Free research proposal on the relationship between preschool programs and kinderg...

The name

Fall 2013

Relationship between Preschool Programs and Kindergarten Readiness

Schools today are undergoing a lot of challenges in terms of funds. With budget cuts for early education and limited resources of funding, school readiness to formal education is becoming an area of concern for schools, teachers, and parents. Schools are striving to manage their educational responsibilities by reducing their financial obligations through minimizing the number of teachers and increasing the number of students in each class. This strategy by many schools could not go by without impact on educational performance of students. This impact extends to affect the federally funded program No Child Left Behind (NCLB 2000) which enforces rigorous standards on schools and students that may be very difficult to meet under the circumstances of major budgetary cuts. Federally funded schools must adopt and implement the NCLB standards for the funding to continue. To make the situation even worse, schools are increasing expectations for Kindergarten student's performance (Evans, 2013 p. 10). Preschool educational programs, as a result, are fighting to keep up with continually increasing expectations (p. 11). This puts a big burden and responsibility on early educational programs to structure their system and curricular to serve to bring the knowledge of their graduates to meet the NCLB educational standards, theNational Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC 2009) developmental principles and the increased school expectations of students performance.

On the other hand, the NAEYC has also established and enforced twelve

developmentally appropriate principles for young children to govern how children develop and learn. It is widely believed that the student's school readiness to adapt to the real world around him depends on the way his knowledge was developed (Evans, 2013 p. 14).

The term readiness in education refers to the ability of students to adjust to the new formal school setting based on their social and academic competencies that were developed through previous early education programs and experiences (Woods, 2013 p. 1). Teachers of formal schools have complained that new students coming from early education programs are not well equipped with the necessary skills and attitudes to start their formal education.(Evans, 2013 p. 4). Children that have gone through Head Start programs were found to be more capable to adjust to the new setting than those that had no Head Start education or home education (p. 38). On the other hand, the Montessori Methodis seen as a high quality method which tends to allow students to direct what they want to learn rather than what schools want them to learn (Kayili& Ari, 2011 p. 2105). Children coming from schools that adapted the Montessori Method were also seen to be more capable to adjust to the new formal school setting. Recent studies indicate that conventional preschools are not fully preparing children for formal education, especially in Head Start programs. In fact, Sabol concluded in her thesis that " the goal of improving school readiness by high quality care has been, as of yet, largely unattained"(2011 p. 4).

Literature Review:

In the year 1989, President Bush stated that by the year 2000, he wanted all children to have increased their readiness for school (Bierman, et. Al, 2009). Although not a lot of people would disagree with him, the definition of readiness or the means of measure were not stated. His aim was to have all children wake up and be ready for school first thing in the morning, with very little resistance. There are different terms for " readiness", and for the president during the tie, this was an important issue (Hopkins & Sitkei, 1969).

When it comes to school readiness for grade one, the definitions can vary. Some educators define " readiness" with age (Lloyd, Irwin & Hertzmen, 2009). Since only children who turn five years old on or before a certain date can be accepted into school, not all those who want to enter their children into Kindergarten can. Readiness for kindergarten or grade one can be defined differently by institutions or people. Schools around the nation have varying rules when it comes to accepting children for grade one.

Readiness testing is very common, even though a lot of parents are against it. The point of entering a child into school is to learn, therefore a " readiness" test before even enrolling can be quite controversial (Panter & Bracken, 2009). There are some schools who might even use these test results to discourage parents in enrolling children considered too young for grade one. Although these readiness tests include the necessary skills that children will need or should have, there are a lot of parents and even teachers who have different opinions on what skills are needed and which ones should be considered more important. There are a lot of people who

tend to focus on cognitive skills when it comes to entering a new grade, while others focus on social and emotional development for success.

The readiness for grade one can be determined by a lot of factors. The kindergarten program, the family and environmental factors all play a part in readying a child. Parents and teachers should determine what stimulates children into aiming for higher academic success at a very early age. It can also be determined by the Woodcock-Johnson III Test of Achievement. This is an exam which consists of 22 tests all given in five different sections. The entire test takes only about 60 – 70 minutes, and it can be given to almost anyone, starting from Pre-School children. This test determines strengths and areas that need academic improvements. There are times when these tests are used to determine if a child is academically ready for a different level, or if they are in need of special services.

The Montessori program has been around for over a hundred years (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006). Today, it is used in thousands of schools in the United States. However, studies on the impact of the program on development or school readiness are rare. The very few findings are inconsistent. Only very little studies show that the Montessori program is better than any other ones (Karnes, 1970). However, studies show that one of the Montessori programs' major goals when it comes to childhood education is school readiness. It is believed that children lacking skills who enter the first grade disadvantage themselves as well as their classmates. Montessori schools are seen to value school success in terms of reading, math and vocabulary. However, as compared to other programs, the effectiveness on development is not clearly defined (Lopata, et. Al, 2005). A particular study conducted by Lillard and

Else-Quest (2006) observed child-development in Montessori Programs during the early years. They used the Woodcock-Johnson III Test of Achievement to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. According to the Woodcock-Johnson III Test of Achievement, they had to include lessons as well as the curriculum taught in the particular school for the exam to be accurate.

The Head Start program provides comprehensive health, nutrition, education and promotes parent involvement in school (McKey, 1985). This program has then served millions of children and families. One of the main priorities of the Head Start program is to improve the readiness for school activities including reading, music and much more. These are goals shared with the Montessori program, however the Head Start program believes in starting the program with children from birth (Currie & Thompson, 1993). Although the roadmap for success and school readiness is outlined by Head Start, there are also very few studies on the effectiveness of these programs. There are studies that do show that those who were involved in such a program had higher IQ scores as compared to those who did not (Anderson, et. Al, 2003). These results, however do not say anything about school readiness. The program has been receiving a lot of very positive views from the public. Head Start has more of a focus on the family and the child's social sphere. These things are considered valuable for entering a new grade.

There is a study conducted by Henry et. Al (2004) which evaluates the effectiveness of Pre-Kindergarten programs in two different schools which adopted the Montessori and Head Start methods. This particular study tested the effectiveness of each program by observing the teacher-student

relationships and the curricula in each school. They analyzed this in order to view the development of the children and their readiness for Kindergarten. They used the Woodcock-Johnson III Test of Achievement for the study and used different variables including race, gender and socio-economic status.

The current study:

Early education programs provided in preschools are believed to be an effective way to prepare students for kindergarten. The purpose of the study is to examine the effectiveness of two of the early education programs designed to improve children's readiness to formal education; namely Head Start and Montessori. Several comparative studies have been carried out to realize the pros and cons of the Head start program and the Montessori program on reading and oral language but few have been done on math. The researcher will include the math skill to the reading skill and oral language skill. The researcher does not concern herself with the different social classes that utilize the programs and focuses the study more on searching for the more effective program to serve the purpose of increasing children's readiness to formal education.

The study will compare the test scores on the Woodcock-Johnson tests of achievement- Third Edition (WS-III-ACH) between two groups of children from Head Start and Montessori programs. The study will apply 6 tests to measure Kindergarten readiness skills in three areas; namely reading, oral language and math.

Study questions:

Research questions for this study include:

- How do Montessori students differ from Head Starts students in term of preschool readiness (letter-word identification) for preschool students in Fairfax school district?

- How do Montessori students differ from Head Starts students in term of preschool readiness (Passage Comprehension) for preschool students in Fairfax school district?

- How do Montessori students differ from Head Starts students in term of preschool readiness (Understanding Directions) for preschool students in Fairfax school district?

- How do Montessori students differ from Head Starts students in term of preschool readiness (Picture Vocabulary) for preschool students in Fairfax school district?

- How do Montessori students differ from Head Starts students in term of preschool readiness (Applied Problem) for preschool students in Fairfax school district?

- How do Montessori students differ from Head Starts students in term of preschool readiness (Quantitative Concepts) for preschool students in Fairfax school district?

Method

The research will be both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative design will compare the possible relationship that may exist between subjects while the qualitative design will provide the data as to the factors

that contribute to the lack of readiness.

This comparative study will examine the differences in reading, oral language and math between children in Head Start program and children in Montessori program.

Participants:

Measures:

As a main outcome variable, the study focuses on children's readiness for Kindergarten in reading, oral language and math. The study will adopt scores of the subscales from Woodcock-Johnson tests of achievement- Third Edition (WS-III-ACH) form A of standard and extended battery (Mother, N & Woodcock, R 2001). Measures of kindergarten readiness in this study will included across the following domains: reading, oral language and math. Reading. The Reading domain will include broad reading, basic reading skills and reading comprehension on the Woodcock-Johnson (WJ-III ACH). Two tests of achievement will be used; Letter-Word Identification and Passage Comprehension. The Letter-Word Identification has a median reliability of . 91 in the age 5 to 19 range and the Passage Comprehension has a median reliability of . 83 in the same age range.

Oral language. The Oral language domain assessments will include oral standard, oral language-extended, listening comprehension and oral expression on the WJ III. For achievement, two tests will be used; Understanding Directions and Picture Vocabulary. Understanding Directions has a median reliability of . 77 in the age 5 to 19 range and the Picture Vocabulary has also a median reliability of . 77 in the same age range.

Math. The Math domain will include assessments of broad math and math reasoning on the WJ III. Two tests of achievement will be used; Applied Problem and Quantitative Concepts. Applied Problem has a median reliability of . 92 in the age 5 to 19 range and the Quantitative Concepts has a median reliability of . 90 in the same age range.

Procedures:

Kindergarten Selection Procedure. The researcher will search for local schools in Fairfax Virginia that apply both the Head Start and Montessori program. Schools will be chosen based on their dedication and commitments to the programs.

Children Selection Procedure. The group sample will be chosen from among three classes from the Head Start program and three class from Montessori program. All children in the sample must have been in the programs for one year or longer. The test will be conducted by the teachers to ensure better compliance by children. The child will feel at ease with his teacher and will cooperates more. The teacher knows the psychology of each child and the best way to communicate with the children to get them to take the test.

Applying the Assessment Procedures. The testing period for the children should not be near any major exam or school activity. The students cannot be distracted by any other activity. The testing period will be done during the first half of the day and will last no longer than one hour. The testing shall be treated as a serious exam and will be facilitated by teachers who are willing and able to facilitate the test.

Data Collection. The collection of the data will be done by the teacher who

will facilitate the testing period. Once the testing has been completed, the teacher will fill-up a short questionnaire on how he or she thinks the students responded. An interview will also be prepared for the teacher before the turn-over of data.

Scoring. The scoring will be consistent with the Woodcock-Johnson III ACH testing method and will be done individually. The scores of the students will be averaged, and a final score will be given. These scores will be analyzed according to the specific age of the child, gender as well as the school program he or she is in.

Fidelity of Treatment. The fidelity criteria of this study will take on an objective form. This means that the level of information will be taken in the form of test results and are compressed and / or generalized to come up with a conclusion based on the true results.

Design

The design of this study consists of a three-part test which measures the readiness of different pre-school children aged five years old. The variables that are to be used are the programs (Montessori and Head Start programs), the gender of the children as well as their class standing. This study is a comparative non-experimental study that will focus on the test scores achieved by the students.

Measure/Data Collection

Our outcome measure for this study are the test scores of different students who study in schools that offer Montessori or Head Start Programs from Fall 2014 to the end of the Spring Semester, which will be a total of six months.

The kindergarten selection process will take six to eight weeks, the consent of the parents of each child needs to be taken into account. Before research begins, the parents of the children need to sign a consent form stating that their child will take part in the study. The selection of students will take another two weeks in this process. This will involve the school head as well as the teachers of the students. The teacher training process will take another six to eight weeks. During this time, the teacher will be given material about the study and an in-depth look into what the researchers want to achieve. They will also be briefed about the method of testing as well as how to write a log during the examinations. The teachers will be taught on how to handle the testing period, answer any questions from the students and they will find out more about post-testing analysis. The testing period will take four to six weeks, since two different schools will be visited. The testing period should be done during a time when the students do not have anything academically important on their minds, which means the schedule for testing will depend on the school's schedule of activities. The results and analysis of data will take two to four weeks once all the scores, logs and interview data is in hand.

Preliminary Data Analysis

The data in the results section will be presented in a quantitative manner according the test results of the students. The subjects will be given a code (ie. Student #1 M for Montessori Program), and the results of each section of the test will be separated and scrutinized. The testing scores will be compared according to the section (Math, Reading, ect.) of the exam. The

results section will show the test scores in percentage. These will also be compared according to the specific age and the gender of each student, to see if these variables play a role in the testing scores. The scores will be placed in table and in chart form for easier viewing. The researcher will be using T-tests to compare the results of the children from different schools according to the variables that are to be studied. After which, the results of the tests will be compared and analyzed in order to form in a quantitative style of study.

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