You made me come to group [meetings] and I met people, I love people, but didn't know what to say." None of the at home parents mentioned their own opportunities for socialization, although the questions posed could have generated similar comments. This may suggest that these parents did not connect the time with their children prior to going to school, as a social opportunity.
Parent Perceptions about School (see Figure 4)

Parents' Own Experience with School

The majority of parents who were involved in other preschools (67%), and parents who stayed at home (67%), reported that their own school experiences were generally positive, as illustrated by these two examples: "I have only good memories of school, I always remember wanting to wake up and go. I never had to struggle with major problems or ideals, it was a fun thing for me"; "I loved school, better than home." These positive constructs about school would influence the parents expectations for their own children's school experience, as well as their children's actual experiences. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first parent interviewed on this topic when asked about her child said: "She really likes school, she's a real bubble of excitement about what goes on." The second one said: "He likes it, and chooses computers over blocks." A third parent already generalized her
Parent Perceptions

Figure 4. Parent Perceptions About School.
comments about her own schooling to her children when she said: "School was a good experience for me, I had fun, and looked forward to my kids going."

Less than half (42%) of parents involved in the enrichment programme commented favourably. Many recounted very negative experiences ranging from abuse to insensitivity by school staff, and, I suggest, many of these experiences contributed to problems these people have subsequently encountered in their lives, as derived from their comments. A parent who had low self-esteem and no confidence in her ability to be a parent, made the following comment about her school memories: "School meant failure, not being as good as my sister. I was often sick and couldn't learn, and I hated it. I accepted everything that was said to me, now I challenge that more, thanks to the model I've learned." Another parent said, "School was a rigid programme, there was no leeway, it was their way or no way. They were authority figures to be obeyed and so I would question my past experience, certainly not good." A parent who was bitter about her schooling, said:
I hated school, only one teacher ever took any trouble with me. I was made to stand behind the piano and not allowed go to the bathroom, and then I was ridiculed for my wet pants all day. That stayed with me the rest of my school days.

These negative comments could not only colour the parents' expectations for their own children's school experience, but also influence the children. One mother described her own situation which substantiates this point when she said, "School was a nightmare, I had to toe the line, there were unreasonable expectations, not enough allowance for me as a child. I have to fight not to transfer these feelings to my son." The previous example is a parent who did not receive any support in raising her child, and it is no surprise that her child dislikes school and the parent relates poorly to the school. The point of these revelations is that children's ability to adjust to school is not only contingent on their experiences prior to school but also on the parents' past experiences with school.
Children's Transition to School

According to the parents, all the children who had enrolled in other preschool programmes had made a successful adjustment to school. The majority of children (83%) from the enrichment model also made a successful transition, whereas children who stayed at home (67%) adjusted to school without much difficulty.

It is encouraging that although less than half the parents from the model programme had good school experiences, and the expectation would be that their children may have difficulty adjusting to school, in fact most of them made a successful transition. One parent said, "The programme routines helped get him ready; he was eager to go and was ready to like it from day one." Another one said, "This year he has come a long way, it is an enjoyable time for him." Although no causal attributions can be made, the results indicate that the parent enrichment model could be a contributing factor to children's successful transition to school.
School Policies and Programmes

Some parents (33%) from the enrichment programme commented that the school failed to capitalize on the gains made by their children in nursery school. They also expressed disappointment that teachers were untrained for a parent educator role which they considered essential. One parent said, "The teachers are too busy to give help to parent or offer suggestions." These families had been used to having someone specifically to relate to parents and missed this resource. They also found that the teacher had less time to relate to parents as they had larger classes. A few parents from other programmes (17%) also made similar comments. Several parents from the enrichment programme (25%) would like to see a continuance of the parent support group in school. There was a small increase in the willingness for parents to volunteer in school among parents who had been part of the enrichment programme (25%), over other preschool parents (17%). A few parents from the parent model were concerned about class size at the primary
level, they felt that the teacher student ratio was too high to maintain a good relationship.

Most of the critical comments about schools came from the parents who had poor school experiences themselves, and therefore might be more likely to identify problems.

Analysis of Elementary School Teacher Interviews

There is an integrated system for Junior and Senior Kindergarten in the elementary school taking part in this study. Three Junior and Senior Kindergarten, the regular Grade One, and the general learning disability Grade One teacher who had taught the children in this study were interviewed individually, and they were requested not to discuss their interviews with anyone else, for reasons of confidentiality, and to prevent them influencing the opinion of others. The teachers were given similar options as the parents in terms of location of interview. In other words they could choose to be interviewed wherever was most comfortable and convenient for them. Four teachers chose to be
interviewed before or after classes in their school, and the fifth chose the researcher's home during an evening. The interviews lasted approximately an hour. The questions asked about children who enrolled in school with different preschool experiences, their parents, and the teachers' perceptions about the parent enrichment model (see Appendix B).

**Perceptions about the Children**

The Junior and Senior Kindergarten teachers identified a noticeable difference between children who have had a preschool programme experience and those who have not. Generally, children with previous experience show little or no separation anxiety, adapt to school more readily and quickly, are socialized to school routines, and communicate more effectively with teachers and peers. These differences are gradually eliminated, but children who have enriched home environments continue to progress well in school whereas some children do not progress as well if parental gains are not sustained.
It is interesting that children from the parent enrichment model did not begin school as noticeably different from other children, which was one of the original objectives of the programme. Rather it was the children who stayed at home who stood out. As the teachers pointed out, for most children many of these differences are soon evened out but some continue to be disadvantaged. While the small size of the present sample precludes generalization, there is some indication that the most failure-prone students entering school may be disadvantaged children who did not have access to some form of preschool enrichment.

Two of the three Junior and Senior Kindergarten teachers agreed that there is some evidence of sex differences. Girls follow the social stereotype that females choose to work on cognitive and fine motor skills, and boys select more active gross motor and social skills. The teachers commented that there is a levelling out process by the end of the two years.

The regular Grade One teacher saw no real differences between types of previous experiences or gender differences. The specialized Grade One teacher noted that more boys have academic, developmental, and
behavioural difficulties than girls. There were equal numbers of children who had experienced the parent enrichment model in each Grade One class.

**Perceptions about Parents**

There was agreement among the five teachers about their expectations for parental participation in school at these grade levels. Parents should interact with teachers on a frequent informal basis to build a relationship in order to support children during the early grades. They agreed that this essential relationship usually occurs if the parents have positive attitudes towards teachers and school. Parents who have negative attitudes towards life in general and education in particular, usually based on their own experiences, and who had no exposure to preschool programmes, are often fearful, hostile and defensive towards the school. The teachers' comments about parent attitudes towards school are in accord with the interpretation from the parent interviews about school.
Four of the five teachers stated that the parent enrichment programme built parental skills and esteem that broke down the barriers to effective parent-teacher communication. They noted that parents who had been involved in the programme were less likely to take an adversarial role with teachers. These parents were familiar with being in the classroom, see their children in context with others, and show a clearer understanding of the educational process.

All five teachers said that the connection between parental support and the educational system started in the enrichment programme needs to continue through the primary grades to consolidate gains made by the parents. This unanimous endorsement could be treated with scepticism, as teachers can always use more help, but I felt that they showed a sincere interest in gaining more connection between families, support systems, and education. One teacher said, "If that connection is not carried into the schools, one or two years is not enough to cement that growth, and it is going to dissipate over time."

Two teachers noted that there should be careful selection of teachers for inner-city schools where
negative parental attitudes could be prevalent, and efforts made to provide additional training and orientation to equip teachers for their parent educator role. This comment demonstrates that teachers felt able to make frank suggestions, rather than ones that defend the status quo.

Perception on the Preschool Parent Enrichment Programme

All five teachers stated that the programme fostered the development of mutual support between the educational system and the home, instead of an adversarial, confrontational relationship. They also agreed that parents developed improved skills and self-esteem. They felt that as a result of their experience in the programme, both parents and children nurtured improved respect and understanding of themselves, others and the school. The development of peer relationships, socialization, an introduction to the school system, early identification of developmental delays, and improved skill level were noted as the main benefits for children.
The teachers all agreed that the location of this programme within a public school promoted liaison among home, nursery school, and elementary school. They saw the parent enrichment programme as ameliorating negative attitudes towards school, aiding the transition process for children into school, and trying to integrate the family into the school system. They identified a need to continue the existing programme as well as expand to provide more programmes. They felt that the continuance of a similar parent support programme within the elementary system would consolidate parental gains in commitment and responsibility to their children and the school.

No negative comments were made about the programme, although some honest scepticism was expressed about the usefulness of such a programme when it began eight years ago. Teachers needed to be convinced that it would have an impact, and the general feeling was that it had earned their support. The only caution that was expressed was that this model could not successfully be located in every public school. As one teacher put it, "They must be welcome to the school in a community that they are servicing, so that
they are not strangers." Teachers appeared to be open and candid in expressing their opinions. The model programme which is located within the school is neither funded nor under the jurisdiction of the education authorities, so there seemed to be no constraints on teachers to freely offer comments. The only questions which linked the school and model programme (see Appendix B, Questions 18 and 19), asked for comments on locating the model within the school, and liaison between both programmes. The responses were very enthusiastic, some examples being: "Great, they are always willing to share"; "Continue, continue"; "They belong, we think of them as part of us." The only question which could elicit a guarded response was Question 20, which asked if the involvement with the model programme had changed them as a teacher in any way. The teachers' answers ranged from no change to uncertainty. These responses could suggest a need to protect themselves from self-evaluation, and that the question was too intrusive, or that the programme did not have an impact on them as teachers.
Analysis of Nursery School Teacher Interviews from the Parent Enrichment Programme

Two nursery school teachers were offered the same options as the elementary school teachers for the interview location, and they both chose to be interviewed in their classrooms at the end of the day. They were interviewed separately, for approximately half an hour, and to avoid sharing of ideas had no contact with each other between interviews.

Perceptions about Children

Both nursery school teachers felt that involvement in the programme broadened children's overall experience, but the largest gains were made in language, social skills, and self-esteem. They saw more significant improvements when children remained in the programme for two years rather than one. The only gender difference that they both noted was that girls played more cooperatively in groups and chose quieter tasks, and boys chose solitary active play. One
teacher commented that boys tended to display more aggressive behaviours than girls.

**Perceptions about Parents**

The nursery school teachers noted that parents who remained in the programme for two years showed greater skill development than those who stayed only one year. The explanation offered was that it takes time to establish trust, confidence, and rapport and then rapid gains could be made. The teachers commented that many parents gained self-esteem. This esteem was demonstrated by parents coping more effectively with their children, and treating them in a more positive way. The parents also developed improved communication skills with both children and school staff. According to the nursery school teachers, both parents and children felt familiar and comfortable in the nursery school environment. The nursery school is situated within the same building as the elementary school and both schools integrate some events such as carol singing and parades. The common building and shared
activities help both parents and children to make the transition from nursery to elementary school.

Summary of Results

To summarize the parent perceptions of their children's changes, there is little difference between perceptions related to children in the parent enrichment model and children in other preschool programmes. Both conditions showed that children were perceived to have improved in skill development, behaviour control, self-development, socialization, and the ability to cope with separation from parents. Parent perceptions about children who had remained at home during their early years suggested that this experience had meant a lack of opportunity for peer socialization and some increase in negative behaviour.

To summarize the parent perception of preschool experiences, there was little difference between perceptions related to the parent enrichment programme and other organized preschool programmes in terms of environmental qualities or relationships pertaining to child, peer, or parent, child interactions. However,
parents in the parent enrichment model clearly perceived that their involvement in the programme had provided opportunities for them to develop themselves and socialize with other adults. They also more readily identified the programme as instrumental in their acquiring more effective child management skills, broader knowledge of child development, and having better relationships with their children. This group were least likely to feel that they had options in making decisions about what their children would do prior to elementary school.

The majority of parents from the other preschool and at home groups said they had good memories of their own school experiences. However, only a minority of parents in the parent enrichment programme expressed a similar view. Most children who had been exposed to some form of organized preschool programme, successfully adjusted to elementary school, whereas children without this experience took longer to accept school. A few negative comments about elementary school were made by parents from the parent enrichment model.
In general, the elementary teachers agreed that children who have experienced a preschool programme make the transition to school more rapidly and successfully. Most of them agreed that parents who had been involved in the parent enrichment programme were less likely to take a negative attitude to school than they might have done without the preschool involvement. They all supported continuance and expansion of this type of programme.

The nursery school staff identified bigger gains in both children and parents with two years participation rather than one year, and felt that the programme’s location within the elementary school is an important factor.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

As stated in Chapter Two, the merits of preschool education have been extensively studied in regard to social, physical, and cognitive child developmental skills, and in terms of economic cost benefits, but the more fundamental issue is whether children develop a psychological preparedness for school and, if so, is it sustainable? As children do not grow in isolation, this question could only be answered by people, places, policies, and programmes that influence their development. The literature indicates that without optimal support, disadvantaged families are more vulnerable to difficulties in school and the current study evaluated a programme designed to counteract these difficulties.

In common with other cooperative preschool programmes, the parent enrichment model provided a half-day nursery school for children, with parents expected to perform duties in the nursery school. In addition, the parent enrichment programme provided transportation for parents and children, compulsory...
parent classes, parent counselling, and referrals for social and health services.

This study tested children's inferred self-concept as learners, and interviewed children's teachers, nursery school teachers, and parents, to gauge the impact of preschool experiences on children's development. The results show that within the study limitations, the model preschool programme enabled children to adjust to elementary school with some confidence about their school abilities, and, perhaps more importantly, their parents developed more confidence in themselves and their skills to be effective parents. The teachers agreed but also stressed the need for these gains to be consolidated by continued support.

Conclusions

From a qualitative perspective there are two fundamental questions. The first asks whether the preschool parent enrichment model experience makes any difference to children's ability to cope with elementary school. The parents strongly agree that
without this opportunity, their children would have found adjustment to school a more difficult process. The improved social, emotional, and behavioural skill development together with increased self-esteem, and the ability to cope with separation from their parents enabled children to make the transition from preschool to primary school much more successful. One parent commenting about the programme said, "He couldn't have accepted school without it." The teachers could not distinguish between children who had experienced any type of organized preschool programme. They could only identify children who had not had any organized preschool experience. In other words, children from the enrichment model are not readily identifiable in terms of the profile promulgated for disadvantaged children in the late seventies. As a result, children who have experienced the preschool enrichment programme may be less failure-prone in school.

The second question asks whether the preschool parent enrichment model made any difference to parents in their ability to relate to their children or the parent's ability to cope with life in general. Most of these parents felt that their involvement in the model
programme had helped them to have a better relationship with their children through improved communications and a clearer understanding of child development. The parents also perceived that their children had made a successful transition from preschool to elementary school.

The most important answer seems to be the impact on the parents themselves. Some parents commented on their increased self-esteem and directly attributed this improvement to their participation in the model programme. For example, one person said, "The programme made me come out as a person. It made me feel good about myself." Other people made connections between their esteem and life in general. One person said, "The programme made me feel good, as adults we can never stop learning and needing help, it gave me a basic foundation for the life we are living." Another said, "I’m a changed person. I went back to school and feel better about myself. I am training to be a parent support aide; without the programme I wouldn’t have done that."

The only negative comment which was mentioned by a parent, was the potential for being identified
disadvantaged because of means testing to qualify for programme enrollment. This observation referred to eligibility for the programme rather than involvement in the model itself, but should be an important consideration in showing sensitivity towards needy families. One young mother may have voiced her own concerns but be representative of others. She said, "The nursery school met my needs when I was having a bad time. I didn't want to be labelled like the others, I felt that I was not like the others, but it was what I needed then."

The Florida Key data collected by the measurement of children's inferred self-concept as learners yielded one significant result. There is a difference in the inferred ability to cope as learners between children who had experienced the enrichment programme and those who had remained at home during the preschool years. According to Purkey, Cage, and Graves (1973) and substantiated by Fahey, (1983), the coping factor indicates that children have begun to trust their own academic abilities and are taking pride and interest in their accomplishments in the classroom. This finding corroborated the parents' comments that their children
demonstrated increased esteem and self-confidence and were enjoying school. The teachers’ observations also support this result. They could only distinguish between children entering school who had been involved with a preschool programme, and those who had not. The significant results from the Florida Key subscale on coping perhaps indicate that because these students are more proud and confident in their own abilities, they will be more likely to seek help from teachers and less inclined to adopt the passivity model described by Good (1981) (see Teacher Expectations in the literature review).

In terms of the overall self-concept as learner and the subscales on relating, asserting and willingness to risk, there is no significant difference between groups. There was no significant difference in self-concept as learner between children who had experienced a preschool programme with parental involvement and those whose parents had no involvement. There were no significant gender differences in children’s self-concept as learner or any of the subscales. The sample size was too small to test the
length of time enrolled in a preschool programme as a variable.

The lack of significant differences among groups, except for coping, can be attributed to the fact that the preschool programme may have had no impact on overall effect of, asserting, investing, and relating to school. However, these results can also be attributed to a number of intervening variables, including small sample size. The results can also be interpreted to indicate that children who have experienced the preschool enrichment model are no different from the other groups. In other words, the gains made by these children may reduce their propensity for being failure-prone in school.

Implications for Theory

From a theoretical perspective, the data clearly support Erikson (1963) and self-concept theories. The children demonstrated a firm sense of trust through their ability to relate to nursery school staff, their peer group, and their parents, by improved socialization and success with separating from their
parents without anxiety. Children were also able to generalize this trust to elementary teachers when entering school. The foundation of trust in a stable and stimulating environment encourages initiative which led to improved skill development. The self-confidence and behaviour control illustrate the development of children's autonomy. It appears that the results of this study substantiate the literature review which showed that disadvantaged children make social, psychological, emotional, and behavioural gains through involvement in preschool education. The children seem to have successfully handled the transition to primary school and are continuing to make progress.

The study results indicate that parents make important gains from their involvement in the model programme. They display increased self-confidence, self-esteem, and improved socialization, which demonstrate both a more positive self-concept, and, in Eriksonian terms, more trust in themselves and their ability to relate to other people. With the reappraisal of their basic foundation of trust, parents saw themselves as instrumental in improved skill development, effective child management, knowledge of
child development, and their ability to relate to their children through demonstrating increased autonomy, initiative and industry. In Kellyan terms, the parents from the enrichment model construed their reality somewhat differently from the other two groups. They appeared to have lacked affirmation and encouragement during their own upbringing and needed the support offered by the programme to assist them to make changes in themselves and in their understanding of being a parent.

Implication for Practice

In brief, this study found that short-term gains for children were better readiness for school, more positive self-esteem, improved social behaviour, and a higher achievement motivation. The long-term gains are predicted to be fewer special education placements, less grade retention, and a lower dropout rate from school. At the same time the short-term gains for parents were better social support networks, greater confidence, better interactions with children, and improved parenting skills: The long-term benefits may
be an increased likelihood to continue education, gain employment, and less family breakdown and abuse.

The data provide empirical support for many of the initiatives suggested by the longitudinal research project on primary prevention called *Better Beginnings, Better Futures: An Integrated Model of Primary Prevention of Emotional and Behavioural Problems* (1990) funded jointly by the provincial Ministries of Community and Social Services, Health, and Education, as well as the federal Ministry of Indian and Northern Affairs. The provincial project calls for primary prevention with children based on an integrative model of child development with children viewed within the context of the family and the community which includes school. It suggests that the parent enrichment model under review is already reflecting most of the goals outlined in the provincial project.

**Limitations**

The small sample size is the most serious limitation in this study in terms of quantitative
measures. In a three-year period, 144 children enrolled in the parent enrichment model, but only 20 children continued into primary grades in this school. This meant that only 14.6% of the original number were available to test. From the literature, family mobility was a predicted intervening variable, but the number of children who would choose to attend the five available public or separate neighbourhood schools was an unknown factor. Therefore the small sample size may have influenced the lack of statistical significance rather than the lack of relation between the variables. Confining the study to one elementary school was useful and controllable for the qualitative elements of the study, but a limiting factor for the quantitative element.

The researcher conducted all personal interviews which acted as a limitation in terms of experimenter bias. However, the parent enrichment model subjects indicated that they would have been reluctant to participate and would not have been as frank or open if they had not known the interviewer. This would have reduced the rich source of data which was collected.
Implication for Future Research

This study is viewed as an attempt to evaluate a more holistic model for an interventionist approach to children. Subsequent research should include a comprehensive longitudinal study following families from early childhood to at least secondary school, with an appropriate control group followed as well. New measures need to be devised that evaluate social, emotional, and metacognitive strategies in school rather than relying on academic achievement as the accepted measure of school success for the children. Interviews offer a rich source of data, but additional methods need to be examined to evaluate the parent and family component.

The longitudinal research initiated by the Better Beginnings, Better Futures: An Integrated Model of Primary Prevention of Emotional and Behavioural Problems project (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1990) in nine selected preschool-primary prevention centres across Ontario, will have an impact on the future direction of the programme under review in this study. The Technical Advisory Group
monitoring the provincial project is confident that short-term benefits will become evident within five years, and these results will guide future research.

Recommendations

There are some implications from this study that indicate the current preschool parent enrichment programme needs some review. Although the literature and nursery school teachers confirmed that a two-year preschool involvement consolidates gains for both parent and child, most families in this programme only have a one-year enrollment. Efforts must be made to encourage families to enroll at an earlier stage.

Programmes of this nature need to be more accessible both in terms of increased spaces available and in fewer barriers for eligibility. An integrative model should be available for all children, not just children defined as disadvantaged or "at risk." Many parents felt they were fortunate to have such an opportunity, but expressed concern at the lack of availability for other families. The provincial project calls for development of "non stigmatizing"
programmes. The parent enrichment model bases family eligibility on means testing for regional subsidy which identifies families as economically disadvantaged. There is a need for a way to provide service to families in greatest need who have few alternatives available to them, but not labelling these families as different in a pejorative sense.

The issue of mandatory parental involvement needs to be examined. It can be argued that unless parent group and nursery school involvement is required, some parents would not participate and thus fail to realize the benefits which they need. Several parents said that they felt initial reluctance and resentment with such a policy but were glad it had been compulsory, otherwise they would not have attended and would have lost a valuable opportunity. It can be argued also that mandatory attendance is not conducive to learning or fostering autonomy and that parent programmes should be available to interested people. In other words, parent involvement should not be contingent on nursery school for children. There is no easy solution to this problem but it is an issue which needs review.
There is a need for continuity from preschool to primary school for both children and parents. As the Better Beginnings, Better Futures: An Integrated Model of Primary Prevention of Emotional and Behavioural Problems project (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1990) pointed out, there is little research available on holistic approaches to education, but there is a need to look for ways to optimize the school and classroom environment and develop an integrative approach to school involvement in family and community life. As this study has found, schools need to be sensitive to the negative emotional baggage that both children and parents bring with them from their own experiences.

According to Good (1981) and Harper (1990), schools need to be aware that unless they attend to child development in the affective as well as the cognitive domain, children’s positive self-concept will erode and students will perceive themselves as ineffectual learners and avoid new challenges academically. Good (1981) says that positive self-concept is critical in elementary years. Some of the negative comments from parents pertaining to children
regressing in school, failure to capitalize on preschool gains, and large class sizes could all erode positive affective development and undermine previous gains. Educational systems should be aware of the need for more human resources, and for more specialized teacher education at the Primary-Junior level to develop and sustain this development.

The parent perspective has been shown to be the most important factor in this study and so it is appropriate to conclude with a summary from one parent who was involved with the parent enrichment model for two years, and who was initially somewhat sceptical of the programme. She subsequently completed a post-secondary qualification and is now employed. Her comments capture the essence of the personal, social, emotional, economic and educational benefits which are the objectives of the programme.

I wish there were more programmes like______. They should not just be for low-income families, there are so many other families who could benefit. Where parents are involved, parent groups, chances to be with other parents so you don’t get lost with other worlds. Chances to see
how to relate to how children develop and learn in the classroom and apply the discussions. A chance to have fun. It is important for parents to learn how to ask for things and advocate, to learn how to learn and expand your own knowledge, and to actively participate with hands-on experience with children. I just loved the involvement and wish that others could have the same experience. I would still have stayed at home on workman's compensation and remained in my shell with it.
References


Appendix A

Parent interview guide

Questions about the child and preschool experience:

1. Tell me about your child’s experience in nursery school.
   a) In what ways, if any, did your child change?
   b) In your opinion, what benefits were there for him/her?
   c) In your opinion, what drawbacks were there for him/her?

2. What aspects of nursery school do you feel he/she enjoyed most?

3. Did you feel there were any changes in how you and your child got along together?

4. Did you feel there were any changes in how your child felt about himself/herself?

5. How well did you feel the programme prepared your child for school?
   In what ways?
6. Overall, do you feel the preschool programme made a difference to your child? Explain.

Questions about siblings:

7. I am interested in knowing if you have other children. If so, have they had experiences
   a) with any preschool programmes?
   b) which ones?
   c) Would you compare differences?

8. If you have younger children not ready for preschool, do you intend to enroll them in a
   programme in the future?
   a) If so, which one?
   b) Can you explain your selection?
   c) If you do not intend to enroll your child in a preschool programme, can you explain why?
Questions about parents and preschool experience:

9. An important part of the programme was your involvement as a parent. I am interested in your comments about that.

10. Which aspect of the programme was most important for you as a parent? How?

a) Which aspect did you enjoy most? Why?

11. Do you feel the programme made a difference to you as a parent, as a person? Why do you say that?

Questions about elementary school:

12. What were your opinions about school, based on your own experiences before you became involved with the preschool programme?

13. How is your child dealing with school?

14. How are you coping with your child at school?

15. Are there any other comments you would like to make about the preschool or school programme that we have not covered?
Appendix B

Teacher interview guide

General questions about children:

1. In your experience as a teacher can you identify children in your class who have had any preschool experiences?

2. If so, in what ways?

3. When children begin JK/SK/Gr. 1, are there any differences between children who have experienced daycare, nursery school or stayed at home with a caregiver?
   If so, describe the differences in the children.

4. Are there any differences between children who have attended other programmes and _______ nursery school/parent enrichment programme?
   If so, describe the differences in the children.

5. If not mentioned, do you notice any gender differences?
6. Do any of the differences you have mentioned persist?
   If so, which ones and for how long?

7. What changes, if any, occur throughout the year?

General questions about parents:

8. As a teacher of children in early school grades, you possibly have a close involvement with parents. What school involvement do you expect parents to have during the school year?

9. Do you feel that the amount of parental involvement with you as teacher, and the school in general has any impact on their child’s ability to adjust to school? If so, in what ways?

10. Does the parent attitude towards school have any impact on the child’s school behaviour? If so, in what ways?
As you know, in order for children to attend the _____ programme, families have to qualify for Purchase of Service Agreements with the ______. Parents are required to participate in the nursery school, to act as children's supervisor on the van, and attend weekly parent group meetings. This programme has operated since 1984.

Questions about families who have experienced the _______ programme:

We have just talked about parents in general.

11. Are there any differences in the way that parents relate to the school, in general, and to teachers, in particular, between parents of children from other preschool programmes and _______ parents? If so, describe the differences.

12. What differences, if any, do you see between parents and children who would qualify for this programme but have not participated, and those who have had this opportunity?
13. Do you see any differences between families who have had one year’s involvement in the programme and those who have had two or more years’?

Questions about the ________-programme:

14. In your experience, what differences, if any, has the ________ preschool/parent enrichment programme made?

15. a) How has it influenced the children?
   b) How has it influenced the parents?
   c) How has it influenced you as a teacher?
   d) How has it influenced the school in general?

16. What are the benefits and drawbacks of this programme?

17. What changes, if any, would you suggest?

18. What comments would you make about having the programme located in an elementary school?

19. What comments would you make about the teacher/school liaison with the programme?

20. Has your involvement with the ________ programme changed you as a teacher in any way?
21. Are there any further comments that you would like to add to any areas of discussion that we have covered so far?

22. Are there any comments or suggestions that you would like to make that we have not covered?
Appendix C

Nursery school supervisor/teacher interview guide

1. What are the changes, if any, that you see in children during their enrollment in the preschool/parent enrichment programme?
2. Are there any gender differences?
3. Are there any significant differences between one year’s or two years’ involvement?
4. What are your comments about children’s readiness for school after their involvement in your programme?
5. What comments would you make about your programme being situated within an elementary school?
6. What changes, if any, do you see in parents who are involved in the programme?
7. What comments would you make about teacher/school liaison with the preschool programme?
8. Are there any comments or suggestions you would like to make that we have not covered?
Appendix D

The Florida Key

Elementary Form Grades 1-6

This scale is to assist you, the teacher, in assessing how the student perceives his or her "learner" self. Please select one of the following answers and record the number in the blank space provided.

NEVER: 0, VERY SELDOM: 1, ONCE IN A WHILE: 2,

OCCASIONALLY: 3,

FAIRLY OFTEN: 4, VERY OFTEN: 5

Name of Student ______________________
Teacher ______________________ Date ______________________

Compared with other students of the same age, does this student:

1. Get along with other students? ______
2. Get along with other teachers? ______
3. Keep calm when things go wrong? ______
4. Say good things about his/her school? ______
5. Tell the truth about his/her work? 
6. Speak up for his/her own ideas? 
7. Offer to speak in front of the class? 
8. Offer to answer questions in class? 
9. Ask meaningful questions in class? 
10. Exhibit confidence in his/her school work? 
11. Persist in his/her school endeavors? 
12. Talk to others about his/her school work? 
13. Join in school activities? 
14. Seek out new things to do in school on his/her own? 
15. Offer to do extracurricular work in the classroom? 
16. Spend time helping others? 
17. Show an interest in others' work? 
18. Show interest in being a leader? 
19. Initiate school projects? 
20. Finish his/her school work? 
21. Pay attention to class activities? 
22. Do his/her school work carefully? 
23. Talk to teachers about personal concerns? 

TOTAL
Appendix E

CODING SCHEME FOR PARENT INTERVIEWS

Parent Perceptions of Child Changes

1. **Less Self-Centred**

   Children demonstrated an understanding that other people have an impact on their existence, and there are consequences that involve others. Examples of statements coded into this category are: "He thought that the whole world revolved around him.," "He was used to his brothers giving in to him.," "He learned to accept playing around other people.," "He can inter-relate with boys and girls his own age."

2. **More Socialized**

   Children showed an increased ability to get along with groups of children, cope with institutional routines, and respond to adults
outside the family. Some examples are: "He learned to respect that adults had to be listened to.,” "He was non sociable before.,” "He couldn’t have accepted school without it." "He was too soft and shy and would have been lost if he’d gone from just me to breaking away to a big group of children. As it was he just accepted school as another routine."

3. **More Control of Behaviour**

Children learned to manage their behaviour, some examples are: "He learned that a temper tantrum wouldn’t fix things.,” "She learned how to share.,” "Her manners got better, before I let her do as she wanted.,” "You taught me to let him have a say in choosing his punishment and he’d accept it better and feel more in control of himself."

4. **Separation**

The child was able to cope with separation from the parent. Some examples from the interviews are: "He’s more confident in his ability to do things
without me, not so clingy.," "It [the nursery school] helped her to be around adults I can trust and she can trust other than me."

5. **Increased Self-Confidence**

Children demonstrated more independence and initiative. Some examples are: "Getting to mix with kids his own age, he's becoming more independent.," "He came out of himself, he is still shy but he now talks more and expresses himself more.," "He does things for himself, smiles all the time and thinks he is somebody."

6. **Improved Skill Development**

Children showed improved skill particularly in fine motor and cognitive. Some examples are: "He had poor motor skills before [nursery school].," "She developed an attention span.," "He has learned to play and sing and is just inquisitive and nosy."
7. **Increased Negative Behaviour**

Children showed attention seeking behaviour and challenge parental control, some examples are: "She wanted her way a lot.," "He tested me especially when I was busy."

8. **Socialization**

Children missed the opportunity to socialize with their peers, for example, "She got bored with no kids her own age to play with."

Parent Perceptions of Preschool Experiences in an Organized Programme

1. **Cooperative Support**

The curriculum was designed to work with the parent as well as the child. Some examples are: "The support involved me and him and the whole family, not just him. That I could be involved in the
nursery school classroom and be part of what he was doing.," "We both enjoyed nursery school."

2. **Opportunities for Peer Interactions**

Children had chances to play together, some examples are: "He gained an understanding of group behaviours like circle time and performing Xmas skits.," "Someone his own age to play with.," "She learned to put her toys away with the other kids."

3. **Enriched Environment**

It provided opportunities for children to expand their experiences, for example: "His motor skills are much advanced, if he'd stayed at home he would not have had the chance to do these things and I did not know about them.," "He liked the different play areas like cornmeal, sandbox, all safe play areas.," "She liked outings to the pumpkin patch, she was able to get out of her home surroundings and get together with a big group of kids."
4. **Staff Commitment**

There was a high level of staff commitment, dedication, and involvement, for example: "From the teachers, the whole structure of the programme, he learned that this is the way things are done.," "[School is] great, but the teachers don't take the time with her like they did in nursery.," "Nursery school was well organized and the staff were great.," "All the staff were great, not just there for the pay check.," "I felt important, liked and accepted."

5. **Structure**

Programmes were well run, and organized, for example: "They were all safe play areas.," "All kids were treated fairly and there was more variety.," "They have more people helping, and they do more in nursery school, a quality programme."
6. **Support**

It was a positive experience for both parent and child, some examples are: "As a parent, it [nursery school] gave me support with a wilful child, understanding what I had to face, and helping me deal with it.," "Nursery school met my needs when I was having a bad time.," "There should be more programmes like that so everyone has a chance to experience it."

7. **Alternate Environment**

It provided a stable and consistent environment for children, for example: "At a time when everything outside nursery school was negative, it helped him get away from it. At least school stayed the same."

8. **Help and Diagnosis**

It offered assistance to special needs children and identified developmental delays, some examples
are: "If he had stayed at home, he would not have had the chance to do these things and I did not know about them or understand him.," "I see other kids doing poorly, and he would have been like them without the programme."

9. Comparison

It compared favourably with other preschool programmes, for example: "At the other school the teacher only focused on one group, my son got frustrated and it was a poor experience with little control over the programme, very stressful.," "The other was more like babysitting.," "There was no structure, no variety, and the kids did not have the opportunity to do as much."

10. Parent Education

It was offered through the Nursery School Assistant Training option (NSAP), weekly parent group meetings, and opportunities to observe in the classroom. For example: "Through NSAP I got to be
with children, learn about children, to programme plan, and I got to be sort of a teacher with their [the staff] help.," "In group I learned from the discussions, the films, and being with other adults."

11. Socialization Opportunities to Parents

This was achieved through parent group meetings, social events, fund raising activities, group workshops, and involvement in the nursery school, parents could relate to other adults and gain peer support. Some examples are: "I enjoyed getting to meet other parents to see where they were coming from.," "Being with a bunch of women who had problems and learning how to cope.," "I lived in this city for two and a half years and I knew six people.," "Through the programme I made a few friends."
12. **Parent Self-Development**

It provided chances to improve parent self-development in the areas of esteem, worth, validation, and autonomy. The same descriptors outlined in #11 apply in #12. Some examples are: "I enjoyed doing things in the group, we got to choose what we wanted, we weren't just told." "It was a challenge for me to do the Nursery School Assistant Programme to see if I could handle other kids." "It felt good for me."

The Impact of the Child's Preschool Experience on the Parent

1. **Child Development**

There was increased awareness of child development. The involvement in a preschool programme provided opportunities to observe the range of development, establish norms, and better understand child development. Some examples are: "We learned about children in group, then we saw it"
in nursery school, and I then knew what to expect and what not to expect. "I got tips on how they grow up., I have learned to understand my kids better."

2. Child Management

The programme gave opportunities to learn and practise skills of child management, for example: "The programme meant everything to me, I knew nothing about being a parent.," "Learning the different stages of what to expect of a child"; "The need to have eye contact, I am in command and he has to follow."

3. Relationships

It gave parents a chance to establish a better relationship with their child. This happened through improved communication, interactions and opportunities to spend time away from the child. Some examples are: "I became less frustrated with him as he learned to amuse himself more.," "We had time away from each other which meant we got on
better when we were together.\textquotedblright; "The time away from me was good, at a time when things were bad for me.\textquotedblright; "The techniques were fantastic, key words like my turn to talk, your turn to listen."

4. **Adult Socialization**

The programme provided opportunities for parents to socialize with their peer group, and relate to other families. Some examples are: "The other mums looked out for each other, they confided in you, helped you out, visited and socialized, made friends.\textquotedblright; "It helped me to get to know people and get along with others.\textquotedblright; "It helped me to be less selfish with others."

5. **Parent Self-Development**

The programme allowed parents to develop self confidence, esteem, a sense of worth, and to advocate for help, a few examples are: "I was surprised that I could do it (NSAP) and especially when I could then show other people how to do it. It
made me feel good.," "I felt better when I was shown I was doing things right, knowing things makes you feel good.," "My son has learned that however bad or mad he gets he can always come to me, so that as a parent I count. That means a lot to me."

6. Parent Education

Involvement in the programme has encouraged some parents to return to education, for example: "I would not have trained to be an ECE teacher without the programme, I would never have gone back to school, I would have stayed at home on workman's compensation. I went back to school and now feel better about myself. Without the programme I wouldn't have done that."

7. Choice

The selection of a preschool programme was perceived as a positive choice to enhance their children's preschool experience, rather than as a compensatory necessity, or chose to keep them at
home, for example, "Although I was at home, I chose nursery school as something for her.," "The nursery school enrichment adds to what we can offer at home."

8. **Parent Guilt**

Parents felt guilty about making choices to meet their needs rather than the needs of the child, for example, "She was caught in the middle, I wanted a better life for the whole family, so having her (baby)sat, I felt less of a parent."

9. **Separation**

Some parents experienced difficulties in separating from their children, for example, "She loved school and it hurt to be pushed aside. She was my friend, we did everything together."
Parent Perceptions about School

1. **Parent Educator Role**

Some teachers were not adequately trained for a parent educator role, for example, "Teachers should help parents as well as children.," "I wish they told you more."

2. **Volunteerism**

As a result of their own or their child's experience, parents expressed a wish to volunteer in school. A few examples are: "I help out all the time., I volunteer to stay more involved, I can help get other children ready."
3. **Positive Education**

The parent's own school was positive, for example, "I had fun in school, and looked forward to my kids going.," "I loved it better than home."

4. **Large Class Sizes**

Parents commented unfavourably about large class size in elementary school today, for example, "Class size is too big now, she doesn't get the attention."

5. **Parent Group in Elementary School**

The need was expressed for a bridging group to continue to offer support to parents after leaving the nursery school system, for example, "I would like to have a continuation of helping parents in school."
6. **Transition**

Children successfully completed the transition from preschool to the elementary school experience. A few examples are: "He likes school as he has become more self confident.," "He was eager to go to school, he was ready to like it from day one.," "Now he is doing well in school, he couldn’t have accepted school without it [nursery school], as it was, he just took it as another routine."

7. **Failure to Capitalize on Preschool Gains**

Parents commented on JK /SK as equalizing years to have children reach a standard level for Grade One. Some examples are: "At the beginning of the year his skills seemed ahead, now his skills are more even with other children, he seems to have regressed somewhat.," "When he changed to JK he started fighting again, he does not get the same attention as in nursery school, he also used to listen better, he’s gone back.," "She is doing the same things and
I think she is bored, they had more people helping out and did more in nursery school."
Appendix F

Consent Form with Demographic Questionnaire

WHAT DID YOUR CHILD DO BEFORE GOING TO SCHOOL?

CONSENT FORM

My name is Rosamund (Ros) Battye and I am a Masters of Education student at Brock University. Some parents may remember me as the Coordinator of _________________

I hope to complete a study looking at the effects of nursery school and daycare on children's ability to adjust to school. This study has been approved by the _____________ Board of Education and Brock University Ethics Committee, and is supervised by Dr. John Novak, Faculty of Education.

In order to do this I need your help.

What do parents have to do?
1) Give signed consent for the teacher to complete a short checklist describing your child at school.
2) Answer the brief questions over the page.
3) **Some parents will be selected for interview if they are interested.**

I ________________________, consent to the

(parent name, please print)

class teacher completing a short checklist which may describe________________________ at school.

(child’s name)

I understand that the teacher will not be given the results of this survey and that all individual scores will be confidential.

(Date)_________ (Signature)____________________________

Thank you for taking part in this study. As an interested parent you are making a valuable contribution towards educators gaining a better understanding of our preschool children.

If you want further information or have any questions, please call me during the day at _______extension ____ or evenings at _______.

The completed study will be made available for parents to read at the school office. All data will be destroyed on completion of the study.
Please answer the following questions:

1. Before going to school did your child attend daycare?
   Please circle  Yes  No
   a) If you answer yes, please write the name(s) of the daycare(s)
   b) How long did your child attend daycare?  years/months

2. Before going to school did your child attend nursery school?
   Please circle  Yes  No
   a) If you answer yes, please write the name(s) of the nursery school(s)
   b) How long did your child attend nursery school?  years/months

3. If your child attended daycare/nursery school, please write your comments about your child’s experiences.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
4. If your child stayed at home before school, please write your comments about your child's experiences.


5. As a parent, would you be interested in a personal interview about preschool experiences?

Please circle Yes No

If yes, please write Phone number

Address