A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE TEACHING METHODS OF CHRISTIAN AND

SECULAR PRESCHOOLS

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a comparative study of the teaching methods of Christian preschools and secular preschool. I used two Christian and two secular preschools for the study. The study included interviews of the teachers and preschool directors and observations of actions in the classroom. Many children enter kindergarten not fully prepared for a classroom environment. Some of these children have never been outside the home without a parent and to be placed in a strange setting with strange people and answering to adults that are not parents, can be quite stressful. They are expected to become adjusted and start learning quickly. Preschools offer a less formal setting and generally smaller classes so the getting adjusted effort is not as stressful. Children entering kindergarten have varied levels of social and educational skills. Social skills that can be learned in preschool will better prepare a student to adapt to being in a class with many other students and be able to deal with the new surroundings and requirements. Just being able to recognize numbers and letters is a very positive step for children entering kindergarten and well organized preschool programs can have students ready to learn at the next level. To demonstrate that a preschool program is effective, the information must prove that its efforts not only improve the thinking of students in school, but that students can better deal with social situations, including those encountered in daily school life.

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I acknowledge the help and understanding of all my instructors and my dissertation committee members who worked with me and guided me along this path. I would not have been able to complete this lifelong goal without the help of many. My faith in my Savoir Jesus Christ has sustained me throughout these years and as I sometimes lost initiative or doubted that I could accomplish this task, I turned to Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Dedication

In all the adventures of my life there was always one who stood beside me and encouraged me when I felt like I had reached the end of my rope. This special one was my wife Dreama who was ever willing to sacrifice our time together to allow me to pursue my dreams. She was always my greatest supporter and kept me motivated to spend hours at the computer during the pursuit of this Doctor of Education program. I dedicate this dissertation to her.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

These times present many unprecedented changes in the educational needs and methods of young children. Children are coming from homes of single parents, drug using families, imprisoned parent(s), and working mothers. There is also growing evidence that young children are capable learners and that early learning has a significant impact on future learning. With all these changes in our society, supporters of the early child education needs have risen up to lead the push for more and better resources for the early education of children.

Many believe that preschools can be very effective when they are high quality, which means qualified teachers, involved parents, and support from the community (Marcon, 2002). High quality programs utilize continuous communications between parents and teachers. These types of programs encourage children to initiate their own learning activities and concentrate on developmental practices. Successful programs such as these involve parents, include home visits, and develop parents' ability to see their children as able learners (Cummings, 1990). "Research on teacher-child relationships is important, as the quality of this relationship is linked to numerous child outcomes in the areas of academic and social functioning. In addition, parent involvement has been identified as a significant factor in the successful development of a child. This study attempted to join these two lines of research by assessing the extent to which teacher-child relationship quality varies as a function of parent involvement" Wyrick & Rudasill (2009).

Parents are faced with making a decision on choosing a Christian preschool versus a secular preschool. The purpose of this study was to determine if there are significant differences between the two types of schools that might impact on the child's readiness for kindergarten.

Problem Statement

In a study by Bulotsky-Shearer, Fantuzzo, and McDermott (2008) it was stated that the problem is that children are entering kindergarten and are not properly prepared socially or educationally to begin their formal introduction to school. Parents that do not send their children to preschool put these children in a learning environment that they are not prepared for and they quickly fall behind. The advantages of preschool have been well researched and the majority of research supports the concept. According to Laosa, (2005), preschool programs have the potential for improving the school readiness of both low and higher income families. Although many states have established pre-kindergarten there are many parents who do not send their children to preschool. According to Briody (2005) parents are generally conflicted about their child's first school experience, wondering "Have I selected the correct school?" Briody also says that choosing an early childhood program is the first step families take in the process of a child's separation from home to school. Their decision about school is affected by financial concerns, program location, and availability. Parents also need to be knowledgeable about early childhood curricula, the teachers' credentials and their commitment to professional development. The question is: Is there a significant difference between the two types of preschools in the teaching of both social skills and educational needs prior to students entering kindergarten?

Purpose

Ascertain if there is a difference between what Christian and secular preschools teach that may impact both social skills and educational needs prior to entering kindergarten. Also this study may produce some methods or procedures that may be used by other preschools to enhance their programs.

Focus and Intent

The focus of this research project is on the preschools and the teach ability of the student in kindergarten. It is the intent of this project to investigate the curriculum and teaching methods in both Christian and secular preschools to determine the difference of the methods between the two schools. The intent also is to determine if the difference in such programs may aid in preparing students educationally and socially for formal schooling. Directors of Christian Preschools are constantly asking if the school is effective and is the cost of running the school worth the return or should parents just send their children to a secular preschool. The literature review addressed later in the study provides positive information on the effectiveness of preschools and provides the incentive to further study the question. The goal is to answer the question: Is there significant difference in the teaching programs of Christian preschools versus secular preschools.

Guiding Questions

The following questions will guide in this research project:

1. What types of curriculum are used in Christian and secular preschools? Success in preschool may be in part due to the curriculum which could be either interesting, boring, may promote learning, and may be designed for enhanced learning. In a study by Sylva et

al. (2007) the point was made that in high-scoring schools children were also observed

participating in more activities associated with early reading, emergent writing and active

listening.

2.   What are the teaching methods used in each of these preschools and are they

effective? In a study by New (1999), when asked what children need to know before

entering kindergarten, many teachers in the United States emphasize the importance of

readiness in basic academic skills. American parents and teachers are also increasingly

concerned about the young child's developing ability to solve problems and communicate

effectively, to make friends and keep them, to resolve conflicts and negotiate agreements,

and to develop safe ways to deal with negative emotions. In a study by Moschovaki,

Meadows, and Pellegrini, A. (2007), the research questions of the study concerned

teaching methods and answered some of the teaching method questions. Special

techniques are often effective for very young children. Is the use of Christian subjects to

teach values a significant advantage? Since their span of attention is so short, any good

technique for teaching young children is valuable.

3.   Do the teachers teach what is presented in the curriculum or do they improvise for

a better lesson? According to a study by Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow (2003) children's

development at pre-kindergarten age is highly influenced by the environment to which

they are exposed, and preschool children's home, community, and educational

environments differ substantially. This study shows that young children can, indeed, learn

a great deal and that their development is highly impacted by the learning environment to

which they are exposed. The potential for facilitating positive child outcomes coupled

with the desire for accountability of funds invested in early care and education have led

to increasing pressure for more explicit articulations of just what children should know, be like, and be able to do before they enter kindergarten. Does the preschool program in either a Christian or secular preschool more adequately prepare children to meet Virginia pre-kindergarten standards (see Appendix D) by providing a more positive learning environment? A study by Missal et al. (2007) looked at the predictive validity of early literacy skills of children in preschool and from a sample of preschools looked at some of the children in kindergarten and some of them through the end of first grade. Effective preschool education programs lay a foundation for children's subsequent school success, by building knowledge and abilities with an emphasis on language and emergent literacy, but not neglecting other aspects of cognitive development, and attending equally to the development of dispositions, habits, and attitudes, as well as social and emtional development including self-regulation.

4. What recommendations are given by preschool teachers to improve the preschool program? No one knows what works as well as the people doing the job so getting input from the teachers, as opposed to the administration, may prove to be significant. A review of a study by Assel, Landry, Swank, and Gunnewig (2007) indicate that at-risk children can benefit from a well-specified curriculum. This study included using mentors to assist preschool teachers in the utilization of curricula and the results showed significant improvement in the application of the curriculum.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to present an understanding of the issue of pre-school selection I used two theories to form a framework for the research. The first is social exchange where I explored the social relationship between the teachers and the students, the social relationship between students, and exchange of information with school administration. This theory is based on Albert Bandura's social learning theory behavior. Bandura (1977) demonstrated that children learn and imitate behaviors they have observed in other people. The second theory is that the subjects interviewed provided objective information since the subjects are considered experts in their experiences and the interaction with them is in an environment in which they are most comfortable. Information extracted from the literature review should provide sufficient background for an individual to understand the potential advantages of preschools by discussing their history, operation, plus social and educational impact on the student.

The issue facing parents today is that they are faced with making a decision on should a child attend preschool and then choosing a Christian preschool versus a secular preschool while very little information is provided to assist in making that choice. The literature review objective is to provide reliable information to support preschool attendance by giving the history, operation, advantages of preschools and to answer the question: Are there significant differences between the two types of schools (Christian and secular) that might impact on the child's readiness for kindergarten?

Background of the Study

This review of the literature looked at; the historical perspective of preschools,

why have preschools, what the preschool provides, the effectiveness of preschools, are children ready for preschool, and what is the future of preschools. Much of the research deals with how people learn and why sending children to preschool enhances their later learning skills. Research by Laosa (2005) and Friedman (2004) shows the increase in preschool participation and why high quality programs are worth the money and effort. Many believe that quality education that includes well organized programs with competent teachers will make preschools an answer to later success in school Carter and Pool (2010). Getting children off to a good start with child-initiated early learning programs has shown positive results later in primary and middle school (Marcon, 2002).

Early childhood education, prekindergarten programs, and school readiness are areas of concern in education that have been important to the educational community for a number of years. However, not since the 1960s and the creation of Project Head Start has so much emphasis been placed on these educational issues (Kagan, 1987). With the introduction of America 2000 (Austin, 1989) in 1989 and Goals 2000 in 1994 (Austin, 1989) increased emphasis has been placed on the topic of early childhood education.

For two of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (U.S. Department of Education 2001) objectives; to provide accountability for the educational program and eliminate achievement gaps between groups of children such as low income versus high income and minorities versus whites, preschool may be the answer to both by providing quality education to give children a good start and putting them on an equal footing as they enter school. As states and school districts strive to meet national goals and objectives they may find that money spent in good preschool programs is a sound investment.

A major player in early childhood education is the United States Department of Health and Human Services Head Start Program. "Established in 1965, Head Start promotes school readiness for children in low-income families by offering educational, nutritional, health, social and other services. Head Start, and Early Head Start launched in 1995, has served 27 million children, birth to age 5. Nearly a million children are currently enrolled in Head Start's center-based, home-based or family child care programs in urban, suburban and rural communities. In FY 2009, enrollment expanded by approximately 64,000 children through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (United States Department of Health and Human Services)".

Teaching methods and curriculum in this study were implemented at my study schools in a real-life setting and I hope to provide some of this useful information for other preschools that are working to improve student performance in kindergarten. These methods and curriculum may be useful for making positive changes in the school's program.

Definitions for the Review

Preschool is the years before kindergarten and usually children are three and four years old. *Kindergarten* is the year before first grade and usually includes children five years old. *Prekindergarten or PreK* is used to refer to a program that is an educational program for four-year-old children prior to their entrance in kindergarten. The name *Preschool California* refers to an effort by several groups in California to get support for a state supported preschool.

Historical Perspectives Regarding the Role of Preschools

Many think of preschools as a recent addition to the more formal schooling. However, "While preschool may be thought of as a recent development in the history of U.S. public education, it's really been around since the 17th century, when the English charity school movement was formed in an attempt to educate poor children. Infant Schools for factory workers' children were adopted by U.S. educators and reformers during the Industrial Revolution, but died out within two decades as American social values changed and mothers were again tasked with educating young children at home" (Theroux, 2006, p. 1).

Early educational leaders saw a need for educating the very young. Rousseau, in his book, *Emile*, divided childhood education and development into stages. The first stage was from infancy to five, the second stage was from five to twelve, the third stage was from twelve through fifteen, the next stage was from fifteen to eighteen, and the last stage was from eighteen to twenty. Rousseau argued that childhood was a necessary and desirable stage in the human life span. Indeed, childhood experiences often pointed the way to adult behavior, ethics, and values (Gutek, 2005). Friedrich Froebel, a German educator in the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, was a pioneer in early childhood education and started a kindergarten (Gutek, 2005).

Drummond (2000) wrote about an early preschool, and maybe the first, that was started in Cambridge, England, founded by the wealthy eccentric Englishman Geoffrey Pyke, whose only son, David, was born in 1921. An advertisement was placed for a private teacher and as is now known, the advertisement was answered by Susan Isaacs, who went on to open the Malting House School in a spacious house beside the river Cam,
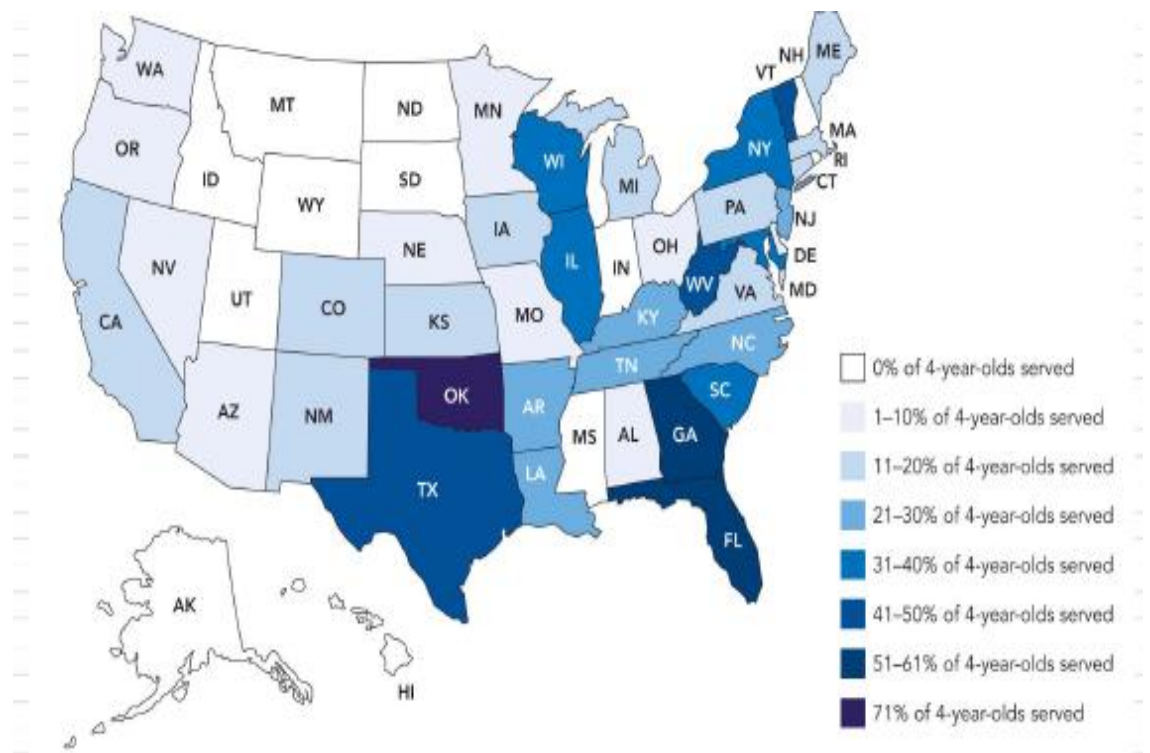
in the center of Cambridge, in the autumn of 1924. Isaacs remained there until the end of 1927, when she returned to London.

<div align="center">**The Trend in Preschools**</div>

The Trust for Early Education (2004) reported that based on the 2000 census there are nearly eight million three and four year olds in the United States and expected to increase at a rate of 14% over the next twenty years. This puts pressure on the states that have preschools to expand their present system and for those states that have no program, there is a need to investigate the establishment of a system. Pianta (2007) reported that the need for childhood education has expanded faster than the school systems could respond and if universal pre-kindergarten is implemented, fifty thousand additional teachers will be required by the year 2020. The trend of more children attending kindergarten and preschool has steadily increased over the last two decades and appears to be headed even higher. Barnett and Yarosz (2004) reported that the preschool participation has grown steady and significantly for many decades and the way that children are educated has significantly changed. A variety of names such as preschool, pre-kindergarten, Head Start, day care, and nursery, are used for programs involving three and four year olds, and they reflect the diversity in early childhood education efforts. Also some programs are state sponsored, some are private secular programs, and some are Christian run programs. The recent trend in childhood education appears to be based on a desire for increased education or social development for children before they start to school. Barnett and Yarosz (2004) presented information that showed the increase in participation in preschool type programs increased the same for parents that worked

outside the home and those that stayed at home. This suggests that preschool programs are not overwhelmingly used as baby sitters.

Epstein (2009) presented information that shows a dramatic increase in preschool enrollment. In 1976 there were approximately 21% of the three year olds and 41% of the four year olds enrolled in some type of preschool program and in 2008 those numbers were 52% and 82% respectively. "During the 2007-2008 school years, states spent a total of $4.6 billion on state pre-k, up by 23.4% from previous year" (Epstein, 2009). See Figure 1 for percent of four year olds served in state pre-k.

WA MT ND MN NH ME VT
OR ID SD MI NY MA RI CT
WY IA PA NJ
NV UT CO NE IL IN OH DE
CA KS MO WV VA MD
AZ NM OK AR KY NC
TX MS AL GA TN SC
LA FL
AK HI

- [ ] 0% of 4-year-olds served
- 1–10% of 4-year-olds served
- 11–20% of 4-year-olds served
- 21–30% of 4-year-olds served
- 31–40% of 4-year-olds served
- 41–50% of 4-year-olds served
- 51–61% of 4-year-olds served
- 71% of 4-year-olds served

Figure 1. Percent of four year olds served in state pre-k.

What has not been researched very effectively is which types of preschool programs are most effective. Do Christian preschools do a better job of preparing children educationally and socially than secular preschools and are state supported preschools better or worse than private preschools? Additional research must be done to see if preschools could better prepare students if they worked with the kindergarten that the students will eventually attend, to coordinate the curriculum.

Shipley and Oborn (1996) compared the effectiveness of four types of prekindergarten programs: Head Start, Montessori, public prekindergarten and private day care programs. The researchers concluded that the development of an effective public school prekindergarten program must include a set of criteria designed to implement the instructional strategies of all four types of prekindergarten programs in the study. Also,

Shipley and Oborn developed a model for public school prekindergarten programs which included the following components: (a) connections to service agencies to increase parent involvement; (b) effective teacher training; (c) attachment to existing public school buildings and joining the elementary school routine; and (d) curricular connections between prekindergarten programs and kindergarten programs.

To identify quality indicators of prekindergarten programs, Brandford (1992) compared three types of programs: Head Start, a public school prekindergarten program, and a private prekindergarten program. Brandford concluded that public school prekindergarten programs were more likely to have a greater number of endorsed quality standards for early childhood education than were Head Start programs or private prekindergarten programs (see Appendix F). One of the quality indicators related to teachers. Teachers in public school programs were more likely to be certified in an appropriate field and receive continuous in-service training and support services than teachers in Head Start or private prekindergarten programs.

A number of publications on preschool were developed with a possible bias. Groups such as Preschool California have published performance of preschools to sell the need for state supported programs. Much of the information listed in these publications lists only the positive aspects of the preschool system without reviewing some of the negatives. Only positive reports were used to develop this publication.

This literature review includes studies of preschools in the United States, United Kingdom, and two Scandinavian countries. Although the study included information from both Christian and secular preschools, the studies included were from countries with a predominately Christian population. Studies from Japan and other countries that have

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preschools were not included because the schools (Holloway, 1999) were influenced by non-Christian religions such as Shinto and Buddhism and since the preschools are under the government there is pressure on how human relations should be organized and socialized in young children. Two of the most advanced preschool systems, which are in Norway and Sweden, were included because they typify United States and other European preschool systems. "Preschool for young children is quite common in both Norway and Sweden because a high percentage of parents work. To accommodate working parents, society has taken partial responsibility for young children's education and well-being. The development of national plans for preschools also reflects society's awareness of the importance of the early years for lifelong learning" (Alvestad & Samuelsson, 1999, p.1). A considerable number of articles have been written in the last ten years on the subject of preschools. The topics of the articles varied but all related to childhood education. Some articles looked at teacher performance, some studied the effectiveness of preschools and preschool systems, and others presented information on education systems and methods. Some articles were not included in the review because of their age. Since the dynamics of child education has changed significantly and the number of preschools has grown almost exponentially, these older studies may not portray an up-to-date picture of the benefits or negatives of the preschool.

Cummings (1990) believes that preschools can be very effective when they are high quality which means qualified teachers, involved parents, and support from the community. These programs utilize continuous communications between parents and teachers. Programs of these types encourage children to initiate their own learning activities and concentrate on developmental practices. These programs involve parents,

including home visits, and developing parents' ability to see their children as able learners.

There is no doubt that both academic and self-control skills are critical developmental tasks for preschoolers to master. Self-control skills such as sitting still, learning how to work collaboratively in groups, and age-appropriate decision-making are now being taught in many preschool programs. According to Paccione-Dyszlewski and Boekamp (2005), these same self-control skills are strongly related to later academic success in school. Paccione-Dyszlewski and Boekamp also stated that teaching children to read and write is basic in our complex society; however, learning is directly related to children's development of social and emotional skills.

According to Carter and Pool (2006), a significant problem for preschool teachers is dealing with student with challenging behaviors. It begins early and between 10–30% of preschool students are not behaviorally and emotionally ready to succeed in school. Early problem behavior is predictive of future challenges. It is the best predictor of delinquency in adolescence, gang membership, and incarceration. Preschool teachers report that children's disruptive behavior is the single greatest challenge they face. Preschool children are three times more likely to be expelled than children in K-12.

The Head Start program was begun with this view of the whole child and it has been established that children who are emotionally well adjusted are much more likely to experience early school success. Children who experience serious emotional difficulty in their preschool classroom are at grave risk for early school failure. Learning environments that emphasize resiliency or inner strength enhancement can significantly counter the risk factors that underlie many unhealthy behaviors including school

violence, school failure, juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, alienation and substance abuse. "Learning to identify and manage emotions, to make good decisions, to behave morally and responsibly, and to develop positive relationships are just as vital to successfully negotiating the world as learning letters, numbers, and shapes in preschool" (Paccione-Dyszlewski & Boekamp, 2005, p.1).

In a study by Mashburn (2006) on the associations between quality of social and physical environments in preschools and children's development of academic, language, and literacy skills, and the extent to which preschool quality moderated the associations between child risk and development, it was found that there is extensive literature that has examined associations between process quality and children's outcomes and that provides general support that higher quality experiences within preschool programs are associated positively with children's development.

Why have Preschools?

Much research has been done promoting preschools. Questions that were answered include: Are preschools really worth the costs involved and do the taxpayers get their money's worth? Several writers have shown that there are not only economic advantages but social advantages as well. Friedman (2004) found the following: The longitudinal studies conducted on the Perry Preschool Project, Abecedarian Intervention and Chicago Child-Parent Center have yielded sound empirical evidence that high quality early childhood programs yield significantly positive benefits for children in terms of IQ, school achievement, grade retention, need for special education, and social adjustment. The Perry Preschool Project involved 123 children followed until the age of 27 years, who attended roughly two years of preschool for 2.5 hours/day, and received home visits

from the teacher once a week. Participants were compared to a control group that did not receive these services. The analysis indicates that for every dollar invested in these services, over $7 in benefits was returned for the participants and society. The greatest savings are estimated to come from the reduction of crime and increases in earnings for participants. This research shows that the taxpayer investment into preschool is worth the money.

According to Berman (1997), in addition to the savings of education money there is the fact that American parents and elementary teachers are also increasingly concerned about the young child's developing ability to solve problems and communicate effectively, to make friends and keep them, to resolve conflicts and negotiate agreements, and to develop safe ways to deal with negative emotions.

How Effective are Preschools?

The literature presents a strong case for the effectiveness of preschools. "There's increasing evidence that children gain a lot from going to preschool," says Parents advisor Kathleen McCartney, PhD, dean of Harvard Graduate School of Education, in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Kanter, 2007). Kanter (2007) concluded that children learn much by being exposed to letters and numbers and their social skills are better developed as they associate with other children.

The advantages of preschool have been well researched and the majority of research supports the concept. According to Laosa (2005), preschool programs have the potential for improving the school readiness of both low and higher income families. Studies have shown that children learn many social skills only when they are placed in an environment where there are others of the same age to associate with. He also states that

the foundation for literacy and other academic learning is laid down before age five and studies demonstrate that high-quality preschool education can improve the school readiness and school performance of children. Laosa also stated that research shows that preschool education significantly influences children's abilities at school entry. His study says that hundreds of studies have examined the effects of early childhood programs, including various types of child care settings, preschool, and nursery school classrooms and these studies show that these programs can have immediate effects, and that these effects can last at least through the early grades. However, Laosa states that these effects vary with the type and intensity of the programs. Not all preschool programs will have the same success.

According to Friedman (2004), the Abecedarian Project demonstrated the effectiveness of a quality child care setting. The statistics from that study demonstrate very clearly that early childhood education make a difference. The intervention began very early, during infancy and continued through age five.

According to Barnett (2006), the primary goal of state-funded programs is to improve the learning and development of young children and, thereby, improve their preparation for the increasingly rigorous challenges of kindergarten. Effective preschool education programs lay a foundation for children's subsequent school success. A study done by Barnett (2007), estimated the effects of five state pre-k programs serving 4-year-olds on several measures of children's early learning relating to language, literacy, and mathematics. This study adds to the evidence that preschool education programs of reasonable quality can produce broad gains in children's learning at kindergarten entry.

These kinds of effects may be expected to yield greater school success, particularly in reading and math.

The literature did not include information on the learning abilities of the individual students. Studies should be done to determine what impact on preschool success is due to tutoring by parents who want their child to do well in school.

Are Children at Age Three or Four Ready for Preschool?

Research has shown that children that attend preschool are more likely to be better readers in elementary school and less likely to be held back a grade, they are more likely to graduate from high school, and go on the college. According to Friedman (2004) they are better citizens and are less likely to get into trouble with the police and as they grow older they are less likely to need public assistance later in life. Laosa, (2005) reported that preschool programs have the potential of improving the school readiness of low-income and minority children as well as of those from higher income and non-minority families. A preschool with universal programs appears to be a promising policy tool to help schools close the educational achievement gap.

Morrison (1991) suggested most early childhood educators and parents believe readiness relates to a child's ability to participate and succeed in beginning school, including a child's ability, at a given time, to accomplish activities and engage in processes associated with the educational experiences that occur in school. Thus, readiness is the sum total of a child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development at a particular time. Also, in today's educational setting, readiness is measured against the process of formal schooling and a child's lack of readiness may be considered a deficient indicating a lack of what is needed for success in kindergarten.

The research done on preschools has a very practical use as many states and school districts are looking to expand their preschools (Pianta, 2007). Studies such as Friedman (2004) show that preschools provide a student with a good start for kindergarten and these studies also show that students that attend preschool do better than their non-preschool peers in later school years. This research also shows which of the programs provide the best ratio of teachers to students, what qualifications are necessary for preschool teachers, and what types of programs are more productive in preparing students for kindergarten. Any question about the effectiveness of pre-schools to better prepare a child for kindergarten has been answered positively in the research that was reviewed.

Previous articles on this study subject have identified the many benefits of preschool for children before entering kindergarten. These articles have also identified areas of concern and consideration for the establishment, operation, and instruction for preschool operation. These articles also included references to curriculum, screening of students, and teacher selection and qualification.

According to a report from Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Consortium (2008), a variety of preschool curricula is available and in widespread use, however, there is a lack of evidence from rigorous evaluations regarding the effects of these curricula on children's school readiness. The lack of such information is important as early childhood center-based programs have been a major, sometimes the sole, component of a number of federal and state efforts such as; Head Start, Even Start, and public pre-kindergarten, to improve young at-risk children's school readiness. In 2005, nearly half (47%) of all 3 to 5-year-old children from low-income families were enrolled

in either part-day or full-day early childhood programs (U.S. Department of Education 2006).

According to Stipek (2006) the effects of the NCLB legislation are beginning to be felt in preschools. Policy makers believe that an early start on developing academic skills will help children reach the standards they are expected to achieve in elementary school. The belief according to Stipek is that an early introduction to academics will reduce the gap in achievement between children from economically disadvantaged and more advantaged homes. There is an increased pressure on preschool teachers to begin teaching children the basic academic skills that are assessed under NCLB.

A situation that applies to most preschools is the small student to teacher ratio. Small class size gives the preschool teacher an advantage by allowing more one on one instruction and an ability to take a child aside and discuss behavior and individual lesson information. According to Wasik (2008), small group instruction is important but generally under used in many preschool programs. Wasik also states that being responsive to a child's question is extremely important and a small classroom allows that to happen. Wasik defines a small class as no more than five students per teacher. See Table 1. Recommended Staff-Child Ratios for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers by National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Table 1

Recommended Staff-Child Ratios for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers

Age	Group Size							
	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20
0–15 months	1:3	1:4						
12–28 months	1:3	1:4	1:4	1:4				
21–36 months		1:4	1:5	1:6				
3 years old					1:7	1:8	1:9	1:10
4 years old						1:8	1:9	1:10

Note. The National Association for the Education of Young Children recommends that to promote a high-quality environment, individual infant/toddler caregivers should not be responsible for more than 4 children when their ages are 28 months or less, or 6 children when enrollees are older toddlers. Furthermore, total enrollment in any classroom should be capped at 8 children in a room serving infants up to 15 months, and 12 if children's ages are between 21 and 36 months.

According to Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes, & Karoly (2007), the success of early education is a threefold effort; parents, children, and teachers. The study also stated that parents do not prepare their children for school and the emotional and social stresses they will encounter.

Based on our results, early childhood educators believe that a child needs to be emotionally (confident, motivated), physically (healthy with good motor skills), cognitively (alphabet, numbers, and problem-solving skills) ready and have good social skills that will allow the child to get along with others. At the parent-level, we found that educators believe that parents need to provide a stimulating home environment that

promotes learning. Educators in our study also believe that parents need to prepare the child for the transition from home to school. At the teacher level, participants in our study said that teacher-parent relationships were also important in preparing a child for kindergarten (p.5).

In a study by Bulotsky-Shearer et al. (2008), it was noted that a large body of literature has documented the influence of early risk factors on children's emotional and behavioral adjustment. Such risk factors as poverty, malnutrition, inadequate housing, community violence, crime, and parental isolation have shown to have significant impact on children as they attempt to develop socially and educationally. This study recommended that additional studies be done to identify multiple classroom situational influences on child behavioral adaptation and to examine the unique and combined influence of both classroom situational and child-level behavioral problems on early learning and social outcomes. These additional studies would provide information about both child-level behavioral needs and classroom contextual demands that are designed to stimulate cognitive and social development.

Samuelsson (2003) believes that children's participation is not a question of listening to children and then letting them decide. It is more about interpreting children's intentions and actions and to have trust, even expectations, that a child can handle and manage things with the right support and guidance from adults.

In a study by Sandberg and Eriksson (2008), they concluded that "The preschool staff experience that the children in general participate in the preschool's decisions, but at the same time recognize that there are conditions and obstacles for their participation. Conditions are presented in form of the personnel, how big the work force is and

attitudes, the children's age and the informal structures that the preschool teachers have in the team. According to the preschool teachers, obstacles for the children's participation can be the parental upbringing of the children, the preschool's routines and structure in the shape of what is seen as being the adults' responsibility and that it is the adult who has the overall perspective."

Williamson, Meltzoff, and Markman (2008) conducted a study that emphasized the significance of teaching children through imitation. Children are very adept at imitating others especially adults. The study showed that preschoolers may often use imitation in everyday life. When children encounter a problem they cannot solve, they may seek out another person's means or think back to what their parents or other experts did. Preschool teachers can use imitation in the teaching process to get children to attempt things on their own. The teacher will demonstrate an action and get the class to attempt to duplicate. Some children will be successful immediately and others will copy or imitate other students. This type of hands on teaching has significant retention value.

Ramey and Ramey (2004) listed Seven Essential Transactions for Caregivers with Young Children: Encourage exploration, mentor in basic skills, celebrate developmental advances, rehearse and extend new skills, protect from inappropriate disapproval, teasing, and punishment, communicate richly and responsively, and guide and limit behavior.

The significance of developing good social skills in preschool was demonstrated in a study by Emond, Ormel, Veenstra, and Oldehinkel (2007). This Dutch study found that students in elementary and middle school with serious disruptive behavior have a trail of bad behavior that goes back to preschool. Unfortunately, there is little help for the

preschool teacher to head off such behavior since little is known about how individual behaviors in the preschool period can predict problems in adolescence.

Missall, et al (2007) studied the development of early literacy skills and concluded that early literacy skills develop during the first five years of life and long before formal schooling when reading becomes the primary academic focus.

According to a study by Andrews & Slate (2001), the number of studies comparing public school prekindergarten programs to private prekindergarten programs was limited, primarily because prior to 1980 few public school programs existed (Mitchell, 1989). In some studies, positive effects were demonstrated for children who attended public prekindergarten programs. For example, Gullo and Burton (1993) found that public school prekindergarten experiences were effective in promoting children's early school adjustment, regardless of their SES. Andrews & Slate (2001) also reported on the results of two other studies of the effects of public school prekindergarten programs which showed that there were gains of cognitive, social, and emotional development for children. The first of the studies was of 1,077 children and their parents who participated in Project Giant Step, a half-day comprehensive, public school prekindergarten program for underprivileged children which began in 1986. Large gains in children's cognitive, social, and emotional development were reported (Reed & Bergemann, 1992). The second study, an evaluation of a public school prekindergarten program, was conducted by Brogan (1990) to assess the merit of the prekindergarten program and to assist in the formative revision of program activities. Evaluation data were provided by classroom observations, telephone interviews with 25 parents, surveys with two elementary school teachers, and interviews with the prekindergarten staff.

Results were that the cognitive, social, and emotional development of the children who

attended the program was enhanced.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to compare the curriculum and teaching methods in secular and Christian preschools to ascertain if any differences exist in teaching both social skills and educational needs prior to students entering kindergarten and to provide readers with supporting documentation on the need for preschool, the history of preschools, the different programs and types of preschools, and the long term advantages students have by attending preschool. I chose case study for this study because case studies can provide an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Case studies are anchored in real life and can provide rich detailed accounts of observed occurrences (p.457). "Case studies may employ multiple methods of data collection and do not rely on a single technique" (p. 458). This study fits very well into the qualitative case study method because it is a study utilizing interviews, observations, and is conducted to shed light on a particular educational phenomenon which is in this study the processes, events, curricula, staff roles, student social interaction and instructional programs of the selected preschools. The case study fits with the theoretical framework of the study where using social exchange I explored the social relationship between the teachers and the students, the social relationship between students, and exchange of information with school administration. The theory being that the subjects interviewed will provide objective information since the subjects are considered experts in their experiences and the interaction with them is in an environment in which they are most comfortable.

The preceding chapter presented the literature relating to the effectiveness of preschools. This study was created to provide additional data on methods and curriculum used in preschools. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methods and curriculum used in two different types of preschools and the effectiveness of those tools in preparing students for kindergarten. This chapter will provide a description of the design of the study, the participants, the collection and treatment of data, the data analysis and measures taken to ensure validity.

Design

This study used observations, interviews, and surveys to gather data. According to Ary et al., 2006, Observation is the basic method for obtaining data in qualitative research and observation was the primary tool for gathering information about student behavior and teaching methods in this study. In Ary et al., 2006, the Observer role is defined as a participant or non-participant. In this study the observer was a non-participant and no contact was made with any of the participants.

Research Questions

The following questions were used to guide me in this research project:

1. What is the curriculum used in Christian and secular preschools?

2. What are the most common and most effective teaching methods used in each of these preschools?

3. Does the preschool program in either a Christian or secular preschool more adequately prepare children to meet Virginia pre-kindergarten standards by providing a more positive learning environment?

4. What recommendations are given by preschool teachers to improve the preschool program?

Participants

      The participants were four preschools, two Christian and two secular, four preschool teachers, four preschool directors, and students in four target preschools. Participant schools in the Christian school portion of this study were selected based on recommendations from a public school kindergarten director. Participant schools in the secular school program were selected based on county school administration recommendation.

      The Christian school student participants for this study are almost all white from mostly medium income families. The classes are a slight majority of boys versus girls in both schools. Most of the children come from Christian oriented families even though many of the parents do not attend church regularly.

      The students attending the secular preschools were mostly white and most were at risk children selected from applicants who filed a profile questionnaire with the County School System (see Appendix E). Most of the parents were lower income families, single parent families, parent in prison, or other at risk factors.

<div align="center">

Selection of Site

</div>

      These sites were chosen for this project for several reasons. All selected preschools are considered by the county school board to be well run schools that produce above average students. One of the preschools is located in my church and therefore very accessible. All preschools have well organized support systems and are supported by active school boards. The School Directors in all of these schools are experienced

educators with years of teaching experience and school directing. Two of the schools offer partial scholarships to children from needy families. Three of the schools are located in the county and one in the city although many of the students in the city school lived in the county and commuted in to school.

Researcher's Role

I saw my grandchildren and great grandchildren attend a Christian preschool and when they got to public schools they excelled and were well ahead of their fellow students, some of whom also went to preschool, but a public preschool. I became fascinated with the idea and I helped to start a Christian preschool at the church where I used to be the associate pastor and my daughter is the preschool director. (This school was one of the selected schools for this study). Since I was not familiar with the public preschool program I decided to do my dissertation on a comparison of the two varieties of schools to see what the difference is.

Data Collection Process

The plan included visiting the schools during class, interviewing school directors and teachers in each school, and selecting classes to view as an observer. Several journal articles on teacher training were reviewed for background information. A list of specific questions (see Appendix A) was used but was expanded as the interview proceeded.

During the observation of the classes in progress particular attention was paid to the interaction between children and the reaction of the teacher and to the social actions between students. My role in the classes was strictly as an observer and I had no participation in the classes. Attempts were made to remain as inconspicuous as possible so as not to interfere with or distract from the class. Field notes included selected

information about the student, such as; gender, age, the specific event, and the reaction of any other student affected. Notes also included the teacher's reaction to the event and any follow-up needed and conducted. Field notes referenced any action by the teacher that demonstrated adequate or inadequate training or actions that reflect a positive technique worth noting for follow-up.

Teaching methods were observed and curriculum was reviewed to develop comparisons between schools. Individual teacher educational and social development techniques were observed and were included as questions on the teacher interview.

Observation in the classroom was critical in this study to determine the social interactions between students. According to Ary et al., 2006, "Observation is the basic method for obtaining data in qualitative research" (p. 474). In this study the observer was not a participant so that the students were functioning in a totally uninhibited atmosphere. To be able to compare classroom to classroom the settings must be as normal as possible and observation is the best tool. As a non-participating observer he or she looks at the scene as if looking through a one way mirror (Bodan & Biklen, 2007).

According to Ary, (2007), field notes are the most common method of recording data collected during observations. Field notes were critical in this study during the observation phase. The many actions of the students had to be captured at the scene for analysis later and field notes were the most effective tool. Field notes, according to Ary, (2007), have two components; a descriptive part that describes the setting, the people and their reactions and reflective part which includes the observers personal feelings or impressions about the event.

According to Ary et al., 2006, interviews are one of the most widely used methods for obtaining qualitative data. Interviews can be used to gather information that cannot be obtained by observation alone. Bodan and Biklen (2007), describe a good interview as one where the subjects are at ease and talk freely. "An interview is a purposeful conversation, usually between two people but sometimes involving more (as cited in Morgan, 1997), that is directed by one in order to get information from the other," Bodan and Biklen (2007), (p. 103). The opened ended interview was appropriate for this study because I was trying to get information from people considered experts in their field. "An approach to open-ended interviewing we find effective and feel comfortable with is one in which you treat the person you are interviewing as an expert" (p.107).

Interview Preparation

Prior to starting the interviews I read the journal article by Lilian G. Katz; "Visiting Early Childhood Classes." This article provided considerable thoughts and ideas to consider when visiting the classes and interviewing the teachers. Katz (2007) stated that what to look for when visiting early childhood classrooms can be addressed as a set of fundamental developmental principles. Katz outlined five developmental principles that can be invoked when seeking answers to the question every educator must address when creating a curriculum. Her first principle was to strengthen children's understanding of their own experience and the younger the children, the curriculum should be a plan for strengthening and deepening their knowledge and understanding of their own experience and their own environments. Katz believes the curriculum planning should emphasize awareness, knowledge, understanding, appreciation, and close observation of the children's own environments and experiences.

It has been noted throughout the ages that children are born with a powerful

disposition to investigate, although it may be stronger in some children than in

others. Young children are natural anthropologists, social scientists, and scientists.

They spontaneously put enormous amounts of time and energy into investigating

whatever environments they arrive in, prying and poking around, trying to figure

out what people mean, when they mean what, why they do what they do, what

things are used for, where they come from, and so forth. They frequently test the

limits and boundaries of their environments, all in an effort to make the best sense

they can of their own experience (Katz, 2007, p 3).

The second principle Katz emphasized is that the younger the children for whom

the curriculum is being generated, the more appropriate it is to include frequent

opportunities for active firsthand investigation and direct observation. These

investigations are generally referred to as projects (Katz & Helm, 2001; Katz & Chard,

1998). Projects are defined as extended in-depth investigations of real phenomena in the

children's own environments worthy of their deeper understanding. Katz's third

developmental principle is that the younger the children, the more they are likely learn

through interactive processes rather than through processes that are largely passive,

receptive, and reactive in nature.

Thus, a curriculum for young children should include ample opportunity for

interactive experiences with the human, as well as material, environment of the

children. This is not to say that children do not learn from passive experiences

such as listening to stories or watching television. However, many important

dispositions related to children's intellectual (versus academic) development are

strengthened by actively engaging in project investigations such as predicting, theorizing, hypothesizing, persisting, and so forth (Katz 2007, p.3).

Katz's fourth principle was; the younger the children the more important it is that what they are learning has horizontal versus vertical relevance.

Horizontal relevance means that what the children are learning about, that is, the knowledge that they are acquiring, is meaningful on the same day, on the way home, and on the weekend. Vertical relevance means that what the children are learning about and learning to do may have limited meaning at the time, but is primarily intended to prepare them for the next class, the next grade, or the next school; its current meaning or relevance to the children has not been the basis for its inclusion in the curriculum (Katz, 2007, p.6).

Katz's fifth principle says that a child's dispositions to seek in-depth understanding of experience and events are strengthened when they have early experience of in-depth investigations.

I observed for Katz's principles in the classroom experiences to see if teachers were using her principles or something similar to develop curriculum that would allow the student to make the best sense they can of their own experience. This included considerable firsthand investigation and direct observation, more opportunity for interactive experiences versus passive lessons. Also important is emphasis on horizontal relevance (meaningful on the same day, on the way home, and on the weekend) versus vertical relevance (learning primarily intended to prepare them for the next class, the next grade, or the next school), and the early experience of in-depth investigations.

Both secular and Christian classes had curriculum that included the above principles to some degree. Many of the class projects allowed students to work on their own and to work on projects that they could relate to from their own environment. Most of the class projects in all the classes I visited had horizontal relevance as children were dealing with pictures, models, figures that they could carry home. However there were some projects that were oriented towards preparing students for kindergarten specifically, such as reading, number recognition, and letter recognition.

The first Christian preschool visited had an excellent project where the students visited a pond and identified all the pond creatures and later learned more about the individual pond creatures. This was typical of Katz's second principle where students were given frequent opportunities for active firsthand investigation and direct observation. Although all the schools had some projects that would fit this principle this one at the Christian preschool was the best example.

Katz's third principle was in practice in all of the schools and the teachers had learned early in their career that interactive projects not only promoted education but kept the students occupied and prevented boredom that grew from such passive activities as listening to stories. Again, the first Christian preschool I visited had this principle ingrained into their curriculum more effectively than any of the other schools. The fourth principle was also evident in the children in that the younger the children, the more important it is that what they are learning about (e.g., knowledge, concepts, facts, information) and what they are learning to do (e.g., skills) have horizontal rather than vertical relevance. Katz's fifth principle says that children's dispositions to seek in-depth understanding of experience and events are strengthened when they have early

experience of in-depth investigations. I was not able to observe this principle during classroom visits; however the teachers when given this principle agreed that their experience showed this to be true.

Data Analysis Procedure

I gathered all the field notes and conducted an analysis of the information in an effort to determine what the different methods and techniques were that may be effective in developing social and educational success in the preschool children. The qualitative data collected included: field notes from the class observations, field notes from the interviews with the preschool teachers, survey results, and notes from discussions with the school directors.

Each item was analyzed to provide answers to the four guiding questions and enabled me to answer the research questions. After each of the interviews with the preschool directors (Appendix B) was completed, each of the items was thoroughly analyzed by coding and recoding.

The field notes, interview transcripts, audio recordings, reflections, classroom observations were examined and interpreted. The analysis involved reducing and organizing the data, synthesizing, searching for significant patterns, and separating out important data. Some data analysis was done concurrently during the data collection and significant information was identified and noted. The information was synthesized and examined to establish relationships. The analyzing task was "broken down into three stages: 1) familiarization and organization, 2) coding and recoding, and 3) summarizing and interpreting" Ary et al. (2006). Methodological triangulation, which is, checking out

the consistency of findings generated by different data-collection method, was used to compare findings from the different research methods.

The data was organized so it could be easily retrieved. All audio, written notes, interview notes, and reflections, were typed without any editing except to remove any reference to individuals to ensure confidentiality. After transcripts of the notes were made they were read over and over and thoughts were captured in the margins. After the notes had been transcribed they were coded through sorting by looking for words, phrases, sentences, subjects, behavior patterns, and events that seem to appear frequently and seem significant for the study. The number of notes was increased as needed but some were reduced in number or combined. The coding led to categories that facilitated comparisons. The following categories were established initially:

1. School data

2. Teacher perspectives on the school

3. Teacher perspectives on the student achievements

4. Events in the classroom

5. Methods of teaching

6. Activities during class and interaction between students

7. Director comments about the school.

8. Subject matter

Each of the statements was coded to identify commonalities. Words, phrases, sentences, behavior patterns, that appeared frequently or seem important. The percentage of positive responses to specific categories outlined in the questions were computed and were used to help answer the research questions. The interviews were unstructured to

allow for free discussion; however a combination of open and closed ended questions that allowed the teachers to elaborate on specific items impacting the training they received and the need for additional training were used to initiate discussion. I was sensitive to non-verbal actions or inflections that might indicate specific individual preferences or dislikes.

As the data was collected I began to analyze the data, by reading and rereading notes and transcripts and listening to the audio tapes trying to get more familiar with the data. (Ary et al., 2006)

The first step in the analysis was to prepare a data base containing all the data (field notes, answers to interview questions, school director comments, and class observation notes) collected during the data collection phase. The next step was to number the lines and divide them into meaningful segments. Next, the development of meaningful categories, coding the data, and placing the data into all categories that it applies, led to the development of constructs that emerged from the categories. (Gall, Gall, & Berg, 2006) Throughout the research and analysis of the data, including examination of the interview, I was specifically focused on patterns and common themes emerging in responses dealing with specific items, how these patterns help to illuminate the answers to research questions. Furthermore, I investigated to see if there were any deviations from these patterns, interesting stories/responses that emerged during the interviews and how these stories or responses helped to illuminate the answers to the research question.

Quality of the data was checked by asking the six following questions (Ary et al. 2006):

1. Are the data based on my own observations or is it hearsay?

2. Is there corroboration by others on my observation?

3. In what circumstance was an observation made or reported?

4. How reliable are the people in prioritizing the data?

5. What motivation might have influenced a participants report?

6. What biases might have influenced how an observation was made or reported?

Justification of Analysis Methodology. The analysis method used in this study is typical of qualitative research. The analytic and coding procedures described in the text (Ary et al., 2006) were used. Questions from the interview were used to analyze the data to aid in triangulation of the responses. A phenomenological approach as described in Bodan & Biklen (2007) was used in comparing the responses from the different teachers and looking for similar answers helped to validate the data. Phenomenological is defined as the study of "phenomena," appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view. (Smith, 2011). I looked at every statement that is relevant to the questions asked in the study. Meaning units then created. These meaning units are then clustered together for categories..

According to Bodgan & Biklen (2007) researchers in the phenomenology mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations. These questions stimulated thinking in a comparison of different teacher responses. Responses from the preschool Directors were also used to validate the data when their responses were compared to the teacher' comments. Individual with-in

case analysis was done to break the information into bits and pieces for more detailed study. After the with-in analysis was complete a cross-case analysis was done to identify patterns or common thoughts. The Table 1 in the text (Ary et al., 2006, p.527) was used as a guide for analyzing relationships between questions, data collection, and analysis.

Summary of Analyzed Data. After the data was analyzed the resulting information was used to answer the research guiding questions. The data was summarized and presented in a narrative form with supporting tables. The data was interpreted to report the major findings of the study. Generalizations were made based on the common findings and connections among the categories (Ary et al., 2006).

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness refers to the credibility, dependability, and transferability of my research findings. Credibility was addressed by collecting data from multiple sources and comparing the data through triangulation. Bodan and Biklen (2007) stated that triangulation has come to mean in qualitative research that several sources of data were better in a study than a single source because multiple sources lead to a fuller understanding of the researched information.

Data collection methods were detailed to the point that anyone could replicate the study or expand the study to gather additional information this makes transferability of the findings in whole or part easier.

The interviews could be used by the interviewee to express personal biases and/or disagreements with the school program. They could also be used to criticize other teachers or the school directors. Although these subjective factors are sometimes considered threats to validity, they can also be strengths because the interviewer can use this insight to ensure a true understanding of the participant's opinions. I was alert to

obvious cases of hearsay, rumors, and unsupported opinions. The interviewees in this study were all very open and there was no criticism of any individual or organization.

Shortcomings. The most significant shortcoming of this study is the limited number of preschools included in the study and the lack of diversity by not using several geographical areas. The greater number of schools and the more geographically wide spread the study the more reliable the information for the population as a whole. Some of the teaching techniques may be based on local population cultures and not on nationally accepted methods. School student makeup may be quite different in the geographical area of the study and this makeup may produce more or less successful programs in geographical areas with different student makeup in; race, income, or student selection methods.

Limitations. The significant limitations to the study include the number of teachers interviewed, the limited number of classes observed, and the dependence upon the open unbiased comments from the people interviewed. The interviews of the preschool directors provided a summary of their opinions on the preschool effectiveness; however, the time and scheduling difficulties prohibited more interviews. I believe that the study was based on an adequate number of interviews and classroom assessments to meet the study objective of comparing Christian Preschools to secular preschools. More interviews and classroom visits probably would not have delivered any different class situations but may have added some teacher techniques that would be of benefit to other teachers and school directors.

Considerations. Teacher confidentially will be assured. The surveys do not contain names of the teachers or the school. Each person interviewed was told that the

information will not contain any reference that might pinpoint either of the schools or the individuals involved. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. All recorded and transcribed information will be kept on my personal recorder and computer. No one else has access to either of these items. All transcriptions will be done by me and recordings and transcribed information will be done on my equipment. The recorder will be secured in a locked file cabinet when not being used and all transcriptions will be maintained on the computer and password protected. Individuals interviewed will be identified as teacher 1, director 1, teacher 2, for example and interviewee names will not be recorded anywhere. Transcriptions will be reviewed to ensure that there is no reference to anyone that would indicate who they are or where they work. Printed copies of transcripts will be maintained in a locked file cabinet. Also no names of participating schools will be documented. Records will be maintained only through the research project and destroyed after completion.

The schools will be identified as A, B, C, or D and teachers will be identified as A-1 or B-1 and so forth.

None of the information shared by the persons interviewed that may have reflected either good or bad on another teacher, director, or school were retained in my notes.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

As stated in the Abstract, the primary purpose of this qualitative study is to compare the curriculum and teaching methods in secular and Christian preschools to ascertain what differences exist in teaching both social skills and educational needs prior to students entering kindergarten. The participants were four preschools, two Christian and two secular, four preschool teachers, four preschool directors, and students in the four target preschools. In the two Christian preschools selected for this study the students are almost all white from mostly medium income families. The classes are a slight majority of boys versus girls in both schools. A majority of the children came from Christian oriented families even though many of the parents did not attend church regularly.

The secular preschools were selected based on county school administration recommendations. In both of these schools the students were predominately white but from medium to low income families.

School Visit Plan

The plan included visiting the schools during class, interviewing teachers and directors in each school, and selecting classes to view as an observer. Several journal articles on teacher training were reviewed for background information. Although a list of specific questions was prepared the list was expanded as the interview proceeded.

During the observation of the classes in progress, particular attention was paid to the interaction between children and the reaction of the teacher and to the social actions between students. My role in the classes was strictly as an observer and had no participation in the classes. I was as inconspicuous as possible so as not to interfere or

distract from the class. Field notes were written and the information about the students, such as; gender, age, the specific event and the reaction of any other student affected were used. Notes also include the teacher's reaction to the event and any follow-up needed and conducted. Field notes reference any action by the teacher that demonstrates adequate or inadequate training or actions that reflect a positive technique worth noting for follow-up.

The following questions were used to guide me in this research project:

1. What is the curriculum used in Christian and secular preschools?

2. What are the most common and most effective teaching methods used in each of these preschools?

3. Does the preschool program in either a Christian or secular preschool more adequately prepare children to meet Virginia pre-kindergarten standards by providing a more positive learning environment?

4. What recommendations are given by preschool teachers to improve the preschool program?

Class Visits

Four preschool directors and eight teachers were interviewed and I sat in five different classes. School director and teacher comments are listed later. Initial impressions of the school directors and teachers were very positive and all individuals involved were very helpful and appeared to be dedicated professionals.

The first preschool class to be observed was a Christian school located in a church building. Classrooms were very large, with excellent lighting, and a comfortable temperature. Walls were completely covered with pictures, numbers, letters, and work

done by the students. The religious atmosphere was obvious with pictures of Jesus and other biblical characters and the students prayed together and sang religious songs. Group work areas were separated and chairs or mats were available in each area.

This school had 96 students with an average attendance each day of 72. The student body was composed of three Asian, two African Americans, one Hispanic, and the remainder white. There were 51 boys and 45 girls. All the students were dressed very neatly and clothes were clean and appropriate for school. Fifty seven of the students were regular church attendees and the remainder did not attend church on a regular basis. The class that I visited had 20 students with a teacher and an aide.

The class started with a Pledge of Allegiance, a posting of the day's weather by one of the students, and each student placing their picture and name tag on the appropriate bulletin board location. The classroom and the teaching activities were well organized and all students participated in an excellent manner. Students were very polite with the teachers and with each other. There was no loud talking, no pushing or shoving, and students remained seated during teaching sessions.

At one point in the class day the students were organized into teams to work on projects. Class teamwork was very impressive as students worked together on projects and were willing to share materials among the teams. Training in teamwork was more important than the specific project and the students were complimented by the teacher and teacher aide as they demonstrated teamwork. Some of the students stood out as natural leaders as they supported other students with assistance and advice. Teamwork projects appear to be great tools for developing not only teamwork but other social skills such as saying "thank you," "please," and taking turns to talk and to use materials.

A teaching tool used in this school as well as all the other schools I visited was story telling. The teacher's story telling ability was critical in holding the class's attention. The teacher in this class has years of storytelling experience and was able to keep the class in awe as she read the story and used character voices to add some realization to the reading. All the students in this class were very attentive and kept their eyes on the teacher during the whole story. At the beginning of the story the teacher asked the class to put on their listening ears.

Since this was a Christian school there were a number of pictures and references to Christ. Some of the students were organized into a "Jesus Team" and all students participated in prayer and other worship experiences. All the teachers, students, and the Director participated in the Christian activities. Christian songs and secular songs were sung during the class. Songs included; "This is the Day that the Lord has Made," "I want to be a Sheep," and "Jesus Loves Me". One song that was sung at the beginning of the class was "Getting to Know You." Music was a frequent teaching tool in this class and the songs were used to get the children to remember certain teaching points.

The teacher in this class had been teaching preschool for 23 years. She has a teaching degree and taught two years in public education. A common theme of all the teachers in all the preschools visited was patience. A comparison of all teachers and their education level is in Table 2.

Table 2

Teacher Qualifications

School	Secular or Christian	Years Teaching	Preschool Teaching Training	Social Skills Training	Adequacy of Training	Formal Education
A - 1	Christian	23	None	College Courses	No	Teaching Degree
B - 1	Secular	11	None	None	No	Teaching Degree
B - 2	Secular	6	None	none	No	Teaching Degree
C - 1	Secular	5	None	College Courses	Yes	Teaching Degree
D - 1	Christian	8	5 years	2 years	Yes	Associate Degree

The preschool director at this school was not a principal but an administrator who was also a recruiter, and an interface with parents.

The second school was a secular preschool, located in an elementary school building. This is an all-day preschool class with two teachers and a teacher's aide. There were twenty students, nine boys and 11 girls who were categorized according to race as 18 whites, one Hispanic, and one African/American. All the students were selected through the county at risk selection process. In addition to the consideration of the family make up there is a family medium income level of $20,000–30,000.

The room walls were covered with pictures drawn by the students, a calendar that the students changed each day, and many pictures of letters and numbers. These numbers and letters were attached to the walls with Velcro for easy changing every day. There was

a parent board that displayed the work of the students for the parents to see. The room was arranged with different stations and the students were divided into four teams with one team on each station with a teacher or aide, except there was one station where the students are allowed to work on some project by themselves with an occasional observation by one of the teachers. The teachers controlled the activities very close at the other three stations and tried to keep the students moving at a pace that would not allow them to get bored. The activities were varied with each group and were based on the abilities of the group members. The teachers knew the background of individual students and made adjustments as a different student or group participated in a group activity. The true virtue of the teachers in this class along with the teachers in all the secular classes was patience. When students became a little bored the teachers would have the students perform some short different activity such as hugging the other students or lining up on their feet. Team exercises were used very effectively to keep students occupied. Another control exercise was assigning chores to help the teachers; the students were very responsive and volunteered for these duties. One of the most effective social skills building was the interface with the adult teachers and helpers. The teachers were very careful to set good examples and when a student did something they should not have done the teachers would talk them through what was wrong, why it was wrong, and what should they do to make restitution.

The exchange between students was generally good and only once did students have a confrontation and that was when they both wanted to use the same box of crayons. The teacher handled the situation very well by explaining to both how the rotation of work and play stations worked and why one of the students was next in line. The

situation was settled and there were no further disagreements between students. I was impressed with the ability of the teachers to come up with activities on the spur of the moment to get the attention of the students and bring them back from boredom to excitement. One technique that worked very effectively was story time. With just the mention of this the students crowded around the teacher waiting to be entertained with the selected story, all of which had some pictures to be shared with the class. Stories of animals seemed to always get their attention.

The learning unit supplied for this class was literacy based and reading based. Teachers and helpers (including one parent volunteer, who was there during my visit) read stories to the students. The students were very receptive to the stories as long as they were short and had pictures.

The third school I visited was also a secular preschool with 14 students in the class, the makeup being eight girls and six boys all of whom were white. There were three teachers assigned to this class but one was away in training. As in the other schools the walls were covered with pictures the students had drawn and there were numbers and letters hung. This class had a unique system of maintaining order by having students sit on designated spots. When a student started moving around the teacher would direct them back to their spot. This class did a lot of songs and storytelling. A special education teacher was there during my visit. She read several stories to the students and because she was not a regular teacher and was a great story teller the students paid attention. In addition to the stories the students worked with words by sounding them out. The teachers also used pictures to reinforce the words in the students mind.

Several techniques that were used in this class that I not observed in the other classes were, hand washing sessions, birthday recognition, and "thank you" to the teacher when the student received some help with an activity or a compliment for work well done. Oral hygiene was a high priority with the teachers in this class. The teachers in this class were very affectionate with the students and this seemed to motivate the students to participate in activities.

The students were given a performance evaluation by completing timed activities such as coloring pictures, placing numbers on the right block, and recognizing symbols. Clay modeling was used very effectively by having the students make models of some of the things they had seen in a recent visit to a simulated pond. Number games were very popular with most of the students except one or two that struggled with numbers. Computer learning was in the class curriculum and the students played computer games and did number tests. One student who was very impatient, got restless, and sometimes disrupted the class; loved working on the computer and the teachers gave him extra time to keep him occupied.

The students who were the most at-risk were generally easy to identify. The teachers did not share names but gave me some of the at-risk criteria that caused the most concern with a couple of students. The teachers said it was not always true that the most at-risk student would present the most problem in the classroom because occasionally an excellent student would come from a broken home that had alcohol or drug problems. The teachers said they were very careful not to classify students based on their family environment and gave every student an equal opportunity to excel. I witnessed two

children in this class that were leaders and were helpful to the teachers by setting examples for the other students.

The fourth class I visited was a Christian preschool but much smaller than the first Christian school I visited. There was one teacher in the class with six white students, four girls and two boys. The classroom was decorated like all the other classes I visited with pictures by the students, and numbers and letters hanging on the walls. This class was a very attentive group with good manners and active participation. The teacher had been teaching preschool for seven years and had an excellent relationship with the students. The teacher was well respected by the students and they always used yes ma'am, no ma'am. The lesson for the day included story reading, identifying colors and numbers, writing their names, and playing a word game.

The students were kept in one group—opposed to the other schools that divided the class—because there was only one teacher and the class was small. Even with a small class it posed problems when a student had to leave the class to go to the bathroom, for example. This would have been a good opportunity for a parent to spend the day with the class to give the teacher a break. The teacher in this class was fortunate that all the students were well disciplined so she could leave the room as needed.

It was obvious that this was a Christian preschool because of all the pictures of Jesus and the other references to God and the disciples. The day I was there was the day for chapel for that week. Some days the pastor would provide chapel services but when he was not available the teacher would lead the class. This service, according to the teacher was the only exposure to the church that some of her students had. Even though this was a Christian preschool it did not mean that all the families were church goers.

In this class the teacher used Bible stories and often referenced Jesus to the class. Christian values were taught as the rules of the class. Students were taught to care for each other, to share, to help, and to practice good manners. I was impressed with the teacher's ability to relate learning to friendship and caring. The use of a reference to Jesus had a very positive impact on the class and was used to keep order in the class by saying to the students that Jesus is happy with the class when everyone is kind and loving. In this school there was considerable reference to religious objects or stories. The Bible was read often although usually just a short verse or chapter to get the students more familiar with the Bible. Many of the stories read to the class were Bible stories and the teacher was very good at relating the Bible story to the life of a preschool student. Students were encouraged to take pictures, puzzles, and games home to share with parents and other family members. It was obvious that this teacher was trying to get as much religious information into the home as she could. The teacher told me stories of her past experiences with children and references to Jesus and the Bible. During one session a four year old boy asked, "Who is Jesus?" The teacher took the rest of the class time to explain to this young boy and the class about Jesus and how he loved children and what being a Christian means. She related to me that this is why she teaches in a Christian preschool as opposed to a higher paying secular school teaching position. My first impression was that this class was like a Sunday School class, however after observing the teacher use the Bible and Bible stories to teach, not only social skills but also colors, numbers, and names from the Bible stories, my impression was changed. There was no reference to anything religious in the secular preschool classes.

Teacher Interviews

I found there was wide variation in the teachers' experiences, from preschool to higher grade levels. Although the curriculum was very similar the use of the lessons and the teaching styles of the teachers varied significantly in all the schools as well. The summary below compares the comments from the teacher interviews.

1. How long have you been a preschool teacher? As shown in Table 2 there was significant variation in the years of teaching which ranged from five to twenty three. Some of the teachers had spent almost all their entire career in preschool education. All interviewed teachers were teaching at this level because they felt this was their calling and they enjoyed working with young children. One teacher commented that she was in the business of molding future leaders and the molding came much easier at the preschool age. All of the teachers in all of the schools appeared to me to be very professional and caring teachers. There appeared to be in the secular schools a relationship between the number of years teaching and the ability to control the class. It was difficult to determine if the lack of control came with less experience or was it just the teacher's style. The younger teachers seemed to have the patience just to allow the students to do what they wanted until they got it out of their system and rejoined the class. The older teachers were more disciplined with the class and as a result there was less freedom of expression. Both systems seemed to work and it appeared the teachers were using techniques they felt comfortable with.

2. What type of training did you receive when you started this job? None of the teachers interviewed had received any training specifically oriented towards

working with preschool children before they started the job. One teacher commented that being a mother was the best practical training available. One teacher in a secular school had some training in special education but it was not aimed specifically at very young children. The secular school teachers over all seemed better prepared with special training for teaching even though it was not necessarily training for dealing with children who were not socially prepared for formal school. All the teachers were advocates for more training prior to taking on the preschool teaching job. They felt that they were in a basic training or basic molding function and mistakes they made in handling students could affect them for the rest of their school years so training that would better prepare them was a necessity. One area of need was training in how to develop teams among the very young students, many of whom had no association with other children until coming to preschool. According to one of the secular school teachers, students at this very young age had individual mindsets making group activities, team work or helping each other, hard to maintain. A significant part of the preschool program in all the schools visited was aimed at developing team work.

3. Did you receive specific training on developing social skills? Only one of the teachers had formal training and this secular school teacher had classes in early childhood development in a master's program. All of the teachers expressed the need for such training because all the children come to school with varying levels of social skills and trying to conduct classes where some of the students have little or poor social skills strains the teacher's efforts. The problem of some students with poor social skills was much more evident in the secular school classes. Even

though the lack of social skills was somewhat evident in all the classes, the degree of poor skills was much more evident in the secular schools. Some of the students still had not mastered total bathroom skills. All the teachers commented on the need to have some formal training in early childhood development. Every teacher was an advocate for having family members attend and even participate in an occasional classroom activity to help the teacher, but more important, to gain an insight into what was expected of a child in preschool. According to the teachers interviewed, many parents still look upon preschool as a babysitting service.

4. Do you feel the training was adequate? Without exception every teacher commented that their training, when they did receive any, was very inadequate in preparing them to deal with the social problems that could develop in a classroom. Even teachers who were parents and had been parents for some time were for the most part, totally unprepared for dealing with social conflicts and untrained in developing team play and team learning. All the teachers agreed that they would have appreciated some previous training in this area. They felt that experience on the job—in the classroom—had been the best training they could get, but learning by doing had led to some mistakes in managing social skill development. Secular preschool teachers, because of the class structure of so many at-risk children, were totally unprepared when they began teaching.

5. Did you have any previous training on developing social skills in children? This question is very similar to question number three but I tried to determine skills required for three and four year olds. Since teachers at higher levels deal with a different spectrum of social problems in the classroom and the teacher training

that most teachers get prepares them to deal with students who, for instance, already know how to go to the bathroom and how to feed themselves. There was little or no training for preschool social problems. The personal skills such as bathroom requirements, eating, and playing together were at the same level for children in both secular and Christian preschools and seemed to be more age dependent skills.

6. What is your formal education level and what was your major? The preschool teachers I interviewed had a wide range of formal education. The secular school teacher had to have certain credentials to teach whereas the Christian preschools had less restriction on teacher education. This question is summarized in Table 2.

7. Do you have many children that show up with poor social skills and do not mix well with the other children? All teachers answered this question with a resounding yes. The number of children with more than one poor social skill ranged from 50% in the first Christian preschool and from 75% to 80% in the secular preschool. The second Christian preschool estimated about one in every three children or 66%. All of the teachers commented that after the children have been together for several months their social skills improved significantly. The first Christian preschool had a class that had been together for two years and credited the improvement in behavior to the children becoming friends. The teachers gave examples of some children not mixing well with other children (such as the one student in the second secular preschool who was a loner and was a good student when he was left alone to work but when he was placed in a group he would not participate and was disruptive to the class). The secular preschool

teachers told stories of children who would cry all day, children who would hit other children for no reason, and an occasional student who would not do anything. The teachers found that most of the children with emotional problems came from homes with one parent or homes where one of the parents was into drugs or alcohol very deeply.

8. What specific behavior, communication, or social problems are most common among your students? The most frequently mentioned poor behavior in both of the Christian preschools was restlessness or failure to pay attention; also there were some cases of speech problems. One of the common problems in the Christian preschools, especially among the three year olds, was lack of bathroom skills. Even though most were potty trained they required assistance in cleaning up. The behavioral or social problems among the students in the secular schools were much more prevalent and usually more difficult to deal with. In the secular schools there were more cases of hitting and other physical situations such as biting, kicking, failing to share class resources. The secular schools also had a greater number of communication problems among the students. There were several students in each of the secular preschools and one in the second Christian school who could not speak in sentences. They had trouble using the right words and connecting the words together to make understandable messages. All the students in the first Christian preschool and most in the second Christian school were able to communicate reasonably well. Teachers in all the schools said they could readily tell which students had parents that worked with their children to

supplement skills learned in the classroom. The two Christian preschools had many more parents who were willing to help in the classroom.

9. Do you consider yourself adequately trained to develop social skills in your students? I was surprised when all the teachers said they felt adequately trained to develop social skills in their students since only one had had formal college education on early children development. When asked why they felt confident to develop social skills in their students, all the teachers based their presumed ability on experience and having seen results in their students. All the classes monitored the progress of their students in both academic and social skills and used available teaching specialists to assist in difficult cases. Since it appeared that many of the bad social actions and the lack of good social skills came to school with the student and usually originated in the home, all of the teachers tried to understand the family problems and provided assistance whenever possible by way of discussions with the parents. Although the secular preschool teachers in particular admitted very little success in changing home lifestyles that affected the student's ability to learn, they continued with letters and meetings whenever possible.

According to Landerholm, Gehrie, and Hao (2003) teachers in the 21st century need to be proficient in technology and skilled as reflective practitioners. They need to be able to reflect on diversity in myriad ways; learning styles, special needs, cultural differences, racial differences, developmentally appropriate differences, teaching styles, and personality differences of children, teachers, parents, community, members and administrators. The paradigm shift of the twenty-first century is that

teachers need to be team players who are skilled at operating in a variety of collaborative partnerships.

10. Is there any specific training you would recommend for developing such skills?

All the teachers had recommendations for training that would help develop social skills in children. One of the programs mentioned by all the teachers is called T/TAC. The Virginia Department of Education's Training/Technical Assistance Centers (T/TAC) for Persons Serving Children and Youth with Disabilities. The Virginia Department of Education, sponsor of T/TAC Online, also supports eight regional T/TACs that comprise a statewide system emphasizing collaboration in the planning and provision of services to meet state and local staff development needs. The site was designed and developed by George Mason University students and professors. The mission of Virginia's T/TAC is to improve educational opportunities and contribute to the success of children and youth with disabilities (birth–22 years). The Centers provide quality training and technical assistance in response to local, regional, and state needs. T/TAC services increase the capacity of schools, school personnel, service providers, and families to meet the needs of children and youth. The T/TACs meet these needs through activities such as:

1. consultation
2. information services (including periodic newsletters)
3. linking and networking resources together
4. lending library of multimedia resources and technology
5. long-range planning

6. presentations about T/TAC services

7. referral to other services

8. workshops

Two of the older teachers stated that nothing beats experience but added that there are many good training programs such as the Shining Star seminars and The Development of Social Competence in Children.

11. Do you have a specific technique that works well to get children to play and learn together? All the schools used small groups with group activities that fostered interaction between students. Role modeling was used by all the schools and was recommended as the best technique for getting children to play and learn together. Other techniques included not raising one's voice, giving corrections in a positive tone, being sure to add meaning to any corrections made, peer modeling, guiding and hovering near by any activities. Two teachers stated that they tried to have activities whenever possible that involved as many of the students as possible because those not involved would find something to keep them from boredom. Idle students are a potential for disruptive activities as they seek to find something to do. The first school visited was a Christian preschool with a large class but there was a teacher and an assistant teacher and they split the class into two groups and rotated the groups between teachers. The groups were split based on the ability of the students to work together and to function well socially. Students who were uncomfortable or disruptive in one group were moved into the other group and even more rotations might be made to get two harmonious groups. These groups stayed together throughout the year whenever there was a split

group activity. There were also many class functions where all the students participated together as one large group. The second secular preschool I visited was an example of teacher patience. In addition to the class being split into two teams for many activities, there were also times when one or two of the students would not participate and they would be separated from the group and a special education teacher would come into the room and work with those student, sometimes one on one or maybe do an exercise involving both students. The first secular school had split groups but with more success. Only one student, who was a three year old, caused any disruption during the group exercises. This student required the attention of a teacher during the outdoor events because he tried to get out the gate and started crying when he was not allowed to just roam on his own. Both Christian preschools had well organized, well controlled group functions when the whole class participated and when they were split into smaller groups.

12. Do you discuss social dysfunctions with the children's parents? All the teachers answered positive to this question. One of the secular school teachers stated she would always give the parents positive ideas to use with the children at home to help develop good social techniques, such as family fun events. Another secular preschool teacher stated she met every other month with the parents of children who needed help and she told them about activities they could practice during home time to train the children to be more socially adapt. One of the secular school teachers stated that she held two conferences and two home visits each year. The first conference would be scheduled in late October or November after

the teacher had some time to evaluate each student and to document any social or

educational things to discuss with the parents. Both Christian preschool teachers

said they had two conferences with family members, one in the fall and one in

February. The teachers also used e-mail and the telephone to stay in touch with

the parents. All teachers commented during their interviews that staying in touch

with the parents as often as possible was extremely important to keep the parents

informed on the child's progress or lack thereof. In many cases parents would be

able to supply some information about the student that the teacher may not be

aware of. The secular teacher in the first school visited stated that many of the

parents were not willing to discuss their children's problems and some even

denied that there was a social problem. One parent this year was in total denial

that her son had a problem getting along with the other students and threatened

the teacher for even suggesting that there was a problem with the child. It was

discovered later that the parent was about to lose custody and did not want any

negative information known by the child welfare group.   The second secular

school teacher said she was constantly in touch with the parents of two of her

students who had problems routinely in class. One child would not participate in

any group activities and the other child cried almost all day. Both parents had

been advised of the help available but neither sought help so the teacher was

routinely calling or sending letters urging that they take advantage of the free help

from the county system.

13. Are you able to get much help from parents? Only the Christian preschool

teachers said that they received consistent help from the parents. The secular

school teachers said that some of the parents were helpful sometimes and some parents were never available for help. The most frequent help was on student field trips. The secular school teachers all told of problems getting in touch with parents. The teacher at the first secular preschool stated that some of the parents did not want to help because of their jobs, some because of their life style and some because they just did not show any concern for their children. Many of these students were classified at risk and this usually meant only one parent, a parent or two with drug problems, or a parent in jail. This meant that the one parent usually worked and was never available to participate in school functions or to assist in school classes as an assistant. Neither of the Christian preschools had a formal Parent Teachers Association (PTA).

Landerholm et al. (2003) stated that Research from the onset of the Head start program in the United States in the 1960's through current research has provided substantial evidence that children's academic achievement is linked to their parents' involvement in their education.

14. Have you had specific training on dealing with ADD (attention deficit disorder) and ADHD (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) children? One of the Christian preschool teachers had received specific training on dealing with ADD and ADHD children and all the secular school teachers had been through formal training in this area. The teacher in the Christian preschool who had received formal training commented on her observations for looking for ADD or ADHD. She said that the signs and symptoms of ADD/ADHD typically appear before the age of seven so she was in a good position to be able to detect early signs. She

commented that it can be difficult to distinguish between attention deficit disorder and normal "kid behavior." If you spot just a few signs, or the symptoms appear only in some situations, it's probably not ADD/ADHD. On the other hand, if a child shows a number of ADD/ADHD signs and symptoms that are present across all situations at school it's time to take a closer look. This teacher stated that once you understand the issues your child is struggling with, such as forgetfulness or difficulty paying attention in school, you can work to find creative solutions. The bottom line is you don't have to wait for a medical professional to tell you what the problem is. This Christian preschool teacher seemed to be very well informed on the problem and she said that all teachers through the first grade should have adequate training in this area because parents sometimes go into denial and refuse to accept their child has a problem so some outside source such as a doctor or teacher can be more objective.

15. Discuss your process of developing social skills. The first Christian preschool teacher interviewed by me had been a preschool teacher for more than 20 years and had developed her own style of training students in social skills. She felt that the one on one with the student was the best way to deal with students who displayed either poor social skills or had an absence of certain social skills. This teacher also practiced group discussions when an individual student did, or failed to do, something that affected the class or group functions. An example she gave was when one student becomes disruptive, fails to participate, or takes actions against another student—she thought a good approach was to get a group or the entire class to discuss the problem and come up with ideas or solutions to help the

active student to change. She also recommended taking time to listen, staying on the subject and getting the family involved if the actions or social skills don't change. I was not positively sure that the controlled demeanor of her class came from her techniques but something was working well in her class, at least when I was present. I would give credit to her many years of experience and would recommend her approaches to control of the class to other teachers, both Christian and secular. The first secular school teacher interviewed stated that in her experience modeling good social skills seemed to have a very positive influence on the students and she was always careful not to display anger, impatience, or unpleasant attitude. In observing this teacher it appeared she had her class very well under control during the entire interview time. During the time I was present the teacher made several contacts with different disruptive students and they reacted very well to her corrective actions. The teacher was calm and spoke in a friendly voice but there was a tone of authority in her voice. She obviously had the respect of her students. During the time I was there several students came to the teacher and the assistant and hugged them for no apparent reason but it was obvious they were just looking for some affection. I could not identify any of the students as at risk students that may be looking for something they do not get at home. The second secular school teacher had many of the same ideas expressed by the other teachers but she added that she used pictures to show good social skills because the students seemed to learn more from the pictures then from the spoken word. This teacher also said she used mediation to settle disputes between the students. I was not able to observe this mediation in action during the class

time but the teacher described the process as a peace making forum where each student has an opportunity to state their case and then discuss the significance of the disagreement and why it was really not serious and should be settled peacefully. Modeling was a method of chose for all the teachers. They felt that setting a good example pays off over time. Many of the children came from homes where there was arguing and in some cases physical abuse, so demonstrating to the students that you do not have to get physical or angry to settle a disagreement may have a positive impact on preparing them for kindergarten. One of the teachers explained her technique of calming her students by smiling and saying "I love you" and many students would reply by saying "I love you, too." I did see this technique used one time and this did seem to take the anger out of the disagreement that was going on at the time; and the one student that said "I love you' too" just seemed to forget what had been going on and he went back to his school work. The second Christian preschool teacher used many of the mentioned processes but also used time out very effectively. I thinks her technique was effective because the students did not want to be separated from the rest of the class. This was the teacher who had a small class, she handled the students like they were her own children and they responded accordingly with occasional hugs. The smaller class also seemed to be a factor in exercising control since there were fewer students to interact with each other and there was more opportunities to interact directly with the teacher.

16. What is your source of professional guidance on children behavioral techniques? All of the teachers had a source that they went to for professional help on child

behavior techniques but the secular school teachers had more identified sources

and went to those sources more frequently than the Christian school teachers. I

contributed this to the greater number of behavior problems among the secular

school students plus the county school system that the secular schools were part

of had an Education Specialist and a Family Service Worker that was available

for both training and counseling and teachers could attend a one day training

session each month. The Christian school teachers relied more on on-line

assistance through the internet and occasional workshops. The churches where the

schools were conducted had a full time pastor, who, on occasion, would provide

support for the teachers as well as deliver messages for the students on Christian

values.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The different student selection criteria between the private preschool and the public preschool is a major factor in judging the results of the social and educational advances of students in the two types of schools. The public school based preschool has application restrictions placed by the State that increases the advantage of getting enrolled in a preschool program if the applicant has more at risk factors in their life (see Appendix E). Accepted applications must meet one or more of the criteria of the local, state, and federal government listed below.

1. Multiple family factors reported by parents on the last page of the application.
2. Child has been identified with a disability and school division specifies preschool placement for services.
3. Family meets requirements of income eligibility, homeless status, foster care status, or are receiving public assistance.

Children who will be four years of age by September 30th of the school year are given priority. Three year olds may apply but will only be accepted after all eligible four year olds have been selected. Private preschools have no such restriction on recruiting students and unless the enrollment is low they will take only students that they expect to do well in the program.

In the classroom experiences it was obvious that the private preschool students were much more attentive, had better social skills, and were able to grasp lesson objectives better than the public school students. Without further research and observations it is impossible to predict exactly how the two different students will

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perform in kindergarten; however it appears that the private preschools have an

advantage in that the students come into the class with better tools to learn. Studies such

as those referenced in this paper have repeatedly supported the advantage of a child going

to preschool before kindergarten. The advantages of preschool have been so pronounced

that most states that have surged ahead in starting public preschools and private

preschools have also seen a significant increase in new schools.

Shipley and Oborn (1996) compared the effectiveness of four types of

prekindergarten programs: Head Start, Montessori, public prekindergarten and private

day care programs. The researchers concluded that the development of an effective public

school prekindergarten program must include a set of criteria designed to implement the

instructional strategies of all four types of prekindergarten programs in the study. Also,

Shipley and Oborn developed a model for public school prekindergarten programs which

included the following components: (a) connections to service agencies to increase parent

involvement; (b) effective teacher training; (c) attachment to existing public school

buildings and joining the elementary school routine; and (d) curricular connections

between prekindergarten programs and kindergarten programs.

During my visits to the classrooms and observations of the control of the students,

it appeared that teacher qualification and experience seemed to play a significant role in

the control of the class and enhancing social skills as well as innovation in teaching

educational skills. To support this conclusion, Barnett, Frede, Mobasher, & Mohr, (1987),

reported that regarding teacher qualification, one way to increase the quality of

prekindergarten programs is to hire highly educated teachers. According to the National

Association for the Education of Young Children (1991), the quality of the staff was the

most important determinant of the quality of any early childhood program. Even with the best facilities, the best program, the best teachers, there are still problems in preschools that are extremely difficult to deal with and many require parental support they don't get. An example is a student in the third school I visited who was four years old, an only child, first school experience, very smart, loves books, engages well with adults, aggressive, uses verbal threats, destroys other children's products, and damages toys intentionally. The teacher stated she knew the background of the parents but she did not give any information about them so it was impossible to draw any conclusion as to what effect the home life may have on this student's behavior. Without some parental support to help deal with this student's behavior he is a significant risk of preschool expulsion.

The literature supports, and I observed, several criteria that make a pre-k or preschool program exceptionally effective. These criteria include: low teacher-child ratios and small class sizes, research-based curriculum aligned to K-12 standards, and involved families.

The basic principle of the Federal Voluntary Pre-K program, which is available only to public preschools, is that it is voluntary and flexible so school districts can adapt the funding to their particular needs. Tennessee, like most states, has guidelines that direct that parents, communities and school districts can decide locally whether they want and need high quality Pre-K classrooms. Pre-K in Tennessee is accessible to all 4-year olds, with an emphasis on at-risk students and high priority communities. The districts can maintain existing high standards by keeping the high quality standards already in place regarding small class size, curriculum requirements and certified teachers. The local school district serves as the applicant for matching state funds. Local school

districts are accountable for matching state dollars based on their BEP formula state/local match requirement. Local school districts have the ability to use federal funds, private dollars or in-kind resources as part of their local match. (Tennessee Department of Education)

My observations of the classroom and the comments from the teacher interviews confirm that young children learn best in small groups in which they can ask and answer questions and receive individualized attention from the teacher. In small, less intimidating classes, children are more likely to initiate activities on their own. Teachers with fewer children to manage have time to develop students' language skills, guide their social interactions, and encourage exploration and problem solving. All of the preschool teachers interviewed recommended one teacher for every 10 or fewer children to ensure a successful classroom.

Although all of the teachers and school directors that were interviewed recommended a curriculum that they used and liked, they all agreed that the curriculum must be flexible to adapt to the class since every class is different and has certain specific needs. They did agree that a good curriculum was one that integrated learning across all aspects of a child's development: educational, physical, social, and emotional. They also made the point that children must have occasions every day to participate in class activities, and to have individual interactions with the teacher.

Parents and extended family members are an integral part of any high-quality pre-k program. The most organized preschool program I observed was blessed with exceptional family support. The most important function of family engagement is communication with the teachers. In the Christian preschools this was done very

effectively and very frequently through parent/teacher conferences, and regular reports. Parents and teachers exchanged information about a child's strengths and successes, activities, and learning progress. This was done in the secular preschools but not with the same level of participation as some parents refused to participate in any activities. Both secular preschool directors stated that contact with some parents was very difficult and the ones who were difficult to get to a parent/teacher conference were generally the parents of the students who needed the most parental help and the parents who needed suggestions from the teachers on what they perceived to be the problem with the students.

Both secular preschools expressed a concern about the physical and mental state of some children that come to school undernourished and in a mentally depressed state that appears to come from a dysfunctional family setting. According to one of the secular school teachers some children get no educational or social support at home and come to school either angry or embarrassed over their home life. Children cannot learn when their basic needs are unmet or when special needs go undiagnosed. If a child is undernourished, or cannot hear what is said to them, learning cannot take place. The preschool programs I visited all screen children's vision, hearing, and general health in order to identify problems and make appropriate referrals early. Food and snacks were provided in both the secular and Christian schools. Some of the teachers used the snacks as a reward for good class performance or behavior.

According to statistics published in a study by Andrews and Slate (2001), prior to 1986 only half of all four-year-old children were enrolled in a prekindergarten program. However by 1995 that number had grown to 61%. The greatest growth in private prekindergarten programs occurred between 1975 and 1984. This private prekindergarten

growth in enrollment may have been related to family income; the higher the income of the family, the more likely the child would attend a private prekindergarten program. Attendance for public school prekindergarten programs increased, as well, resulting from the development of state-supported public school programs created for at risk children.

Andrew and Slate also reported that with the increase in the number of prekindergarten programs and because approximately twice as many prekindergarten programs in the late 1980s were private programs rather than public programs, regulation to determine quality of the private programs became a problem. One of the problems concerned staffing. A majority of teachers in private programs lacked the early childhood training required of public school teachers. In fact, the majority of prekindergarten teachers in private programs were considered to be child care givers rather than educators.

"As interest in education for preschool-age children and public school sponsorship of prekindergarten programs has increased, the number of states that have invested in programs to help preschool-age children succeed in school has increased, as well. States that provided education related services to preschool-age children almost tripled between 1979 and 1992. For example, in 1979, seven states had appropriated funds for prekindergarten programs in their public school systems" (Mitchell, 1989). Ten states had state-funded prekindergarten programs in 1984 (Mitchell & Modigliani, 1989). In 1991-1992, 32 states had well established prekindergarten initiatives (Adams & Sandfort, 1994). Most of the states used their funding from the initiatives to either expand Head Start programs and other federally funded prekindergarten programs or to support new state prekindergarten programs. Related services, as well as prekindergarten

programs, were provided for three- and four-year-old children through some of the state initiatives. Approximately half of the programs implemented had a comprehensive services component designed for at risk children and their families (Adams & Sandfort, 1994).

Many research studies link children's high-quality preschool experiences and success in school and later life. Recently researchers from Georgetown University studied Oklahoma's universal pre-k program. The researchers found significant benefits for children from both low-income and middle-income homes. As a group, the Oklahoma children attending pre-k programs had better reading, math, and writing skills than children who attended Head Start programs or did not go to a public preschool program (Gormley, Phillips, & Gayer, 2008). Likewise, an ongoing evaluation of New Mexico pre-k found significant gains in children's math and early literacy skills (Hustedt, 2010). Other studies show similar positive results. For example, one study found that children attending state-funded pre-k programs in five states (Michigan, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and West Virginia) gained significantly in early language, literacy, and math development (Barnett & Jung, 2007). According to Friedman (2004) The Perry Preschool Project, Abecedarian Intervention and Chicago Child-Parent Center have yielded sound empirical evidence that high quality early childhood programs yield significantly positive benefits for children in terms of IQ, school achievement, grade retention, need for special education, and social adjustment. Program returned to society $7 for every $1 invested. This study provides sound evidence that preschools can have a positive impact on the student's future in society.

Preschool Director Interviews

The interviews with the preschool directors were one of the most convincing arguments for having preschools and also provided input into the advantages of one school (secular versus Christian) over another. Appendix B-1 shows an average of the numerical responses from the directors to the interview questions as well as their suggestions and comments.

All the preschool directors were adamant about the benefits of a preschool education prior to kindergarten. Three of the directors had previously been kindergarten teachers and were well aware of the difficulty of dealing with students who had no exposure to group settings or who had never been away from home. The directors told of children coming to kindergarten who had no bathroom skills. Many could not communicate in sentences and had no social skills. The secular preschool directors were all very supportive of adding more teachers and aides to assist with the students that were hard to handle. The kindergarten teacher's time was quite often devoted to taking care of the students who were not socially ready for participation in groups or class activities. I observed one class where one of the students occupied a teacher's aide the entire class session. Since kindergarten is the beginning of formal education students must be at a social and educational level that such education can begin.

Both Christian preschool directors were very supportive of teaching students the personal behavior values associated with what they called Christian values, such as; honesty, kindness, caring, forgiveness, and proper language. These values were taught in all the schools that I visited but seemed to have more impact in the Christian schools. The directors contributed this primarily to the home environment of the students. Students

who came to class with good Christian values were easier to teach and easier to control. They were generally more adaptable to working in groups and were more often willing to help other students. The students I observed in the Christian preschools were very good at working in groups. They were polite and well mannered. I wondered but did not have any evidence to support the theory that the Christian preschool students were also use to working together in Sunday school which would have helped to develop some social skills.

The secular school directors had mixed feelings about the way students were selected for their classes. They reported that more than one student without proper social or educational skills made it very difficult for a teacher who did not have an assistant to deal with the distractions. They recognized the need for at-risk children to be given priority for public preschool but the classes should be a leaner mixture of at risk and other students so the co-mingling of social skills might have a positive influence. This however would result in more preschool classes which would cost more money for teachers and classrooms. The significance of a teacher having to deal with at risk students who are distracting to the class and trying to teach the other students at the level they deserve makes a good case for spending the money and establishing more classes, hiring more teachers, and adding classrooms. The directors felt that the public was not well versed on the at- risk quota that public schools face and the impact it has on advancing the education of the better prepared students. The directors were unanimous in support of prekindergarten and supported the idea that every child attends preschool even if only their social skills were improved before kindergarten.

Each of the directors commented on and recommended the integration of parents into the class functions whenever possible. It could be something as simple as sitting in class, helping with projects, or reading to the students. I did notice that even a visitor in the classroom had a positive influence on the class, especially when the visitor was a stranger. Visiting special education teachers had a positive impact on the classes by providing new ideas. During my visits, two special education teachers provided storytelling and conducted some interviews with some students. The students were more alert to the visiting teacher than they were to the regular teachers. This may have been because they were not as familiar with the visiting teacher and were not sure of what they could get by with or it could have been the personality of the teacher.

When is a child ready to enter the kindergarten class and begin a formal education process? What are some of the basic skills that a kindergarten teacher would be looking for in a child who has completed a preschool program? Knowing what these skills and abilities are and the importance of each one could provide guidance to the preschool teachers and directors as they prepare curriculum. The preschool directors were asked to complete a questionnaire on the importance of some of the expected kindergarten skills. Their comments and the ranking of these skills is in Appendix B-2

Limitations of the Study

This study may be limited due to the completeness of the events, programs, and the unbiased comments made by those interviewed. The possibility exists that those interviewed may have embellished or downplayed the effectiveness of the programs. It is assumed however, that all those interviewed were truthful and rendered honest facts and opinions. The class functions during the visits by me may not be typical and may be tempered by the fact that there was a visitor in the classroom. Only four schools, two

Christian and two secular, were included in the study and with a limited number of schools the chance exists that the best or the worst and not the average schools were visited. However the objective of the study was to pick two Christian and two secular preschools and compare their methods, techniques, and programs and an objective was not to portray these schools as average, perfect, or even below average. Almost all the students in all the schools studied lived in the county. An interesting study would have been to study a school composed of city students since the city schools in this area have a more diverse student population. If I were doing this study over I would expand the study to include more schools and would include a city secular preschool, not just because of the diversity, but the city student selection process may be different from the county process. The city student population should have some different classroom interaction because many of the students would have lived near each other, possibly played together, had more opportunities for learning to socialize in the neighborhoods, and probably would have the same cultural background. In the county preschools the students have less of an opportunity to associate with their classmates outside of school.

<div align="center">**Further Research Recommended**</div>

Additional research is recommended to validate this comparison. Because of the small number of schools included in the study, additional research should be conducted to ensure that the comparisons were not based on schools that did not represent the normal school. The methods and techniques used in the study schools may by chance be peculiar only to those schools and not representative of most schools in either category. There may also be many great ideas and successful programs that were not available in the study schools and limiting the research to this particular study may not capture the best

approach to preparing students for kindergarten. The literature search uncovered considerable previous research that was done on the advantages of preschools but very little information on the comparison of the different types of preschools. More research is needed on the specific differences between not only secular versus Christian preschools, but the size of the classes, the experience of the teaching staff, the curriculum used, and the effect that diversity has on the classroom. Additional research should be done on the impact of secular and Christian preschools on students where both of the types of schools were from the same economic, cultural, and racial majority background. This study compared secular and Christian preschools but no consideration in the selection of preschools was given to the possible impact from different cultural and economic locations. The difference in social and educational advantages may be related to or influenced by living conditions and not necessarily on the school classroom settings.

Epilogue

This study was simply a comparison of the makeup, teaching methods, events, and programs of two Christian and two secular preschools. There was no attempt to say which was the most effective in developing social skills and educational preparedness but only to give the parents of a prospective preschool student some insight into how two different approaches to kindergarten preparedness might look. The major difference in the two approaches is the religious base in the Christian preschool that attempts to teach social skills by practicing and teaching Christian values. A secondary difference is the student selection process and the sizes of the classes. Another factor that was apparent was the excellent parent support of the Christian schools and the somewhat weakness of the parental initiatives in the secular preschools.

Considerable research was done to provide a clear picture of the preschool; where it came into being, how it has developed over the years, what is happening in the growth of the preschool today and the perspective of many writers on the effectiveness of the preschool. This background will help the reader to better understand the preschool concept and relate it to the research done.

Parents should select a preschool for their child based on a review of several different preschools, both Christian and secular, and not base their selection on just one visit to a school or just talking to an administrator. I recommends discussions with the school director, administrative personnel, and the teachers to get the philosophy of education and social skills development. Selection should not be based on cost, the size of the school, or because someone else's children go to that school. This first step in a child's education is extremely important as pointed out in the literature on preschools and the decision should be very thoughtful and researched well.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Questions for Teacher Interviews

1. How long have you been a preschool teacher?

2. What type of training did you receive when you started this job?

3. Did you receive specific training on developing social skills?

4. Do you feel the training was adequate?

5. Did you have any previous training on developing social skills in children?

6. What is your formal education level and what was your major?

7. Do you have many children that show up with poor social skills and do not mix well with the other children?

8. What specific behavior, communication, or social problems are most common among your students?

9. Do you consider yourself adequately trained to develop social skills in your students?

10. Is there any specific training you would recommend for developing such skills?

11. Do you have a specific technique that works well to get children to play and learn together?

12. Do you discuss social dysfunctions with the children's parents?

13. Are you able to get much help from parents?

14. Have you had specific training on dealing with ADD and ADHD children?

15. Discuss your process of developing social skills.

16. What is your source of professional guidance on children behavioral techniques?

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Preschool Directors on Preschool Effectiveness

Rate the effectiveness (in your opinion) of the preparedness of the students who have

finished your preschool and moved to kindergarten.

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly

Disagree

1. Did students demonstrate better social skills?   ___

2. Were students educationally better prepared?   ___

3. Did students demonstrate a greater desire to learn?   ___

4. Were students more attentive?   ___

5. Were students adequately prepared for kindergarten?   ___

6. Was the level of reading ability better?   ___

7. Was the math ability better?   ___

8. Did students show better organizational skills?   ___

9. Was the participation level of parents adequate?   ___

10. Did parents show positive attitude towards the school?   ___

Do you have any suggested curriculum items that would enhance the preparation of the

student?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Do you have any suggestions for the preschool teacher on the development of social

skills?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Are there any suggestions you have to improve the preparation of preschool students?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix B-1

(Summary of comments and average of numerical scores)

Interview Questions for Preschool Directors on Preschool Effectiveness

Rate the effectiveness (in your opinion) of the preparedness of the students who have finished your preschool and moved to kindergarten.

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Neither Agree or Disagree 2 = Disagree

1 = Strongly Disagree

1. Did students demonstrate better social skills?   5

2. Were students educationally better prepared?   5

3. Did students demonstrate a greater desire to learn?   4

4. Were students more attentive?   4

11. Were students adequately prepared for kindergarten?   5

12. Was the level of reading ability better?   5

13. Was the math ability better?   5

14. Did students show better organizational skills?   4

15. Was the participation level of parents adequate? 4

16. Did parents show positive attitude towards the school? 4

Do you have any suggested curriculum items that would enhance the preparation of the student?

1. Christian values, including areas of forgiveness, being polite, good manners, how can we best deal with our feelings.

2. "Creative Curriculum" is a very comprehensive program with lots of data kept on the computer and is easily accessed.

3. Team building exercises.

Do you have any suggestions for the preschool teacher on the development of social skills?

1. Encourage independence of the students.

2. Do group activities (large & small) as often as possible.

3. Modeling good manners.

4. Compliment students on good behavior and helping others.

Are there any suggestions you have to improve the preparation of preschool students?

1. Encourage parent involvement, even for small events.

2. Keep parents on board with all activities/instructions.

3. Give student assignments to the parents whenever possible and ask them to participate.

4. Have routine discussions with parents on individual student needs.

Appendix B – 2

How important is each of these tasks to be able to perform before moving on to kindergarten?

		Not important	Not very important	Somewhat important	Very important	Essential
a.	Finishes tasks	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Can count to 20 or more	1	2	3	4	5
c.	Takes turns and shares	1	2	3	4	5
d.	Has good problem-solving skills	1	2	3	4	5
e.	Is able to use pencils and paint brushes	1	2	3	4	5
f.	Is not disruptive of the class	1	2	3	4	5
g.	Knows the English language	1	2	3	4	5
h.	Is sensitive to other children's feelings	1	2	3	4	5
i.	Sits still and pays attention	1	2	3	4	5
j.	Knows most of the letters of the alphabet	1	2	3	4	5
k.	Can follow directions	1	2	3	4	5
l.	Identifies primary colors and shapes	1	2	3	4	5
m.	Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in primary language	1	2	3	4	5

The average response from the secular preschool directors to the questions shown in Appendix 2 are listed below:

a. 2

b. 2

c. 5

d. 2

e. 2

f. 5

g. 2

h. 4

i. 3

j. 2

k. 3

l. 2

m. 4

The average response from the Christian preschool directors to the questions shown in Appendix 2 are listed below:

a. 5

b. 4

c. 5

d. 4

e. 5

f. 5

g. 4

h. 4

i. 5

j. 4

k 5

l. 5

m. 5

Based on these scores it appears that the secular preschool directors feel that "Takes turns and shares" is a top priority task, followed by "Is not disruptive of the class", "Is sensitive to other children's feelings", and "Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in primary language", are high priority skills before going to kindergarten. It shows that social skills rank higher then academic skills in that first year in formal education.

However the Christian preschool directors had a more ambitious goal for their students. In all fairness to the secular preschool classes their students generally have further to go to get to the academic level of the Christian preschools. A factor is the at risk students in the secular preschool program.

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Preschool Benefits

Lloyd David McDaniel

Liberty University

Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study to compare the curriculum, teaching methods, and effectiveness of Christian preschools to secular preschools.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are either a preschool teacher or director. Teachers have been selected based on who is available and willing to participate and the recommendation made by the school director. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Lloyd David McDaniel, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education, Liberty University

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to compare the curriculum, teaching methods, and effectiveness of Christian preschools to secular preschools.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: Participate in a semi-structured interview and to allow the person conducting the study to sit in a class as an observer only with no participation in the class. The interview will be audio taped and then transcribed. The interview should last no longer than two hours. A follow up interview may be necessary for clarification.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

This research has minimal risk for loss of privacy during the classroom portion since recorded comments will be from the PI, and teacher/student conversations will not be recorded, however there is some level of risk of confidentially during the interview phase since teacher and director comments will be recorded. To minimize the risk teachers and directors will never be referred to by their names but referred to as Teacher 1 or Director 1. This risk will be further minimized by securing recording equipment when not in use

and password protection on the transcription equipment. This risk is no greater than every day activities since no one or no school will be identified. The identity of anyone or any particular school has no merit for the study and they will be referred to as school A, B, etc., and teacher or director 1,2,3, etc. All participants are volunteers with the understanding that if they do not wish to comment on or answer any question, they are free not to do so.

The benefits to participation are: There are no direct benefits to individual participants, however, schools involved in the study may realize some direct benefits by being able to see themselves compared to another program and in addition to the self evaluation may be able to utilize some different methods.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. All recorded and transcribed information will be kept on the PI's personal recorder and computer. No one else has access to either of these items. All transcriptions will be done by the PI and recordings and transcribed information will be done on the PI's equipment. The recorder will be secured in a locked file cabinet when not being used and all transcriptions will be maintained on the computer and password protected. Individuals interviewed will be identified as teacher 1, director 1, teacher 2, for example and interviewee names will not be recorded anywhere. Transcriptions will be reviewed to ensure that there is no reference to anyone that would indicate who they are or where they work. Printed copies of transcripts will be maintained in a locked file cabinet. Also no names of participating schools will be documented. Records will be maintained only through the research project and destroyed after completion.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time with out affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Lloyd David McDaniel. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 112 Anen Town Lane, Waynesboro, Va. 22980. 540-949-8298. E-Mail is: ldmcdaniel@liberty.edu. Advisor and committee chair for this project is: Dr. Randall

Dunn at Liberty University. 1971 University Blvd, Office TE 107, Lynchburg, VA 24502
E-Mail is: rdunn@liberty.edu. Phone 434-592-3716

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 2400, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You may be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:_____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

Appendix D

Virginia's Prekindergarten Standards

- VA.1. Strand / Topic: History Similarities and Differences: The child will identify ways in which people are alike and different.

  - 1.a. Standard / Strand: Recognize ways in which people are alike and different

  - 1.b. Standard / Strand: Describe his/her own unique characteristics and those of others

  - 1.c. Standard / Strand: Make the connection that he/she is both a member of a family and a member of a classroom community

  - 1.d. Standard / Strand: Engage in pretend play to understand self and others

  - 1.e. Standard / Strand: Participate in activities and traditions associated with different cultural heritages

- VA.2. Strand / Topic: History Change Over Time: The child will develop an awareness of change over time.

  - 2.a. Standard / Strand: Describe ways children have changed since they were babies

  - 2.b. Standard / Strand: Express the difference between past and present using words such as before, after, now, and then

  - 2.c. Standard / Strand: Order/sequence events and objects

  - 2.d. Standard / Strand: Ask questions about artifacts from everyday life in the past

  - 2.e. Standard / Strand: Recount episodes from stories about the past

  - 2.f. Standard / Strand: Take on a role from a specific time, use symbols and props, and act out a story/narrative

  - 2.g. Standard / Strand: Describe past times based on stories, pictures, visits, songs and music

- VA.3. Strand / Topic: Geography Location: The child will develop an increased awareness of the physical relationship between and among people and places.

- 3.a. Standard / Strand: Identify and describe prominent features of the classroom, school, neighborhood and community

- 3.b. Standard / Strand: Engage in play where one item represents another – miniature vehicles, people, blocks

- 3.c. Standard / Strand: Make and walk on paths between objects – ex., from the door to the window

- 3.d. Standard / Strand: Represent objects in the order in which they occur in the environment

- 3.e. Standard / Strand: Experience seeing things from different elevations

- VA.4. Strand / Topic: Geography Descriptive Words: The child will use words to indicate relative location of objects and people including direction words, comparison words, and attribute words.

  - 4.a. Standard / Strand: Use words to indicate relative location

  - 4.b. Standard / Strand: Use words to describe features of locations in the environment and manmade structures found in stories and seen in everyday experiences

  - 4.c. Standard / Strand: Develop control in using direction words – on, under, over, behind, near, far, above, below, toward, and away – one direction at a time

  - 4.d. Standard / Strand: Develop control in using comparison words – closer, farther away, taller, shorter, higher, lower, alike, different, inside, and outside

  - 4.e. Standard / Strand: Develop fluency using attribute words –hard, soft, rough, smooth

  - 4.f. Standard / Strand: Use labels and symbols for what the child has seen

- VA.5. Strand / Topic: Economics World of Work: The child will develop an increased awareness of the kinds of work people do and the variety of tools people use in their jobs.

  - 5.a. Standard / Strand: Identify pictures of work and name the jobs people do

  - 5.b. Standard / Strand: Describe what people do in their community job

- 5.c. Standard / Strand: Match tools to jobs

- 5.d. Standard / Strand: Match job sites to work done

- 5.e. Standard / Strand: Role-play the job of workers

- VA.6. Strand / Topic: Economics Making Choices: The child will identify that people have wants and make choices.

  - 6.a. Standard / Strand: Identify choices

  - 6.b. Standard / Strand: Recognize that everyone has wants

  - 6.c. Standard / Strand: Choose daily tasks

  - 6.d. Standard / Strand: Role-play purchasing situations where choices are made

- VA.7. Strand / Topic: Civics Citizenship: The child will participate as a member/citizen of a classroom community.

  - 7.a. Standard / Strand: Cooperate with others in a joint activity

  - 7.b. Standard / Strand: Recognize the need for rules to help get along with others

  - 7.c. Standard / Strand: Participate in creating rules for the classroom

  - 7.d. Standard / Strand: State personal plans for learning center activities

  - 7.e. Standard / Strand: Participate in discussing and generating solutions to a class problem

  - 7.f. Standard / Strand: Share thoughts and opinions in group settings

  - 7.g. Standard / Strand: Demonstrate responsible behaviors in caring for classroom materials

  - 7.h. Standard / Strand: Identify the needs of other people by helping them

Appendix E
County School System "At Risk" Profile Questionnaire

Family Factors: *This is a needs based program so please check as many family factors that apply. Placement on the waitlist and a large part of preschool acceptances are determined by the number of family factors checked.*

_____ Child's parents did not marry	_____ Parent does not have GED or H.S. Diploma (native country or US)
_____ Child's parents are divorced/separated	_____ Parent(s) has limited reading skills in primary language
_____ Child has no contact with one or both parents	_____ Parent(s) has limited English proficiency
_____ Child does not live with his/her parents	_____ Child has limited English proficiency
_____ Child or siblings have been removed from the home	_____ Parental substance abuse history
_____ Child is/was in foster care	_____ Domestic violence in the home
_____ Deceased parent (of child)	_____ Child has been abused (physically, sexually or emotionally)
_____ Incarcerated parent(s)	_____ Child or family is in counseling
_____ Parent absent from the home: works out of town,	_____ Teen mother or father at child's birth (under 20 yrs. of age)
long term hospitalization, or military service	_____ Child weighed less than 5 lbs at birth
_____ Both/all parents/legal guardians unemployed	_____ Child has a disability
_____ Family has moved more than 2 times within the last year	_____ Sibling has a disability
_____ Housing Concerns: overcrowded,	_____ Parent has a disability
needs major repairs, lack of heat, etc.	_____ Child does not have medical insurance
_____ Homeless family (lack a fixed, permanent residency)	_____ Parent has a long term or chronic illness
_____ Family has nutritional needs	_____ Child does not have a regular pediatrician and/or dentist
_____ No drivers license holder in household	_____ Child has a medical condition. Please list condition:
_____ Family is receiving WIC	
_____ No other preschool services available for this child. State why:	

Income documentation is requested for consideration for services. *(Your child cannot be considered for all available preschool funding if income documentation is not received.)*

_____ 0 Income: If the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) is earning "0" income, check here and provide at least one of the following documents.

☐ copy of your food stamps award letter	☐ notarized letter explaining your situation	☐ send a copy of your most recent tax return

_____ Income: Please list all of the types of income that the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) receives and check which documents you are providing to verify the amount of each.

☐ Tax Return	☐ Social Security Award Letter	☐ Recent Check Stub	☐ Child Support Order	☐ Employer Letter
☐ W-2	☐ Unemployment Compensation Notice	☐ TANF Notice	☐ Supplemental Security Income (SSI) documentation	☐ Any other papers that prove your income amount for the family income received.

Name of parent/legal guardian receiving income	Place of employment/ income source	How often is income received?	Gross (before taxes) Amount?
		☐ hourly ☐ weekly ☐ monthly ☐ twice a month ☐ yearly ☐ every 2 weeks ☐ quarterly	
		☐ hourly ☐ weekly ☐ monthly ☐ twice a month ☐ yearly ☐ every 2 weeks ☐ quarterly	

Has this child ever been referred to or evaluated by the school system or other facility for special education, speech, infant education, or preschool services? _____ When? _____ Where? _____ Outcome: _____

Does he/she have an IEP or are they currently receiving services for the diagnosis above? _____

Are you concerned about this child's health, development, speech, or behavior at this time? ☐ yes ☐ no
If yes, why?: _____

Is your child currently enrolled in a daycare/preschool service? ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, please state the name of the daycare/preschool: _____
Who referred you to school-based preschool? _____
Please list any additional reasons this child should be considered for Preschool Classroom Placement on a separate sheet and attach.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME IN COMPLETING THIS APPLICATION!

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

Return Application To:	School-Based Preschool Network	Phone: 540-245-5162 ext 127
	6 John Lewis Road	Toll Free: 800-405-8069
	Fishersville, Virginia 22939	Fax: 540-245-5064

Appendix F

Quality Standards

State Pre–k Policy	Benchmarks
Early Learning Standards	Comprehensive
Teacher Degree	At least a BA
Teacher specialized training	Specializing in pre-K
Assistant teacher degree	CDA or equivalent
Teacher in-service	At least 15 hours/year
Maximum class size	20 or lower
Staff –child ratio	1:10 or better
Screening/referral and support services	Vision, hearing, health; at least one support service
Meals	At least one a day
Monitoring	Site visits