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An Exploration of Preschool Choice with Low-Income Families: The Critical Role of Positive Attitudes, Behavioral Norms and Control Beliefs

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AN EXPLORATION OF PRESCHOOL CHOICE WITH LOW-INCOME FAMILIES: THE CRITICAL
ROLE OF POSITIVE ATTITUDES, BEHAVIORAL NORMS AND CONTROL
BELIEFS

by

Laurel E. Schmitt

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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AN EXPLORATION OF PRESCHOOL CHOICE WITH LOW-INCOME FAMILIES: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF POSITIVE ATTITUDES, BEHAVIORAL NORMS AND CONTROL BELIEFS

Laurel E. Schmitt, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2020

Since the 1960s preschool has been seen as a potential equalizer for children of poverty as they enter kindergarten and long term studies of state and federal preschools have documented positive impacts, especially for low-income students. What has yet to be deeply explored is guardians' decision-making processes to explain the lack of enrollment even when the stated barriers are eliminated (Obi, 2011; Payne, 1994; Swartz, 1996).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and interpret, through a phenomenological lens, how low income parents and guardians made decisions to enroll their child or dependent in a preschool program. I examined their decision-making processes by organizing the research questions around Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (1991) which includes the notions of (a) behavioral beliefs, (b) normative beliefs, and (c) control beliefs and the role they play in intention to carry through on a behavior. The central research question was: What explains parents' or guardians' decision making process regarding enrolling their children in Head Start or Great Start Readiness Preschool?

This study took place in a mid-sized school district in Allegan County, Michigan. I interviewed a total of twelve guardians of current kindergarteners using a semi-structured interview guide. All participants had children that attended preschool the previous year (six were Head Start eligible and six were Great Start Readiness Preschool eligible).

The major findings of my study showed that parents/guardians who chose preschool for their child expressed positive feelings about education birth to school age and the desire for children to be successful. They supported early learning, and held positive perceptions of preschool and kindergarten. Parents/guardians made a conscious decision to enroll their children in preschool based on factors important to them regarding their child's development such as perceived benefits of preschool, desired preschool elements, and logistics that made preschool feasible. Further, my study found that when parents/guardians made their decisions was based on an accepted norm. When preschool was a norm among peers and family parents/guardians made early decisions. Early education experiences influenced the next step. Preschool for younger siblings followed the older siblings' path.

My findings affirmed and furthers the previous research on the role of positive attitudes, societal norms and control beliefs, (Ajzen, 1991; Grenny, Patterson, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2013), as well as the literature that shows the early years present incredible opportunity to build a strong foundation as the brain rapidly develops during the first five years of life (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Robinson et al., 2017; Xiang & Schweinhart, 2002). My study adds to the literature that shows connected systems provide parents the support to access programs that would support children's development (Chaudry, Morrissey, Weiland, & Yoshikawa, 2017; Obi, 2011; Payne, 1994). Areas for further research include longitudinal choice within families, non-preschool attenders, and early education choices.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I began my pursuit of my Ph.D. I was committed to enjoying the journey, to not just look at the end goal, but to get as much from the learning along the way as possible. As I now approach the destination I look back to see some unexpected twists, detours, and scenic vistas.

I am appreciative of my many guides and fellow travelers who added perspectives and contributed to the enjoyment of the coursework. A special thank you to my committee chair, Dr. Poppink, who encouraged, checked in, read, re-read, provided invaluable feedback and was so generous in giving her time. Also going above and beyond in the commitment of time and expertise was Dr. Pat Reeves who coached and supported and gave me hope that I could indeed finish this journey. Dr. Tomoko Wakabayashi agreed to serve on my committee as my preschool expert. I so appreciate her encouraging spirit and the perspective she brought.

I could not have completed my research without the help of the school district which allowed me access to parents of kindergarteners. I also want to acknowledge the encouragement of my work colleagues and the assistance of preschool contacts Susan Berens (Great Start Readiness) and Sarah See (Head Start) for their help in recruitment and enrollment information. And, of course, I want to thank the parents and guardians who gave me their time and allowed me a glimpse into their lives.

My family, especially my husband Fred, put up with the many years of climbing up the hills and navigating the valleys. Never did he suggest I wouldn't finish or that it was a hardship. I hope in some small way this provides an example for our children and grandchildren to see they are never too old to accomplish an important goal.

Laurel R. Schmitt

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, preschool has gained momentum as a factor that could level the educational playing field for children as they enter kindergarten. Preschools of one type or another have existed for hundreds of years, but they have been outside the k-12 compulsory education system. Beginning in the early 1800s, infant and family schools were the first to educate young children outside the home in the United States (Beatty, 1995, p. 20). These programs operate under a wide range of auspices, from home-based to private organizations to public schools. Preschools also have varying goals, from socialization, to care for children in order to allow their parents work, to cognitive development. The percentage of three to four year olds in formal preschool program in the United States has increased from 47% in 2001 to 64% in 2011 (OECD in Comparative Indicators of Education in the United States and Other G-20 Countries: 2015).

There is an emerging consensus among professionals that young children should be provided educational experiences (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2000). The growing research base on the positive impacts of preschool experience, coupled with the increasing demands of federal legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and Race to the Top (2009) have prompted additional focus on early learning experiences as the foundation for later school and life success. Michigan did not apply for this funding, however, in May of 2013, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan made a visit to Michigan to visit the Perry Preschool. This research impacted the Obama administration's federal policy regarding preschool. At the time, Arne Duncan stated:

Michigan has been a leader in providing children with the foundation they need to succeed, and President Obama has proposed to build on Michigan's success by partnering with states to expand access to high-quality early learning opportunities to more American children, especially those from disadvantaged communities (U.S Department of Education, 2013).

In December of 2015 the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) included the first-ever dedicated funding stream for early childhood education with the new Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five program.

Tuition-based preschools can put preschool attendance out of reach for many families. Head Start is a federally funded program that provides low income children a free preschool opportunity. It saw its beginnings in 1964, when President Lyndon Johnson declared an unconditional war on poverty. Following that speech, The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was enacted to relieve the symptom of poverty, to cure it and, above all, to prevent it (Johnson, 1964). Head Start was intended to help children in poverty become aware of the excitement of learning (Johnson, 1964).

Michigan has a mixed system of federal, state and private preschools. Head Start, a federally funded program, and Great Start Readiness Preschool (GSRP), a state funded program, are available free of charge to eligible children in Michigan. Eligibility is based on economic need as well as other factors that contribute to educational risk. These factors include a diagnosed disability or developmental delay, severe or challenging behavior, primary home language other than English, parent/guardian with low educational attainment, abuse or neglect and other environmental risks (Head Start Act, 2007; Great Start Readiness Program, 2013). Most statewide early education programs have followed Head Start's lead and targeted children

of low socioeconomic status or children who were otherwise at-risk (Burnett & Hustedt, 2003). In 1985 the Michigan School Readiness Program began in a very limited way serving less than 700 students statewide. In 2008, renamed the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), the program served approximately 30,000 students statewide. A targeted program, like Head Start, GSRP serves at-risk 4 year olds. The goal of both Head Start and GSRP is to reduce the impact of the risk factors on children's readiness for school. The primary risk factor is income level of the family. In 2013 Michigan's Governor Snyder added an unprecedented level of funding to expand Michigan's capacity to serve 4 year-olds in the state Great Start Readiness preschools. The Michigan legislature approved a \$130 million increase in Great Start Readiness Program funding across two years (Wakabayashi et al, 2017). Michigan's early childhood focus is evident as a part of long range strategic initiatives. In 2015 the Michigan State Board of Education adopted the Top 10 in 10 goals designed to realize Michigan becoming a top 10 education state within the next 10 years. The first goal is "Provide every child access to an aligned, high-quality P-20 system from early childhood to postsecondary attainment – through a multi-stakeholder collaboration with business and industry, labor, and higher education – to maximize lifetime learning and success." The second strategy for goal 1 is to "expand access to quality publicly-funded preschool for all four-year-olds by 2020; three-year-olds by 2025" (Michigan Department of Education, 2016, p.6).

Preschool and its benefits have been topics of national interest and research documenting the short and long-term impacts. Three long-term studies that looked at the costs and benefits of quality programs examined the High/Scope Perry Preschool, the Abecedarian Early Intervention program and the Title 1 Chicago Child-Parent Centers. The researchers concluded that academic and other benefits from preschool education can yield economic benefits that far outweigh the

costs of intensive, high-quality preschool programs (Barnett, 1996; Masse & Barnett, 2002; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002). Former preschool participants were less likely to cost taxpayers money in the long term for such public services as schooling, welfare and criminal justice. In school they were less likely to be retained in grade or placed in special education (Barnett, 2011, Hattie, 2009). As adults they were more likely to get better jobs and earn more money thus avoiding welfare. The former preschool participants were also less likely to break laws or participate in other delinquent acts. (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993). More recently, a cost benefit analysis of the GSRP expansion revealed a benefit-cost ratio of 2.35 due to the impact on high school graduation rate (Wakabayashi et al, 2017). That same study confirmed previous study findings in a reduction in referrals to special education after third grade.

Children with preschool experience are more ready to learn upon entering kindergarten. They are able to retain learning, maintain good attendance and have an interest in school (Xiang & Schweinhart, 2002). Children who attend a preschool have higher academic skills upon entering elementary school compared to their peers who have stayed at home with parents or who attended an informal child care (Magnusen, Lahaie, and Waldfogel, 2006). Academic benefits include improved verbal fluency, reading, and mathematical skills (Magnusen & Waldfogel, 2005; Hattie, 2009). In addition to improved cognitive development, children who attend preschool are aided in emotional and social development (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Children who attend preschool from homes where mothers do not speak English have even more significant academic improvements than their peers (Magnusen et al., 2006).

While school readiness was a goal for preschool decades ago, its importance remains for today's children. The United States has been moving in an unprecedented way toward the

adoption of rigorous college and career readiness standards that will test students in an entirely new way (Common Core State Standards, 2014). Additionally, brain research provides insights into child development and “windows of opportunity” for skills such as language acquisition which further accentuates the importance of early learning experiences (Kotulak, 1997). With kindergarteners being asked to learn at higher levels added to what we are learning about early learning, preschool for all children is a worthy goal. Preschool becomes a game changer for students from poverty. It offers an opportunity to close a readiness gap. Not all children arrive at the starting line of kindergarten in the same place. Students from lower socio-economic status household experience a 30 million word gap compared with peers from wealthier homes (Colker, 2014). A Stanford University study showed a disparity between SES groups in vocabulary and language processing skills critical for language development (Fernald, Marchman, Weisleder, 2013). For children without kindergarten readiness skills, future academic success is negatively impacted, and preschool could lessen that negative impact (Takanishi, 2004). The Early Literacy Task Force, a subcommittee of the General Education Leadership Network (MAISA GELN, 2016) published the Essential Instructional Practices for Early Literacy, Pre-K. The task force cited the Early Literacy Panel (2008) as research supporting the focus on prekindergarten, as literacy knowledge and skills developed in the preschool years predict later literacy achievement. The Task Force further states “Early childhood programs can also help to address disparities in literacy achievement” (MAISA GELN, 2016, p.1).

Public education policy addresses inequities in student achievement in kindergarten through twelfth grade, and mandates closing the achievement gaps for students of low socio-economic status, racial ethnic subgroups, students with disabilities, English language learners and migrant students (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002). However, these inequities are

present prior to the start of school, as well. And they persist throughout their school careers. Preschool is one answer to beginning to address this achievement inequity early.

Without preschool, children spend their early years in settings that vary greatly in terms of resources. Parents, as their child's first teachers, vary in their preparedness, access to resources, and vision for what it means to get their children ready for school academically and socially. Because children's early learning experiences differ greatly and there may be a mismatch in what parents think is important for children to begin school, the achievement gap begins long before the start of school (Stebbins & Knitzer, 2007).

Problem Statement

Researchable Problem

Preschool, varying in form and purpose, has been around for more than two centuries. Since the 1960s it has been seen as a potential equalizer for children of poverty as they enter kindergarten. Long term studies of state and federal preschools have documented positive impacts, especially for low-income students. But how do we ensure that these students enroll? Preschool is not compulsory in the United States which make the issue of enrollment more complex. Enrolling is a result of parent/guardian choice. The result is that some children attend preschool and others not, which may actually widen the existing school readiness gap upon kindergarten entrance.

As communities have ramped up their ability to serve more preschool children to give them a *great start*, some communities are seeing free preschool slots go unused (French, 2012). Each spring, the Head Start and Great Start Readiness Program actively recruits students for their free preschools. Potential barriers are addressed. Free, quality programs with highly qualified

staff are located in the school districts and transportation is provided. Yet each fall, it can be a struggle to fill the classrooms with the students that would benefit the most.

Because preschool is not compulsory, if guardians do not actively engage in looking for preschool options, the child will not be enrolled in preschool. Because it falls on guardians to decide whether or not children attend preschool, a more precise understanding of how this choice is made. This qualitative study examined the lived experiences of how low income parents and guardians made decisions to enroll their child or dependent in a preschool program.

Studies Addressing the Problem

There have been numerous studies on the benefits of preschool to children and communities (Bartik, 2011; Gormley & Phillips, 2005, Schweinhart et al., 1993). There have also been studies on the factors parents and guardians look for in choosing preschools and barriers that might keep families from enrolling in preschool (Debra, 2006; Elliot, 2012; Miramontes, 2008; Ruhm, Magnusen and & Waldfogel, 2007).

There is an economic and human impact related to the choice to enroll or not enroll children in preschool. Children who enter kindergarten from preschool have clear advantages of social and academic preparedness over most of their peers and for children in poverty the advantages are the greatest. There are lifelong costs for children who enter kindergarten academically and socially below their peers. They are more likely later in life to engage in criminal activities, drop out of high school, not enroll in college, be unemployed, become teen parents and be diagnosed as clinically depressed (Haskins & Rouse, 2005).

The resulting benefits of attending targeted preschools, which are aimed at educating at-risk children have also been well researched (Bartik, 2011; Gormley & Phillips, 2005). The necessary elements of quality preschool and preschool outcomes for children and society have

also been documented (Reynolds, 1999). Investing early in a child's education pays off (Barnett, 2011). Over the lifetimes of the participants, the High Scope study showed a return to the public an estimated seven dollars for every dollar spent (Schweinhart et al., 1993).

While the benefits of preschool seem clear so are current inequities. There are inequities in families' ability to access quality preschools (Debra, 2006; Elliot, 2012; Ruhm et al., 2007). Barriers of cost, transportation, availability of quality options and the trust that children will be well-cared for are often cited by parents as contributing factors leading to not enrolling their children in preschool (The Center for Michigan, 2013). Additionally, studies have shown language barriers, parental beliefs around child rearing, and different fears to be potential reasons for lack of enrollment. Miramontes (2008) studied Latina mothers' beliefs and awareness of preschool benefits. The study found preschool to be important to mothers, but that barriers of access as well as other reasons justified not enrolling their children in preschool.

Taken as a whole, barriers could be categorized as: availability (location proximity, available space), affordability/logistics (transportation, before and after care for working parents, the system is navigable), quality (teacher qualifications, secular/non-secular, program/curriculum), and beliefs (preschool is not desirable/the norm, parental fears (Debra, 2006; Elliot, 2012; Miramontes, 2008; Ruhm et al., 2007).

Literature Deficiency Statement

Previous studies do not go deeply enough into guardians' decision-making processes to explain the lack of enrollment even when the stated barriers are eliminated (Obi, 2011; Payne, 1994; Swartz, 1996). By focusing only on typical barriers, there is also an assumption that elimination of these barriers alone will result in increased enrollment. There is an implied assumption that guardians accept the benefits of preschool. In other words, there is a societal

expectation arising that guardians would send their children to a quality preschool if barriers were removed. However, even in states with universal access to preschool, enrollment percentages are nowhere near 100 percent (Ackerman et al., 2009).

Significance of the Study

The research on the benefits of preschool (Barnett, 2011) or how to select quality preschools (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2000; Obi, 2011) is informative and compelling. The focus of the current research has not shed light on why guardians generally choose to send their children to preschool. With the notion of preschool for all children gaining momentum at the local, state and national level, the question remains if parents will send their children. This study seeks to fill that gap.

This study will provide policy makers, preschool providers and school districts with valuable information they can use to impact preschool enrollment. The positive impact on individual lives, school programming and economic development of communities could be far reaching.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and interpret, through a phenomenological lens, how low income parents and guardians made decisions to enroll their child or dependent in a preschool program. In doing so, I examined their decision-making processes by organizing the research questions around Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (1991) which includes the notions of (a) behavioral beliefs, (b) normative beliefs, and (c) control beliefs and the role they play in intention to carry through on a behavior.

This study focused on one central research question. Together with the eight sub-questions, the central question was intended to guide the investigation to gain insight into

parents' and guardians' perceptions, perspectives and understandings of preschool choice. The parents and guardians had kindergarteners who qualified for free preschool.

The central research question was: What explains parents' or guardians' decision making process regarding enrolling their children in Head Start or Great Start Readiness Preschool?

Sub-questions were designed to solicit responses around the components of the theoretical framework.

Behavioral beliefs and attitudes

1. How do guardians describe their beliefs about enrolling their child in Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?
2. What are the guardians' attitudes toward Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?

Normative Beliefs

3. How do guardians describe the community norm in regard to Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?
4. How do guardians describe the norm in their peer group/family in regard to Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?

Control Beliefs

5. How do guardians describe what stops or encourages them to send their child to Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?
6. How do they describe their belief in the ease or difficulty of sending their child to Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?

Intention

7. What did it take for them to send their child?

- a. What made it feasible?
- b. What made it difficult?

Conceptual Framework and Narrative

For my conceptual framework, I referenced previous experience with parents of preschool aged children and imagined what I knew of their decision-making journey generalized to all preschool parents and guardians. I suggest that predicting behavior regarding preschool choice is like predicting other behavioral choices. There are influences and factors that promote the behavior and inhibit the behavior. For this reason I used Ajzen's theory of planned behavior as a theoretical framework for discovering the experiences of the participants in my study. Maxwell describes a theoretical framework as the "actual ideas and beliefs that you hold about the phenomena studied" (2013, p 39). The framework is "an explanatory device which explains either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied, the key factors, constructs or variables, and the presumed relationship among them (Bell, 2005, p 103).

Because little is known about parental choice for preschool, and that is what this study begins to illuminate, I used the theory of planned behavior to discover how guardians' beliefs, attitude, perceptions, perspectives and understandings influenced their intentions and behavior of enrolling their children in preschool. Using behavior as the conceptual framework provided the basis for the research sub-questions and as a result also guided the open-ended interview questions.

According to the theory of planned behavior, "human behavior is guided by three kinds of consideration, 'behavioral beliefs', 'normative beliefs', and 'control beliefs'" (Ajzen, 1991). The theory of planned behavior also incorporates perceived control and intention to explain a behavior. This model explains how different components that lead to a behavior, such as beliefs

and perceptions, interact with each other. The process may not be linear (Ajzen, 1991). For example, a societal norm can influence attitude and vice versa. Also, attitude, societal norms and perceived control can all impact intention and that may not be enough to result in the behavior. Behavior may be mitigated by the perceived control one has.

As Figure 1 below shows, the three boxes on the left describe behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs. These beliefs may impact each other and lead to attitude toward a behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, respectively. Together, the six boxes on the left side of the diagram impact intention, which impacts behavior.

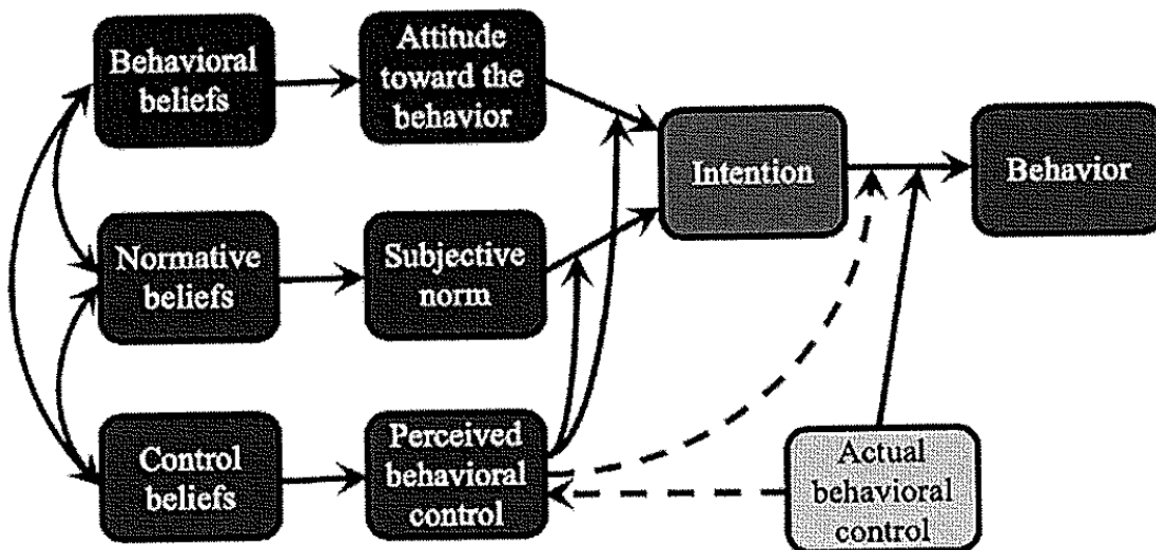


Figure 1. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

A decision-making model that only looks at the factors upon which a decision is made may not be sufficient when seeking to explain a behavior. A person may decide intellectually or logically or based on societal pressure to do something but then not actually carry out the decision to act. Separating intention from the observable behavior allows a deeper look into what led up to the behavior.

For example, the theory of planned behavior could be applied to a common situation such as personal nutrition. A person may value eating nutritionally (attitude toward behavior), it may be the norm in the culture (subjective norm), there may be availability of affordable nutritious food (perceived behavioral control) and a goal is set to eat healthy (intention). But if, the person has had little success in this area in the past, and believes eating healthy is very difficult (perceived behavioral control), the resulting behavior may be to not eat in a nutritionally healthy way regardless of the intent to do so.

The Theory of Planned Behavior as Applied to Preschool Choice

When applying the theory of planned behavior to sending a child to preschool, guardians' decision process can be examined through each component of the framework. Figure 2 shows how the components of the theory of planned behavior can be applied to the idea of preschool choice.

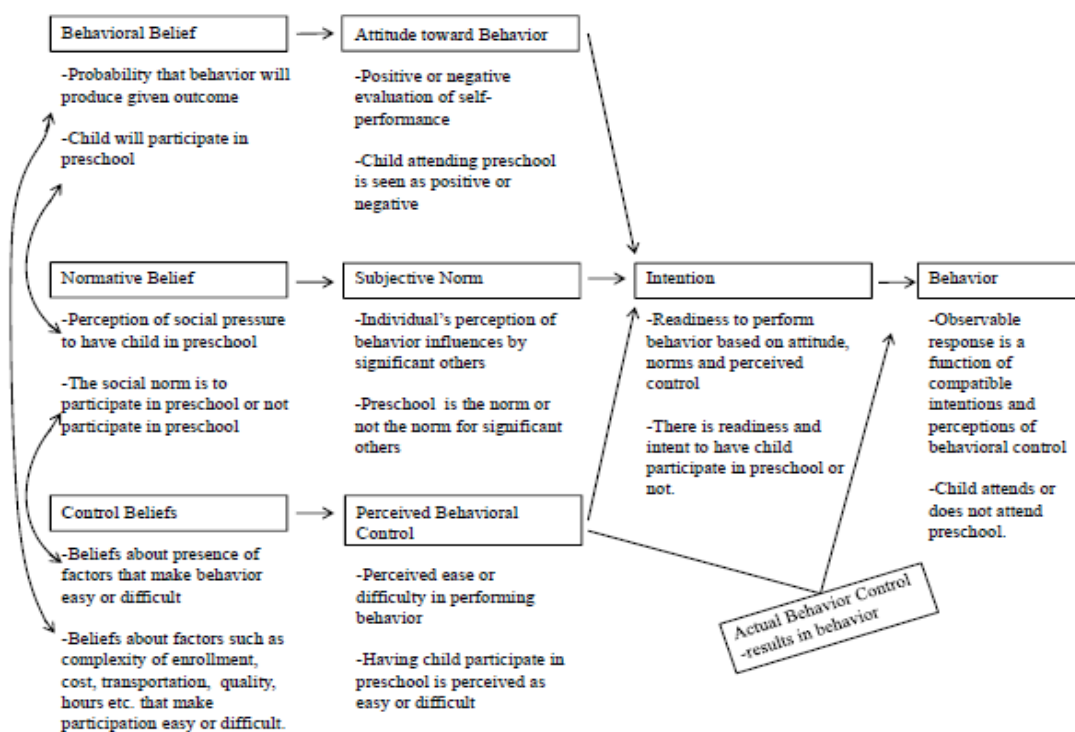


Figure 2. The Theory of Planned Behavior Applied to Preschool Choice

The behavioral belief is that the child will or will not attend preschool. The guardians' attitude toward the behavior, in this case preschool enrollment, could be positive, negative or ambivalent in regard to benefits to the child. The normative belief is that the guardian perceives social pressure to have the child in preschool or not. The subjective norm refers to whether there is the expectation of preschool in the family or peer group. Control beliefs are around the presence of factors that make preschool attendance easy or difficult such as: logistics of transportation, schedule, affordability and availability of a quality preschool. Perceived behavioral control refers to how easy or difficult these factors make it for the child to attend preschool or not attend preschool. In other words, when considering belief around the control factors, do the guardians think preschool is feasible? Behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs play a role in intention. When taken in total, does the parent intend to enroll the child in preschool? The final segment of the model is the behavior. Even if the parent has the intention, there is the question of action. Does the parent act on the intention and enroll the child in preschool?

Other theories may provide insight into a parent's decision-making process, but they are not as comprehensive in nature. Critical theory and the parental involvement model both look at factors that might inform this research, by assisting the researcher in being alert to these areas. Critical theory helps address the social capital differences by "articulating the linkages between these impediments and those based on differential access to economic, political, and cultural resources associated with the social class structure" (Izent, 2000). However, there is still the individual action or behavior that may not occur, even if all the external barriers were removed. The parental involvement model (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995) looks at how the parent

constructs their role, their sense of efficacy and opportunities presented by the child or school. But this model is limited in looking at other contributing factors.

Methods Overview

Qualitative studies tend to examine small groups of people in great detail in order to delve into the complexity of an experience or phenomenon. Marshall & Rossman (1999) note that qualitative inquiries “are pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people” (p. 20). Qualitative studies occur in natural settings, focus on context and involve reflection on the part of the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman). This study was qualitative in design and explored the decision of guardians of kindergarteners who sent their child to Head Start, Great Start Readiness or another preschool prior to kindergarten. Choosing a qualitative research design allowed meaning to evolve from the participants (Creswell, 2007).

This study used phenomenological methods to guide the research process. In a phenomenological approach, the researcher collects data from those who have experienced the phenomenon in an effort to develop a composite description of what and how they experienced it (Moustakus in Creswell, 2007). Through this process, the focus was to describe what participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon, in this case Head Start, Great Start Readiness Program, or another preschool choice. The intent was to capture participants’ perceptions, perspectives and understandings as they experienced preschool choice. Specifically, the transcendental phenomenology tradition was chosen to ensure a clean slate perspective, one in which “everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Guardians were asked about their experiences with the phenomenon of preschool choice with no preconceived notions on the part of the researcher. This allowed the search for meaning and the essences to emerge from the participants in the study.

This study used purposeful stratified criterion sampling of guardians of current kindergarteners. Invitations to be a part of the study went directly to former Head Start and GSRP families as well as through the *Friday folders* of kindergarteners. The school district enable the distribution to only the students who received free or reduced price lunch. Eligibility for free lunch was used for Head Start eligible families and reduced-price eligibility was used for GSRP. While not representative of all the risk factors, this provide an approximate income eligibility to screen participants who would qualify for free preschool.

The interviews consisted of twelve guardians whose children attended preschool (four Head Start, five GSRP and three other preschools). Data collection was through in-depth interviews of decision-makers for children's education/care, specifically those of current kindergarteners who had enrolled in Head Start or GSRP or those who would have been qualified to enroll.

Chapter 1 Closure

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and describe how guardians made decisions about enrolling their children in preschool. Locally, statewide and nationally, there are more options for preschool than are being accessed by parents (Ackerson, Barnett, Hawkinson, Brown, & McGonigle, 2009).

With the benefits of preschool widely researched, there is still a lack of understanding regarding guardians' decision-making processes. Too many students are arriving at kindergarten at a distinct disadvantage compared to their peers (Barnett et al., 2007; Bartik, 2011). Because preschool is not compulsory, preschool enrollment requires an active choice. If parents and guardians do not make an active choice, children will not be enrolled in preschool.

Research on barriers to preschool enrollment has been limited to external factors. Understanding guardians' beliefs, perceptions, perspectives and understandings as they experienced preschool choice will allow school and legislative decision-makers to mitigate barriers that keep children out of preschool. Leaders could utilize insights gained through this research to increase the numbers of children who are prepared to enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Preschool can have many meanings to people but there is consensus that a high quality preschool prepares children for kindergarten and beyond and benefits society and economy as well (Barnett, 2007; Bartik, 2011, Schweinhart, 2004). This literature review begins with background and historical context of preschool education, the research on preschool benefits for the child and society, and preschool models will be presented. A review of existing theories and how they inform this study is included. Finally, weaknesses in the literature will be shared.

Why Preschool?

Early education is gaining additional attention and support as educators reflect on current systems and their ability to adequately address current and future contexts that children face. The rapidly changing world together with what we now know about brain development make quality early learning opportunities even more critical (Kotulak, 1997; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Global competition continues to influence federal education policy which rewards states for adopting rigorous standards and assessments. Not all students are ready to succeed at these increasingly high levels. Large achievement gaps exist between demographic subgroups, and it is clear that the achievement gaps begin long before school starts. “At age four, poor children are 18 months behind their more affluent peers and the gap is still present at age ten” (Stebbins & Knitzer, 2007, p. 5).

As a result of these achievement gaps, there is attention and pressure to improve school achievement for children at risk of academic and social failure (Neuman, 2003). Increasingly, questions are being raised about when children should start formal education. The current

starting age of five or six seems arbitrary and may not be putting our nations' children in the best position to be successful in school (Barnett, Brown, & Shore, 2004).

There are many versions of preschool education in place in the United States. Some are federally supported, others state supported, and still others that are completely privately funded. Rarely, is a universal model attempted. Instead there is a fragmented patchwork of opportunities. Regardless of the preschool opportunities, the element of choice is an important factor. Unlike K-12 compulsory education, with preschool, it remains a parental choice to send a child to preschool.

Evidence is mounting on the value of quality preschool to children, the economy and society in general (Barnett, 2007; Bartik, 2011, Schweinhart, 2004). Global and local economics hinge on a talent stream that embraces 21st century knowledge and skills. "Although many best practices remain to be elaborated, research demonstrates that these years lay a powerful foundation for subsequent learning, and that they should be taken at least as seriously as schooling in later years" (Hines, McCartney, Mervis, & Wible, 2011, p. 968).

Preschool is gaining support in the United States. According to the 45th annual Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools, "7 out of 10 American voters support a federal plan to help states and local communities provide better early childhood education" and "three of four Americans believe preschool programs for children from low-income households would help these same children perform better in school in their teenage years" (Bushaw & Lopez, 2013, p.22).

Benefits to the Child

Children who have had preschool have lower rates of identification for special education services, less behavior issues, lower prison rate later in life, less Medicaid and welfare costs,

higher job skills, and higher earning power (Hattie, 2009; Schweinhart, 2004). Unfortunately, “the current array of independent and uncoordinated early childhood policies and inadequately funded early childhood programs are squandering a precious opportunity” (Gomby, Lerner, Stevenson, Lewit, & Behrman, 1995, p. 21). Early educational opportunities have become a moral imperative as it has become clear that “early inequality in education threatens to breed further inequality” (Debra, 2006, p. 725). Lower socioeconomic status is associated with lower rates of preschool enrollment, which suggests that the very children who would benefit most from preschools are the least likely to be enrolled in them (Elliot, 2012).

The Abecedarian Project, based in North Carolina, was the first study that tracked impacts of participating in the early learning program to age 21. Participants were 111 African-American families. The project demonstrated that young children who receive high-quality early education from infancy to age 5 do better in reading and math. Also, they are more likely to stay in school longer, graduate from high school, and attend a four-year college. Children who participated in the early intervention program posted higher cognitive test scores beginning from the toddler years to age 21. As adults, graduates of this high-quality early education program tended to wait longer to have their first child (Masse & Barnett, 2002).

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart et al., 1993) was a longitudinal study assessing whether high-quality, active learning preschool programs can provide both short- and long-term benefits to children living in poverty and at high risk of failing in school. The study has continued to follow the lives of 123 such children from African-American families who lived in the neighborhood of Perry Elementary School in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in the 1960s (Schweinhart, 2004). The study reported findings that through age 27 preschool participants have significantly higher earnings, rates of home ownership, and levels of schooling, as well as

significantly fewer arrests and social service interventions, than a control group of non-preschool participants (Schweinhart, 2004).

Benefits to Society

Long-term benefits to society for children receiving a strong educational start are many. Resulting higher test scores in schools raise property values (Bartik, 2011). Parents of preschoolers are able to enter the workforce, and preschools are employers- both positive impacts on the local economy (Bartik, 2011; Gormley & Phillips, 2005).

Preschool is a smart investment. In addition to the child benefits reported in the Perry Preschool Project, “cost-benefit analysis revealed that, over the lifetimes of the participants, the preschool program returned to the public an estimated \$7.16 for every dollar spent” (Schweinhart, 2002, p. 3). The long range economic benefits detailed in the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through Age 40 show significantly higher employment rates, higher median annual earnings, greater stability in housing and car ownership and less use of social services for program participants compared to the no-program group (Schweinhart, 2005).

Universal versus Targeted Preschool

Unlike kindergarten, which is compulsory in most states, preschools are often attended based on the ability to pay. Which preschool a child attends is based on parent income and risk factors. Universal Preschool means different things to different people, and public support likely depends on how it is defined. Four definitions surface in the literature (Ackerson et al., 2009):

1. Universal can mean preschool is free and available to all who wish to participate.

This may mean schools are required to offer one or two years of preschool.

2. The second definition still focuses on available preschool options for all, but moves from free to affordable. Sliding scales of tuition are based on ability to pay.

3. The third definition describes universal as equivalent to compulsory. However, compulsory kindergarten is not even mandated in many states, so this is a fairly drastic option for preschool.
4. The fourth definition guarantees a subsidy for preschool but no one agency (like schools) is responsible for ensuring that quality programs are available.

With many benefits of preschool being well-documented, the question still remains regarding the value of every four-year-old attending preschool. There are important factors to be considered. Parents make the decision regarding the education of children aged zero to five. The value of preschool plays into the decision, along with costs. Public support for funding of preschools varies depending on who should be served, all children or only at-risk children. Opponents of universal preschool argue that it is parents' right and responsibility to raise their children, while preschool proponents argue that our global competitors are "making investments in early education, and that failure to do so will dull our competitive edge" (Barnett et al., 2004, para. 6). According to Jensen "the fact is, early care programs do make a difference, and they are worth supporting" (2006, p. 123).

Targeted preschools provide funding to specific student populations based on income, learning disability, and other risk factors such as trauma, incarcerated parent, parental drug or alcohol abuse. Head Start is a federally funded targeted preschool. The Great Start Readiness Preschool program in Michigan is a state-funded preschool. Both have clear income and risk factor guidelines that determine student eligibility.

Universal Access models are rare. Six states offer preschool for all, as opposed to targeting low-income, at-risk children; "Georgia and Oklahoma have been offering access to all 4-year olds since 1995 and 1998 respectively" (Ackerman, Barnett, Hawkinson, Brown, &

McGonigle 2009, p. 3). Table 1 details the six states that offer universal access, the year the program began, the percent enrolled in 2007 and the total population served in those states when Head Start and Special Education preschools are added. Even with universal access, the total enrollment varies from 45% to 90%. The year the program began, as well as funding and policy differences help to account for the differences in enrollment percentages (Ackerman et al., 2009).

Table 1

Publicly Funded Education Programs for 4-Year Olds, FY 2007

State	Year Program Began	Percent Enrolled	Total Percent Served Including Head Start and Special Education
Georgia	1995	53%	65%
New York	1997	35%	55%
Oklahoma	1998	68%	90%
West Virginia	2003	46%	76%
Florida	2005	57%	71%
Illinois	2006	27%	45%

Note. Adapted from “Providing Preschool Education for All 4-Year Olds: Lessons from Six State Journeys by D.J. Ackerman, W.S. Barnett, L.E. Hawkinson, K. Brown and E. McGonigle, 2009, *Preschool Policy Brief*, March 2009, Issue 18. Copyright 2009 by National Institute for Early Education Research.

Preschool Models

Not all preschools are created equal. There are many models and quality varies. State and federally supported preschools, unlike private preschools, have strict quality requirements based on research. Private preschools may choose to adhere to standards such as those required by National Association for the Education of Young Children (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2019) accreditation or not. Mervis found that these “standards

matter and the variation in quality affects outcomes. Programs that adhered to the standards were getting better outcomes” (2011, p. 958).

Frede (1995) analyzed preschools that have been identified as successful in long-term studies to determine elements critical to effectiveness. Frede identified interrelated factors of “program structure (class size, the ratio of children to teachers, and service intensity); processes that help teachers respond to individual children (reflective teaching practice and close relationships with parents); and curricula that serve as a bridge between home and school” (Frede, 1995, p. 126). An enriched environment can positively impact the positive outcomes for children. Jensen identified factors that maximize enrichment in early education settings: “physical activity, novelty, challenging and meaningful learning, coherent complexity, managed stress levels, social support, good nutrition, and sufficient time” (2006, p. 245). There are also privately run home child care/preschools that may or may not be licensed by the state, thus making it difficult to know the quality of the experience.

Theoretical Review

Existing theories have informed this study and the initial interview questions. These theories: choice theory, critical theory and the theory of planned behavior all relate to decision-making. Choice theory seeks to connect internal motivation to choice. Critical theory links choice to societal norms. The theory of planned behavior is a more comprehensive theory that combines both internal and external and adds a follow through component beyond making the decision to actually acting on it. Each theory is discussed here in greater detail.

Choice Theory

Choice theory was developed by William Glasser, MD (1998). It provides an explanation of motivation and behavior. A central aspect of choice theory is the belief that we

are internally, not externally motivated. Choice theory teaches that outside events never make a person do anything. Instead behavior is a result of internally developed ideas of what is most important and satisfying to us. Glasser calls these internally developed ideas or values a person's Quality World (Glasser, 2010). The Quality World is the vision of how a person would like the world to be. This world is constructed based on certain needs: survival, fun, freedom, power, and belonging. According to Glasser these needs are built into the genetic structure of every human being (Glasser, 2010).

As the name of the theory implies, choice theory posits that we always have some choice about how to behave. This does not mean that we have unlimited choice or that outside information is irrelevant as we choose how to behave. It means that there is more control than some people might believe and that people are responsible for the choices that are made.

Choice theory describes an internal process of comparing the *quality world* with the *real world* which is viewed through the filters or lenses of values and knowledge. Either consciously or unconsciously the comparison is constantly taking place to answer the question if a person's behavior the best available choice to take him or her in the desired direction. "When people learn to apply the principles of choice theory, they are taught how to more consciously self-evaluate so that the behaviors they choose have the best chance of helping them achieve what they want in ways that are responsible" (An introduction to choice theory, n.d., para. 4).

Awareness of choice theory could help someone understand that by postponing a short-term motivator of fun that they could have a longer term motivator of power or belonging. Or they may understand that a decision to lash out due to a survival instinct may be in conflict with a desire for freedom. The theory raises behavior choice to a conscious level.

Critical Theory

Critical theory has roots in works of philosophers such as Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. For purposes of this research the modern interpretation was developed by Brian Fay, and it was used to study social contexts. This theory "is an attempt to understand . . . the oppressive features of a society such that this understanding stimulates its audience to transform their society and thereby liberate themselves" (Izent, p. 2). As applied to my study, this theory holds that I would expect the choice made by parents to send or not send their children to preschool to reflect societal factors. "Success in the education of citizens is constrained by factors external and internal to critical social theory. External factors include the receptivity of its audience and any psychological, ideological, or other cultural impediments that must be overcome in order for the message to be received, understood, and found persuasive" (Izent, p. 3). Simply put, Critical theory in this context might suggest that parents would only choose preschool if their social norm for the group with which they identify. Also, the majority group's values of preschool may not be held by the marginalized group or communicated to them in such a way that inspires them to enroll their child.

Critical theory is not like behavior change theory which informs the conceptual framework for this research. Rather, it is an iterative methodology for helping investigators remain attentive to equity while carrying out research, scholarship, and practice. It also urges scholars to work to transform the hierarchies they identify through research. In looking for patterns, critically, the theory is derived. The researcher places a focus in the margins to shift a discourse's starting point from a majority group's perspective, which is the usual approach, to that of the marginalized group or groups. Examples of the marginalized groups in this research could be racial or socioeconomic. Critical theory allows the researcher "not only to grasp the

nature and institutionalization of these beliefs and prejudices, but also to articulate the linkages between these impediments and those based on differential access to economic, political, and cultural resources associated with the (social) class structure (Izent, p. 4). In this case, are the perceived benefits and barriers to preschool enrollment accurate?

Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior may provide a framework to explain the choice to send or not send children to preschool. The theory of planned behavior posits that human behavior is guided by three kinds of considerations: behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, control beliefs (Ajzen, 1991). The theory of planned behavior is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

The theory of planned behavior postulates three conceptually independent determinants of intention. The first is the attitude toward the behavior and refers to the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question. The second predictor is a social factor termed subjective norm; it refers to the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior. The third antecedent of intention is the degree of perceived behavioral control which...refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior and it is assumed to reflect past experience as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles (Ajzen, 1991, p.188).

While theories such as choice theory and critical theory address particular components of choice, the theory of planned behavior seems to present a more complete picture of what may be impacting parents of preschoolers. In the context of this research, the lived experiences of parents may be classified in the attitude, cultural norm and perceived control.

Attitude toward preschool may hinge on image or philosophy (Payne, 1994) or beliefs on preschool or kindergarten readiness. Parents' decision to send their child to preschool may be affected by the alignment of what they believe are important outcomes of preschool and the outcomes that are the priorities of the preschool. Rowland (2007) studied parent and teacher perceptions regarding school readiness. The survey revealed:

several items where parents and teachers were in agreement with the importance. These were: —child is rested and well-nourished and health needs are met, —feeds self with a fork, —can hold a pencil and can use scissors, — can throw a ball, skip, hop, and walk up and down stairs, —is curious, uses classroom equipment correctly, and —finds own belongings. All agreed on level of importance but in the other areas there were significant differences in the importance, not only of the subscales but different items within the subscales. Several items that parents felt were more important than teachers were: — plays well with other children, — can express feelings/needs in primary language, has a sense of right/wrong, is self-confident and proud of his/her work, takes turns, —lines up, stays in line, waits quietly,—can count to 50 or more. On the subscale scores teachers rated independence skills as third highest mean which was the lowest mean for the parents. (Rowland, 2007, p.36-37).

Factors impacting cultural norm would include whether family and friends do now or historically have participated in preschool.

The children least likely to attend pre-K are those whose parents have the least education and least income, whose mothers do not work outside the home, and who live in the western and mid-western regions of our country. More research has been conducted on factors that influence perception of control. Hispanic children appear to be particularly

disadvantaged as they have a much lower rate of preschool education participation than other children but apparently not because cultural values lead them to avoid such programs (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007, p.8).

Other studies have identified factors concerning underutilization of services such as: transportation issues/concerns, the need for an all-day preschool program, the preschool start time was not convenient, parents did not know about available services, and the referral process was reported to be long and hard to follow (Obi, 2011). These factors may also be described as convenience factors (Payne, 1994). These practical issues or concerns can impact intent. If a parent/guardian wants their child in a preschool because they have the belief that it will be beneficial, but they are unable to find one that would match their schedule they may no longer intend to enroll the child. Additionally, if the intent is there, but the enrollment process is too cumbersome or confusing, the parent may not be able to follow through on the intended behavior and the child will not be enrolled.

Chapter 2 Closure

Benefits of a quality preschool experience for children and society have been researched in depth. As a result, states continue to build onto preschool systems in an effort to increase percentages of students attending preschool. The research has been limited in regard to barriers that parents face as they try to enroll their children in preschool. Obi (2011) conducted a quantitative study on factors that influence parents' choice in preschool enrollment. This research surfaced all-day options and transportation as critical factors in that choice (Obi, 2011). Other studies have focused specifically on cultural differences in enrollment. Swartz reported that "Hispanic parents have been slow to overcome their historic reluctance to turning their young children over to non-family members for care" (1996, p. 2). However these studies have

not looked into what the factors were that led the parent or guardian to seek out preschool for their child.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and interpret, through a phenomenological lens, how low income parents and guardians made decisions to enroll their child or dependent in a preschool program. In this chapter, an overview and rationale for phenomenology is presented. The approach to this phenomenological study is shared along with the context, data collection and analysis procedures. Finally, delimitations and limitations are explained.

Research Design, Approach and Rationale

Phenomenology, a qualitative design approach, was used for this study. Qualitative research was appropriate here “because a problem or issue needs to be explored” (Creswell, 2007, p.39). Phenomenology draws from the writings of Edmund Husserl and is popular in the health and social sciences (Creswell, 2007). Contributions from more recent researchers describe common philosophical assumptions in phenomenological research: the study of lived experiences, and conscious ones (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Moustakus, 1994) and the development of descriptions of the essences of the experiences not explanations or analyses (van Manen, 1990).

Two approaches to conducting a phenomenological study are discussed here: hermeneutic (van Manen, 1990) and empirical, transcendental or psychological (Moustakas, 1994). Hermeneutics derives its meaning from the philosophy of Heidegger who believed interpreting of texts in context was necessary to obtain true understanding. The hermeneutical approach described by van Manen involves four activities: bracketing, intuiting, analyzing and describing. Bracketing refers to the isolating of the world and any presuppositions a researcher

may have in an effort to confront the data in as pure a form as possible. Intuiting occurs when the researcher remains open to the meaning attributed to the phenomenon by those who have experienced it. Intuiting results in common understanding about the phenomenon that is being studied and requires the researcher to creatively vary the data until such an understanding emerges. Intuiting also requires that the researcher becomes totally immersed in the study and the phenomenon to experience the inside view to the greatest degree possible. Analysis involves such processes as coding, categorizing, and making sense of the essential meanings of the phenomenon. As the researcher works/lives with the rich descriptive data, then common themes or essences begin to emerge. Analysis involves total immersion for as long as it is needed in order to ensure both a pure and a thorough description of the phenomenon. At the descriptive stage, the researcher comes to understand and to define the phenomenon. The aims of this final step are to communicate and to offer distinct, critical description in written and verbal form.

Transcendental phenomenology is described by Moustakas (1994) as including epoche, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Epoch is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to stay away from the ordinary way of perceiving things. Moustakas (1994) describes this as a necessary first step to the research process. The second step of transcendental-phenomenological reduction allows each experience to be considered in its totality in a “fresh, open way, as if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p.34). Imaginative variation aims to capture the essences of the experience to present a picture of the conditions that precipitate an experience and connect with it. “Phenomenology seeks to eliminate prejudgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of

normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p 40).

Because the research questions aim at understanding the decision-making surrounding preschool choice in a deeper way than has been previously studied, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was chosen. This method allows understanding to emerge from the experiences of the participants.

Reflections on My Identity

Reflexivity in qualitative research is pervasive from the beginning to end of the research. “Researchers, their interaction with the research participants, and the contexts both belong to may influence the research process from an initial, pre-research stage over data collection and analyzing up to questions of writing and publishing” (Mruck & Mey, 2007, p. 519).

Reflexive research takes researcher involvement into account. I recognize that I cannot completely remove myself and my interpretation from the situation. For that reason, at all phases of the research, my awareness of reflexivity and use of tools helped to capture close approximations of reality. I used verbatim transcription of recorded interviews, memos and journal writing throughout the data collection to capture observations, impressions and allow reflection. In this way, I did not miss recording any of the interviews. They were captured in their entirety to analyze afterward.

I used memos to record impressions, observations, and thoughts. Memos can be a tool to document the reflexive elements of the research (Charmaz, 2006; Mruck & Mey, 2007). I used memos to write notes at the time of the interviews as a way to capture elements the transcript would not. I used the memos as a tool to “bracket” my perceptions and beliefs in order to honor

the input from the participants. I was careful during the interview to not offer opinions or react to participants' stated beliefs, other than to seek clarification or additional input.

I also used memos during the analysis process to elaborate on ideas about the data as I was processing it. In this way, I could capture my perceptions or opinions separate from the steps of data analysis.

Reflexivity involves intentionally looking at myself and background. My gender, culture, socio-economic status, education, political practice, values and past experiences can bias or prejudice my research (Cresswell, 2007; Marshall and Rossman, 2011). I am a mother of four children and grandmother of three children. All of my own children attended a preschool and the grandchildren that are old enough have done so as well. I value education and strongly believe that parents are their child's best, first teachers and they play a very important role in the future success of their children in school and beyond. My experiences have led me to believe parents have varying values, skillsets and resources to bring to bear on their role as their child's first teacher. As an administrator in an education agency that oversees the county preschools I have an in depth knowledge of the Great Start Readiness Preschool program and a vested interest in its success. I believe in the value of preschool, especially for our most at-risk children.

In carrying out this qualitative research, it was impossible to completely remain 'outside' and objective; my presence in the design of the study, the selection of participants and interviews, have some kind of effect. Mruck and Mey assert that "research and its results depend on time, place and the context a researcher belongs to" (2007, p 516). However, by analyzing the potential sources of bias and prejudice, I was able to make conscious decisions throughout my research in order to increase the validity of my study.

Population, Sample and Setting

Bryant and Charmaz (2007) describe three traits the researcher must possess for qualitative inquiry: (a) excellent research skills, (b) locating excellent participants, and, (c) targeted and efficient sampling techniques. In regard to research skills, "experience enables the researcher to know at what points in the interview process to move the participant's narrative from the general to the specific, and when to interrupt to ask for specific examples" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 230). Locating excellent participants for a qualitative study requires the researcher to go where the participants who have the experience that is being researched are (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). If potential participants are located the researcher must ask "are they willing to participate, are they articulate and are they reflective?" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 233). Data collection is targeted in qualitative inquiry. The researcher purposely "seek(s) the best examples of whatever it is they are studying" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 234) as they gather enough data to reach saturation.

This study took place in a mid-sized school district in Allegan County, Michigan. Current public school options in Michigan target at-risk children and are stratified by parent income and risk factor. The two free public preschool options in Michigan include the federally funded Head Start program and Michigan's Great Start Readiness Preschool (GSRP). Both programs aim to serve students with economic and other defined risk factors. These are considered targeted preschools because only students who qualify are in the programs. School districts also may choose to operate preschools using local funds. Those that do generally have a sliding tuition based on income. Additionally, districts may allow private preschools to operate from their buildings.

The two targeted programs, Head Start and GSRP operate in every county. Head Start was designed to help break the cycle of poverty, providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs. First established in 1964 under the Johnson administration, the Head Start Act (2007) reauthorized the program under the Bush administration, with several revisions designed to improve the quality. School readiness goals must now be created to align with early learning standards in each state. Additionally, higher qualifications are now in place for Head Start teachers. Since its inception, “Head Start has served nearly 30 million children, growing from an eight-week demonstration project to include full day/year services and many program options” (Office of Head Start, n.d., para. 6).

Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) preschools accept students after the most at-risk have been accepted into Head Start programs. There are agreements between the programs to ensure that the students with the greatest needs receive the most services. As with Head Start, there is no cost to families, but enrolled children must qualify for the program. GSRP includes strong family involvement and parent education components as well as preschool education. However, funding per student is only about half of the Head Start funding and thus does not provide the extensive health and family supports. GSRP has provided “quality preschool education to over 500,000 at-risk four-year-olds since it began in 1985” (Office of Great Start, 2011, p. 1). Students are eligible for GSRP if they are living in extremely low family income (up to 250 percent of poverty) and have two additional risk factors including: diagnosed disability or developmental delay, severe or challenging behavior, primary home language is other than English, the parent/guardian has low educational attainment, there is abuse/neglect of child or parent or there is environmental risk (Office of Great Start, 2011).

In addition to Head Start and GSRP and classrooms that have a blend of Head Start and GSRP, there are other early childhood programs that serve children. Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) provides special instruction and resources to children aged 3-5 who qualify under the Individual with Disabilities Act. Early On is a program for infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities. Early Head Start serves infants, toddlers, and pregnant women and their families who have incomes below the Federal poverty level.

Table 2 shows enrollment by preschool program compared to kindergarten enrollment numbers in Michigan for 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. Enrollment in the Great Start Readiness Program has been fairly consistent since its expansion in 2013 with enrollment in the most recent year of 2018-2019 up slightly from previous years to 33,960 students. Head Start serves three and four year olds. Michigan kindergarten enrollment in 2018-2019 was 24,854. Using kindergarten enrollment as a rough estimate of the number of four year olds, the combined GSRP and Head Start numbers serve about half of Michigan's preschoolers.

Table 2

Michigan Enrollment for 2017-2019 in GSRP, Head Start, and Kindergarten Programs

Year	Great Start Readiness Preschool (GSRP) Enrollment	Head Start (HS) Enrollment of Three and Four Year Olds	Michigan Public School Kindergarten enrollment	Approximate Percentage of Kindergarteners Who Received HS or GSRP
2017-2018	32,009	30,232**	119,512	52%
2018-2019	33,960	24,854**	119,098	49%

Note. Allocations and Awards, Great Start Readiness Preschool; Head Start Student Count, Kidscount; Pre-K and Kindergarten Enrollment, mischooldata.

**Fiscal year

Table 3 provides enrollment numbers for Allegan County in each early childhood program for 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. Enrollment in ECSE, Early On and Early Head Start are

by referral. Head Start, Head Start/GSRP blends and GSRP are open enrollment and free to families that qualify.

Table 3

Allegan County Early Childhood Enrollment by Program for 2016-2017 and 2017-2018

	2016-2017	2017-2018
Early Childhood Program	Enrollment	Enrollment
Early Childhood Special Education	300	287
Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP)	223	222
Head Start (HS)	193	201
GSRP/HS Blend	69	66
Early Head Start	107	101
Early On	244	248

Note: Pre-K and Kindergarten enrollment, mischooldata.org

Table 4 shows the GSRP and Head Start enrollment trend compared to kindergarten enrollment in Allegan County for the years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 as well as percent eligible for free preschool through either Head Start or GSRP. Unlike at the state level, where half of the kindergarteners receive free preschool through Head Start or GSRP, less than one third of kindergarteners in Allegan County do. For the most recent two years of available data, fully one out of every five Head Start/ GSRP eligible children in Allegan County was not enrolled.

Table 4

Allegan County Great Start Readiness Preschool and Head Start Preschool Enrollment Trend for 2017-2018 and 2018-2019

Year	Total HS/GSRP Enrollment	Kindergarten Enrollment	Approximate Percentage of Kindergarteners Who Received HS/GSRP	Percent of students eligible for HS/ GSRP	Percent of HS/GSRP Eligible Students not enrolled
2017-2018	404	1276	32%	52%	20%
2018-2019	365	1238	29%	51%	22%

Note. Allocations and Awards, Great Start Readiness Preschool; GSRP enrollment from Allegan Area Educational Service Agency; Head Start enrollment, Allegan County Head Start; Pre-K and Kindergarten Enrollment, mischooldata. Percent eligible for HS/GSRP is based on Free and Reduced lunch counts.

Allegan County is the second largest agricultural county in the state. The district is suburban/rural in makeup, with families commuting into neighboring cities for work or working locally. The district is typical of many suburban/rural districts in West Michigan. District enrollment is approximately 2,300 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade (mischooldata.com, 2019). Approximately 40% of the students receive free or reduced price lunch. The student population is 92% white, 3% of students are two or more races, 3% are Hispanic/Latino, 1% are African American, and 1% of the students are Asian.

The entire kindergarten population for the district used for this study consists of about 175 students. By using the free and reduced price lunch eligibility as an indicator of income I approximated that roughly 70 students would have qualified for either Head Start or GSRP. Of the 70 eligible, 29 students attended Head Start or GSRP. I interviewed twelve participants, or 41% of the population that attended Head Start or GSRP. In choosing this size sample, the goal was to have a large enough sample to support a rich analysis of the experiences. I originally

sought to interview an equal number of eligible preschool families that did not enroll in preschool. None of these families volunteered for the study, yet they were the majority kindergarten population (59%).

Table 5 details the entire kindergarten population, number and percent eligible for Head Start and GSRP, number and percent of enrolled GSRP students, number and percent of enrolled Head Start students, eligible students that enrolled in Head Start and GSRP.

Table 5

District Kindergarten Population, Preschool Eligibility and Preschool Enrollment

Total Number of Kindergarten	# (%) Total GSRP/HS Eligible	# (%) Eligible Students who Enrolled in Head Start/GSRP	# (%) of Eligible that Enrolled in GSRP	# (%) of Eligible that Enrolled in Head Start
175	70 (40%)	29 (41%)	18 (26%)	11 (16%)

Note. Great Start Readiness Preschool; GSRP enrollment from Allegan Area Educational Service Agency; *Head Start enrollment*, Allegan County Head Start; *Pre-K and Kindergarten Enrollment*, mischooldata. Percent eligible for HS/GSRP is based on Free and Reduced lunch counts.

While the district has aggregate test scores are above the state average, economically disadvantaged students, represented by eligibility for free or reduced lunch, underperform their peers by more than ten percentage points in nearly every grade and subject (mischooldata, 2019). This is the case with many schools districts across the state, and another reason to study preschool choice for at-risk students (Reading Now Network, 2014).

This study used purposeful stratified criterion sampling. This technique illustrates the subgroups and facilitates comparison (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In this case there were four subgroups originally sought: (a) guardians of children who attended Head Start, (b) guardians of children who qualified for Head Start but did not attend, (c) guardians of children who attended

GSRP, and (d) guardians of children who qualified for GSRP but did not attend. Choosing comparative groups was designed to help to generalize the data (Charmaz, 2006). However, even with repeated attempts over the course of two years to engage guardians who had not chosen either free preschool option, zero guardians in that group volunteered to be in the study. Thus the only perspectives of guardians that were included were guardians who made the decision to enroll their children in Head Start or GSRP. The perspectives of guardians of children who did not decide to have their children attend Head Start or GSRP were not included.

Polkinghorne (in Creswell, 2007) recommends that researchers interview five to 25 participants that have experienced the phenomenon. For this reason six guardians whose children qualified for GSRP and six who qualified for Head Start were interviewed. Purposeful samplings allowed for in-depth data gathering on the experiences of guardians of preschool-aged children. Purposeful sampling allowed for the selection of participants and sites that provided the richest information in order to explore the central phenomenon. Creswell (2005) called this type of sampling homogeneous sampling which is where the researcher selects participants based on their membership in a subgroup, or in this case, guardians of preschool-aged children who attended or would have qualified to attend Head Start or GSRP.

In order to understand the lived experiences and preschool choice of guardians, a total of twelve guardians of current kindergarteners were interviewed. All participants had children that attended preschool the previous year (six were Head Start eligible and six were GSRP eligible). The study did not focus on the male or female perspective of the decision making. Either gender parent or guardian was eligible to be interviewed for their experiences in this process.

Recruitment and Consent Procedures

The recruitment and selection process sought to ensure a balance of preschool attenders from Head Start and GSRP and non-preschool attenders who would have been eligible for both of these targeted preschool programs. Because Allegan County districts use a questionnaire during the kindergarten enrollment process which asks about preschool attendance, I asked the participating district to use this screening, along with free and reduced lunch eligibility to identify the participant pool for non-preschool attenders. The school sent this recruitment letter to all guardians of non-preschool kindergarteners multiple times over the course of two years however there were no volunteers from this group.

A second recruitment letter was sent directly from the Head Start program and the GSRP program to former students' guardians to recruit preschool attendees. I would have randomly chosen Head Start guardians and GSRP guardians if I had received more than the desired sample, however since there were only 12 volunteers and I originally sought 10, and I had no volunteers from the non-preschool group, I interviewed all volunteers. Table 6 shows the breakdown of participants by program.

Table 6

Proposed/Actual Crosswalk Table for Interview Participants

Program Eligibility	Proposed # to be Interviewed	Actual # of Volunteers
HS= Head Start eligible	5	6
GSRP= Great Start Readiness Preschool eligible	5	6

Data Collection Protocol

The data collection protocol I used in my phenomenology were interview questions. The interview questions corresponded to my research sub-questions. A semi-structured questionnaire was written to guide the interviews. Interviews allowed for input that was not specifically sought, as opposed to a survey which would have assumed that all the factors have been identified and just need to be quantified or confirmed. The interviews were guided but emic in nature to respect the way the participant wished to frame or structure the responses, as opposed to the way I may have viewed it. This was a less standardized and structured type of interview intended for discovery. The interviews focused on past experience with the phenomenon, in this case making a decision about preschool enrollment. The interviews also contained questions about the present experience, how kindergarten was going. There were also questions that join the past experience to the present.

The central research question was: What explains parents' or guardians' decision making process regarding enrolling their children in Head Start or Great Start Readiness Preschool?

Sub-questions were designed to solicit responses around the components of the theoretical framework. Interview questions related to the sub-questions (see table 7).

Behavioral beliefs and attitudes

1. How do guardians describe their beliefs about enrolling their child in Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?
2. What are the guardians' attitudes toward Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?

Normative Beliefs

3. How do guardians describe the community norm in regard to Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?
4. How do guardians describe the norm in their peer group/family in regard to Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?

Control Beliefs

5. How do guardians describe what stops or encourages them to send their child to Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?
6. How do they describe their belief in the ease or difficulty of sending their child to Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?

Intention

7. What did it take for them to send their child?
 - a. What made it feasible?
 - b. What made it difficult?

Table 7

Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Research sub-questions	Interview Questions and Prompts
	<p>Hello. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today about your experience with preschool.</p> <p>Could you begin by talking about who makes up your household?</p> <p>Question #1 Please share your awareness of any early childhood educational opportunities prior to kindergarten?</p> <p>Prompts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were there any you took advantage of? • How did those work out for you/your child?
How do guardians describe their beliefs about enrolling their child in preschool? What are the guardians' attitudes toward preschool	<p>Question #2 How would you describe your knowledge or opinions about Head Start/GSRP before your child attended kindergarten?</p> <p>Prompts Has your opinion changed? If so, in what ways? What led to that change?</p>
How do guardians describe the community norm in regard to preschool?	<p>Question #3 How typical is it for children in this district to attend preschool?</p>
How do guardians describe the norm in their peer group/family in regard to preschool?	<p>Question #4 Is attending preschool typical in your family or circle of friends?</p> <p>Prompts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did siblings attend? • Did the child's friends attend?

Table 7 – continued

Research sub-questions	Interview Questions and Prompts
What factors do guardians believe exist that make sending their child to preschool easy or difficult?	<p>Questions #5 What made preschool doable for you?</p> <p>Question #6 What made preschool difficult for you?</p>
Was there an intention to enroll the child in preschool?	<p>Questions #7 Did you want your child to attend preschool?</p> <p>Questions #8 When did you make that decision?</p> <p>Prompts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What helped make that happen? • What got in the way of making that happen? <p>Question #9 If you had it to do over, knowing what you know now, would you decide to enroll your child in preschool?</p> <p>Question #10 How is kindergarten going?</p>

Data Collection Planning

Pilot Testing

The guiding interview questions were pilot tested with guardians of kindergarteners in another district prior to conducting the research with the study participants. This provided valuable practice and insight to me and enabled revisions prior to the actual research. Asking pilot participants following the interviews about their comfort with or understanding of the questions asked helped me determine if revisions to the questions was necessary. The pilot

process did not result in a change in questions, however, it did result in ideas on how I could probe for greater understanding during the interview.

Journaling and notetaking helped me document observations and reflections on the process and provided reminders where I might probe for additional insight.

The pilot also helped with ease of use in managing the technology needed to record the interviews, thereby hopefully lessening the possibility that participants would be intimidated by that process. The piloting allowed for stops and starts and sound checks when the interview data was not as critical.

Access

I made arrangements with the school district to have space in one of the conference rooms in the main office area. The recruitment letter indicated the interviews would be held at the elementary school of their choosing. However, if in speaking with participants to set up the interviews, this seemed to present a hardship, I offered to come to their home. The most important consideration was to eliminate potential barriers to their participation in the study. Also during the phone call, the timeframe of no more than an hour was conveyed and participants had the opportunity to ask questions.

Prior to the interviews I bracketed off personal experience with the phenomenon in the initial phase of the inquiry known as epoche. This included my personal decision making experience of enrolling my children in preschool. Each decision for my four children was somewhat different. I also have had experiences with the preschool decision-making of my children regarding my grandchildren, and friends of my children as they made decisions. I also have experience with preschool decision-making as an education administrator. By intentionally

bracketing there was an opportunity for self-examination which helped bring clarity from any preconceptions in the search for the essences in the interviews.

Data Collection Procedures

I collected data from face-to face interviews. Marshall and Rossman (2011) describe phenomenological interviewing as being built on the assumption that “shared experiences can be narrated” (p. 148). It was important to convey the attitude that the participant views were valuable and useful (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) and to create a safe, comfortable environment in order to gain trust and willingness to share. The “in-depth nature of an intensive interview fosters eliciting each participant’s interpretation of his or her experience” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25).

Participants were made aware of when the recording began and when it ended. The HSIRB consent form was provided to each participant and they signed it. Consent letters are in Appendix C. They were told they could end the interview at any time, and they would still be able to keep the \$20 thank you regardless of whether or not they completed the interview.

I collected data through in-person interviews of 12 participants over a two-year time period. I did not have to have an interpreter since all participants’ first language were English. I took notes contemporaneously to capture reflections and observations during the interview to analyze later.

Storing Data

Interviews were recorded on a computer and then transcribed into Microsoft Word files. The audio recordings were also stored on a flash drive as backup in case the computer files were compromised. Notes were also save in files on the computer and hard drive. Also documents and audio files were assigned a number corresponding to each participant to protect confidentiality.

Once the data were transcribed and my dissertation was complete, I removed the digital data from the computer and stored them on a flash drive in a locked location. All data and consent forms will be stored separately in the Primary Investigator's office for at least three years after the study closes.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were conducted, the next phase of phenomenological interviewing is called phenomenological reduction (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). This analytic approach allowed me to discover the essence of the shared experience. It involved a multi-step process (Creswell, 2009; Foss & Waters, 2007) to (a) create codable data, (b) organize the data, (c) create possible themes, and (d) create an explanatory schema. Initial codes came from words and/or behavior in the interview data and my insight as the researcher in my journaling (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The final stage of my data analysis resulted in a structural synthesis. This stage allowed for the imaginative exploration of meaning and ultimately culminated in a description of the essences of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). At this stage, themes and subthemes emerged. Rearranging of some of the data then occurred as it now seemed a better fit in a different place.

Analysis Steps

The units of analysis were the aspects of my data that were "most relevant to answering the research question" (Foss & Waters, 2007, p. 186). In this research, the units of analysis were explanations for parents' and guardians' decision making regarding sending their children to preschool. Foss and Waters recommend reading through the transcriptions looking for a unit of analysis, marking its beginning and end and noting a term or phrase that captures the content. This was done by highlighting the written transcript without interpretation or explanation. Codes

would have been apparent to anyone else reading them as suggested by Foss and Waters. They were key phrases that held the meaning of a sentence or paragraph. Each unit of analysis with its code was cited to be able to “keep track of the origins” (Foss & Waters, 2007, p. 191). By assigning each transcript a participant number, and using line numbering I coded each data point with the participant and line number to be able to connect the data to the original source.

Memos were additional forms of data. These were written records of my thinking (Birks & Mills, 2011). Memos were written throughout the whole study, beginning to end, and added to study findings (Birks & Mills, 2011). The memos provided a systematic method of journaling and capturing thinking during the research process.

When analyzing transcripts, I first identified specific excerpts that were descriptive of the decision-making process in the text of the interviews. I captured textural data that described what participants experienced in their decision-making about preschool. I also captured structural data that described how participants experienced decision-making about preschool. In this way, the units of analysis encompassed what was significant about the nature of the experience as well as the way participants made meaning about it. Units of analysis, or excerpts from the transcripts, were not always directly quoting, but close to verbatim, or pulling key words and phrases. Each of the units of analysis were written on a sticky note with its source. Moustakis (1994) refers to this step as horizontalization.

The second step of my analysis was to code each unit of analysis with a word or short phrase that captured what was in the excerpt (Cresswell, 2009; Foss & Waters, 2007). During this stage I coded very closely to the text without abstraction. “Staying at the surface level of the text as you code prevents you from coding what you want to find or for what you think you will find” (Foss & Waters, 2007, p.189).

The third step in the process, after coding all my data, was to sort the coded data by what seemed to go together. Foss & Waters (2007) suggest an affinity-type process to put the excerpts together and label to begin to form the schema and this is what I did. Without thinking too much about it, data was sorted. The excerpts were now in categories on chart paper.

The fourth step was to label each category of coded data (Cresswell, 2009; Foss & Waters, 2007). The labels were a phrase or a sentence that described all the data in that category. I did have some data that did not neatly fit a group, so that data was labeled “Don’t Know” and revisited later (Cresswell, 2007).

The fifth step was to check my codes to ensure that the codes on the excerpts were relevant to the label I had given them. I moved those that did not belong. If excerpts belonged with more than one label, I duplicated them to put them with each appropriate label (Cresswell, 2009; Foss & Waters, 2007). I now had posters with categories that were labeled coded excerpts. During this stage of the process, I was immersed deeply in the analysis for days.

Once the categories emerged, the sixth step was to begin to create my explanatory schema. Foss and Waters (2011) suggest using the labels to find relationships and connections and write notes about the basic relationships. To accomplish this, I moved posters around and began to draw lines between the groups where I saw connections. I made notes on the lines to describe the relationship such as, some groups appeared to be subsets of other categories, or a category may have represented a causal relationship to another category. There were some data that seemed to be outliers until talking through the emerging schema resulted in some aha moments. Moving categories and drawing relationships resulted in regrouping and redrawing lines until the data painted a coherent picture. I left the data on large posters to revisit over the

next couple of weeks until I was confident this was the schema and language that represented my data best.

The categories together with the relationships created the schema for the data. The explanatory schema that emerged represented an “organic and coherent relationship among the labels” (Foss & Waters, 2011, p. 206). As the affinity process progressed an initial schema emerged. I captured that visually, and this is included in Appendix C. Initially this schema included 11 natural categories and sub-categories emerged. Each category was given a descriptor that captured the data points within it. Table 8 shows the categories with the corresponding sub-category descriptions.

Table 8

Initial Emerging Schema with Category and Subcategory Descriptions

Category	Subcategory
Awareness of and participation in other early learning experiences	-Parent prompted -Early On/Early Head Start/pediatrician prompted
Parent/Home influences/fit	-Conditions that supported: (Cost, Transportation/distance, Family schedule, Extended family support, Coordination with work) -Barriers to carry out commitment to preschool: (Legal paperwork, Transportation/distance, Daycare, Parent work schedule, Coordination between programs, Cost)
Overall positive experiences with preschool	-Comfort with decision to enroll -Some offered general statement (e.g. good, fantastic) -Other's offered more specific (e.g. writing, math, reading, happy child)

Table 8 – continued

Category	Subcategory
Intentionality for providing parent/home support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Structures for homework, reading, educational toys, parent teaching -Taking advantage of early learning experiences (e.g. library, PAT, EHS)
Connecting to how child doing in Kindergarten	-Positives grounded in: (Socialization, No negative experiences (e.g. issues, problems), Overall happiness)
How typical is preschool in peer group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Typical with peers -Typical in family -Historical pattern of preschool attendance /age stage of life
When (timing for making decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Long-range (early) -Immediate or spontaneous
Sibling pattern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -If this was first child, intended to enroll following siblings -If there were older siblings this sibling was following the older sibs
How they found/introduced to preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -How it came to them -How they went after it
What they were looking for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Academic -Non-academic
Why preschool- value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Family connection to education -Value of education

The seventh step involved an additional level of abstraction which allowed for the emergence of overarching themes. At this point was when the three themes with their subthemes began to emerge.

The eighth step was to go back to the units of analysis and analyze the data by participant for each theme. Each participant was color coded for this stage to visually show connectivity to themes by individual. This step confirmed that themes applied across participants and became the basis for the data tables.

What then emerged was a fully developed schema that included three themes and eight total subthemes of supporting data (Foss & Waters, 2007). This explanatory schema formed the basis for the written analysis and can be found in tables 10-14.

Trustworthiness in Data Analysis

Creswell (2013) discusses eight procedures for verifying qualitative studies. He recommends researcher use at least two of these procedures. One such procedure is triangulation. Triangulation “involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). By using evidence in the literature to explain themes and subthemes that emerged from my data, I validated my analysis through triangulation. My research participants also contributed to triangulation. Interviewing 12 participants on different days in different locations over a two year period, there was greater validity to their responses.

Trustworthiness through rich, thick description leads to the ability of the reader to audit the research as a result of the analysis practices being made visible. My analysis utilized direct transcription, codes that surfaced from directly from the data, and a detailed analysis plan in an effort to make the process visible. This visible process, together with clarification of researcher bias through reflexivity contributes to trustworthiness of the data analysis and reduction of research bias.

Lastly, I utilized peer review. The peer review was conducted through dissertation committee. This three-person committee consisted of Ph.Ds. and Ed.Ds who brought extensive

backgrounds and experience with qualitative research, K-12 education, early education and preschool.

Delimitations

There are delimitations for this study. Delimitations allow the researcher to “narrow the scope of the study” (Creswell, 2003, p.147). I narrowed my focus to the following: (a) one Mid-West public school district; (b) guardians of kindergarteners who had chosen preschool prior kindergarten; (c) Head Start and GSRP eligible families; and (d) volunteers. Thus this study did not include higher socioeconomic status families or families that did not choose to enroll in preschool.

Chapter 3 Closure

The transcendental phenomenology design for the study of guardians’ perceptions, perspectives and understanding of the choice to enroll or not enroll their children in preschool entailed in-depth interviewing of guardians of kindergarteners in one school district. A purposeful stratified sampling of twelve participants were interviewed. Data collection was done in phases: epoche, phenomenological reduction and structural synthesis. While interview questions guided the research, follow up probes were used as needed to fully explore participant experiences. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Memos were used to capture researcher reflections along the way. These reflections were also analyzed for themes and patterns.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview of Purpose and Questions

In this chapter I include the findings of the data analysis resulting from interviews with guardians of kindergarteners regarding how they made decisions on preschool enrollment for their children.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and interpret, through a phenomenological lens, how low income parents and guardians made decisions to enroll their child or dependent in a preschool program. In doing so, , I examined their decision-making processes by organizing the research questions around Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (1991) which includes the notions of (a) behavioral beliefs, (b) normative beliefs, and (c) control beliefs and the role they play in intention to carry through on a behavior.

The central research question was: What explains parents' or guardians' decision making process regarding enrolling their children in Head Start or Great Start Readiness Preschool?

Participant Profiles

Prior to discussing the results of the interviews, it is important to describe the participants and the context of the study. The study involved parents and guardians of current kindergarteners in a mid-sized Allegan County school district. Twelve families were represented by participants. Nine of the participants were either the birth mother or father, or both parents; two were grandparents who now had guardianship, and one was a foster parent. Table 9 presents the participants by number to maintain confidentiality, their preschool eligibility, adults in the household, preschool attended by the current kindergartener and preschool attended by siblings if applicable.

Table 9

Participant Household, Preschool Eligibility and Attendance

Participant #	Parents/ Guardians Other adults In household	Preschool Eligibility	Preschool of Current Kindergartener	Preschool of Siblings
1 mother	Mother, father	GSRP eligible	GSRP	4 yo GSRP
2 mother	Mother, father	GSRP eligible	Preschool out of state	4 yo GSRP 2 ½ will enroll
3 father	Mother, father	GSRP eligible	GSRP	12 yo, 9 yo private preschool
4 mother	Mother, father	GSRP eligible	GSRP	6 yo Early Childhood Special Education
5 mother	Mother, father	GSRP eligible	GSRP	3 ½ will enroll
6 mother	Mother, father	GSRP eligible	In-home daycare with preschool	8 yo private daycare/preschool/ In-home
7 mother	Mother, father	GSRP eligible	Developmental Kindergarten (DK) private daycare/ preschool	12 yo, 10 yo private daycare/preschool
8 mother and father	Mother, father	Head Start eligible	Church preschool, private therapy	3 yo enrolled in church preschool, 20 month will be
9 foster mother	Foster mother, foster father, son	Head Start eligible	DK, K Early Childhood Special Education, Early On, Head Start	4 Early Childhood Special Education
10 grandmother	Grandmother, uncle	Head Start Eligible	Head Start	15,14,11 sisters Head Start 3 and 4 year old preschool

Table 9 – continued

Participant #	Parents/ Guardians Other adults in household	Preschool Eligibility	Preschool of Current Kindergartener	Preschool of Siblings
11 grandmother	Grandmother	Head Start eligible	DK Head Start, Early Head Start	5 yo Head Start, Early Head Start
12 mother	Mother, father	Head Start eligible	Early Childhood Special Education, Early On Intervention	4 yo will likely enroll in Head Start, Early On Intervention

Participant 1

Participant 1 was the mother of a six-year-old kindergartener who was eligible for and who attended the Great Start Readiness Preschool (GSRP). Both mother and father lived in the household. The kindergartener had a younger sibling who was currently enrolled in GSRP.

What was significant about her decision-making experience was that she knew generally of preschool options and that knowledge led her to do research on specific preschools that would fit their family. The results of her research would impact her level of perceived control. She viewed preschool as important for kindergarten readiness. She stated, “I knew the guidelines for kindergarten. I heard feedback, word of mouth, that there would be tuition help with GSRP.” This statement was indicative of a positive attitude toward preschool. Preschool was described as common in her social circle and other family and friends children attended preschool. She had a view that it was common in the school district, yet “at kindergarten round-up it honestly surprised me how many people didn’t have any preschool.” Prior to her experience at kindergarten round-up her perception had been that preschool was more prevalent in the district.

The decision process involved word of mouth feedback from friends and family on different preschools, as well as affordability and fit for the family budget, as well as convenience factors. GSRP was described as just right, between Head Start and tuition-based preschools. The family income put them above eligibility guidelines for Head Start but below comfortably being able to afford a tuition-based setting. Convenience factors such as schedule and busing were important once recommendations and cost had been obtained. “What I liked was that it was full-day, was on the school district hours and had busing,” Participant 1 explained. These factors lead to the perceived ease or difficulty in enrolling the child in preschool.

Taken in total, the expressions of positive attitude, a normative belief that is present in family and friends, and perceived control positively impacted her intention to enroll her child in preschool, which then resulted in acting on that intention.

Participant 2

Participant 2 was the mother of a five-year-old that had just completed GSRP. A six year old sibling attended preschool out of state. Both mother and father lived in the household. The participant indicated she would be enrolling a 2 ½ year old sibling in GSRP when the child is old enough.

This participant was proactive about decision-making. Upon moving into the school district she sought information. The way she seemed to make sense of the decision process was by analyzing cost and convenience, which lead to perceived control. However, what also surfaced was that she chose an option that was a known entity for both children. For the older child it was a church preschool with which the parents were familiar. For the second child that attended GSRP, the location at the same school the sister attended and available transportation

were important factors in the decision. There seemed to be a level of comfort because of the familiarity. When discussing the older child's preschool she shared "we are strong proponents of education. I liked that it was associated with our church. I went to private school myself until high school. If kids attend preschool, they can get a head start." The comfort and strong positive feelings about education both contribute to a positive attitude toward the behavior. There was perceived control due to the location and transportation, which led to the intent to enroll and ultimately the behavior of enrolling the child in GSRP.

Participant 3

Participant 3 was the father of a five-year-old kindergartener who was eligible for and who attended GSRP. The mother, father, two older siblings and the kindergartener lived in the household. The older siblings attended a YMCA preschool where the father worked.

The decision process involved the desire to find a GSRP classroom nearby. He stated "we wanted a more school-based option that was affordable, at a location not too far away from where we live." The underlying assumption was that school-based classroom would be more school-like and result in a smooth transition to kindergarten. This is a behavioral belief which lead to a positive attitude toward GSRP. The parents were willing to transport the child, and even to put up with the Wednesday "late starts" in the district in order to have their child attend. These were not issues that were perceived as negatively impacting the ease of having the child attend preschool.

Participant 3 expressed the value of routines, listening, following directions and supported those things in the Y classes he taught. All the children were home at the time of the interview and once we met, they were told to do their chores. He seemed proud of all the children. He had just been at the school the day before to meet with the Kindergarten teacher and

he shared “conferences were yesterday. She gets along with people, follows direction, which is good. She’s great, where she needs to be, at grade level or however they do that.”

What was significant about their decision-making experience was the exposure of both parents to preschools in their work settings. The mother worked in an elementary in which a GSRP preschool was located. The father worked at a Y and the director of the Y preschool was in office next door to him. The participant also shared that preschool is common with their peers. These factors contributed to the belief that preschool is the norm. The presence of this subjective norm, together with their positive attitude to preschool and their perceived control led the parents to follow through on their intent to enroll the child in GSRP.

Participant 4

Participant 4 was the mother of a five-year-old kindergartener who was eligible for and who attended GSRP. The mother, father and one older sibling lived in the home with the kindergartener.

The participant’s parents, the child’s grandparents, are both teachers. The mother of the participant told her a story of a friend whose child did not attend preschool and ended up very behind in kindergarten. This clearly made an impression on the participant. They did not want their children to experience the difficulties of this other child. This is an example of a normative belief which leads to a subjective norm in which the individual’s behavior is influenced by significant others.

The decision to enroll the second child in preschool was influenced by the experience with the older child. The family was living in a different county when they began looking at preschools for the older child. During the preschool search process for the older child, the child

became qualified for Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) to receive specialized services related to the child's disability.

When the second child came of preschool age the family had moved into the current school district and looked again at preschool options. Since preschool enrollment seemed a given, the decision process centered on where to enroll. Affordability and proximity to home with the offer of transportation if needed were all factors that contributed to the decision. With a positive attitude toward preschool, and the subjective norm of preschool being the norm, the participant focused on factors that would influence perceived control. The intention to enroll the child in preschool was present, actual control resulted in the behavior of enrolling the child in GSRP. Participant 4 shared:

I knew about preschool. I first heard about the whole Great Start/Head Start when I was looking with our oldest. When we moved I ended up looking it up through (this) County. Preschool was more expensive than I was thinking it was going to be and that's why we were looking at different community resources. We were able to get him into Great Start and we had a really good experience.

Participant 5

Participant 5 was the mother of a five and one-half year old kindergartener who was eligible for and who attended GSRP. The mother, father, kindergartener and a three and one-half year old sibling lived in the household.

The mother of the participant is an educator. She shared this as background for why preschool was as a given for her. Participant 5 said whether or not to enroll in preschool was not really a decision she remembers making. She just knew she would send her child when she was

old enough. This is an example of both a positive attitude toward the behavior as well as the participant being influenced by significant others. Preschool was seen as the norm.

Comfort played a part in which preschool was ultimately chosen. She visited the preschool to get a feel for the environment and whether this was a good placement for her child. Comfort affected the attitude toward enrollment. With a feeling of comfort came a positive attitude.

Participant 5 also discussed the challenge of navigating all the logistics. Logistics impact the perceived ease or difficulty in performing the behavior. Even with the intent to enroll the child in preschool being a foregone conclusion it was not easy to put all the pieces together. Before and after daycare, cost, transportation were accessibility factors that were important to the decision. She also was under time pressure, so immediate availability was necessary in order to have a setting for her children while she was at work. She shared “when our daycare closed we had to make a choice fast. I work, so I had to find one that would fit our family.” A positive attitude, the perceived norm and perceived control impacted intent and led to the actual behavior control which led to enrollment.

Participant 6

Participant 6 was the mother of a five-year-old kindergartener who was eligible for GSRP with some tuition who chose to enroll the child in a private, in-home daycare with preschool programming. The mother, father, an eight year old sibling, and the kindergartener lived in the home. The eight-year-old attended a private daycare/preschool and then attended the same in-home daycare for the 6 months prior to kindergarten as the current kindergartener.

Participant 6 is an educator who chose a private in-home child care setting with a preschool curriculum for their current kindergartener. The older child had been enrolled in a

private, center-based program for preschool. She explained her thought process had been that she assumed a more school-like setting would prepare the child better for school when they transitioned to kindergarten. During the visit to meet the provider, the participant was impressed with the cleanliness, structure, and curriculum. These are examples of factors that led to a positive attitude toward the preschool.

When the family moved into the current school district they needed to find a closer provider. They sought personal recommendations when they had to switch providers. Recommendations led the participant to a home daycare. She knew the family and so there was trust that the children would be safe and well cared for. The recommendations are examples of subjective norms. The behavior was influenced by significant others.

Ease of difficulty in the decision-making centered on feasibility with work schedules. There was around wraparound care before and after school. This worked for the parents' workday schedules. The participant also explained that if a center-based preschool without wraparound child care would have been chosen, then transportation would have been needed to and from the daycare to a school-based preschool and it would have had to have been worth the additional expense of holding a full-day daycare slot on top of tuition at a preschool. This is an example of a control belief. These factors led to a change in heart from a center-based setting to a home-based setting. Participant 6 stated:

I wanted a more school-like environment and I think I made some assumptions about in-home daycares. And when I needed to look around due to the commute, I had gotten recommendations, you know, somebody recommend this very highly. It was highly structured and a great place and then when I went to visit it was very clean and orderly and they immediately showed me the curriculum that she used.

The parent indicated that kindergarten readiness for the younger child coming from the home-based daycare with preschool curriculum has been better than the older child from the formal preschool. She seemed very shocked about this and almost as if she felt guilty that the older child had had this type of preschool experience and thus not gotten as good of a start in school.

For this participant the intent to enroll the child in preschool was there, influenced by a positive attitude toward preschool and the subjective norm of preschool attendance being present. Control beliefs prohibited enrollment in a center-based preschool. Transportation and the extra expense led to the behavior of enrolling in a home-based daycare with a preschool curriculum. This is an example of how actual behavior control was different for each child and resulted in a different behavior. Each child still attended a preschool, but the ease or difficulty impacted whether the decision was a center-based or a home based option.

Participant 7

Participant 7 was the mother of a five-year-old kindergartener who was eligible for GSRP but enrolled in a private daycare/preschool. The mother, father and two older siblings lived in the house with the kindergartener. Both older siblings attended the same private daycare/preschool when they were younger.

The participant is a nurse who worked two days a week when the older children were young. This is significant in relation to perceived control. Not working full time allowed the participant to act on her positive attitude toward early education. She sought out experiences such as Parents as Teachers and Playgroups for socialization and then preschool when the children were old enough.

The participant had a Christian schools background, so she looked for a Christian preschool for her children. Participant 7 shared the belief that preschool would prepare the children for school success. The belief that preschool would lead to school success and the participant's Christian school experience both influence a positive attitude toward a Christian preschool.

Preschool was an expectation with the participant's family. Her preschool decision experience was around where the child would attend, not if the child would attend preschool. The Participant stated "they always knew they would send the children to preschool." Alignment to family values, best practice instruction, and what other parents were saying were considerations. This shows a subjective norm toward preschool attendance.

Once the preschool was chosen, they made the logistics work. The Participant worked part-time. On the days the participant was not at work, she transported the child to preschool. On the days the participant worked, her mother helped with transportation. Also important were financial considerations. The preschool had a payment plan, so they could make the finances work.

There was a positive attitude toward Christian preschool, preschool was a norm for family and friends, and the participant perceived she was in control of the logistical factors. She had the intent and now could follow through on the behavior. She described her decision making process:

Number one, we did originally want our kids to attend a Christian preschool and not just public school. So we looked at the Christian school atmosphere. We had gotten several references. They were also starting to teach the Rewiring the Brain program and so that was another factor. We just heard some positive things about that. I guess that everything

fell into place. It isn't horribly far away from where we live and it was helpful because my mom helped us with transportation.

Participants 8

Participants 8 were the mother and father of a six-year-old kindergartener who was eligible for Head Start and enrolled in a church preschool. There were two younger siblings that also lived in the household, a three-year-old and 20-month-old. The three-year-old was already enrolled in the same church preschool and parents indicated they would enroll the 20-month-old when the child became old enough. The kindergartener also received behavior therapy prior to kindergarten.

The decision experience was around wanting to help the child socialize. They also wanted to support learning. The father indicated "he was already learning" as an indication the child was ready for preschool. When the parents talked about the child, they smiled and said he was very smart. They wanted him to continue to learn with a qualified teacher and to give him a routine. The parents have a high level of trust for the teachers. The preschool teachers referred the parent to behavior therapy for ADHD and Asperger's. The parents were happy with this experience. They said he was doing much better. These statements indicate a positive attitude toward education in general, and toward preschool in particular.

Significant about the decision making experience was that preschool was common among their peer groups. They did some research on the website and there was awareness of the preschool through their church. Their perception was that preschool was the norm among significant others.

The church preschool was the least expensive from the parents' research, so that was where they decided he would go. The parents would have qualified for free preschool, so the

information they sought or found did not reveal this to them. In discussing what made their preschool choice feasible they shared “the price. I knew the teachers. It was comfortable. Our son knew most of the teachers.” The positive attitude toward education, the presence of the subjective norm of preschool and the perceived control of cost and quality led to the intent and behavior of enrolling the child in the church daycare.

Participant 9

Participant 9 was the foster mother of a five and one-half year old kindergartener, and a five-year-old kindergartener. The household consisted of the foster mother, foster father, their adult son and three foster children. The third child is a four-year--old in the Early Childhood Special Education program. All the children received Early On services, and are Head Start eligible. The two kindergarteners both attended Head Start preschool.

Significant about her experience is that the participant is a grandparent but is now parenting the next generation. She works part-time. All three of the younger children have special needs due to the birth parents being drug addicts. The children’s pediatrician connected them with early intervention services. The participant was well informed and proactive in decision-making for the children. She was also active on the Head Start Policy Council to influence programming and quality improvements. She has advocated for the children when it came to school and teacher placements.

The participant believed that things have changed since her children went to school and what used to be learned in first or second grade is now being learned in kindergarten. “To have what they need in kindergarten they have to have some kind of preschool.” These are examples of a positive attitude toward education in general and to the Head Start preschool in particular.

The preschool decision experience was made around next step in programming and service in order to be prepared for success at school. This shows that in addition to a positive attitude toward education the participant believes preschool is the norm with significant others, in this case the individuals that provided early intervention services.

When asked what made preschool feasible the participant named the support she received from the three home-based teachers and transportation. “They were very informative. And I think it’s important to have some type of transportation. That’s a big one. Especially if you don’t have a vehicle.” The transportation, together with help from the intervention team gave the participant perceived control. The intent to enroll the child in preschool was established as a result to the positive attitude and subjective norm. The participant could control the factors that were critical to enrolling the child in preschool.

Participant 10

Participant 10 was the grandmother and legal guardian of a five-year-old kindergartener who was eligible for and who attended Head Start as a four-year-old. Also in the household is the adult son of the participant and three siblings of the kindergartener aged 15, 14 and 11. The siblings attended Head Start as three and four-year-olds.

Participant 10 was the grandmother, but was now the guardian of the children. The children were in Head Start prior to her having guardianship so there was awareness of that program and relationships built with staff. Head Start home visitors actually came by the house during the interview. During the interview the house was busy with cats, dogs, the child and the home visitors. The participant was on a first name basis with the home visitors, and all the child’s teachers. She was always positive and appreciative of services. The positive attitude

toward education, the Head Start program, and the Head Start staff was evident in the participant's interactions with the staff and during the interview with me.

The participant expressed preschool enrollment barriers due to navigating paperwork and legal aspects and then not having openings in the home district. She also was sensitive to the child's feelings of abandonment due to her mother leaving. The grandmother believed as a result of Head Start the child will be kindergarten ready. She shared:

I had a hard time getting her into programs because her parents dragged their feet for me to get guardianship and without guardianship it's hard to get them in. You have to be legally something. When I finally got it they tried to get her into (another district) and it was too long of a bus drive and she just couldn't handle the separation so I finally got her slipped into (this district).

Participant 10 had the intent to enroll the child in preschool as a result of a positive attitude toward the program and the influence of significant others. In order to have actual behavior control resulting in enrollment, she had to persist in overcoming barriers such as legal guardianship and advocating for placement in a classroom her home district.

Participant 11

Participant 11 was the grandmother and legal guardian of a six-year-old in kindergarten. There were no other adults in the household. The six-year-old attended Head Start and Early Head Start since infancy. The five-year-old sibling was currently in Head Start and had also attended Early Head Start since infancy.

Significant about her experience was that the participant had just gained official guardianship even though the children had lived with her since birth. The mother, who did not

have custody, chose Early Head Start as a free babysitting service, according to the participant. When the children turned three, they transitioned into Head Start preschool.

The participant's preschool decision experience was more around advocating for a location close to home to avoid long travel on a bus, and to be in the school district the children would attend later. Head Start was the next step for the children after attending Early Head Start. This shows a positive attitude toward the program as well as the presence of the subjective norm, that preschool was the next step. She shared that she thought she had a different view than some of the other Early Head Start and Head Start parents:

I think it's a real good program and I'm for it one hundred percent. I think a lot of people find it as a way to just well, my kid is gone from nine to three so I just do what I want or sleep in or whatever. And, I think that's a bad thing. I think if there was a requirement or something that they, you know, attend school or a job placement program or something it would benefit themselves while their kids are in school.

The participant provided transportation when necessary because of a busing interruption. She knew the teachers by first name and she was aware of a teacher change mid-year. She knew the curriculum and supported it at home. She had a belief that many of the parents in the program looked at it as free babysitting and did not support the learning at home. She believed teachers hold lower expectations for the children and parents than they should in this program. She has even talked to the building principal to advocate for more academics in the preschool program, but the principal said it was not her program. The school just provides space for Head Start.

This participant's experience showed how intention was formed through interactions with early programming. Early experiences were positive and there was a relationship with the program staff that influenced future decision-making. The participant was supported by program

staff in her desire to keep her in-district, and she was able to provide transportation when needed. These factors allowed the child to enroll and stay in the preschool program.

Participant 12

Participant 12 was the mother of a six-year-old kindergartener who was Head Start eligible and who was enrolled in Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) prior to kindergarten. The household consisted of the mother, father, six-year-old and a four-year-old sibling. The participant seemed a little nervous about the interview. She indicated she did not understand the questions several times. Although she became more comfortable, she indicated she was “a rookie at all this.”

What was significant about her experience was that through a kindergarten readiness screening the child was identified for speech therapy, so the child received home visitors. The home visitors provided the kindergartener and the four-year-old sibling services in the home. The mother indicated she will likely enroll the four-year-old in preschool. These experiences provided the participant with an early education program which then provided a significant influence on future decisions.

The home visitors connected the child to Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) preschool as a four-year-old. The decision to enroll the child experience was more of a referral for the kindergartener based on the influence of respected individuals rather than an active choice made by the parents. Although she did not seek out preschool, the participant thought positively about it. She shared her thoughts about preschool:

I think it's important because they are always learning, with their minds like sponges and they really like to play and enjoy. I think it's good for social and mentally for just

basically all of them. It helps them get prepared for school and it gets them in a routine, and knowing what to understand and get ready for kindergarten when the time is right.

The participant indicated she is looking at GSRP for her four-year-old son for next year for socialization, a routine, and to get him ready for kindergarten. Although, she made that comment, she went on to say that it would be a hard decision, because he was her last child at home. This shows how she is feeling a positive attitude toward preschool, she believes preschool is important for school readiness and has perceived control over enrollment. Whether she has actual control, considering her comment about her son being the last one at home, will determine whether she actual enrolls him.

Summary

In summary, all 12 participants enrolled their children in some type of preschool. All 12 ultimately had the intent to enroll and followed through on that intent. All stated positive attitudes toward education in general and preschool in particular. Participants that had early education experiences when their children were aged zero to three, were influenced in their decision-making by the early education providers. Those who did not have formal early education experiences were influenced in their decision-making by family and peers. Perceived ease or difficulty in enrolling their children in preschool included factors such as cost, transportation, quality of the program, comfort with the provider. Navigating these factors allowed all 12 to act on their intent and enroll their children in preschool.

Presentation of Themes

Through an extensive, multi-layered data analysis process, as described in Chapter three, three overarching themes emerged. The three themes were:

1. Guardians expressed positive feelings about education birth to school age and the desire for children to be successful.
2. Guardians made a conscious decision to enroll their children in preschool based on factors important to them regarding their child's development.
3. When decisions were made was based on an accepted norm. Early decisions around preschool seemed influenced by personal or family experiences, where later decisions seemed to be due to perceptions of the next step following early education experiences.

Table 10 provides a summary of the themes by participant. This table illustrates the themes generated and the applicability to each participant through the data gathered through the interviews. An "X" indicates there is data directly attributable to support that theme from that participant.

As can be seen, all three themes were supported by all twelve participants. Across all three themes is an essence of positivity. Participants expressed positive feelings about education in general. They all indicated that early education has benefitted their children. Participants expressed the belief that education is important to the success of the child. Participants held different definitions for the benefits and success, but believed that preschool met their expectations in these areas.

Table 10

Emerging Themes by Participant

Participant #	Theme		
	Guardians expressed positive feelings about education birth to school age and the desire for children to be successful.	Guardians made a conscious decision to enroll their children in preschool based on factors important to them regarding their child's development.	When decisions were made was based on an accepted norm.
1	X	X	X
2	X	X	X
3	X	X	X
4	X	X	X
5	X	X	X
6	X	X	X
7	X	X	X
8	X	X	X
9	X	X	X
10	X	X	X
11	X	X	X
12	X	X	X

Each of the three overarching themes is discussed briefly in this section. Participant quotes are included to help illustrate with the essence of each theme. Each theme and subtheme will then be discussed in depth.

Theme 1: Parents/guardians expressed positive feelings about education birth to school age and the desire for children to be successful.

All 12 participants expressed general positive feelings around education. Three of the 12 had a familial connection to an educator which surfaced as statements such as “I am in education”, “my wife works at (school), “my parents are teachers”. Another participant indicated “we are strong proponents of education”.

The essence of this theme was that education is a good thing and that they wanted their child to experience success in school. Success was defined differently for different participants. It was described as happy children through descriptions such as “she loved it...she smiles on her way to school and she smiles on her way home” (Participant 3), or the absence of trouble with Participant 1’s comment, “she hasn’t had any trouble,” Participant 4 said “we haven’t had any complaints”, academic growth as evidenced by Participant 5’s comment “she is a top reader”, or social skills “she gets along with people” (Participant 3).

Theme 2: Parents/guardians made a conscious decision to enroll their children in preschool based on factors important to them regarding their child’s development.

The essence of this theme came from how parents described what was important to them in their choice. Parents knew they were going to enroll their child in a preschool, so they went about looking for one that would fit their child and family. It was not a decision of “if” they were enrolling, rather it was “where” they would enroll.

When parents were discussing their decision-making process two subthemes emerged. The first was around the perceived benefits of preschool which included more specific desired elements that matched those perceived benefits. The second subtheme that emerged was around logistics, fit with the family and factors that made preschool feasible.

Theme 3: When decisions were made was based on an accepted norm.

The essence of this themes was expectations. Parents made the expected move to enroll, whether that was their families' expectation, their peer groups' expectation or service providers' expectations. Enrolling their children was the perceived norm. When analyzing the data within theme 3, three subthemes emerged: how participants heard about preschool, when they decided seemed influenced by their peer/family experience or personal connection to early education services, and preschool decisions for siblings.

Tables 11, 12 and 13 summarize, in turn, each of the three themes with their respective subthemes. Table 11, below, presents theme one and its subthemes by participant.

Table 11

Theme One and subthemes by Participant

Participant #	Theme and Subthemes		
	Parents/guardians expressed positive feelings about education birth to school age and the desire for children to be successful.		
	Support for Early Learning	Positive perceptions of preschool	Positive perceptions of kindergarten
1	X	X	X
2	X	-	X
3	X	X	X
4	X	X	X
5	X	-	X
6	X	X	-
7	X	X	X
8	X	X	X
9	X	X	X
10	X	X	X
11	X	X	X
12	X	X	X

Theme 1: Parents/guardians expressed positive feelings about education birth to school age and the desire for children to be successful.

The essence of this theme was that education is a good thing and that they wanted their child to experience success in school. Three subthemes emerged to support the overarching

theme of “Parents expressed positive feelings about education birth to school age and the desire for children to be happy and successful.” The subthemes are: support for early learning, positive perceptions of preschool, and positive perceptions of kindergarten.

Support for early education. The data analysis revealed that all 12 participants expressed positive feelings around early education experiences. The early education experiences fell into two general categories of in-home and out-of-home. For the in-home experiences participants described structures or experiences they supported or services they invited into the home. The out-of-home experiences were community based offerings that parents took advantage of, or services to which they were referred.

Three participants specifically mentioned reading to their child. Participant 3 indicated “we read every night for at least 10 minutes.” Participant 3 commented “we try to read as much as possible” and Participant 7 said “we read to the kids”. Other comments on at home support included “we try to work with them on basic stuff” (Participant 3), “I make sure they know the alphabet, numbers... play flashcards, watch educational TV.” Participant 4 indicated support for educational play in the comment “we look for interactive toys,” (Participant 7) as did Participant 10 when she shared “she and her sister play school, writing and coloring.” Participant 8 shared that she “did some home school stuff too.”

Participants 2, 9, 11, and 12 had in-home services from Early Head Start or Early On. Participant 2 indicated they had been referred to Early On “our son has autism, at 1 ½ to 2 he received early intervention.” Commenting on the intervention, Participant 11 said “It was a blessing.” Participant 12 said “she had a home teachers for speech, I am thankful she gets the extra help.” As a result of those home visits, two participants indicated they followed up with activities, Participant 12 shared “when I had time, I’d do some learning experiences at home as

well.” Participant 7 participated with “Parents as Teachers home visitors.” Participant 11 indicated that her daughter had her grandchildren in “Early Head Start because it was a good babysitter.”

Participants 1, 3 and 12 specifically mentioned taking advantage of the library with Participant 3 saying “we hit the library every 3 weeks or when books are due.” Other programs that were mentioned were “Classes at the Y, museums,” (Participant 3) the “Kids regularly go to Sunday school,” (Participant 6) “we attended Tots and Tunes playgroups” (Participant 7).

Three participants mentioned knowing about library programs but finding logistics difficult to manage. Participant 4 said they “didn’t take advantage of library programs, I work and my husband is home with the kids and he is not a people person.” Participant 5 said “I know about library programs but it was hard to make that work,” and Participant 6 indicated they “went to the library sporadically.”

The essence of this subtheme revolved around the participants’ engagement in educational experiences prior to preschool. They all either directly provided or invited providers into their homes. There was a positivity and ownership of their child’s educational success implied in how they described their experience.

Positive perceptions of preschool. Ten out of 12 participants expressed positive feelings around their preschool experience in general, how they viewed their child’s perception and feelings and skills attained toward school readiness. Several participants made general positive statements about their preschool, Participant 1 indicated “The program has met or surpassed my expectations,” Participant 7 said “I would recommend it” and Participant 10 shared that she was “totally impressed,” Participant 4 said “it was fantastic,” Participant 11 said “I’m impressed with the whole thing.” Participant 12 said “I think it was perfect for her, baby steps.”

Two participants mentioned their child's feelings. Participant 3 said "she loved it, she smiled on the way there and on the way home." Participant 10 shared that "she'd get up for school and be happy."

Six participants mentioned social and academic growth. Participant 4 said "It definitely helped him, he was shy at the beginning and he's not shy now." Participant 12 expressed "I think it's good for social and mentally." Participant 6 was more specific around skills attained "he learned motor skills like tying shoes, he learned the Pledge of Allegiance, reading and math."

Five participants expressed general positivity around learning and readiness. Participants 9, 10 and 11 specifically mentioned learning: "they learned to play together" (Participant 9), "She's actually learned interactions with kids her age" (Participant 11), "I think they learned a lot" (Participant 9), "she grew, she learned," (Participant 10). Two participants mentioned school readiness. "He was ready for school, he's not going to have issues, they come prepared" (Participant 7) "he was beyond ready," (Participant 8).

Only Participant 9 expressed a need for improvement in the program. She was very informed of how the program worked and was also on the Policy Council. She indicated that "socially it was good, academics could be stronger."

The essence of this subtheme was that if there were expectations of preschool they were met. If they wanted their child to be happy, they perceived that they were. If they wanted them to gain academic skills, they did. If there was a desire to grow socially and get along with others, the children did so. Participants viewed preschool as a successful stepping stone to kindergarten.

Positive perceptions of kindergarten. Eleven of 12 expressed positive feelings about their kindergarten experience at the time of the interview. Similar to participants' reflections on preschool, thoughts expressed around kindergarten are general overall statements including

readiness, statements specific to the perception of the child's feelings, and social or academic skill attainment.

Participants 3, 5 and 12 indicated that kindergarten "is going great". Participants 5, 9 and 10 shared their child was prepared for kindergarten. Participant 10 said the child was "so ready for Kindergarten."

Participants 3, 5, 7 and 12 expressed their child's feelings about kindergarten. "So far he loves kindergarten" (Participant 7), "she's growing, she's learning and she enjoys it" (Participant 12), "she loves it" (Participants 3 and 5), "she loves reading and math" (Participant 5).

Participants 1 and 8 expressed their experience as avoiding negatives. "She hasn't had any trouble of any kind, she hasn't struggled with anything" (Participant 1), "we haven't had any problems" (Participant 8).

Participants 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11 mention more specific social and academic aspects of their child's kindergarten experience. Participant 2 expressed that kindergarten has been "typical, he is socializing, learning how to read, it has been a positive experience so far." Participant 3 shared "she gets along with people. She's where she needs to be, on grade level or however they do that." Participant 7 said "he is already starting to read words and read books, the simple books. He is doing things a little earlier than the others." Participant 5 indicated "she writes and she is doing really well with the emotional side as well. Participant 8 indicated "his favorites are creative and gym time." Participant 11 shared "she's writing and counting."

Two participants shared their perception of the teacher. Participant said that the teacher "is firm, after 22 years he knows how to teach." Participant 8 shared "I really like her teacher."

The essence of this subtheme centered on the participants' view of kindergarten.

Participants wanted their child to be successful, happy and not struggle too much. They believed that preschool helped them be ready to for kindergarten.

Theme 2: Parents/guardians made a conscious decision to enroll their children in preschool based on factors important to them regarding their child's development.

All 12 parents discussed making a decision to enroll their child in preschool for specific benefits to their child's development and/or benefits to the family. When parents were discussing their decision-making process two subthemes emerged. The first was around the perceived benefits of preschool and elements present in preschools that matched those perceived benefits. The second subtheme that emerged was around logistics, fit with the family, and factors that made preschool feasible.

Table 12 presents theme two and the two subthemes by participant.

Table 12

Theme Two and Subthemes by Participant

Theme and Subthemes		
Parents/guardians made a conscious decision to enroll their children in preschool based on factors important to them regarding their child's development.		
Participant #	Perceived benefits of preschool/ desired elements	Logistics/ fit/ what made preschool feasible
1	X	X
2	X	X
3	-	X
4	X	X
5	X	-
6	X	X
7	X	X
8	X	X
9	X	X
10	-	X
11	X	X
12	X	X

Perceived benefits of preschool/ desired elements. Participants shared why they wanted their child to attend preschool and more specifically what they were looking for in a preschool. Three participants made general reasons that contributed to their choice. Participant 2 said she is a “strong proponent of education.” Participant 5 said “My mom is an educator.” Participant 11

said “I think it’s a good program, I am for it 100%.” Participant 2 stated “if kids attend preschool they can get a head start.” Participant 9 said “parents have to be proactive if they want them to be successful.” Participant 8 indicated the child “was already learning and I’m not a teacher.” Participant 11 said preschool “helps parents if they are there while they are working.”

Several participants shared they wanted their child to be ready for school. Participant 1 expressed “being academically and socially ready, there is a difference.”

Participant 6 said “readiness and preparedness were not a question.” Participants 3 and 6 looked for school environments specifically. Participant 12 wanted the child “not to be overwhelmed, know what to expect.” Participant 4 shared that the child “hasn’t been around a lot of kids” so they were “trying to start school without him being blown away.” Participant 4 also shared that her parents are teachers and that her mother “had a friend whose granddaughter didn’t go to preschool and had a really hard time and was held back. So you know, just from that story, and myself going to preschool, wanting them to be ready for kindergarten and as prepared as possible.” Participant 12 indicated preschool would help “get them in a routine.”

Several participants had specific elements they mentioned. Participant 5 said it was “different for each child. I wanted her to be comfortable. I wanted to challenge her.” Participant 6 said they looked for a preschool that was “highly structured, clean, orderly, and used a curriculum.” Participant 7 said “I heard they were using ‘rewiring the brain’ like the school was, so it would be an easy transition to school.”

In essence, the participants indicated what they found the benefits of preschool to be and then found a preschool that they could see those elements. If they wanted structure, such as a school setting they looked for a school-based preschool. If they wanted comfort, they looked for

that. Some participants had greater knowledge of academics at the school, so looked for preschools that would align with that.

Logistics/ fit/ what made preschool feasible. In addition to looking for specific programming elements as was discussed above, participants shared other factors that played a role in their decision-making process. Factors such as affordability, schedule, transportation and fit for the family were shared. Participants also shared challenges.

Five participants specifically mentioned cost or affordability of the preschool as a factor in choosing a preschool. Participant 5 said “it can be a challenge if you can’t afford it.”

Five participants mentioned their work schedule and that they looked for a preschool that would match. Participant 6 related the need to coordinate with before and after school and said “for children of working parents it can be difficult.”

Participants 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11 and 12 mentioned proximity to home and availability of transportation. Participant 11 shared that busing was interrupted, making it necessary for her to drive her child “so it was a little more expense.”

Participant 5 made a general comment that it “had to fit the family.” Participant 8 shared “it was comfortable, I knew the teachers, he knew the teachers.” Participant 6 said “they’re (town) folks”, so I know the family, I had the daughter in school.” Participant 10 discussed how family challenges could arise but that “teachers are versatile and helpful.”

Participants also shared specific challenges when making the decision about preschool. Participants 9 and 10 mentioned guardianship paperwork as a barrier to enrolling. Participants 8 and 12 shared “potty training issues” as a challenge. Participant 9 discussed a disconnect between preschool and kindergarten. She said she wanted her child to start kindergarten early

otherwise the child would have had another year of preschool because “she wasn’t going to be 5 until October 1 so I signed the waiver.”

Participant 5 shared that it is “hard to find a good one.” Participant 12 said it was hard to enroll her child because he is her “last child at home.”

What seemed to surface as the essence here was that there were factors that could make preschool choice easier or impossible regardless of how much they believed in the importance of sending their children to preschool. No one said it would have been easier not to do preschool, however, they did talk about having to navigate transportation, cost, schedules and paperwork to make it happen. It was implied that it was worth the effort.

Theme 3: When decisions were made was based on an accepted norm.

All 12 participants were influenced by people they trust and with whom they have relationships. For those whose family members or friends typically chose preschool, the preschool decision was made early on, sometimes even before the child was born. It was “a given” based on expectations within their peer group. For those whose families did not necessarily experience preschool, but who interacted with early education services, those providers brought the preschool enrollment process to them.

The essence here was that Participants indicated they enrolled their child into the expected next step. They were always on the path, or the trusted early educators put them on this path. Once on this path to preschool, they stayed on that path for other children. Preschool became the expectation for all.

When analyzing the data within theme three, three subthemes emerged: peers/family influenced early decisions, early education experiences influenced the next step, preschool for

younger siblings followed the older siblings' path. Table 13 presents theme three and its subthemes by participant.

Table 13

Theme Three and Subthemes by Participant

Theme and Subthemes			
Participant #	When decisions were made was based on an accepted norm.		
	Peers/ family Influenced early decisions	Early education experiences influenced the next step	Preschool for Younger siblings followed the older siblings' path
1	X	-	X
2	X	X	X
3	X	-	-
4	X	-	-
5	-	-	X
6	X	-	X
7	X	-	X
8	X	X	X
9	X	X	X
10	-	-	X
11	-	X	X
12	-	X	-

Within this subtheme data suggests that participants actively sought information about preschool, or they were the recipients of information as a result of being connected to early education services.

Peers/family influenced early decisions. Eight out of 12 Participants indicated that preschool was typical for themselves, their families, their friends or their school. The influence they discussed was often in regard to which preschool to choose, not whether to enroll their child. Participants described how they heard about preschool. Participant 1 indicated she sought out information on available preschool options, and that she “did research. I did a lot of it online and word of mouth.” She also expressed the opinion “if you don’t have family or friends who have gone before you, you can be lost in the dark.” Participant 4 expressed that she “first heard about GSRP when I was asking for my oldest.” Participant 8 expressed that information was not easy to come by, she said “I’d heard about Head Start but didn’t know anything.” Participants 6 and 8 indicated they themselves attended preschool, and Participant 6 added that “someone recommended it highly.” Participants 2 and 9 said “everyone I know does some kind of preschool.” When choosing a preschool, Participant 7 share that she “got references, and heard positive things.” Participant 3 said “the preschool director is in the office next to mine, and he would ask ‘when are your kids coming to preschool?’” Participant 8 shared that she “knew the teachers (through church).” Participant 3 also shared “my wife works at (school), she got to see the preschool there every day.” In these cases, the decision to enroll in a preschool was made already and the references from trusted peers influenced which preschool would be chosen.

The essence of this subtheme is that all of the participants in the study followed the perceived norm to enroll their child in preschool. They were not stepping out in a different direction from what they saw as an expectation. They sought confirmation of their choice from

trusted peers. They actively sought information and it may not have been easy to get, understand or navigate when trying to find the right fit.

Early Intervention providers influenced the next step. Five participants received early intervention services as a result of a reference from a trusted individual. If the participant was a grandparent, they indicated preschool had not been typical for their own kids but it was now. Participant 9 described her feelings about engaging early intervention services for her child with special needs, she indicated “because I work in the medical field, I wanted to get on this.”

These five participants expressed that information came to them in some way, as opposed to seeking it out. Participants 2, 7, and 12 indicated they had seen flyers, signs and posters.

Participants that were linked to early education services shared how they learned of services: “the pediatrician referred us to Early On (Participant 9), “Early On referred us to Head Start” (Participant 12), “she aged out of Early Head Start and started in Head Start” (Participant 11). Participant 9 also said she had “learned a lot since adopting.” Participant 2 indicated “It was difficult to get information about special education for my son.”

The essence of this sub-theme was that if families were involved in early education services they followed the advice of the provider. They took advantage of the early services and then continued on to the next step, the path that would reflect the norm.

Preschool for younger siblings followed the older siblings’ path. Nine out of 12 indicated that the siblings attended or will attend the same preschool. The three that did not indicate that sibling attended the same preschool made a different choice due to family circumstance (moved from another state) or because the sibling needed special services (Early Childhood Special Education).

Participant 7 seemed to capture the essence of this subtheme by saying “we were happy with the other kids, so thought ‘why change?’” No one in the study expressed regret at their decision to enroll their child in preschool.

The essence here is that Participants had positive feelings about their decision to enroll their child in preschool and so those feeling carried into repeating the decision to enroll the siblings. Implied here as well, is that they successfully navigated any issues and had received positive outcomes, so they hoped to repeat the successful outcomes in the future. Preschool became the norm in the family, with each successive child following the same path.

Chapter 4 Closure

This section presented a summary of the findings of this study. As a result an in-depth recursive data analysis three significant themes and eight subthemes emerged. Table 14 presents the three emerging themes and subthemes all together by participant. The themes and subthemes that emerged through analysis were:

Theme 1: Parents/guardians expressed positive feelings about education birth to school age and the desire for children to be successful.

Subtheme a: support of early learning

Subtheme b: preschool perceptions are positive

Subtheme c: kindergarten perceptions are positive

Theme 2: Parents/guardians made a conscious decision to enroll their children in preschool based on factors important to them regarding their child’s development.

Subtheme a: perceived benefits of preschool/ desired elements

Subtheme b: logistics/ fit/ what made preschool feasible

Theme 3: When decisions were made were based on an accepted norm.

Subtheme a: peers/family influenced early decisions

Subtheme b: early education experiences influenced the next step

Subtheme c: preschool for younger siblings followed the older siblings' path

Table 14

Emerging Themes and Subthemes by Participant

Participant #	Themes and Subthemes							
	Parents expressed positive feelings about education birth to school age and the desire for children to be successful.			Parents made a conscious decision to enroll their children in preschool based on factors important to them regarding their child's development.		When decisions were made was based on an accepted norm		
	Support of early learning	PS perceptions are positive	K perceptions are positive	Perceived benefits of PS/ Desired elements	Logistics / fit/ what made PS feasible	Peers/ family	Early education experiences	PS for Siblings
1	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	X
2	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X
3	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	-
4	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	-
5	X	-	X	X	X	-	-	X
6	X	X	-	X	X	X	-	X
7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
9	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
10	X	X	X	-	X	-	-	X
11	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	X
12	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	-

These themes and subthemes help explain how participants expressed their decision making process of whether to enroll their children in preschool. They all made a choice to enroll their child, though they made that choice at different times depending on their circumstances. They also help illuminate the disposition of the participants toward education in general and preschool in specific. All participants were overwhelmingly positive in their feelings about education in general and preschool specifically. Further, the themes and subthemes capture how, looking back on the decision, participants chose the preschool they did and how they felt about that decision now. Looking back they all reflected on how they navigated making an informed choice that would fit their family circumstances. In many cases, though not stated specifically, it would have been easier not to send their child to preschool. There was a lot to figure out. However, the perceived benefits outweighed the necessary effort to make it happen.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will present an interpretation of findings by discussing how the study informed the purpose and answered the research questions. I will also discuss implications for further research, current practice, and policy.

Focus of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore through a phenomenological lens, how low income parents and guardians made decisions to enroll their child or dependent in a preschool program. In doing so, I examined their decision making processes by organizing the research questions around Ajzen's (1991) notions of (a) behavioral beliefs, (b) normative beliefs, and (c) control beliefs and the role they played in intention and carry through of a behavior. More generally speaking, the research explored and described how parents and guardians in one community made decisions and how they made sense of that experience when looking back on it.

Overview

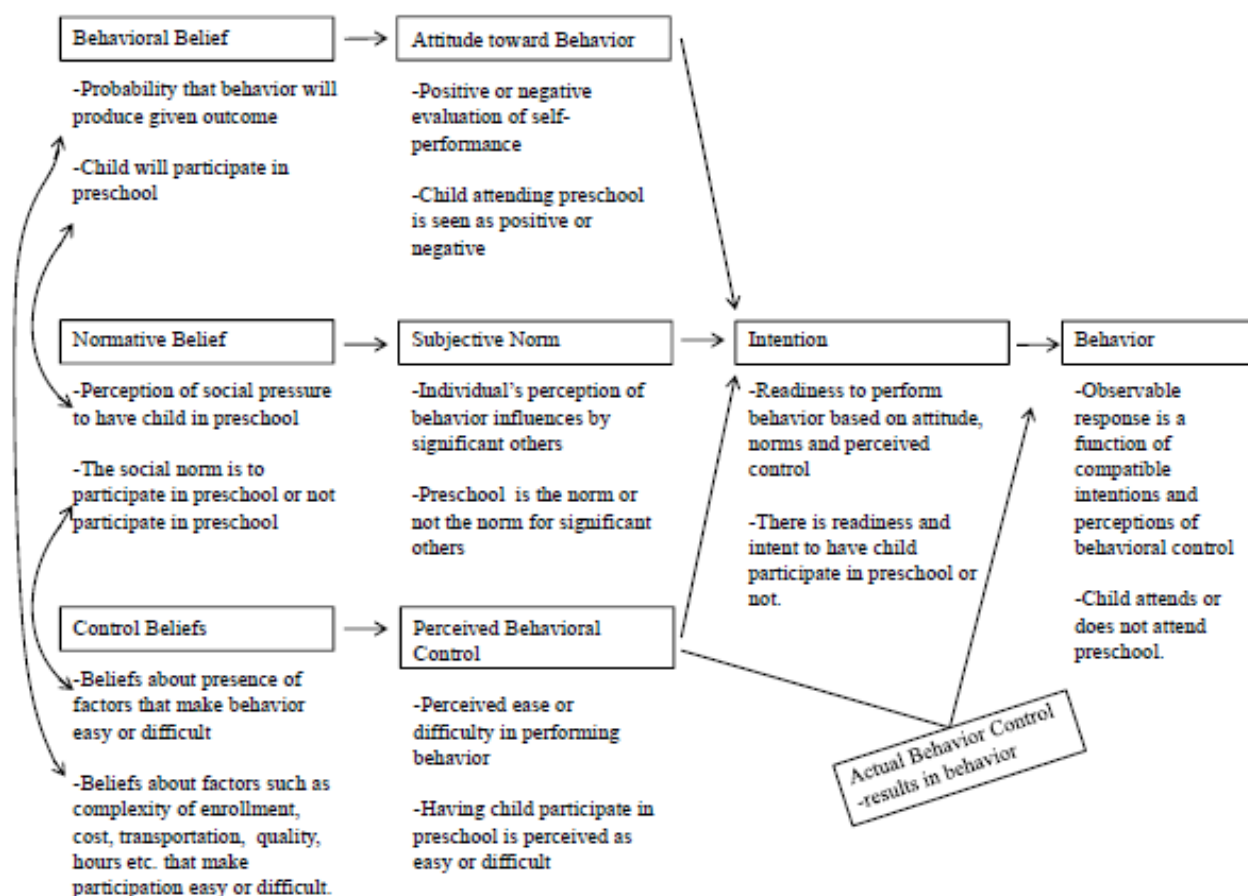
This section offers a discussion of how the data analysis informs the central research question and the sub-questions. The central research question was: What explains the decision making process as to whether to enroll their children in Head Start or Great Start Readiness Preschool? In Chapter 1 I presented a theoretical framework that informed my research. The sub-questions were derived from this theoretical framework based on the theory of planned behavior (Figure 1). The model explains the role that beliefs and perceptions play in intentions and ultimately behavior. Specifically, the model defines behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs. Further, the model shows the links between these beliefs with an individual's attitude toward a behavior, the individual's perception of influences by significant others and the

perceived ease or difficulty in performing the behavior. These factors lead toward an individual's intention to engage in the behavior and then finally actually exhibiting the behavior.

The overarching question is discussed first with relevant data from the interviews. Following the overarching question, each sub-question is discussed. After this discussion, I discuss the relationship of my study to existing preschool studies, including how the findings affirmed, added to and/or differed from that literature. Then I discuss the implications of my study on preschool policy and practice. I end the chapter with a discussion of my concluding thoughts on the study.

Figure 2.

Theory of Planned Behavior as applied to preschool decision-making



Analysis/Discussion of Major Results

Research Questions

Before analyzing my data to answer my research questions, I analyzed data to surface emergent themes. These themes were described in depth in chapter 4. I developed themes and subthemes regarding preschool decision making among the participants. Subsequent to that process, I went back to the empirical data gathered in interviews to answer my overarching research questions and sub-questions. This discussion follows.

Overarching question: What explains the decision making process as to whether to enroll their children in Head Start or Great Start Readiness Preschool?

A common experience emerged from all 12 participants in the study. All participants shared a remarkable positivity about, and belief in the importance of education. The positivity was influenced by their family members, peers, and early education providers with whom they interacted. Some participants were educators or had educators in their families. Participant 7 stated, “I’m an educator.” This was stated as if this was reason enough to choose preschool, that anyone in education would make the same decision. Participants who had experiences with early education programs, such as Early Head Start described those programs and staffs in very positive terms regarding their impact on their children.

Participants described people in their lives that influenced their decision. These influencers impacted the timeline of the decision-making process. Participants who described being influenced by family and peers began their preschool decision at the birth of their child or even before and even might not have looked at it as a decision, that it was a foregone conclusion. Participants 4, 5, 6, 7 talked about thinking about preschool prior to birth or that it was always an expectation. Participant 6 shared that they decided “right away, even before we were parents.”

Participant 5 said “it was not an active decision, when she got to that age she would go to preschool. It was the next step. I didn’t really think about it.” And Participant 7 said “I think we almost just had the expectation, there was never a doubt that we would send kids to preschool.”

Many participants described a decision making process that began closer to preschool age. The process began after interactions with influential people in their lives. Participants 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11 and, 12 began looking at preschool when the child was three or four years old. Participants who were not connected with early learning programs began doing their research at this time. Participant 2 said “it was last minute, we had been talking about it but it was close to the deadline.” Participant 3 shared that “the preschool director is in the office next to mine, and he would ask ‘when are your kids coming to preschool?’” Participants who were connected with the early childhood programs were guided in the enrollment of their child in the next stage of schooling as it was recommended they do.

The essence that emerged in the overarching question was that even though enrolling the child in preschool was their decision, there were beliefs, attitudes and influences that played a role in participants choosing a preschool for their child. The participants discussed influences either with their family and peers, or with providers of early education services.

Practical factors that influenced the decision and contributed to the feasibility of the choice. These factors came into play only after the decision was made to enroll the child in a preschool. Participants discussed how they researched the available preschool options online or through friends and family. For each early childhood provider, participants were looking at feasibility factors such as school day schedule, location, transportation availability, and cost. Altogether these factors contributed to the he control belief which then led participants to believe they could engage in the behavior of preschool choice.

Sub-questions

The sub-questions will further explain how participants related their preschool decision-making process by exploring the connections to their beliefs and attitudes, perceived community and peer group norms, and belief in the ease or difficulty of control of enrolling their child in preschool. The research sub-questions address the component parts of the Theory of Planned Behavior.

Sub-question 1: How do guardians describe their beliefs about enrolling their children in Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?

All 12 Participants expressed positive beliefs around preschool in general. This is critical to making a decision. If preschool was compulsory, a parent or guardian would still have a choice of where to enroll their child. However, since preschool is not compulsory, any enrollment is optional. Parents and guardians who do not believe in the value or importance of preschool will likely not seek one out for their child. Participant 2 indicated “if kids attend preschool they can get a head start.” Participant 4 stated they were “trying to start school without them being blown away.” Some participants had previous experience sending a child to preschool and continued to choose it if there were other siblings. Participant 7 indicated “we were happy with our experience with my other two, so why change?”

Sub-question 2: What are the guardians’ attitudes toward Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool (GSRP)?

All participants expressed positive attitudes toward preschool, in general, prior to sending their child to preschool, although some had heard some negative things about some of the options. When asked what their current attitudes were, all participants expressed that their choice had been a positive experience that they would make again.

Participants 6, 8 and, 9 indicated they had negative perceptions of Head Start or GSRP.

Participant 6 said “I think there are some opinions, not based on truth, that they are at-risk preschools and that children there are probably lower level than their child.” Participant 8 shared that she had “heard some negative things about Head Start but we don’t go by that.” Participant 9 said “my sister had the idea that this was just for poor people and you know that’s not true.”

These attitudes are important regarding deciding to enroll in the program or not. Head Start and GSRP are free options for those that qualify, however parents and guardians will not choose to participate in a preschool even if it is free if they do not have a positive attitude about the program.

Sub-question 3: How do guardians describe the community norm in regard to Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?

The community norm can figure into the decision as a social pressure to conform. If a there is not a family norm to choose preschool, a perceived community norm can set an expectation and a desire to not miss out on something in which other participate. All but two participants expressed that preschool is typical in their community. Participant 10, a grandmother, shared that she thought it more common now that when her children were young “I think parents are more aware of it now.” However, Participant 1 said “It surprised me how many people didn’t have preschool.” She had thought it was more common than it turned out to be. She had that realization when she attended kindergarten round up. Participant 3 just didn’t know, he said “I can’t speak very well of this district, I work in (another community).

Sub-question 4: How do guardians describe the norm in their peer group/family in regard to Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?

Participants perceived norm of the peer group or family influenced their behavior. There is social pressure and support to behave in a way that is similar to individuals close to them. Seven participants expressed that preschool is typical in their peer and family group. Participant 2 expressed that “everyone I know does some type of preschool. Two participants chose Christian preschools even though they qualified for GSRP. Participant 8 said “I knew the teachers.” Participant 4’s parents, both teachers, used story to influence the preschool decision. They told participant 4 about a friend whose child did not attend preschool and ended up very behind in kindergarten. This clearly made an impression on the participant. They did not want their children to experience the difficulties of this other child. The perceived norm in the family and with peers influences the decision. Compliance with the behavior is reinforced by the influential family and peer group.

Sub-question 5: How do guardians describe what stops or encourages them to send their children to Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?

Participants indicated that family members or early education professionals encouraged preschool enrollment. This is an example of their participants’ perceptions of the influences on their behavior in general. Participants did not describe any instances of being talked out of deciding to enroll their child in preschool. Participant 9 said “there’s pretty good advocates out there, it’s just up to the parents to call that number.” Participant 4 said her parents “were adamant.” Participant 4 also mentioned the child’s interest in preschool “he wanted to go to school because his brother was in school.”

There were examples of influences in which preschool to choose. Perceptions of the quality of the preschool led parents to choose alternatives to Head Start or GSRP. As mentioned under sub-question 2, Participants 6, 8 and, 9 indicated they had negative perceptions of Head Start or GSRP. These participants did not choose either program.

Perceived barriers influence the feeling a person has regarding control and intent. If a barrier is seen as insurmountable or not worth the trouble in respect to the gain, then the individual will not intend to engage in the behavior.

Sub-question 6: How do they describe their belief in the ease or difficulty of sending their child to Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?

All 12 participants did enroll their child in Head Start, GSRP, or a different community preschool. They shared factors that influenced their choice. Participants discussed factors that helped them choose such as: fit with family finances, location, before and after school daycare, transportation, and comfort level with the staff and environment. Participant 1 shared that “full day, school district hours and busing” were helpful in making preschool feasible.

Participants mentioned factors that needed to be overcome. This is significant, because even though parents and guardians may decide they want to enroll their child in preschool, if it is not feasible there will not be follow through on that behavior. Participants mentioned factors that needed to be overcome in order to have their children enroll. Participant 12 delayed preschool a year for her 4 year old because “he is not fully potty trained.” Participants 10 and 11 mentioned guardianship paperwork being a barrier to enrollment. A long bus ride resulted in a switch of classroom for Participant 10. Participant 7 overcame a transportation by enlisting help from her mother.

The presence of barriers alone is not the important factor. This question was designed to surface how individuals described those barriers. The presence of a barrier can have the effect of keeping someone from engaging in a behavior. The same barrier can also be navigated by another individual and not keep them from engaging in the behavior. The important aspect to uncover is how in control the participants felt they were in regard to overcoming the barriers.

Sub-question 7: Was there an intention to enroll the child in Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool?

All 12 participants described their intent to enroll in preschool and they followed through on that intent and did enroll. However, three participants chose an alternate preschool to Head Start or Great Start Readiness preschool even though they would be paying for those options. Two participants chose a home-based preschool due to transportation and cost issues. One participant chose a church-based preschool for comfort and fit with family values.

Sub-question 7a: If they intended to send the child and did, what made it feasible?

All participants saw the value and made a commitment for their child to attend preschool. Participants expressed how they navigated the process of enrolling. For those that decided to enroll in GSRP or Head Start, the factors they considered that made the decision feasible included location in the school, transportation, full-day school schedule and affordability. Participants who chose Head Start had previous experience with early education providers. They shared how these providers helped the participants navigate potential barriers to enrollment such as location in their home district and paperwork.

Sub-question 7b: If they intended to send the child and did, what made it difficult?

Participants described getting into a program in their district, transportation, wraparound care for the child, quality, and comfort level as desired elements that if they were not present

would be potential barriers. Participants had to be able to juggle preschool along with work, other children, school, and budget. Navigating those barriers impacted the final decision on which preschool in which to enroll.

While all participants did enroll their child in a preschool of some sort, not all enrolled in one of the free public preschools. The free preschools were considered, but fit with the family was not there for them. Those who qualified for Head Start or GSRP that chose other preschools, did so because of elements important to their family. Participant 2 shared “I liked that it was associated with my church.” Participant 6 said “GSRP time of day just doesn’t work for two working parents.” The lack of wraparound child care was an insurmountable barrier for this parent. When she was asked the question initially about barriers parents face to enrolling in preschool, she said emphatically “transportation, definitely transportation.” However, GSRP provides transportation. So upon digging, what really surfaced was transportation to and from child care would mean paying for child care all day for just the before and after time the child would spend there. So the parent opted to keep the child at the child care all day. She didn’t see the “hassle” as being worth it.

Sub-question 8: If they did not intend to send the child to preschool, why not?

This question did not apply to the volunteer participant data as there were no volunteers for the study that did not choose to enroll their children in preschool. However, the absence of data here could be seen as a finding. The finding here could be that parents that are not engaged in early education activities, continue to not be engaged in education activities, such as this study.

Relationship of Results to Existing Studies

As a result of in-depth analysis, three themes emerged from the data. A comparison of those themes with the previous research are presented in Table 15 and discussed in pages that follow.

Table 15

Comparison of Research

Comparison Summary Between Schmitt (2020) and Previous Research	Previous Research
<p>Theme 1: Parents expressed positive feelings about education birth to school age and the desire for children to be successful.</p> <p>Parents/guardians support early learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/guardians supported learning at home prior to preschool. • Support was provided by parents/guardians in the form of reading and other educational activities. • Parents/guardians of eligible children took advantage of in-home visitors in order to address learning delays. • Parents/guardians saw providing early education opportunities for their children as an important role they played. <p>Preschool perceptions are positive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits of preschool are accepted by parents/guardians. 	<p>Affirms The theory of planned behavior- beliefs and attitudes (1991). The early years present incredible opportunity to build a strong foundation as the brain rapidly develops during the first five years of life (Robinson et al., 2017). Create safe, secure, and stimulating environments; share books in engaging ways (MAISA GELN, 2018)</p> <p>New Find Adds to: Connected systems provide parents the support to access programs that would support children's development (Chaudry, Morrissey, Weiland, & Yoshikawa, 2017). Parents are more involved in their children's schooling, they improve their parenting knowledge and skills, and developmental delays and health problems are detected early (Hamdon, 2019).</p> <p>Affirms: Theory of planned behavior- positive behavioral beliefs lead to positive attitude toward the behavior (Ajzen, 1991).</p>

Table 15 – continued

Comparison Summary Between Schmitt (2020) and Previous Research	Previous Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents/guardians seek out preschool because they see education in a positive light and they want their children to be successful. <p>Kindergarten perceptions are positive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents/guardians believe preschool played a role in their child's current success in Kindergarten. Parents/guardians expressed desires for their children to love school and learning, and socialize appropriately. Parents/guardians expressed desires for their children to avoid problems and struggles. 	<p>Children who attend preschool are able to retain learning, maintain good attendance and have an interest in school (Xiang & Schweinhart, 2002). In addition to improved cognitive development, children who attend preschool are aided in emotional and social development (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005).</p> <p>New Find Adds to: Most Americans believe preschool programs for children from low-income households would help these same children perform better in school in their teenage years (Bushaw & Lopez, 2013).</p> <p>Affirms:</p> <p>Children who attend a preschool have higher academic skills upon entering elementary school compared to their peers who have stayed at home with parents or who attended an informal child care (Magnusen, Lahaie, & Waldfogel, 2006). Academic benefits include improved verbal fluency, reading, and mathematical skills (Magnusen & Waldfogel, 2005; Hattie, 2009). Children who participated in the Abecedarian Project posted higher cognitive test scores beginning from the toddler years to age 21 (Masse & Barnett, 2002).</p> <p>New Find Adds to: School readiness gaps are not intractable problems. Access to high-quality early care and education could ameliorate sharp inequalities (Chaudry et al., 2017).</p>

Table 15 – continued

Comparison Summary Between Schmitt (2020) and Previous Research	Previous Research
<p>Theme 2: Parents made a conscious decision to enroll their children in preschool based on factors important to them regarding their child’s development.</p> <p>Preschool desired elements were determined based on parent/guardian perceptions of their children’s needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/guardians articulated how they chose their preschool was related to their child’s needs, such as academic challenge, social-emotional opportunity, comfort level with the teacher or environment. • Parents/guardians sought specific elements based on their perceptions of how they would contribute to school success such as a school-based setting, a specific curriculum, schedule or routine. <p>Feasibility was driven by logistics, fit with family values.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost/affordability, transportation and schedule were primary considerations when choosing a preschool which led to the belief that preschool would be feasible or not. • Choice was impacted to a lesser degree by limited awareness of available preschool options, and navigating the enrollment process. 	<p>Affirms Theory of planned behavior- control beliefs. Perceived ease or difficulty in performing the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Class size, the ratio of children to teachers, and service intensity, reflective teaching practice and close relationships with parents; and curricula have been identified as critical elements for preschool success (Frede, 1995). An enriched environment can positively impact the positive outcomes for children. Factors that maximize enrichment in early education settings include activity, novelty, challenging and meaningful learning, coherent complexity, managed stress levels, social support, good nutrition, and sufficient time (Jensen, 2006).</p> <p>Affirms Underutilization of services can be attributed to convenience factors such as transportation issues/concerns, the need for all-day programming, lack of awareness of services, complicated referral and enrollment processes (Obi, 2011; Payne, 1994)</p> <p>New Find Adds to: When the system is not well organized, it can be difficult for families to access resources for their children and challenging for service providers to connect families to needed supports (Robinson et al., 2017)</p>

Table 15 – continued

Comparison Summary Between Schmitt (2020) and Previous Research	Previous Research
<p>Theme 3: When decisions are made was based on an accepted norm.</p> <p>Early decisions around preschool seemed influenced by personal or family experiences.</p> <p>Later choices were influenced by service providers.</p> <p>Preschool for younger siblings follows the same choice unless family circumstance change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully enrolling and having one child complete preschool leads to enrolling siblings in the same preschool. 	<p>Affirms Theory of Planned Behavior- Normative Belief and Subjective Norm (Ajzen, 1991).</p> <p>New find Adds to: All children benefit from an organized system of community resources to help them thrive, like health care, quality early learning experiences, healthy nutrition, and parent support (Robinson et al., 2017). People who are respected and connected can exert enormous influence (Grenny, Patterson, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2013)</p> <p>Affirms Theory of planned behavior-- normative belief and subjective norm (Ajzen, 1991).</p> <p>New find Adds to: Compliance is normal (Grenny et al., 2013)</p> <p>Affirms Theory of planned behavior- control belief and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Underutilization of services can be attributed to convenience factors such as transportation issues/concerns, the need for all-day programming, lack of awareness of services, complicated referral and enrollment processes (Obi, 2011; Payne, 1994) Beliefs are based on past experiences (Bandura, 1997).</p> <p>New find Adds to: Changing behavior almost always involves new skills (Grenny et al., 2013, p.142).</p>

Theme 1: Parents/guardians expressed positive feelings about education birth to school age and the desire for children to be successful.

Parents expressed a desire for their children to be successful. They believe that their child's success is connected to their child's learning whether that was in the home or in a more formal school setting. Parents/guardians expressed a positive attitude about education in general. This included support for early learning at home, as well as their perspectives on their preschool and kindergarten experience.

Parents/guardians support early learning. Participants in the study described reading to their child, playing educational games, ensuring they had educational toys that supported learning. This supports the research contributing to the Early Literacy Essentials recommendation to create safe, secure, and stimulating environments; share books in engaging ways (MAISA GELN, 2018).

Parents/guardians also took advantage of intervention services when they were made available. This included following up on pediatrician's referrals to early special education services and home visiting provided by early head start. These services are available for children who qualify, but parents/guardians must seek out or agree to the services. Seeking out or agreeing to the services requires a level of trust in those who referred the parents and in the intervention providers. This affirms the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) in regard to positive beliefs and attitudes contributing to a behavior. The trust parents and guardians put in providers that contributed to their choice is indicative of their normative belief and subjective norm which is formed around a person's view of their referent group. This behavior of parents/guardians following from Early Head Start to Head Start adds to the research that

connected systems provide parents the support to access programs that would support children's development (Chaudry et al., 2017).

When participants described the importance of educational play, learning the ABC's, reading, socialization, though not articulated as such, they were acting as "their child's first and best teacher (Parents as Teachers). Each participant took an active role in supporting early learning prior to preschool. This also affirms the Help Me Grow literature (Robinson et al., 2017) that the early years present incredible opportunity to build a strong foundation as the brain rapidly develops during the first five years of life).

All 12 participants were actively involved in the early education of their children. This adds to Parents as Teachers' studies that show parents who are more involved in their children's schooling improve their parenting knowledge and skills, and developmental delays and health problems are detected early (Hamdon, 2019).

Preschool perceptions are positive. Participants described preschool as a way to get ready for kindergarten. They articulated benefits of preschool as providing important academic and social skills. Since participants saw success in school as important, they saw preschool as an important stepping stone to school success. The positive beliefs and attitudes about preschool that were present prior to enrolling affirms the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The positive belief is an expression that there is a probability that the behavior will result in the desired outcome.

Parents/guardians expressed a positive causal belief that preschool would help provide their children a good start to their schooling. This belief affirms the finding in literature that children who attend preschool are able to retain learning, maintain good attendance and have an interest in school (Xiang & Schweinhart, 2002). Also, in addition to improved cognitive

development, children who attend preschool are aided in emotional and social development (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005).

My study adds to the Gallup Poll results (2013) that showed most Americans believe preschool programs for children from low-income households would help these same children perform better in school in their teenage years (Bushaw & Lopez, 2013).

Kindergarten perceptions are positive. Parents/guardians believe preschool played a role in their child's current success in Kindergarten. Parents/guardians expressed desires for their children to love school and learning, and socialize appropriately. Parents/guardians expressed desires for their children to avoid problems and struggles.

The positive perceptions of preschool benefits add to the literature that documents benefits to children who attend preschool include increased interest in school, good attendance, cognitive, emotional and social development and that those benefits persist as children continue in school (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Masse & Barnett, 2002; Xiang & Schweinhart, 2002). These positive perceptions also add to the literature that show most Americans believe preschool program for children from low-income households would help children perform better in school into their teenage years (Bushaw & Lopez, 2013). Also affirmed is the literature that states that children who attend a preschool have higher academic skills upon entering elementary school compared to their peers who have stayed at home with parents or who attended an informal child care (Magnusen, et al., 2006) and that academic benefits include improved verbal fluency, reading, and mathematical skills (Hattie, 2009; Magnusen & Waldfogel, 2005).

The positivity of beliefs and attitudes led to intention. Attitude is the degree to which the behavior is valued (Ajzen, 1991). Overall there was a confidence in education to contribute to their child's success. These statements are examples of beliefs and attitudes that factor into a

behavior as described by Ajzen (1991). This behavior became predictive of future educational decision-making in regard to preschool. They perceived a level of control about their child's early learning.

My study adds to the research that states school readiness gaps between low-income students and their peers are not insurmountable, and that access to high-quality early care and education could ameliorate inequalities (Chaudry et al., 2017).

Theme 2: Parents/guardians made a conscious decision to enroll their children in preschool based on factors important to them regarding their child's development.

In order for children to attend preschool, parents/guardians must actively seek out options and decide to enroll their child. All the participants articulated the perceived benefits of preschool to their child.

Preschool desired elements were determined based on parent/guardian perceptions of their children's needs. Parents/guardians articulated how they chose their preschool was related to their child's needs, such as academic challenge, social-emotional opportunity, comfort level with the teacher or environment.

Parents/guardians sought specific elements based on their perceptions of how they would contribute to school success such as a school-based setting, a specific curriculum, schedule or routine.

This finding affirms the theory of planned behavior in regard to control beliefs which reflect the perceived ease or difficulty in performing the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Specific elements when present or not present would enable the parent/guardian to look at the choice as desirable.

Also affirmed in the literature is that parents were savvy about quality preschool elements. They were not just looking for a safe place for their children. Class size, the ratio of children to teachers, and service intensity, reflective teaching practice and close relationships with parents; and curricula have been identified as critical elements for preschool success (Frede, 1995). An enriched environment can positively impact the positive outcomes for children. Factors that maximize enrichment in early education settings include activity, novelty, challenging and meaningful learning, coherent complexity, managed stress levels, social support, good nutrition, and sufficient time (Jensen, 2006).

Feasibility was driven by logistics, fit with family values. Cost/affordability, transportation and schedule were primary considerations when choosing a preschool which led to the belief that preschool would be feasible or not. Ajzen (1991) discusses the Perceived Behavioral Control as being influenced to a greater or lesser degree depending on the perceived power of each factor. Choice was impacted to a lesser degree by limited awareness of available preschool options, and navigating the enrollment process.

This finding also affirms the literature that shows underutilization of services can be attributed to convenience factors such as transportation issues/concerns, the need for all-day programming, lack of awareness of services, complicated referral and enrollment processes (Obi, 2011; Payne, 1994).

My research supports the work of Help Me Grow (Robinson et al., 2017) which seeks to create strong early childhood systems. When the system is not well organized, it can be difficult for families to access resources for their children and challenging for service providers to connect families to needed supports.

Theme 3: When decisions were made based on an accepted norm.

Timing of decisions was dependent on family, peer and social norms. This affirms the theory of planned behavior. “Normative beliefs refer to the perceived behavioral expectations of such important referent individuals or groups as the person’s spouse, family, friends and – depending on the population and behavior studied- teacher, doctor, supervisor, and coworkers” (Ajzen, 1991).

Peers/family influenced early decisions. When the norm was present in personal or family experiences, participants described their decision to enroll their child in preschool as a given. They described the decision as “since birth or before” (Participant 6) or “I don’t remember making the decision, I just always knew she would go to preschool” (Participant 5), “I always knew we would send the children to preschool,” (Participant 7). In these participants’ experiences, there was an assumption that children would attend preschool. Because this was the norm, a more active decision would have been needed to *not* enroll their child in preschool. This affirms the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). “Normative beliefs refer to the perceived behavioral expectations of such important referent individuals or groups at the person’s spouse, family friends,” (Ajzen, 2019).

The perception of preschool as a norm in the family and something from which all children can benefit affirms the work of Help Me Grow which aims to create a community norm, similar to that which was expressed by participants in my study (Robinson et al., 2017).

Hearing participants’ stories of how family members and peers influenced their beliefs adds to the work of Grenny et al. that people who are respected and connected can exert enormous influence (Grenny et al., 2013).

Early education experiences influenced the next step. Participants that received early education services discussed the preschool decision as a referral or recommendation that they followed. It was the next step in the system for the child in order for them to continue to grow and learn. All participants described a positive relationship with the early intervention providers. They were known by name and had spent up to 3 years in a relationship with them visiting their homes. This affirms Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (1991), depending on the population and behavior being studied, the referent group includes "teachers, doctors, supervisors and coworkers" (Ajzen, 2019).

The children receiving early intervention services were given priority for preschool openings and providers helped navigate the enrollment process. This adds to the work of Grenny et al. that suggests harnessing the influence of the referent group to make compliance normal as a way to change behavior (Grenny et al, 2013).

Preschool for younger siblings followed the older siblings' path. Participants who successfully enrolled and had one child complete preschool repeated the process with subsequent children unless there was a change in circumstance. One family had moved so the older child had attended a different preschool. Two other participants had a child that needed special education services so attended Early Childhood Special Education. This behavior affirms the theory of planned behavior, specifically control belief and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). When parents/guardians have the belief of control over the behavior and the intent to engage in the behavior and do so successfully, it reinforces their feeling of control in continuing to engage in the behavior.

This research finding also affirms the literature regarding underutilization of services being attributed to convenience factors such as transportation issues/concerns, the need for all-

day programming, lack of awareness of services, complicated referral and enrollment processes (Obi, 2011; Payne, 1994). Once these barriers have been navigated, participants stay on the same path.

Participants repeating the behavior with siblings affirms Bandura's (1997) research which contends that beliefs are based on past experiences. The past experiences in the case of my preschool research, is prior decisions on preschool choice. Participants expressed satisfaction in their choice, and their intent to repeat the behavior.

This research finding adds to Grenny et al.'s research that suggests "changing behavior almost always involves new skills" (2013, p.142). In order for a different choice to be made it was necessary for participants to obtain new skills. Participants that described this type of experience described learning about preschool options in a new community due to a move, or by learning a new system in order to meet the special needs of one of their children.

Implications for Further Research

After analyzing how the results of my study related to the literature on early education, preschool research, choice and behavior literature, I considered the implications for future research. Implications for future research could include longitudinal studies with the families who chose preschool to follow up on choices made for younger siblings, an anonymous study to engage families that did not enroll children in preschool who did not wish to participate in the interview process, and research on families who engage in early education opportunities such as playgroups and early intervention services at ages zero to three.

Longitudinal

There are a few very well-known longitudinal studies for the impacts of preschool on success later in life such as the Perry Preschool Project and the Abecedarian Project. A

longitudinal study that looks at parent/guardian choice from one child to the next could reveal further insights into choice. Insights could include how actual experiences impacted their beliefs and attitudes, and how those impacted their behavior with subsequent preschool-aged children.

Non-preschool

Engaging families who did not choose preschool for their children could help reveal whether not having the child attend preschool was an active choice not to enroll, whether the parents/guardians never considered preschool, if they did not know of choices, or if they did not feel any choice was desirable or feasible. Studying the experiences of these families could inform preschool program design in order to better meet family needs. This research could also inform system design in order to increase awareness and accessibility of preschool options.

Early Education

Researching early education choice prior to preschool enrollment age could provide further insight into the role of social norms and control beliefs. Looking into the choice process for this very early entry point into education experiences outside of the home could provide insight into later decisions.

Implications for Current Practice and Policy

Implications for Current Practice

Knowing that preschool enrollment means taking action, engaging in a behavior, I reflected back at the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) for potential leverage points. I looked at each component of the model as a possible intervention point. As I reflected on this, I saw a connection between the theory of planned behavior and the work of Grenny et al. (2013). Grenny et al. (2013) which suggest six sources of influence as a model for change. Figure 3 illustrates the six sources of influence and their impact on motivation and ability.

	Motivation	Ability
Personal	1 Help them love what they hate	2 Help them do what they can't
Social	3 Provide encouragement	4 Provide assistance
Structural	5 Change their economy	6 Change their space

Figure 3. The Six Sources of Influence (Grenny et al., 2013, p.77).

There are two sources of influence connected to personal factors, two sources connected to the social arena, and two sources of influence in the structural category. The three sources of influence that impact motivation are: (a) help them love what they hate, (b) provide encouragement, and (c) change their economy. The three sources of influences that impact ability are: (a) help them do what they can't, (b) provide assistance, and (c) change their space.

Once I reflected on the six sources of influence I saw connections with most of them in the ways participants described their choice process. There were a couple influences that surfaced when participants described their experiences after they enrolled and began attending the preschool program.

Help them love what they hate- One tactic for this source of influence is to create direct experiences. Early education experiences such as Early On and Early Head Start fall in this category for participants 4, 9,10, and 11. Participants 9,10, and 11 talked about home visits where they learned how to play educational games and help with physical therapy. Another tactic is to tell meaningful stories. Participant 4 discussed the influence of her mother (the child's grandmother) telling a story of her friend's granddaughter who "didn't go to preschool and had a

really hard time and was held back.” She said her parents were teachers and “they were adamant that they were prepared for kindergarten. “

Help them do what they can’t. This source of influence came to light as participants talked about finding information about preschool or navigating the enrollment process.

Participants 9 and 10 talked specifically about guardianship and having the right paperwork.

Provide encouragement- Employing formal and informal leaders can influence behavior. Participant 3 talked of his boss saying “when am I going to see your kids in preschool.” Participant 9 shared that their pediatrician said “there’s no medication that is going to help, it has to be stimulation.”

Provide assistance- Social capital plays a vital role in this source of influence. Families, companies, communities and schools working in concert to help facilitate the preschool enrollment decision-making process. This source of influence was not directly referred to, however, could be what is in play when Participants 7 and 8 chose their church based preschools. They were familiar with those system.

Change their economy- This influence involves external rewards and punishments and may not play a direct role in this process. Free child care and preschool may be seen as a motivator for some, however, participants must be interested in preschool in the first place to have this influence where the child may go.

Change their space- This source of influence involves making the desired behavior more visible and easier. Participant 4 discussed having a free option that was close and provided transportation made the difference.

Figure 4 depicts how six leverage points based on the six sources of influence can also align to the elements of the theory of planned behavior. In this way, intentional action can be

made at critical points in the decision-making process, that have the greatest chance of influencing the desired behavior of enrolling in preschool.

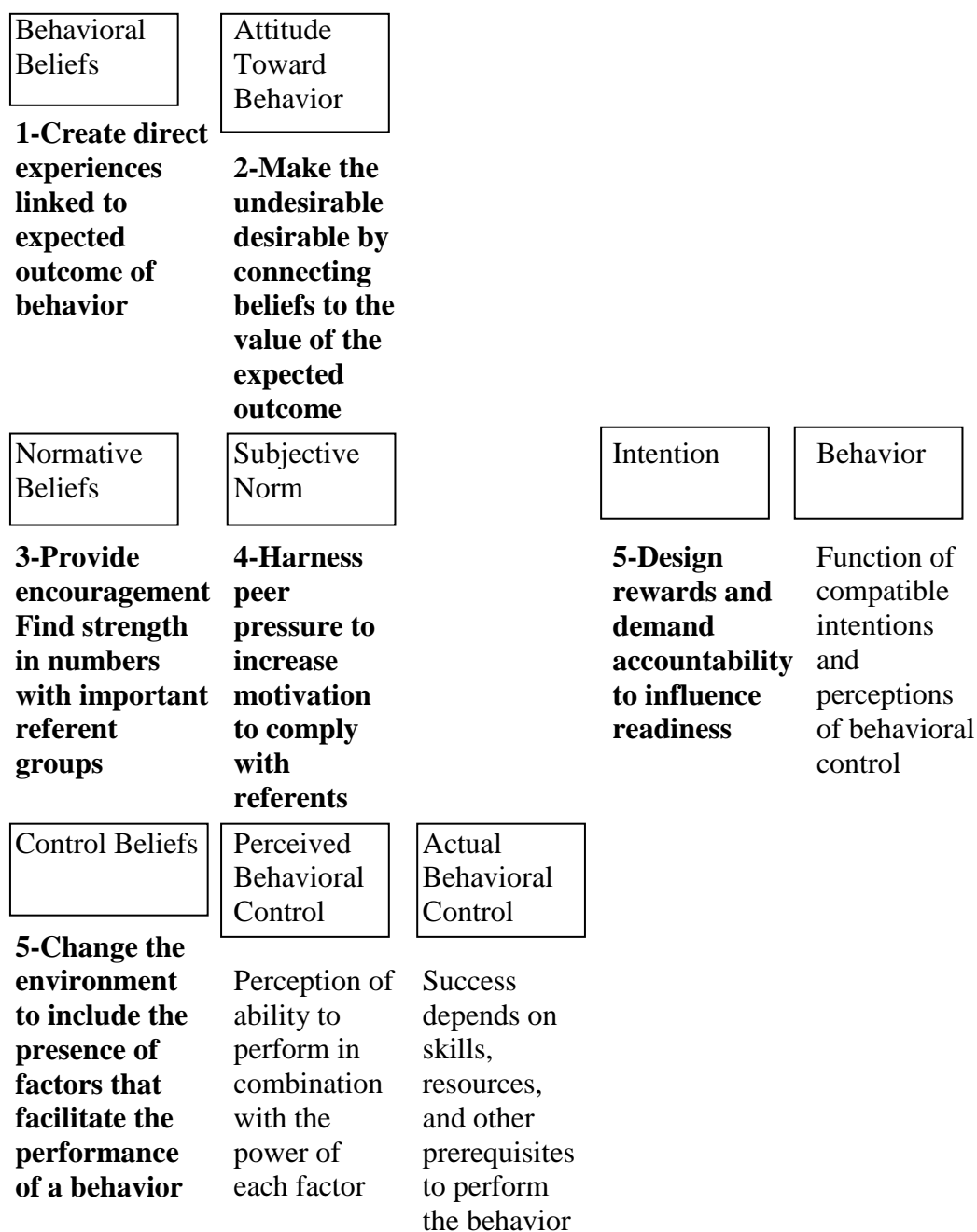


Figure 4. The Six Sources of Influence Applied to the Theory of Planned Behavior.

Leverage point one is to help shape behavioral beliefs. Encourage surpassing limits by providing experiences linked to expected outcome of behavior. The first step in the decision making process is awareness. Since beliefs are built on experiences, early learning experiences that encourage the first positive, low-risk, highly accessible touchpoint for families are critical. Positive early experiences will lead to participation in further experiences.

School districts could conduct kindergarten round up when children are three. This would provide a touchpoint an entire year sooner than current practice. Since kindergarten is seen as the typical entry point for school, an earlier touchpoint for all children could result in engaging families that do not have preschool on their radar.

Leverage point two is to help shape behavioral attitudes. Make the undesirable desirable by connecting beliefs to the value of the expected outcome. More school districts across the nation are looking for creating ways to fund outreach to children from birth. Opportunities for families to value preschool when children are 2 or 3 to become familiar and comfortable with teachers and schools could positively impact beliefs and attitudes and ultimately the intention to enroll their children in preschool when they are three or four years old.

Leverage point three is to create a norm for preschool choice. Find strength in numbers with important referent groups. Engaging community partners that already see infants and toddlers can create a bridge to early education. Physicians, child care providers, community libraries, departments of health and human services, faith-based organizations, and employers may have relationships with families that the educational community does not.

Engaging and educating grandparents in ways they can be involved in the early education of their grandchildren could provide additional support to the parents and children. Additionally, some grandparents are the primary caregiver. By purposefully engaging grandparents and

creating opportunities for them to feel connected and valued, another resource is created.

Participant 11 suggested, “I think you should reach out to grandparents. There are a lot of us out there who are taking care of the children on a day to day basis.”

Leverage point four is to impact the subjective norm in order to increase motivation to comply with the referents. This can be done by harnessing peer pressure. By creating a shared vision, we can capitalize on the social capital of community partners. Creating community goals for percentage of children in preschool and early education is an example that could increase motivation.

Campaigns that emphasize relationships, stories and recommendations from real community members could provide social pressure to engage in the decision-making process. Engaging formal and opinion leaders helps create new norms. “Social influence- the deeply felt desire to be accepted, respected, and connected to other human beings really pulls at human heartstrings. It often sits at the top of the heap of all sources of influence” (Grenny et al., 2013, p.183).

Leverage point five is to impact control beliefs. This can be done by changing the environment to include the presence of factors that facilitate the performance of a behavior. Engage prospective preschool families in dialog to surface needs and help provide counseling on overcoming any barriers to preschool enrollment that might exist on the part of the parent/guardian, real or perceived. Each choice ultimately is personal and must be made their own in order to operationalize it. “Changing behavior almost always involves new skills” (Grenny et al., 2013, p.142).

Increasing funding may be necessary to address barriers and provide accessibility to quality options through such solutions as lengthening of the preschool day, training of current

child care providers to include preschool programming, engaging business partners to house preschools in the workplace, and the like.

It is important to note that providers of preschool often jump right to these factors that increase the feasibility and decrease barriers to enrollment. They are obvious. For example, if preschool is not affordable, parents/guardians will not enroll their child. However, while this is true, it only addresses the families that have already chosen preschool. Presence of these enabling factors will go a long way to enrolling children whose parents have made the choice for preschool. They, alone, will not bring in parents/guardians who have not made the choice for preschool.

Leverage point six is to impact intent. Designing rewards and demanding accountability to can influence the motivation to engage in the behavior of preschool choice. Making the choice for preschool means an effort is required. For some families, the inherent benefits of preschool may not be recognized as worth it. If there is a reward that is valued by the parent/guardian, it may encourage them to make the effort. This might be a monetary incentive such as a gas card or free dinners at preschool round up. Accountability might come in the form of a pediatrician asking about preschool at a well-child visit.

Implications for Policy

Our most vulnerable children depend on our least resourced adults to help navigate a complex, disconnected array of early education services and programs of varying quality. Early learning is competing with many other initiatives, but the economics of investment in our youngest citizens is compelling. The benefit-cost ratio for the Great Start Readiness program alone is 2.35 to 1 from increased graduation rates (Wakabayashi, Hardin, Claxton, & Grace, 2017). Equality of opportunity in education must start before kindergarten in order to eliminate

or at least reduce income-based social, cognitive and achievement gaps. What became clear in my research was the agency required on the part of the adult to engage in and navigate the fragmented early childhood arena.

Time after time, parents and guardians discussed the research required to find preschools that would be affordable and meet the needs of their children. They discussed chance conversations with other parents, a care provider, a physician, that started them on a path to find programming for their child. Not once did a parent suggest that this process of finding a preschool was easy to navigate. Instead they talked about doing research, asking family members for help, and running into conflicts with logistics. Imagine if K-12 worked this way. We would have only half of our students in school. It is time to create a barrier-free, accessible at any point 0-5, friendly system that will help guide the process.

The medical community has recognized the need to work across systems. “States and communities can use surveillance data to drive action around early childhood investments. Partners within public health can use data-informed approaches to prevent health disparities by facilitating service linkages across health, social and educational systems. Timely referral and better integrated services might help children at low or moderate risk reach their full potential by returning to healthy developmental trajectories” (Robinson et al., 2017, p.772).

In my county level, we have the beginning of a no wrong door system with Help Me Grow. Counties opting into this system can provide the infrastructure to connect the dots between disconnected programs and services and create a one-stop shop for parents. Utilizing the Help Me Grow system to connect parents to first touch programs such as Imagination Library, play and learn groups, library programs, child care providers, and preschools. Once in the system, parents could have access to developmental screeners to allow them to benchmark their

child's growth and development. They could reach out for information and information could be shared more readily. The key will be to create the positive perception of this system and that it is what every family is doing. That will align with study findings regarding positive beliefs and the subjective norm.

Successful county level systems may provide the data necessary to help create a groundswell at the state level. Creating policy and funding to make the state of Michigan a birth to age 20 system could have a far reaching positive impact on individual lives, school programming and economic development of communities and the state. A system, that once accessed, could provide a navigable educational path for the parents and guardians would actually require an active decision not to continue, as opposed to our current opt in system.

Limitations

The limitations of a study are the boundaries of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 76). My study sought to explore the experiences of low-income parents/guardians of kindergarten-aged children regarding preschool choice. All 12 participants in my study enrolled their child in preschool. Because of these boundaries, I am not exploring the differences between parents/guardians who chose preschool and did not choose preschool. Nor am I looking at the differences between low-income families and families that were not low-income.

Another limitation of my study was that the study sought to understand the retrospective perceptions of the preschool choice experience of participants of children who were now in kindergarten. This means my study may not take into account a change in perception of preschool choice as the child progresses through school. The study did not look at longitudinal impacts of preschool choice beyond kindergarten.

While the results of the study “may be transferable, they are not generalizable” (Marshall

& Rossman, 2011, p. 76). The study is “bounded and situated in a certain context,” specifically, a particular group of participants in a particular school district (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 76). The results of the study may change, if replicated, depending on the demographic and geographic conditions.

Concluding Thoughts

Quality early childhood experiences positively impact the growth and development of children, and specifically, children who start school with quality preschool experiences will positively benefit both the child and the community. As an educational leader at a county level, I feel an urgency and a moral imperative to ensure that parents and guardians who make choices regarding the health and well-being of their children make informed choices about early experiences. The stakes are too high for the child, family and community not to ensure that every child has access to programs and services that will impact the rest of their lives.

For families that start with a positive attitude toward education, preschool enrollment seems likely. Preschool also seems likely if families are connected to early education services. However, preschool has not been an option for about half of our children. This is a result of: (a) parents and guardians do not see the value and thus do not enroll their children, (b) parents and guardians do not give early education prior to kindergarten any thought whatsoever, or (c) parents and guardians would like preschool but cannot find one that fits their needs or that they can afford. As a result, only about half of our children enter kindergarten having had the benefit of quality early education experiences. They arrive at kindergarten more prepared for success than those who have not had those experiences.

There is much to be done if we truly believe each and every child deserves the opportunity to become what they are meant to become. Our current public early childhood

programs are stratified by family income. Lowest income level families are eligible for Head Start. Slightly higher income level families are eligible for Great Start. Next highest perhaps qualify for sliding fees at school-based or community based preschools. The opportunity gap in the 0-5 years creates an achievement gap by kindergarten entry that only widens as the years go on. This does not have to be. A coherent system, of quality early childhood programs would go a long way to eliminating the barriers to access and thus the differences in educational outcomes that currently result based on family income or neighborhood. If preschool is seen as the norm in communities, along with the perception that it is feasible for everyone, it would go a long way in reaching families where preschool attendance is not a norm.

This study focused on the experiences of families that chose preschool. If we learn from this study we can put in place programs and services that will influence parents' and guardians' positive attitudes toward early learning, behavioral norms for choosing preschool, and control beliefs that enable agency to engage in quality early learning for each and every child.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Guiding Interview Questions

Initial Questions

1. Please describe your family/household. Such as number of children, ages, grades, parents/step parents?
2. Could you tell me about your child's kindergarten experience so far?
3. How did you come to know about kindergarten enrollment?
4. Prior to kindergarten were you aware of opportunities in the community for your child to participate?
 - a. If yes, what types of opportunities were you aware of?
 - b. Were there any you took advantage of?
 - c. What were your feelings about those opportunities?

Intermediate Questions

5. When you think back, did you have an opinion about preschool?
6. Has your opinion changed? If so, in what ways? What led to that change?
7. When you think back, what was your thinking around deciding to have you child attend preschool (or not)?
8. Were you aware of preschool options?

If yes, how would you describe those options you were aware of?

How did you find out about those options?
9. Is attending preschool typical in your family or circle of friends?
10. Did siblings attend?
11. Did the child's friends attend?
12. What made preschool doable/not doable for you?
13. What made preschool difficult or challenging?
14. What stood in the way of your child attending preschool?

15. Do you believe it was easy or difficult to have your child attend preschool?
16. Did you have a desire to have your child attend preschool?
17. When did you make that decision?
18. What helped/got in the way of making that happen?
19. If you had it to do over, knowing what you know now, would you decide to enroll your child in preschool?

Concluding Questions

20. Do you have any advice for parents of preschool aged children that you would share now that you have one in kindergarten?
21. Is there anything else you have thought of regarding your experiences prior to your child attending kindergarten that you would like to share?
22. Is there anything else you think I should understand better?
23. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX B

HSIRB Approval Letter and Informed Consent


WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: April 12, 2016

To: Sue Poppink, Principal Investigator
Laurel Schmitt, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair 

Re: HSIRB Project Number 16-04-12

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "An Exploration of Choice Regarding Head Start and Great Start Readiness Programs" has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., *you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study."*) Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: April 11, 2016

1903 W. Michigan Ave., Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5456
PHONE: (269) 382-8293 FAX: (269) 382-8276
CAMPUSSITE: 251 W. Walwood Hall

Western Michigan University
H.S.I.R.B.

Approved for use for one year from this date:

APR 12 2016


HSIRB Office

Informed Consent

Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Sue Poppink
Student Investigator: Laurel E. Schmitt
Title of Study: An exploration of choice regarding Head Start and Great Start Readiness Programs

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "Influences and factors contributing to preschool choice". This project will serve as Laurel Schmitt's dissertation for the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy in K-12 Educational Leadership. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?

There is little research that documents why parents/guardians choose or do not choose to send their children to preschool. This study is trying to understand what is important to them in making the choice.

Who can participate in this study?

A total of 20 parents will be included in the study. Otsego School District parents/guardians of current kindergarteners who have children in Head Start or Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) preschool or were qualified to do so will be invited to take part in this study. Otsego Public Schools will create a list of kindergarten parents/guardians who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch who did not attend Head Start or GSRP. This list will be the Head Start or GSRP eligible. Parents/guardians of current Head Start and GSRP programs will also be invited to participate. A random sample of 5 Head Start, 5 GSRP, 5 Head Start eligible and 5 GRSP eligible will be selected from parents/guardians who respond positively to the letters of invitation.

Where will this study take place?

The interviews will take place at the Elementary School in Otsego where your child attends kindergarten at a time convenient to you and the student investigator.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?

The interviews should take approximately 60 minutes.

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What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?

As a participant in the study you will be asked questions about your experiences and opinions regarding early childhood experiences.

What information is being measured during the study?

Your experiences in deciding to enroll or not enroll your child in preschool provide the data which will be used in this study. The interviews will be recorded to make sure the transcription is accurate. Themes will be identified from the different interviews.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?

Steps will be taken to protect your identity. This involves the use of pseudonyms for each participant such as "Parent/Guardian 1," "Parent/Guardian 2," and so on. All written and audio data will be locked up each day.

Federal regulations require that data be maintained in a locked file in the Primary Investigator's office or in the University Archive for at least three years after the study closes. Thus, the written transcripts will be stored on the campus of Western Michigan University for at least three years. The audio transcripts will be destroyed once the transcription process has been completed and a written record is produced and the participant is confident that the written transcript accurately reflects her comments during the interview.

Upon conclusion of the study, the data will be stored on a USB drive and transported from the school to WMU via the researcher. The audio transcripts will be destroyed once the transcription process has been completed and a written record is produced and the participant is confident that the written transcript accurately reflects her comments during the interview. A translator will be present in all interviews where this might be the case.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

The benefits of participating in this study will be your contribution to gaining an understanding of how decisions of preschool enrollment or non-enrollment are made by parents/guardians in your district. This study will provide school districts, preschool providers and policy makers with valuable information they can use to impact preschool enrollment. The positive impact on individual lives, school programming and economic development of communities could be far reaching. With the benefits of preschool widely researched, there is still a lack of understanding regarding the parental decision-making process. Too many students are arriving at kindergarten at a distinct disadvantage compared to their peers (Barnett et al, 2007; Bartik, 2011). Because preschool is not compulsory enrollment requires an active choice on the part of the parent/guardian. The result of not making that active choice is that children will not be enrolled in preschool.

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Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

The only cost to you will be transportation to the school for the interview.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?

You will be given a \$20 gas card to compensate you for their time and travel for the interview.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?

The student investigator will be the only person with access to a separate master list with the names of all participants and the corresponding code numbers ("Parent/Guardian 1," "Parent/Guardian 2," and so on). Upon approval by the Dissertation Committee the study, or portions of it, may be published in the dissertation database as well as educational journals.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?

You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. There will be no consequences to you personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Laurel Schmitt at 269-760-5298 or yeoschmitt@gmail.com or Dr. Sue Poppink, advisor, at 269-387-3569. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Participant's signature

Date

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Consentimiento Informado

Universidad de Western Michigan Departamento de Liderazgo para la Educación, Investigación y Tecnología

Investigador principal: Dr. Sue Poppink
Estudiante Investigador: Laurel Schmitt
Título del estudio: Una exploración de elección con respecto a Head Start y Great Start Readiness Programas

Usted ha sido invitado a participar en un proyecto de investigación titulado "Una exploración de la elección de preescolar de los padres". Este proyecto servirá como la disertación de Laurel Schmitt para los requisitos del Doctor en Filosofía en K- 12 Liderazgo Educativo. Este documento de consentimiento le explicará el propósito de este proyecto de investigación y repasará todos los compromisos de tiempo, los procedimientos utilizados en el estudio, y los riesgos y beneficios de participar en este proyecto de investigación. Por favor, lea este consentimiento cuidadosamente y por completo y por favor hacer cualquier pregunta si usted necesita más aclaraciones.

¿Qué estamos tratando de averiguar en este estudio?

Hay poca investigación que documenta por qué los padres / tutores eligen o no optan por enviar a sus hijos a la guardería. Este estudio es tratar de comprender lo que es importante para ellos para hacer la elección.

¿Quién puede participar en este estudio?

Un total de 20 padres/guardiánes será incluido en el estudio. Los padres/guardiánes del distrito escolar Otsego se invitará a representantes de kinder actuales que tienen los niños en Head Start o Great Start Readiness preescolar (GSRP) o fueron calificados para hacerlo para tomar parte en este estudio. Escuelas Públicas Otsego creará una lista de los padres/guardiánes que califican para almuerzo gratis o precio reducido, que no asistió a Head Start o GSRP. Esta lista será el derecho de Head Start o GSRP. Los padres/ guardiánes también se invitará a participar guardianes de los actuales programas de Head Start y GSRP. Una muestra aleatoria de 5 Head Start, 5 GSRP, 5 Head Start elegible y 5 GSRP elegibles serán seleccionados de los padres/ guardiánes que responden positivamente a las cartas de invitación.

¿Dónde se llevará a cabo este estudio?

Las entrevistas se llevarán a cabo en la Escuela Primaria en Otsego, donde su hijo asiste a la guardería en un momento conveniente para usted y el investigador estudiante.

¿Cuál es el compromiso de tiempo para participar en este estudio?

Las entrevistas deben tomar aproximadamente 60 minutos.

¿Qué le pedirá que hacer si decide participar en este estudio?

Como participante en el estudio, se le pedirá preguntas acerca de sus experiencias y opiniones con respecto a las experiencias de la primera infancia.

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¿Qué información se midieron durante el estudio?

Sus experiencias en la decisión de incluirlos o no a su hijo en el preescolar proporcionar los datos que se utilizó en este estudio. Las entrevistas serán grabadas para asegurarse de que la transcripción es precisa. Los temas se seleccionarán a partir de los diferentes entrevistas.

¿Cuáles son los riesgos de participar en este estudio y cómo se van a reducir al mínimo estos riesgos?

Se tomarán medidas para proteger su identidad. Esto implica el uso de seudónimos para cada participante como "padre/ guardian 1", "padre/ guardian 2", y así sucesivamente. Todos los textos e audio se bloqueará cada día.

Las regulaciones federales requieren que los datos se mantendrán en un archivo bloqueado en la oficina del investigador principal o en el Archivo de la Universidad durante al menos tres años después de que el estudio se cierra. Por lo tanto, las transcripciones escritas serán almacenados en el campus de la Universidad de Western Michigan durante al menos tres años. Las transcripciones de audio serán destruidos una vez que el proceso de transcripción se ha completado y un registro escrito se produce y el participante confía en que la transcripción escrita refleja con precisión sus comentarios durante la entrevista.

Al final del estudio, los datos serán almacenados en una unidad USB y transportados desde la escuela a la UMM a través del investigador. Las transcripciones de audio serán destruidos una vez que el proceso de transcripción se ha completado y un registro escrito se produce y el participante confía en que la transcripción escrita refleja con precisión sus comentarios durante la entrevista. Un traductor estará presente en todas las entrevistas en las que este podría ser el caso

¿Cuáles son los beneficios de participar en este estudio?

Los beneficios de participar en este estudio será su contribución a la obtención de un entendimiento de cómo las decisiones de matrícula preescolar o no la inscripción son hechas por los padres / tutores en su distrito. Este estudio proporcionará a los distritos escolares, proveedores de preescolar y las autoridades información valiosa que pueden utilizar para afectar la matrícula preescolar. El impacto positivo en la vida de los individuos, la programación de la escuela y el desarrollo económico de las comunidades podría ser de largo alcance. Con los beneficios de preescolar ampliamente investigados, todavía hay una falta de entendimiento en relación con el proceso de toma de decisiones de los padres. Demasiados estudiantes están llegando a la guardería en una clara desventaja en comparación con sus pares (Barnett et al, 2007; Bartik, 2011). Debido a que el preescolar no es obligatoria la inscripción requiere una elección activa por parte os el padre / tutor. El resultado de no hacer esa elección activo es que los niños no serán inscritos en preescolar.

¿Hay costos asociados con la participación en este estudio?

El único costo para usted será el transporte a la escuela para la entrevista.

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¿Hay alguna compensación por participar en este estudio?

Se le dará una tarjeta de gasolina \$ 20 a compensarle por su tiempo y los viajes para la entrevista.

¿Quién tendrá acceso a la información recopilada durante este estudio?

El investigador estudiante será la única persona con acceso a una lista maestra separada con los nombres de todos los participantes y los correspondientes números de código ("Padre / Guardián 1", "padre / tutor 2", y así sucesivamente). Una vez aprobado por el Comité de Disertación del estudio, o porciones de la misma, podrán ser publicados en la base de datos de tesis, así como revistas de educación.

¿Qué pasa si usted quiere dejar de participar en este estudio?

Usted puede optar por dejar de participar en el estudio en cualquier momento y por cualquier razón. Usted no va a sufrir ningún perjuicio o sanción por su decisión de dejar de participar. No habrá consecuencias para usted personalmente si usted decide retirarse de este estudio. El investigador también puede decidir dejar de participar en el estudio sin su consentimiento.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta antes o durante el estudio, puede ponerse en contacto con el investigador principal, Laurie Schmitt al 269-760-5298 o yeoschmitt@gmail.com o Dr. Sue Poppink, advisor, a 269-387-3569. También puede comunicarse con el Presidente, Human Junta de Revisión Institucional Temas en 269-387-8293 o el Vicerrectorado de Investigación de la 269-387-8298 si surgen preguntas durante el curso del estudio.

Este documento de consentimiento ha sido aprobado para su uso por un año por el Human Subjects Junta de Revisión Institucional (HSIRB) como indica la fecha impresa y la firma del presidente de la junta en la esquina superior derecha. No se debe participar en este estudio si la fecha impresa es mayor de un año.

He leído este documento de consentimiento informado. Los riesgos y beneficios han sido explicados. Estoy de acuerdo en participar en este estudio.

Por favor escriba su nombre

Firma del participante

Fecha

APPENDIX C

Initial Schema

