URBAN KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF FORMER HEAD START STUDENTS AND THEIR READINESS FOR SCHOOL

by

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A DISSERTATION

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The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the experiences and instruction of kindergarten teachers in an urban school district who are teaching students who were previously enrolled in a Head Start program. Eleven kindergarten teachers who taught in an urban school district in the southeastern United States participated in this study.

Data sources collected for this multiple case study included: (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) observations, and (c) curriculum documents. Results from the study revealed mixed experiences teaching former Head Start students. While some teachers expressed positive experiences teaching former Head Start students, others indicated teaching former Head Start students did not impact their curriculum, instruction, or views on school readiness. The study also found that teachers perceived Head Start to be most beneficial to students from extremely low-income families. These findings were consonant with other research on the Head Start readiness program [Pigott, T.D. & Israel, M.S. (2005). Head start children’s transition to kindergarten: Evidence from the early childhood longitudinal study. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*. 3(1), 77-104.]
Implications for educators illustrate the need for the development of Early Childhood Learning Communities and alignment between local programs, the community, and parents.

Key words: Head Start, kindergarten teachers, school readiness, teacher perceptions, urban teachers
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, who has been very supportive of me as I’ve traveled this very long journey. To my mother, Mrs. Evelyn S. Hardy, thank you for continuously reminding me that I can do whatever I put my mind to do. To my husband Kevin, thank you for allowing me the time to pursue my dream. And to my four wonderful children: Darius, Angelica, Kayla, and Kennedi. Let this work remind you to dream big, be persistent, and have faith. It doesn’t matter how long it takes or how old you are when you reach your goal. The important thing is that you complete what you start.
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To Dr. Jerry Aldridge, my first advisor and professor at UAB, you have touched my life in a wonderful way. I aspire to be the type of teacher that you are: witty, kind, encouraging, and knowledgeable. You taught me the importance of thoroughly knowing
your field of study, and made me want to “do” something to advance the field of Early Childhood Education.

To the participants of the study who unselfishly gave of your time to help me, I sincerely thank you. To my friends, colleagues, and supervisors who have helped me, given me a smile, or listened to me tell a story about graduate school, thanks so much for your support.

I believe that timing is everything. My time is now. The best is yet to come!
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Based on the 2009 Census Bureau school enrollment profile, 74% of all five-year-olds in the United States attended a public or private kindergarten before first grade (http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school/cps2009.html). While kindergarten attendance numbers have continued to increase, the knowledge, skills, and educational levels of the students who are entering these programs have continued to vary tremendously. The kindergarten programs themselves have also evolved, moving away from socializing and play in favor of emphasizing academic subject matter content (Freeman & Hatch, 1989; Karweit, 1988, Shepard & Smith, 1987). In kindergarten, children learn basic skills that serve as the foundational understanding of more sophisticated skills in later grades (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) noted that for reading, these introductory skills may include: conventions of print (reading from left to right, top to bottom); letter recognition; letter sound associations; and vocabulary knowledge. Ginsburg (1989) noted that foundational mathematics skills include: rote counting; one-to-one counting of objects, number recognition, and knowledge of numerical relationships (e.g., greater than, lesser than, or equal to).

Although not a requirement for kindergarten admission, in today’s educational environment of high-stakes assessments and push-down curriculum, a number of kindergarten teachers suggest that letter and number recognition before entering kindergarten are readiness skills that are crucial to success (Heaviside & Farris, 1993). Research by Siegler and Richards (1982) indicated that preschool children who have
acquired basic early reading and math skills are more likely to learn more complex reading, writing, and calculating earlier and more proficiently than those who have not acquired the basic skills.

Contrasting previously stated research, other teachers have said that whether or not a child succeeds in school depends on more than just the academic skills and knowledge they have obtained in preschool programs or at home (West, Germino-Hausken, & Collins, 1993). Teachers indicated that non-academic competencies – such as physical and emotional well-being, motor development, and social skills – are just as important if not more important for school success (Kagan, 1990; Kagan, Moore, & Bredekamp, 1995; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995). Preschool programs often help to develop both cognitive and non-cognitive skills in children before they enter school.

Data from the National Institute for Early Education Research indicated that preschool attendance is primarily associated with socioeconomic status (NIEER, 2004). Barnett (2011) further noted that preschool participation levels varied according to parental income levels. According to Barnett, “less than half of those in poverty and just over a third of low-income children attend a preschool program, but at higher income levels children are much more likely to attend programs” (p. 976). If preschool helps to improve early learning and development, children from low-income families may enter kindergarten lacking these critical basic skills. This deficit may lead them to enter school trailing students from higher income families (Lee & Burkam, 2002). Lee and Burkam (2002) stated the average cognitive scores of low-income students entering kindergarten to be 60% below students in the highest income group. Perez-Johnson and Maynard
(2007) have demonstrated that quality preschool programs can help close this gap for low-socioeconomic (SES) children.

The achievement gap between low-income and minority students has been the subject of many long-term research studies, policy decisions, and program investigations for nearly a century (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). Increasing accountability measures such as, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, standardized high–stakes assessments, and the Common Core College and Career Ready standards of 2010, have increased proficiency goals for all students. These measures once again elevate the topic of closing the achievement gap to the top of educational agendas. The demographics of the U.S. are rapidly changing. By the year 2050, the majority of the U.S. population is projected to be non-White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Research and debates are ongoing regarding the most promising and cost-effective strategies to reduce, eliminate, and prevent achievement gaps. Proposals include expanding preschool and/or pre-kindergarten programs and better coordinating curricula and instruction in the early grades, among others (Perez-Johnson & Maynard, 2007). Researchers have shown that early readiness programs that are specifically designed for low-income children, such as Head Start, make significant strides toward reducing or eliminating gaps in early readiness and lay a stronger foundation for learning (Pigott & Israel, 2005).
Statement of the Problem

Many researchers have indicated either a positive or inconclusive impact of the Head Start program on the transition to kindergarten for low socioeconomic students. For example, Pigott and Israel (2005) suggested that Head Start students, when entering kindergarten, score higher in reading as compared to their same-age peers. Numerous researchers have documented that participation in the Head Start program helps to close the gap between children attending the program and their more financially-advantaged peers (Currie & Thomas, 1995; Pigott & Israel, 2005; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005; Zigler & Styfco, 2004; Zigler & Valentine, 1980).

Conversely, longitudinal studies have been conducted which indicated that although children who have attended a Head Start program had been prepared initially to transition to kindergarten, these gains were quickly lost, and children did not retain academic gains beyond third grade (Bickel & Spatig, 1999; Haskins & Sawhill, 2003; Lee, Brooks-Gunn, & Schnur, 1988; Wilson, 1987). Berrueta-Clement (1984) noted that many Head Start research studies involved small samples, and the differences between children who had attended Head Start and those who had not were not statistically significant.

Despite the numerous research studies conducted on the Head Start program, a review of research showed that the majority of the research was conducted by analyzing standardized test data, report cards, and program observations. Few studies specifically considered kindergarten teacher’s perceptions of their experiences with children who had formerly attended a Head Start program. Since there is a void in the literature concerning teacher perceptions of the impact of Head Start programs in an urban school district in
the southeastern United States, this study will contribute to the literature by addressing these perceptions.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the experiences and instruction of kindergarten teachers in an urban school district who are teaching students who were previously enrolled in a Head Start program. Exploring the experiences and instruction of kindergarten teachers is generally defined as understanding how the teachers respond to, teach, and plan instruction for students who have attended a Head Start program. The study involved multiple (11) cases involving kindergarten teachers who are teaching former Head Start students. The study was bounded by place, an urban school district in the southeastern United States, and by time, May – June 2012.

By analyzing participants’ authentic experiences of teaching children who have attended Head Start, the results of the study are likely to contribute to the understanding of the perceptions of kindergarten teachers’ and their experiences instructing children of Head Start. This information may be useful for early childhood educators, Head Start program administrators, school administrators, and policymakers when making decisions about preschool programs and readiness issues.

**Research Questions**

The central research question that guided this study was: How do kindergarten teachers in an urban school district describe their experiences teaching children who were previously enrolled in a Head Start program? Sub questions were:
(1) How have kindergarten teachers beliefs about school readiness been impacted by teaching students who were previously enrolled in a Head Start program?

(2) How has the instruction of kindergarten teachers been impacted by having students who were previously enrolled in Head Start in their classes?

(3) What attitudes do kindergarten teachers have about teaching children who were previously enrolled in Head Start?

**Limitations of the Study**

This research study had several limitations. First, the study was limited to teachers in one urban school district in the southeastern United States. Information gathered in this study is descriptive of the perceptions, beliefs, and actions of teachers in one school district. However, the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this study can serve as a valuable resource for other early childhood teachers, Head Start administrators, and district policy and decision makers. Second, in accordance with qualitative research practices the researcher acted as the instrument of data collection and analysis. There may have been researcher biases and views due to previous work experiences as a kindergarten teacher of former Head Start students. These experiences may have influenced the interview process and data interpretation. Despite this previous role, the researcher made every effort to put aside any biases and values during the course of data collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. Third, since the study only sought to understand kindergarten teacher perspectives, neither local Head Start program administrators nor Head Start teachers were consulted or interviewed during this process.
Terms and Definitions

At-Risk Student – Students who do not experience success in school and have the potential to drop out.

Free and Reduced Lunch - Children from families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level are eligible for free meals and those with incomes between 130% and 185% of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals.

Low-Income, Low Socioeconomic Status, Children of Poverty – Families with incomes 125%, 150% and 200% of the poverty line for a family of four. For the purpose of this study, these terms are used interchangeably.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 focused on the introduction to the study. The chapter provided background information, stated the rationale for the need of the study, and outlined the purpose of the study. The remaining chapters in the study will follow the subsequent format: Chapter 2 will review current literature related to the Head Start program, Chapter 3 will provide details about the methods used in conducting the study, Chapter 4 will present findings from the research and the final chapter, Chapter 5 will include a detailed discussion of research findings as well as a discussion of implications and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand teacher perceptions of former Head Start students and students’ transition to kindergarten, a literature review on different aspects of school readiness as well as information about the Head Start program was conducted. Thus, this chapter begins with a review of the literature regarding preschool readiness, including the differing views of the definition of “readiness”. This review also includes kindergarten teacher perceptions of how readiness is defined. Current literature on the background of readiness programs for low–income children is provided, followed by a discussion of two pioneering programs that helped introduce school readiness in America to low–income children. The chapter concludes with the history of the Head Start readiness program as well as present literature that supports and refutes the effectiveness of Head Start Programs.

Experience and research both highlight the early years as a crucial period in the development of intelligence in young children and their academic and social success in school (C. Ramey & S. Ramey, 2004). Researchers have known for some time the issues that low-income children frequently face. Schorr (2004) noted the risk of failing in school begins early and that academic deficits are often difficult to overcome. Early readiness programs for low-income children and their families have strived to provide the tools necessary to help children succeed in school and in life.

A review of the research shows that studies regarding preschool readiness programs have focused on the characteristics of early education that determine programs,
policies, and investment choices. These characteristics include: more mothers in the workforce, the nature of poverty and its impact on family structure, the significance of the early years, ideological differences in the term “readiness”, working with children of poverty, and learning from research what works in readiness programs that serve low-income children (Schorr, 2004).

Preschool Readiness

According to Snow (2006), the first thoughts of school readiness were associated with the passing of compulsory education laws in 1836. These laws mandated that children between certain ages attend school, and many parents questioned the “readiness” of their child to begin at the age set by these mandates. During this same time of compulsory education many states began to develop and define a beginning age for school (Snow, 2006). States established initial ages that were slightly older than children who begin school today, but evidence of how states determined school start ages has not been easily identified (Grue, 1993).

Throughout the years, readiness gained attention in research and literature as a matter of educational policy. In 1989, U.S. President George H. W. Bush, and the nation’s governors, tendered six National Education Goals in the first Education Summit held in Charlottesville, Virginia. Among the six National Education Goals, goal number one stated; “by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn” (National Education Goals Panel, 1991, p.1). Congress enacted the Educate America Act, and President Clinton signed it into law in 1994. That same year, Goals 2000 entered the education debate. In 2001, President George W. Bush introduced educational programs that demanded more focus on readiness for school and an increase in the
academic content of Early Childhood programs. More recently, in the February 2013 State of the Union address, President Barack Obama urged Congress to increase spending for high quality Pre-k programs. In Obama’s words, “Study after study shows that the sooner a child begins learning, the better he or she does down the road... So let’s do what works, and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind” (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/12/president-barack-obamas-state-union-address). The Education Summit catapulted school readiness issues to the forefront and the demand for accountability and children’s educational performance continues to increase in the U.S. The issue of readiness has caught the nation’s attention and become an educational topic evoking much discussion and debate.

**Definitions of Readiness**

While readiness for school is a relevant goal, how readiness is defined and measured has not been clearly established. With differing views including those of parents, educators, business leaders, and politicians, the definition of readiness may vary depending on who is asked and their underlying beliefs and motivations about children, learning, and the role of early childhood education (Welch & White, 2000).

There are currently two predominant beliefs about school readiness expressed in early childhood education literature. The first viewpoint proposes that responsibility for readiness rests within children and that they will, in most cases, become ready for school (Gesell et al., 1940; Graue, 1993; Kagan, 1990; Welch & White, 2000). This view is based on maturational and developmental concepts proposed by Gesell.
Maturation theory.

Gesell’s maturation theory suggests that children proceed through a normal, progressive, patterned, and predictable growth process (Gesell, 1940). Gesell posited that biological forces determine school readiness, or when a child’s developmental age is adequate for educational purposes. The maturationist view is that children are ready to enter school when they have grown old enough and arrived at a certain level of expected maturity (Snow, 2006). Thus, the “time to grow” is the maturationist prescription for a child who is not yet ready for academic instruction.

Researchers have shown that the maturationist perspective served as the basis of kindergarten admission policies during the 20th century. In 44 states and the District of Columbia, children were eligible for kindergarten based on their chronological age (Saluja, Scott-Little, & Clifford, 2000). Accordingly, children were admitted if they were 5 years old prior to mid-October of the school year.

Interactionist/Constructivist view.

The second major belief that is expressed in the research literature and serves as an alternative perspective to readiness is that all children are ready to learn in school based upon what they already know about the external world. Welch and White (1999) referred to this perspective as the “interactionist/constructivist” view. This belief places the readiness burden on both the child and the school, but particularly on the school.

The Interactionist/Constructivist view is based on research by Piaget (1969) and Vygotsky (1978) and suggests that children possess innate knowledge which fosters curiosity and a drive for problem solving. Through interaction with their environment, children develop, test, and accept or reject hypotheses, continuously revising their
knowledge. Welch and White (1999) suggested that the interactionist/constructivist perspective would reject testing as a method for determining school readiness. For the authors, entrance age as a sign of readiness was not an issue since all children are ready to learn. From this perspective, schools bear the readiness burden of being prepared to work with all children at their current level of skill as they arrive at the school door (deCos, 1997; NAEYC, 1995).

School readiness, as a matter educational policy, has also been cited in the research literature through terms of “ready schools”. Research by Kagan (1990) and Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (1999) showed that within transactional or ecological models, kindergarten readiness is only a small part of the larger concept of ready schools. In a report written by the leadership of the National Governor’s Association (NGA) Task Force on School Readiness (NGA, 2005), ensuring that schools were ready to receive all students was highlighted. In the report, the task force stated the following:

… as important as it is for children to be ready for school, schools must also be ready for children. Children enter school with different skills, knowledge, and previous experiences, so schools must be ready for a diverse student body at kindergarten entry. (p. 5)

The NAEYC further noted the importance of ready schools in a 1995 position paper. In this paper, the organization stated:

Schools may reasonably expect that children entering kindergarten will be active, curious and eager to learn. NAEYC believes it is the responsibility of schools to meet the needs of children as they enter school and to provide whatever services
are needed in the least restrictive environment to help each child reach his or her fullest potential. (p. 1)

Snow (2006) advanced a third perspective on readiness that bridged the maturationist and transactional through evolutionary developmental psychology (Bjorkland & Pellegrini, 2002; Geary, 2002). Bjorkland and Bering (2002) expressed the view that “schools are artificial settings in which modern, evolved ‘Homo Sapien’ children are specifically instructed in skill sets that are expected for adults in the community” (p. 9). Research by Bjorkland and Bering echoed the call for efforts to make schools ready for children.

Shepard and Smith (1987) introduced the Nativist interpretation of the readiness concept as a method for determining whether a child is ready for first grade. Using this interpretation, if it is determined that the child is not ready then the child is held back in kindergarten. Data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-K) suggested that there are parents who delay their age-eligible child’s entry into kindergarten (Datar, 2003). This practice, referred to informally as “holding out” or “redshirting”, is done under the assumption that some children are not developmentally ready for the rigors of formal schooling (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Datar (2006) suggested that delaying kindergarten entry is more common for boys than girls, although research does not indicate differences in gender affecting school readiness. The Nativist view asserts that giving children extra time (one year) before entering kindergarten can mitigate future academic problems.
As a result of trying to determine a child’s “readiness status”, Meisels (1998) reflected on the use of early assessments to determine children’s knowledge and skills before entering kindergarten. Today, over 30 different tests are available to assess readiness. Many of these instruments are standardized and assess academic as well as developmental levels of children (Niemeyer & Scott-Little, 2001). Ackerman and Barnett (2005) demonstrated that, in most cases, schools use assessment results for instructional purposes (student needs or class placements); however, results have been used to encourage parents to give their child an extra year to “develop”.

Teacher Perceptions of Readiness

Ackerman and Barnett (2005) further reported that although testing for kindergarten readiness is common around the country, teacher perceptions of what it means to be “ready for kindergarten” also helps determine if students will be admitted. Depending on the state and local school district, teachers’ perceptions about the skills necessary for kindergarten entrance varied. Data from the ECLS-K study showed that kindergarten teachers rated nonacademic as well as academic readiness skills to be “important”. In addition to academic tasks (letter recognition, colors, and shapes), teachers identified skills, such as following directions and communications, as essential readiness skills (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003). In a study of school readiness, Wright, Diener, and Kay (2000) determined that teachers in urban districts more frequently defined readiness in terms of having knowledge of academic concepts; teachers placed less importance on social skills. The authors attributed this definition of readiness to an emphasis on state standards and an increased focus on accountability. This current study also addressed urban teachers’ perceptions of the definition of readiness and whether
teachers perceived former Head Start students to be “ready” when students entered school.

Defining the term “readiness” has been the topic of many prominent research studies in early education. Since the focus in Goals 2000 was school readiness, the research literature is replete with definitions, assessments, and models of school readiness. As stated by Snow (2006):

although there is general agreement about the nature of school readiness, at its most abstract level (i.e. prepared to be successful in school), where the real debate comes is in the determination of the critical components of child development that contributes to school success. (p. 35)

In the above mentioned studies, the researcher discussed how the term readiness has been defined and viewed in early childhood literature. In the following section, preschool readiness programs that attempt to close or decrease the achievement gap will be discussed.

**Preschool Readiness Programs for Low–Income Students**

Early childhood education has traditionally been aligned with social and educational reform efforts (Lazar & Darlington, 2002). These reform efforts began with pioneers who advocated for early education for the poor, such as Comenius, Pestalozzi, and Montessori, and continues today with present-day advocates of quality preschool readiness programs for “at risk” students (Karweit, 2001).

Many factors can negatively affect school readiness. Researchers have shown that parental educational level, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, as well as living environments and children’s health all relate to differences in academic, social, and
language skills of students entering kindergarten (Currie, 2005; Magdalena & Duku, 2007; Raver & Knitzer, 2002). Since researchers have demonstrated that income and environmental components can play a large part in readiness, states and communities are developing plans to support children’s transition and readiness to kindergarten. Rouse, Brooks-Gunn, and McLanahan (2005) reviewed factors that influenced the achievement gap and concluded, “the most promising strategy” for supporting readiness “is to increase access to high-quality center-based early childhood education for all low-income three- and four-year olds” (p. 7).

Perez-Johnson and Maynard (2007) evidenced that early interventions can help close readiness gaps and improve the lives of children at-risk. In studies conducted by The Early Child Care Research Network (2001, 2002), results confirmed that children from less enriching cultural and economic environments had fewer chances to attain high levels of growth, and consequently fewer chances for school success. When at-risk children were enrolled in quality preschool programs, they received foundational skills necessary for learning academic skills. Researchers have demonstrated that early entry of children from low-income environments in quality preschool programs favorably influence students’ academic school readiness (Early Child Care Research Network, 2002; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

Historically, researchers have examined the immediate and long-term results of early education programs targeted for disadvantaged families. The most compelling evidence of the positive effects of high quality preschool for low-income students comes from two studies that were conducted several decades ago. Researchers investigated the long-term outcomes of high-quality readiness programs specifically designed for children
of poverty. The two programs involved in the investigations were the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project and the Carolina Abecedarian Project.

**High/Scope Perry Preschool Project**

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project was a study that began in 1962 in the Ypsilanti Public Schools (Schweinhart, 2002). The project’s director, Weikart, along with other researchers, designed the program’s template and began research at the local school district level. Researchers targeted 123 African American children who were low-income, with IQ scores between 70 and 85. Children with biologically-based mental impairments were excluded, and all participants had an increased risk of failing school (Wilson, 2000). There were 58 children, ages 3 and 4, in the preschool group; 65 children were designated as a control group. These students did not attend the preschool program. Both groups were equitable in terms of gender, IQ, age, and socioeconomic status (Wilson, 2000).

Weikart’s goal was to positively impact the academic achievement of low-income students by providing enriching environments and activities that students were not receiving in home and community settings (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993). The study lasted approximately two years and also involved weekly home visits by teachers and monthly parental group meetings.

According to Schweinhart (2002), the high-quality approach of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project involved active learning and emphasized the cognitive as well as social development of the children. Drawing from child development theory by Piaget, the educational approach used in the program regarded children as active learners (Schweinhart et al., 1993). The model encouraged children, supported by teachers, to
contribute to their learning activities. The program also provided numerous resources and materials. Teachers were empowered through training and supervision that was designed to both improve program effectiveness and provide ongoing professional development (Schweinhart et al., 1993).

In research on the programs’ components, Wilson (2000) noted that the preschool operated for two-and-a-half hours per day, Monday through Friday during the two-year period. Since the staff-to-child ratio in the program was low, one adult for every five or six children, teachers conducted home visits for one-and-a-half hours every week with each child’s family (Wilson, 2000). Teachers also facilitated monthly parental small group meetings. Annual data collection continued on both the experimental and control groups from ages 3 through 11, and researchers followed-up with participants when they were 14, 15, 19, and 27 years old. The most recent follow-up was conducted in 1999-2002 when the participants were 40 years old (Belfield, Nores, Barnett, & Schweinhart, 2004).

Although originally initiated as an educational intervention to aid school readiness, the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project accomplished several other favorable outcomes (Wilson, 2000). These outcomes can be sorted into three main categories: scholastic achievement, social responsibility, and socioeconomic success (Schweinhart et al., 1985). Scholastic achievement was determined by variables, such as: graduation rate, grade point average, and postsecondary attendance. Social responsibility included factors of marital status, pregnancies, and delinquency. Socioeconomic success was based on factors including: earnings, employment, and public assistance (Schweinhart et al., 1985).
Findings from the study on scholastic achievement, as related to school readiness, were significant (Schweinhart, 2000). Not only were program participants better prepared for school than children who were in the control group, but through age 10, fewer program participants (17%) had repeated a grade or received special education services than children who had been assigned to the control group (Weikart, Bond, & McNeil, 1978). By age 14, preschool participants had attained significantly higher achievement scores. By age 19, these students also reported higher literacy scores (Schweinhart, 2000). Long-term outcomes were equally noteworthy. Seventy-one percent of preschool participants graduated from high school or received General Education Development (GED) certification, compared to 54% of students in the control group (Schweinhart, 2000).

Schweinhart et al. (1993) documented that in other key areas, there were fewer arrests (7%) of program participants as compared to 35% of non-program participants, a lower percentage receiving social services (59% of program participants vs. 80% of non-program participants), and higher wages (29% of preschool participants vs. 7% of the control group earned $2,000 or more per month). Belfield et al. (2004) also reported the results of a cost-benefit analysis of the program:

The average cost of the program per participant was $15,827 (in terms of today’s dollar amount), and the average amount of economic benefits were estimated at $88,433 per participant. Benefits included: savings on unneeded special education services, welfare assistance, the criminal justice system process, and higher taxes paid by participants due to higher earnings. (p. 163)
Overall, the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project demonstrated long-term benefits for project participants in areas such as: family stability, higher wages, long-term employment, academic success, and pro-social behaviors (Wilson, 2000).

**Carolina Abecedarian Project**

The Carolina Abecedarian Project occurred in the early 1970s, during a time when some theorists suggested that to be effective early intervention should be offered from birth to age four – the period of most rapid cognitive growth (Campbell, Helms, Sparling, & Ramey, 1998). Guided by this theory, the Abecedarian study was planned and carefully controlled to study if/how much intellectual/academic development could be increased if the intervention began in infancy (Campbell et al., 1998). The project began with one primary goal: to positively impact school readiness and academic success of children from low socioeconomic status, high risk families.

The Abecedarian Project was funded by a federally subsidized grant from the Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Branch of the National Institutes of Health. The State of North Carolina was chosen as the site for the study based on census data that determined 20% of the population had income below the Federal poverty line in 1970. Project designers also recognized that there was a severe shortage of full-time child care for infants; therefore, the study was crafted to address this need while simultaneously conducting the scientific portion of increasing intellectual/academic development through early intervention (Campbell & Ramey, 2007).

Four cohorts of infants (28 in each cohort, for a total of 112) from low-income families entered the Abecedarian study between 1972 and 1977. Half of the children attended the child care program full-time and the other half were placed in control groups
(Ramey & Campbell, 1991). Operating within a Child Development Center on the campus of the University of North Carolina, children attended five days per week for 50 weeks per year. Participants were provided transportation to and from the center and on-site medical care was provided. An instructional curriculum was used that included the developmental areas of language, fine-motor, gross-motor, cognitive, and social-emotional (Campbell et al., 1998).

Before program participants began kindergarten in the public schools, the researchers randomly divided the preschool treatment and control groups into primary school-age treatment and control groups. During this second phase of research, which lasted three years during primary school years, treated families received home visits from a resource teacher who provided specific learning activities for home use (Ramey & Campbell, 1991). Program participants, along with family members, were assessed from infancy. Academic achievement was evaluated using standardized instruments during the first three years. Follow-up intellectual, academic, and socioemotional data were collected four and seven years later (Campbell & Ramey, 2007).

C. Ramey and S. Ramey (2004) noted major outcomes of participation in the Abecedarian Project and grouped them into three broad categories: (1) children’s intelligence and cognition, (2) children’s reading and math achievement in school and early adulthood, and (3) general life adjustment in the adolescent and early adulthood years. When entering public school, children from the intervention group performed at significantly higher levels (Ramey & Campbell, 1991). Children’s IQ scores showed the largest differences during their early preschool years, with differences being somewhat smaller as children grew older. Children who participated in the Abecedarian Project
consistently scored significantly higher on reading and math achievement, and among participants who attended the five preschool years of the program, only 12% were placed in special education compared to 48% of children in the control group (C. Ramey & S. Ramey, 2004). By age 21, a significantly higher number of Abecedarian preschool program participants were enrolled in higher education programs or working in jobs rated at higher skill levels. Additionally, individuals from this group were less likely to have had a child (Ramey & Campbell, 1991).

Perez-Johnson and Maynard (2007) noted that although there were differences between the High/Scope Perry Project and the Abecedarian Project, evaluations of both programs demonstrated that high-quality early childhood programs can significantly reduce readiness gaps. Both programs provided enriching educational programs to low-income children in group settings and featured low student-teacher ratios; attention to cognitive and language skills; and knowledgeable, well-compensated teachers (Temple & Reynolds, 2005). The two programs highlight the possibility of early childhood interventions to provide meaningful change to low-income children by decreasing the chance of students failing as they grow older. The current study considered whether kindergarten teachers perceived Head Start to be a quality early childhood intervention program for urban kindergarten students.

This review of the literature on the history and potential of preschool readiness programs for low-income students has shown the importance of early intervention; however, there is a gap in the literature concerning teacher views on high-quality readiness programs that serve low-income children in an urban district in the southeastern United States. This study is intended to add to the literature by providing this
perspective. The final section of this review of literature will examine literature related to the history of the Head Start readiness program and comments regarding the program’s effectiveness and challenges.

The Head Start Readiness Program

Using data from the ECLS-K, researchers revealed that even though children who attended day care/learning centers scored higher on reading and math tests than children who did not attend, assessment results were even greater for low-income children (Magnuson et al., 2004). Perez-Johnson and Maynard (2007) reported that large numbers of disadvantaged children participate in publicly financed early childhood education. A recent evaluation of one of these publicly funded programs, Head Start, offers critical evidence regarding the extent to which this program can improve overall kindergarten readiness of poor or otherwise at-risk young children.

History of Head Start

Foundational elements of the philosophy and design of Head Start can be found in its historical predecessors. Endeavors to aid the early learning of poor children can be seen in programs of the early 1900s, such as McMillian’s Open-Air Nursery, which served children who lived in the slums of England. In addition to education, Open-Air Nursery focused on children’s health. In Rome, the Casa di Bambini, was founded by Montessori whose mission was to “improve deprived children’s cognitive abilities” (Zigler & Styfo, 2010, p. 4) with curriculum and materials that highlighted spontaneous learning and sensory training. In addition to education, children who attended the Casa di Bambini also received medical care. The Montessori curriculum is being used in a number of Head Start centers today.
The nursery school movement in the U.S. also impacted Head Start’s beginnings. Many early nursery schools were “university based child-research settings with a nursery school component” (Zigler & Styf, 2010, p. 5). The early nursery movement conveyed the worth of preschool for children, but this knowledge was being mainly confined to the well-educated middle and upper-middle class parents whose children attended these university nursery schools. To meet the needs of children from poverty, organizers of Head Start had to modify preschool programs that were being selectively provided to children in early nursery schools.

Officially, Head Start was started at the height of the civil rights movement in the U.S. In 1962, Michael Harrington’s book, *The Other America*, dramatically illustrated the hardships of impoverished Americans who lived in rural, suburban, and city communities. This book drew national attention to the plight of the poor. At the same time, it was said that President John F. Kennedy was deeply troubled by “the low standard of living and lack of educational opportunities he saw while campaigning in the Appalachians in West Virginia” (H. Silver & P. Silver, 1991). President Kennedy developed ideas for programs to improve the plight of citizens of poverty including educational and vocational training. After President Kennedy was assassinated, citizens of poverty gained another influential advocate in Lyndon B. Johnson.

In 1964, the U.S. Council of Economic Advisors reported that most low-income families lived in urban and rural areas. Half of the nation’s 30 million poor were children, and a large percentage of poor families were headed by an individual who had only received an elementary education (Zigler, Styfco, & Gilman, 1993). Looking for solutions to this ongoing problem, President Johnson announced "The War on Poverty"
during his State of the Union speech in January 1964. President Johnson personally appointed Sargent Shriver to lead The War on Poverty program. President Lyndon Johnson was re-elected in November 1964, and together Johnson and Shriver identified civil rights activists and academic leaders to head a program committee (Kagan, 2002).

Directed by Sargent Shriver, President Johnson, and Dr. Robert Cooke, the committee met at the White House in January 1965 (http://www.ilheadstart.org). Other committee members present, including pediatricians, psychologists, and sociologists helped to design a program with the objective to provide assistance to children in overcoming hurdles or interferences caused by poverty. Several names for the project were suggested; “Kiddie Corps” and “Baby Corps” were front runners (some thought the word “corps” would encourage political activism); however, the name Head Start was selected to emphasize the achievement gap (Kagan, 2002).

President Johnson introduced Project Head Start at a Rose Garden press conference in May 1965 (Styfco & Zigler, 2003). The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) housed the Head Start program (Kagan, 2002), and in the summer of 1965 Head Start began as an eight-week program for low-income children who would be starting kindergarten in the fall (Styfco & Zigler, 2003). Approximately 560,000 children attended the first summer program across the U.S., and comprehensive services were provided in addition to the preschool program, such as dental and medical care and mental health services (Kagan, 2003).

Head Start moved to the Office of Child Development in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1969 during the Nixon administration (http://www.ilheadstart.org). In 1977, during the Carter administration,
bilingual/bicultural programs were added to Head Start in 21 states. By 1984, during the Reagan administration, the budget for Head Start grants was well over $1 billion, and more than 9 million children were being served (Styfco & Zigler, 2003). The Clinton administration instituted the first Early Head Start grants, and in the Head Start 1998 reauthorization the program expanded to cover full-day and full-year services. In 2007, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (n.d.) reported that nearly 1 million children attended Head Start programs in the U.S. at a cost of approximately $7,000 per child. Additionally, 12% of program participants included children with disabilities. In program year 2011, 17,301 children were enrolled in Head Start programs in the State of Alabama and the state received over $118 million in federal funding (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).

The Head Start program of today looks much different than the program of 1965. Head Start now administers grants to public and private non-profit and for-profit agencies to promote school readiness for disadvantaged children and families by providing complete social, nutritional, health, and educational services (Head Start, n.d.). Head Start is administered in home day cares, learning centers, and family child care programs, and is located in rural, suburban, and urban communities throughout the U.S. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).

Ramey and Ramey (2004) noted that, “when Head Start began in 1965, its national vision was to improve children’s every day or real-world intelligence prior to entering kindergarten or first grade” (p. 2). The vision withstood the test of time even as the program evolved to meet the growing challenges of the last several decades. The demands that formal education keep pace with new economic conditions as well as calls
for a more stringent academic focus eventually compelled Head Start leaders to defend the effectiveness of the program (Schorr, 2004). Today, new arguments are being raised regarding whether or not Head Start is successful and cost effective.

A number of researchers have found Head Start to be a quality program that produces long-term positive effects on children’s learning. McKey et al. (1995) noted that Head Start students experience many advantages while in the program and immediately after completing it. According to these researchers, program benefits included increased school attendance in later grades and a lower chance that a former Head Start student would be placed in remedial education. Currie and Thomas (1995) showed that by age 6, former Head Start students scored better on reading and vocabulary tests than their peers with no preschool experience. Snow and Paez (2004) established that higher quality Head Start programs generated larger positive outcomes for children than programs of modest quality.

Results are equivocal regarding Head Start as an effective program for ensuring at-risk students can be successful when entering kindergarten. Pigott and Israel (2005) suggested that when comparing former Head Start students who enter kindergarten to other entering kindergarteners, consideration needs to be given to the socioeconomic status of the school population. According to Pigott and Israel (2005), “there is an achievement gap between Head Start children and their kindergarten peers in schools with higher socio-economic status – particularly when examining gaps in the area of reading” (p. 79). The authors noted that Head Start students are frequently behind their kindergarten classmates when classmates come from higher income families.
Despite initial gains during kindergarten entry for Head Start children, Currie and Thomas (1995) noted that these gains seemed to fade over time and disappear by the time students entered third grade. The authors explained that some children attend lower quality schools (i.e., low test scores) and students’ attendance caused the Head Start advantage to fade quickly. Currie and Thomas (2005) questioned the results of various Head Start research studies. The authors reported that evidence in support of Head Start is most often cited from studies of exemplary preschool programs, such as the Carolina Abecedarian Project or the Perry Preschool Project. Currie and Thomas (1995) suggested that Head Start could not possibly show the same type of long-term benefits as the Perry Preschool Project because Perry Preschool had better-trained staff, was funded at higher levels, and involved more intensive interventions than typical Head Start programs. Despite numerous studies that have been conducted on Head Start, questions remain regarding whether participation in a Head Start program affects the readiness of low-income children or produces lasting beneficial effects.

This section reviewed literature regarding the history of the Head Start program and literature that both supports and questions the effectiveness of the program. In reviewing this literature, none of the studies addressed kindergarten teacher views on the readiness of Head Start students. This current study offered research to address teacher perceptions of the readiness of former Head Start students and their preparation for kindergarten.
Summary

This review of literature consisted of three sections. Section one reviewed literature of preschool readiness, including differing views of the definition of “readiness” as well as kindergarten teacher perceptions of how readiness is defined. Researchers have shown that the term “readiness” remains poorly defined. The term is often misinterpreted by teachers, policymakers, business leaders, and community members who hold widely differing positions regarding readiness and related issues. The first section also highlighted a gap in the literature concerning teacher views of readiness, in particular, kindergarten teachers in an urban district in the southeastern United States.

In the second section, literature was presented on the background of readiness programs for low–income children and two pioneering programs that helped to introduce school readiness in the U.S. to low–income children. This section highlighted the importance and major outcomes of participation in high quality preschool programs for low-income students. Researchers showed how enrollment in readiness programs can impact low-income children’s readiness for school and also affect long-term academic and socio-economic success. This section also emphasized the need for research on the impact of low-income readiness programs serving students in an urban district in the southeastern United States.

The chapter concluded with a review of the literature based on the history of the Head Start readiness program, as well as pros and cons of the Head Start Program. Literature noted equivocal results of the Head Start Program and the need for additional research to confirm its effectiveness. This section also illustrated how the current study
will contribute to a greater understanding of the effectiveness of Head Start from the perspective of kindergarten teachers in an urban district in the southeastern United States.

In conducting a study about urban teacher perspectives of the readiness of former Head Start students, it is essential to consider what previous researchers have observed regarding kindergarten readiness, low-income readiness programs, and the background of the Head Start readiness program. For this reason, these three areas provide a strong research foundation for the given multiple case study. Chapter 3 will introduce the methods that were used in conducting this research study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Qualitative methods were used in this research to gain an in-depth understanding regarding kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of former Head Start students’ readiness for school. A multiple case study was conducted to develop a descriptive interpretation of teachers’ experiences when teaching former Head Start students. Semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1988) were used as one of the primary methods for gathering data for this study. There was one central research question that guided the research:

How do kindergarten teachers in an urban school district describe their experiences teaching children who were previously enrolled in a Head Start program?

There were also three sub questions:

1. How have kindergarten teachers beliefs about school readiness been impacted by teaching students who were previously enrolled in a Head Start program?

2. How has the instruction of kindergarten teachers been impacted by having students who were previously enrolled in Head Start in their classes?

3. What attitudes do kindergarten teachers have about teaching children who were previously enrolled in Head Start?
Research Design

Qualitative research methods were used to understand teacher perspectives of the readiness of former Head Start children. Lichtman (2013) stated that qualitative research is, “the systematic investigation of social phenomena and human behavior and interaction” (p. 4). Qualitative research explores people in their “natural settings” rather than in labs or study environments and employs visual and verbal communication to help find answers (Lichtman, 2013). Merriam (2013) noted several characteristics of qualitative research that are present in this study. Characteristics include, “understanding the phenomenon from the participant’s perspectives, not the researcher’s, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, and research involving fieldwork” (pp. 6-7). In-depth interviewing, participant observation, and analysis of multiple data sources were also methods employed in this investigation. A final characteristic of qualitative research that can be found in this study is fundamentally interpretive inquiry. The researcher constantly reflected on her role and the role of the participants in shaping the study.

The design of the study was based on multiple case study methodology. Lichtman (2013) described case study research as, “an in-depth examination of a particular case or several cases” (p. 90). Merriam (1998) defined a case as, “a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 27). As noted in the literature, qualitative methodology works best for researchers who are interested in the process of data collection and analysis, as well as with the description of the population being studied, a treatment, a problem or a program and the population’s experiences with it (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 1994).
Merriam (1998) further defined and characterized case study research as being descriptive, interpretive, or evaluative. This research study was descriptive in nature. As noted by Merriam (1998), a descriptive case study presents a detailed picture of the phenomena being studied. “Descriptive case studies are entirely descriptive and do not attempt to test or build theoretical models” (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). A descriptive multiple case study formats was chosen because the intent of this study was to describe the experiences and perceptions of kindergarten teachers, rather than to evaluate or compare experiences. Merriam (1998) also defined descriptive case studies as frequently serving as “an initial step or database for subsequent comparative research and theory building” (p. 19). It is expected that insight gained from this study will influence Early Childhood practice, research, and policies. The multiple case study methodology was also best suited for this study because the study was bounded by place and time, and the researcher wanted to better understand and detail how kindergarten teachers in an urban district perceived the readiness of former Head Start students.

As I strived to “understand the meaning of events and interactions of ordinary people in particular situations (Bogdan & Biklin, 1998, p. 6), I set aside my experiences to take an objective point of view of the phenomenon being studied. Moustakas (1994) referred to this as “epoche” in which everything is perceived freshly concerning the phenomenon under examination, as if for the first time. In this instance, the phenomenon under study was the experiences and perceptions of kindergarten teachers’ teaching students who were formerly enrolled in a Head Start program.
Philosophical Assumptions

I believe in constructivism as a philosophical foundation for qualitative research that places an emphasis on differing worldviews, multiple realities, and the worlds, views, and actions of individuals being complex. I conducted a constructivist multiple case study, which embodies the interpretive approach to qualitative research. According to Merriam (1998), “understanding the meaning of the process or experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained from an inductive mode of inquiry. Multiple realities are constructed socially by individuals” (p. 4).

Ontologically, I strongly believe that there are many realities and that reality is subjective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I utilized participants’ direct words in quotes and themes to demonstrate various perspectives of how they experienced teaching former Head Start students as well as how they arrived at their views.

Epistemologically, I believe that there is a relationship between the researcher and what is being researched. In this study, I collaborated with participants where they worked in order to understand and become an “insider” into their experiences of teaching former Head Start students. Follow-up interviews were also conducted to ensure data accuracy based on first-hand information from participants.

Axiologically, I believe that in qualitative research, values and biases are present. This was demonstrated in the research process by being “up front”/explicit with participants and by discussing this in my narrative. Every effort was made to ensure that findings reflected the interpretations of the participants; however, I explained and noted my interpretations as well.
Concerning generalizations, I believe that in most cases, generalizations cannot be made without considering time and context. In this study, I produced a contextualized, descriptive analysis of the case based on the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, experiences, etc., of teachers in an urban school district in the southeastern United States.

Regarding causal linkages, I believe that in most cases, there is some cause that precedes or is simultaneous with an effect. Causal linkages are shown in the research process during the coding stage. After collecting data, during coding (Derzin, 1989) and theme development, I identified a central category (concerning the experiences of teachers), and identified any causal linkages or conditions that influenced the central category.

Logically speaking, I believe that logic is inductive and emerging and was shaped as I collected and analyzed data. Since I conducted a multiple case study, I did not conduct research based on a theory that had already been proposed. My goal was to gain insight and interpretation into the experiences and perceptions of urban kindergarten teachers in their context. In short, I assume that the description and analysis that I present offers an interpretive portrayal of participants’ worlds, not an exact picture of them.

Research Site

The research was conducted in an urban school district in the southeastern United States. Based on information from the district website, the city-wide school system consists of 21 elementary schools (K-5), nine elementary/middle schools (K-8), 11 middle schools (6-8), seven high schools (9-12), and one alternative school which conducts classes for students who have committed Class III offenses. The student demographic composition is African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic/Asian. The
school district has been deemed a Title I district, which indicates that over 50% of students in the district receive free or reduced lunch. An urban district in the southeastern United States was chosen as the site because of its proximity to the local Head Start program.

Within the district, there are three different readiness programs operating: Head Start, United Way’s Success by Six, and the state funded universal Pre-K program. Each program has its own unique curriculum, program structure, administration, and professional development. Classes/programs are located in 11 of the elementary school buildings within the district, with several of the buildings hosting two or three classes. In one of the buildings, there were two Pre-K classrooms but different readiness programs, and at one of the schools there were three Pre-K classes, but two different programs.

**Selection of Participants**

Participants for this study included 11 kindergarten teachers with five or more years of teaching experience. Participants were purposefully selected for this study. Specifically, a combination of criterion and maximum variation sampling was used. Initially, criterion sampling was employed. Patton (2002) described this sampling technique as “picking all cases that meet some criterion” (p. 250). Criterion sampling was employed at the onset to ensure that each participant had experience teaching students who had previously been enrolled in a Head Start program (Creswell, 2007). After establishing an initial pool of volunteers, maximum variation sampling was used. Patton (2002) noted that findings from even “a small sample of great diversity” yields “important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having
emerged out of heterogeneity” (p. 172). I purposefully selected teachers with a wide variation in the number of years they had taught kindergarten. By selecting teachers with a variety of years teaching kindergarten, diverse views and multiple perspectives about the readiness of former Head Start students were obtained. The sample included 11 kindergarten teachers whose tenure ranged from seven to 36 years of teaching experience. Participants were assigned pseudonyms during the study to protect their identity. Participant data is summarized in Table 1.
Table 1

Summary of Participant Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Years Teaching Kindergarten</th>
<th>Highest Degree Obtained</th>
<th>School’s Free &amp; Reduced Lunch Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foster</td>
<td>28 Years</td>
<td>16 Years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Diva</td>
<td>22 Years</td>
<td>21 Years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olexa</td>
<td>30 Years</td>
<td>23 Years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gypsy</td>
<td>34 Years</td>
<td>34 Years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>92.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher</td>
<td>20 Years</td>
<td>20 Years</td>
<td>Ed.S.</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oprah</td>
<td>8 Years</td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>Masters (2)</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>10 Years</td>
<td>4 Years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>27 Years</td>
<td>20 Years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sage</td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy</td>
<td>16 Years</td>
<td>16 Years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granny</td>
<td>36 Years</td>
<td>36 Years</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>91.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Recruitment Procedures

Initially, I sought and received approval from the director of curriculum and instruction within the school district and the International Review Board (IRB) (Appendix A). Following research approval, I spoke with the Early Childhood Program Specialist in the school district to determine which elementary schools in the district enrolled a large number of former Head Start students. There are four Head Start programs within the city limits. Based on the location of the Head Start center, students are zoned for one of the elementary schools in the school district. I identified specific schools with which I did not have a direct working relationship. In my position as a system reading coach, I am responsible for curriculum support at 14 of the 35 elementary schools in the district. In order to maintain ethical considerations, I sought participation from teachers in schools that I do not currently serve. After identifying available schools, I spoke with the principals of the schools and provided them with copies of the district level permission letter to conduct research (Appendix B), and also requested permission to recruit kindergarten teachers at their schools. I sent a copy of the recruitment letter (Appendix C) to teachers requesting their participation in the study. After identifying a pool of volunteers, teachers were asked to complete a general demographic questionnaire (Appendix D) which was intended to gather background data and information about teaching experience. In order to gain maximum variation, 11 kindergarten teachers were chosen to participate in the study.
Role of the Researcher

In traditional, quantitative research, it is customary for the researcher to be “nonexistent”, which suggests that participants behave just as they would if the researcher were not present (Creswell, 2007). However, this method omits the changes to the environment that the researcher creates. In qualitative research, these changes are documented and explained. As suggested by Creswell (2007), it is difficult to elicit participant views without interacting with them.

I have been involved in education for 17 years. I was a classroom teacher for 10 years and have been a curriculum support teacher at the district level for the past seven years. During my time in education, I have taught at two different schools within the same school district and primarily in an urban setting. During my first five years within the district, I taught kindergarten at a high poverty school. The school was located in the middle of a housing project and enrolled approximately 550 students. Of the students who attended the school, 99% received free or reduced lunch. All of the students were African American as were most of the teachers and staff. For each of these five years, I had at least one student in my class who had previously attended a Head Start program.

Over the next five years, I taught in a school that was located in a primarily middle-income section of the district. The school was located in a middle-class neighborhood in the city and had a more diverse student and staff population. The school enrolled approximately 400 students, and the student composition included African American, Caucasian, and Asian students. Although I still taught kindergarten, I only taught one student who had attended Head Start during my five years at this school.
Most of the students entering my kindergarten class had attended private preschools or
day care centers, church preschools or day care centers, or stayed home with a parent or
grandparent.

As a former kindergarten teacher who taught former Head Start students in the
same urban school district, I acknowledge that my past experiences may result in certain
biases or preconceptions. However, I set aside my experiences as much as possible to
understand the experiences of the participants. I bracketed my experiences so that
information could be perceived freshly concerning this phenomenon (epoch).
Additionally, I constantly reflected on and reported potential sources of bias throughout
the research process.

Data Collection and Analysis

Types of Data

According to Patton (1990):

qualitative data consist of direct quotations from people about their experiences,
opinions, feelings, and knowledge obtained through interviews; detailed
descriptions of people’s activities, behaviors, actions recorded in observations;
and excerpts, quotations, or entire passages extracted from various types of
documents. (p. 10)

For this multiple case study, three forms of qualitative data were collected: personal
interviews, observations, and a review of curriculum documents (Yin, 1994).

Triangulation is the incorporation of multiple sources of data collection so that
each data source validates the others (Creswell, 2007). Triangulation is essential because
it adds to the validity of case studies by confirming findings through multiple data sources (Creswell, 2007).

**Personal interviews.**

Based on the design of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted as one of the primary sources of data collection. Merriam (1988) indicated that interviews take a variety of forms. Interviews may be focused or predetermined, or they may be more open-ended in nature. Most often, however, interviews are semi-structured and guided by a number of basic questions (Merriam, 1988). Merriam (1998) further noted that personal interviews can minimize miscommunication when other methods of data collection are used. Face-to-face interviewing also allows the researcher to “read” participants’ facial expressions and gestures and clarify what these subtle movements mean to the participant (Yin, 1994). In this current research study, personal interviews allowed the researcher to learn more about the participants’ experiences teaching kindergartners who were former Head Start students.

All interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix E) and began by discussing and signing the informed consent document (Appendix F). The interview process continued with the researcher explaining that the interview was being audio recorded and that notes would be taken by the researcher during the interviews. The interview protocol consisted of 10 open-ended interview questions; however, the researcher also used probing questions to supplement interview questions, clarify responses, and gain a deeper understanding of participants’ experiences teaching. Interview questions focused on understanding teacher perceptions of the definition of
readiness, their experiences teaching former Head Start students, and their perceptions of students’ readiness based on students’ participation in a Head Start program.

Observations.

The second method of data collection used in this research study was observation. In particular, the researcher conducted participant observations during interviews (Yin, 1994). As noted by Patton (2002), observation is used to describe people, settings, events, and the context of what the researcher observed. This form of data collection can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon by allowing the researcher to see interactions that participants may be unaware of or unwilling to address (Patton, 2002). This researcher wanted to learn more about participants’ perceptions of the readiness of former Head Start students. However, the researcher recognized that participants control the amount of information to which the researcher has access; therefore, the researcher observed participants during interviews in their classroom environments. Within this context, the researcher made memos specific to each participant. Memos contained information about the participant’s demeanor, the setting, participants’ reactions to interview questions, and reflections from the researcher on responses as well as the interview process as a whole.

Curriculum documents.

Document review was the third source of data collection used in this study. Merriam (1998) noted that “documents are a reliable source of data concerning a person’s attitudes, beliefs, and view of the world” (p. 116). Documents reflect the participant’s
perspective, which is the primary goal of qualitative research. Merriam (1998) further noted that documents may be written, visual, or physical material.

Documents were collected from participants in the form of lesson plans and daily schedules. Lesson plans were used to determine the types of curriculum teachers implemented in their classrooms. Lesson plans addressed teachers’ beliefs about kindergarten curriculum and what students should be learning in kindergarten. The researcher also used participants’ schedules to examine the amount of time devoted to academic and social content areas and activities. Presumably, participants’ schedules would help the researcher determine teacher attitudes about important learning outcomes.

**Methods of Data Collection**

As previously noted, multiple case study research typically includes all three methods of data collection: observations, interviews, and document analysis (Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) noted:

multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective … By using a combination of observations, interviewing, and document analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to candidate and cross-check findings. (p. 244)

For this study, primary data was collected following Seidman’s (1998) “in-depth” interviewing” model (p. 9), which calls for the researcher to ask open-ended questions and build on participants’ responses to questions. I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with participants (Merriam, 1988) in which I asked a series of open-ended questions. Questions were designed to understand the participants’ thoughts and
perceptions related to children’s school readiness, teachers’ philosophical beliefs about
the Head Start program, and teachers’ perceptions regarding the readiness of children
who had previously attended a local Head Start program. After gaining approval of the
interview protocol questions (Appendix E) from the dissertation committee members and
the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), I arranged to conduct semi-structured
interviews with participants at their convenience. Interviews occurred after school hours
in each participant’s classroom. Participants were provided a copy of the semi-structured
interview protocol prior to their scheduled interviews. Interviews were all audio-taped
and lasted approximately one-and-a-half hours.

Following the initial interview, additional interviews were conducted with five
of the participants to request additional information and ensure that I thoroughly allowed
participants to recount the specifics of their experiences and allowed them to reflect on
the meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 1998). All of the participants were provided
a copy of their specific interview transcript via email and they were encouraged to clarify
and/or elaborate on responses.

Observations were conducted during face-to-face interviews with the participants.
During the interviews, I was able to thoroughly enter the participants’ world by observing
their classroom environments and teaching context. I examined elements in the
classroom setting such as room arrangement, bulletin boards, displayed student work, and
activities that were in learning centers. Through careful observation, I was also able to
gain supplementary information from participants, such as voice inflection, facial
expressions, shifts in posture, etc., during the interview process.
Participants were also asked to provide copies of lesson plans and classroom schedules. Lesson plans from the beginning of the school year as well as from various times during the school year were collected. All participants provided copies of at least two different weekly plans, and all participants provided copies of their daily classroom schedule.

**Data Analysis**

Merriam (1998) noted that a case study is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit” (p. 193). Communicating a thorough understanding of the case is the predominant factor in analyzing data (Stake, 1995). In multiple case studies, collecting and analyzing data from multiple cases is the goal. Merriam (1998) noted that a multiple case study involves two stages of analysis – analysis of one case (within case analysis) and analysis across cases (cross-case analysis). For within-case analysis, each case is analyzed as a complete case (Merriam, 1998). Once each case is analyzed, cross-case analysis can begin. The researcher attempted “to build a general explanation that fits each of the individual cases, even though the cases will vary in their details” (Yin, 1994, p. 172).

To begin the process of data analysis, the researcher followed steps as outlined by Merriam (1998) and Yin (1994). The first step was to organize the multiple sources of data. The researcher organized all of the interviews, observations, and documents for each participant. Second, the researcher transcribed interviews verbatim and recorded notes of researcher reflections from the interviews. Third, the researcher made margin notations while reading through the transcribed data. Fourth, initial codes (bracketing) were developed from the data that described the case and participants’ context (Derzin,
Patterns were uncovered from codes and emergent themes that reflected participants’ experiences teaching and their perceptions of former Head Start students. Emergent themes and quotes from participants were used to create thick, rich description of the case (Geertz, 1983). Finally, the steps in the analysis process were repeated with each case. A final list of six themes emerged across all 11 cases.

Once individual case analysis was completed, a thematic analysis across cases was conducted. The researcher attempted to see processes and results that appeared across cases to demonstrate how cases were bound by their shared environment. Cross case analysis helped to develop increasingly detailed descriptions and stronger evidence.

**Verification Procedures**

Credibility refers to the testing of the researcher’s findings and interpretations of data drawn from various sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and reliability refers to the ability of a measure to produce consistent results. Validity attests that a construct actually measures what it is being used to measure. In conducting this study, the researcher endeavored to achieve consistency by coding and analyzing data in clear and understandable ways, thereby allowing consistency across cases.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Creswell (2007) described multiple steps that qualitative researchers can take to ensure the trustworthiness of results. The five methods that were used were triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, rich and thick descriptions, and clarification of researcher bias.

In triangulation, researchers use “multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm emerging findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). Using data
from multiple sources helps verify theme or perspective. In this study, the researcher used data from semi-structured interviews, observations, lesson plans, and schedules.

Member checking involved sharing all interview transcripts with research participants after their interviews. Lincoln and Guba (1985) considered member checking to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). Member checking allows participants to review data, interpretations, and conclusions and evaluate the factual and accuracy of accounts to strengthen credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2007). The researcher allowed all participants to review their own interview transcript to confirm that what was recorded and transcribed during their interview was accurate. This action provided participants the opportunity to make corrections, clarifications, or elaborations to information they considered important or incorrect. The researcher also allowed participants the opportunity to view rough drafts of preliminary themes and descriptions. With this step, the researcher was able to gain participants’ views of the written analysis and the opportunity to add additional information if needed.

Peer debriefing, helped clarify research and biases from the researcher and provided a more objective prospective from a third group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2007) noted that peer review or debriefing provides an outside check of the research process. The peer debriefer “keeps the researcher honest and asks hard questions about methods, meanings and interpretations” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 251). This step was achieved by conferring with the dissertation committee regarding research methods and future steps. The researcher stayed in constant contact with committee members and submitted preliminary findings for their monthly review through in-person conferences, email, and phone conversations.
Rich and thick descriptions (Geertz, 1983) provided details in terms of the participants and setting of the study. Rich and thick description was used through a detailed description of participants and the context of the study along with a significant use of participant quotations to provide readers with sufficient information to make appropriate judgments regarding the transferability of the results.

A fifth validation strategy, clarifying researcher bias, was also used. Merriam (1988) noted that defining researcher bias from the beginning of the study is imperative for the reader to recognize the researcher’s point of view and any biases or beliefs that may affect the research. The researcher provided commentary on her experiences with teaching Head Start students and how these experiences have shaped her approach to the study. Throughout the study, the researcher continually questioned herself and reflected on any biases and assumptions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that providing an audit trail is a method to enhance procedural credibility. To do this, all raw data was retained by the researcher, including audio tapes of interviews, field notes, transcriptions, permission letters, informed consent forms, and personal correspondence. These records were also kept for the dual purposes of reliability and replication.

**Ethical Considerations**

The researcher submitted an expedited application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to secure approval before conducting research for this study (Appendix A). In addition to the IRB approval, the researcher secured permission from the director of curriculum and instruction to conduct research in the school district (Appendix B).
Every effort was made to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the research site and participants involved in this research study. Participants were familiarized with the purpose of this multiple case study in the recruitment letter (Appendix C) and provided a copy of the interview protocol (Appendix E). Participants were also made aware of the methods for data collection and storage. The researcher thoroughly explained participants’ rights before beginning any research, and all participants were required to sign an Informed Consent form (Appendix F). Participants were able to choose a pseudonym to protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

All data pertaining to the study were placed in a locked metal file cabinet that was kept in the home of the researcher. No one but the researcher was able to gain access to the file cabinet. All participants were informed of this protective measure before the interviews were conducted and again when participants signed the informed consent form. Stored materials included: demographic information of participants, tapes of interviews, transcriptions of interviews, and documents that were analyzed for the study. The researcher also made participants aware of her intent to seek publication of the multiple case study findings once the research study was completed. Participants and the school district were assured that publication would not compromise individual or district identity.

**Summary**

This chapter provided information on the research methods that were used. In this multiple case study, the researcher utilized in-depth descriptions of participants’ experiences and perceptions of former Head Start students. The goal was not to know what is general of many, but to understand the particular, in depth (Merriam, 1988).
Chapter 3 discussed a definition of qualitative research, information on the multiple case study methodology, and a description of how it was used in this study. The researcher also provided information on the research site, the purposefully chosen research sample, data collection, data analysis, and verification. The researcher also discussed ethical considerations that included information on obtaining appropriate permissions from IRB, school district, and study participants.

The purpose of this study was to understand urban kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of former Head Start students’ readiness for school. Participants in the study included 11 kindergarten teachers in an urban school district who have taught students who have attended a Head Start program. A series of open ended-questions were asked to elicit information regarding teachers’ thoughts and beliefs related to former Head Start students and their readiness for school. In Chapter 4, a detailed description of findings will be presented.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand urban kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of former Head Start students’ readiness for school. Participants in the study included 11 kindergarten teachers in an urban school district. Participants taught students who had previously attended a Head Start program. A series of open ended-questions were asked to elicit information regarding teachers’ thoughts and beliefs related to former Head Start students and their readiness for school. This chapter will present the findings of analysis of participant interviews, observations, and curriculum documents.

Themes

During a thorough analysis of the data, four themes and 10 subthemes were identified. The themes were: (a) Kindergarten readiness issues, (b) Head Start program, (c) Instructional impact, and (d) Value of Head Start. A summary of themes and subthemes can be found in Table 2.
Table 2

Summary of Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Readiness Issues</td>
<td>Preschool is Crucial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic/Social Skills are Necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changing Kindergarten Requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start Program</td>
<td>Curriculum and Structure</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Quality of Specific HS Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructional Impact</td>
<td>Methods and Procedures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Planning</td>
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<td>Value of Head Start</td>
<td>Worthwhile Program</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Programs are Better</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Better Than Nothing</td>
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</tbody>
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**Theme 1: Kindergarten readiness.**

Issues related to kindergarten readiness were the most frequently occurring theme that emerged from the interviews, observations, and collected lesson plans. Nearly all participants stressed how their views on school readiness have evolved since they have been teaching kindergarten. Several subthemes emerged within the readiness category: (a) preschool is crucial, (b) academic as well as social skills are necessary, and (c) changing kindergarten requirements.

**Preschool is crucial.** When asked to define the term “readiness” many of the teachers stated that preschool experiences are crucial to help children become “ready” for kindergarten. Oprah stated:
… having preschool experiences are of the upmost importance, because most of the time if you have a child that has not been in any structured program, the little beginning of school tasks, just the tedious acts that you have to go through, they can’t handle it… with the crying and they just can’t handle it.

Pat also mentioned the importance of preschool and said, “preschool is very important because that will determine his transition into kindergarten. If they haven’t had any, then it makes the transition very difficult.”

When asked her definition of readiness, Sage also described her view on the necessity of preschool, “the ‘prerequisites’ for academics and the readiness skills that they receive in a preschool setting will help them be successful in an academic environment; things like their attention span, gross motor skills, and fine motor skills.”

Tracy noted:

if the kids have had an experience like a Pre-K or some type of daycare where they taught them, it makes it so much easier for them to come in and learn to get acclimated. They already know how to get a routine going and once they come in and know that, we have a learning process.

Granny stated how having preschool experiences help set a foundation for learning:

They need to come with cooperation and they need to be able to work in groups with other children. They need to come with that because some children come and they have been at home and haven’t been in a preschool program and never interacted, so if they bring me those things we can work through the others.

Olexa also expressed:
Nowadays, a preschool program of any kind is beneficial because it makes it easier for them to transition to a school setting. Students that come in from preschool know that the teacher is there to help them and to make sure they are comfortable and taken care of.

*Academic and social skills are necessary.* In describing specific characteristics that indicated readiness for school, even though teachers mentioned the need for some knowledge of academic content, having social skills was deemed more important. Reading Diva identified the non-academic skills that she felt were mandatory for school readiness:

- Can follow at least two simple directions (please sit down, please be quiet), can hold a pencil, they don’t necessarily have to write, I would like them to write, but if they can at least hold it. Pick up a pair of scissors and cut, things like that. If they can just sit and listen and be quiet because even if they don’t know it coming in, if they’re quiet, they’re going to absorb it.

Olexa also mentioned general knowledge skills that symbolized readiness:

- being able to hold a pencil, recognize their name, speak in short but complete sentences, know how old they are, able to interact with other students, do all bathroom skills independently, can listen to a story that’s being read or told. Recognizing letters, count to 10 and recognize shapes are wonderful, but at the very beginning of the year, I think the most important ones are to be able to follow directions and recognize and write their names.
Gypsy communicated the importance of social skills for school readiness:

Well since almost everything we do in kindergarten involves socialization, the exposure to other children is extremely important whether or not they get any academics or not. If they know how to get along with the people around them I think it’s very important. It helps if they can have some knowledge of letters and numbers, but I think socialization in community is probably the most important readiness skill.

Social skills and working in groups were also specifically mentioned by Oprah:

I think that students should be socially ready because school is so collaborative now, they work in groups, they’re supposed to sit in groups, so I think that they should be able to function in a group setting, that’s small group and whole group. As an educator, if a child is socially equipped and if they can function in groups, even if you’re a blank slate, I can teach you.

Granny discussed the importance of social skills in readiness for school:

I think the ability to cooperate is most important because that’s going to be key to everything they do. If they can cooperate with the teacher or with other students, then all of the others will kind of fall in, so just getting them to cooperate.

Kindergarten Teacher described her ideas of a child being ready for kindergarten:

Children should be cognitively, socially, physically, and emotionally ready to receive learning or instruction when they enter school. I think students are more likely to have an easier time in kindergarten if they know what to expect, if they are already used to listening and following directions and routines and rules and
they know how to get along with others and they know the basics about letters, numbers, and language.

**Changing kindergarten requirements.** The evolving requirements of kindergarten standards and curriculum were noted by many teachers as directly impacting readiness for school. Reading Diva stated:

Well, with the curriculums that we’re having nowadays and what they’re trying to take away and make the children do, and all the demands that principals are getting put on and we’re getting put on, it’s very important that they come knowing much more than they used to.

Reading Teacher noted:

Kindergarten has changed. The academics are so much the focus. It’s taken a lot of the fun out, even though you can do a lot of the singing and the finger plays and things, but we have to really get to those basics. We’re looking at those standards and trying to make sure we’ve covered everything within the school year, so we have to hit the ground running.”

Granny also discussed how the changing kindergarten standards are affecting school readiness:

Considering what’s expected of them now, because what’s expected has changed over the years, so when they come to school, they need to have been exposed to reading and other skills. With the national push toward Common Core Standards, it’s going to be extremely important that they’ve had some formal schooling or they would have to have had parents who really worked with them.
Foster also expressed her views and noted how she and her colleagues make sure incoming kindergartners have readiness skills:

Well, times have changed so drastically. What used to be is not anymore. With all that the kids are required to know as they go into first grade, now, they really have to know some ABCs and 123s when they get to school; those things are necessary now. We hold our orientation for incoming kindergartners before school is out (the preceding year). The children get to see what the school is like but more importantly, we give them assignments to complete over the summer. We take up money for supplies and we purchase everything so we don’t have to collect supplies on the first day of school. We start instruction on day one.

There were also curriculum documents that supported participants’ views regarding the increasing academic focus in kindergarten. On schedules collected from participants, at least one-and-a-half to two hour blocks of time were allotted for Reading/Literacy-scripted instruction, and one-a-half hours were allotted for math instruction. On eight of the 11 schedules, an additional intervention time was also listed for individualized and small group instruction to ensure students did not fall behind. On seven of the 11 schedules, Science and Social Studies were integrated during literacy, and on four of the 11 schedules, Science and Social Studies was allotted 25 – 30 minutes daily or every other day. Extracurricular subjects such as Music, Art, and Library occurred once per week. Recess was not listed on any schedules or lesson plans, and naptime was only listed on one. When asked about scheduling a naptime or rest, Kindergarten Teacher noted, “We don’t have time, if we’re going to get all of those
things that we need to get in. Sometimes they may get about 15 minutes rest here or there but we just don’t have the time”.

Tracy also mentioned scheduling and the increased kindergarten demands:

We may try to throw in our Science and Social Studies right before we do some extracurricular activities but we don’t have time for a lot of things like nap or anything like that. It’s all work and no play, which kind of makes it sad sometimes because they kind of need that.

**Theme 2: Head Start program.**

During the study, participants shared specific beliefs and experiences they related to the Head Start program. There were two subthemes that emerged during data analysis: (a) curriculum and structure and (b) quality of specific Head Start center.

**Curriculum and structure.** Participants expressed mixed feelings about the Head Start curriculum and structure. Concerns about what the specific Head Start curriculum entailed and how it aligned with the kindergarten curriculum in addition to a lack of program flexibility was expressed by four of the participants. Olexa stated:

I don’t know what their curriculum is, I don’t know what their routines and schedules are, what they think they need to teach, but I think they are making a concerted effort now to make contact with kindergarten teachers, to review how they (former HS students) have been performing in the kindergarten classroom setting, which is a new trend and I think it’s an excellent trend, because that’s what they need to do to improve their program.

Oprah also mentioned improving the Head Start curriculum: “… I think it’s just a thought of maybe them needing to expand their curriculum or training for the teachers.”
Sage also noted that in her experience, the way the Head Start program is structured may make a difference:

I’ve found that it depends on when they were placed in Head Start. The way the program is structured, if you have some that started in I guess, the Pre-K3 program, they tend to have much more success rate than those that just went for one year.

Tracy identified program and curriculum structure and being too rigid as concerns:

The HeadStart teachers that we have in our school, most of their learning is so structured and by the book that it kind of makes it like they’re in that little small bubble. They seem to be stuck, we have to do this at 8:30, and do this at 9:00 and take them outside at 10:00.

Conversely, three participants said the structure children receive while in the Head Start program is very beneficial. Reading Diva said:

Head Start gives some structure, because when I speak to the other parents of the ones that weren’t going to Head Start, they say oh, all they did was play. They didn’t have them do anything structured, no pencil work, no anything.

Foster also mentioned the structure of the Head Start program being beneficial:

Church programs are sometimes not as structured as what you might find in Head Start. I think kids from Head Start have an advantage because that program is so structured, it’s so closely related to what we’re actually doing in the public school setting.
With over 36 years of teaching, Granny noted the change in Head Start’s curriculum and program structure:

The beginning experiences were different from what I am experiencing now because Head Start’s curriculum has changed. In the beginning it was more socialization and play and things of that nature and the focus was not as much on those skills that they needed for academics. So socially they came in fine but then we had to work a little harder at academics, but now they are a more structured program.

**Quality of specific Head Start centers.** When describing the Head Start program, several teachers mentioned noticing a difference in the readiness of former Head Start students depending on which Head Start center they had attended. Foster noted, “Some of them (students) are a lot further along than others, but I’m sure it probably comes from what community they came from or which Head Start center they came from or who the teachers were even.”

Olexa also mentioned center quality, “I’ve had a variety of experiences, and I really believe it depends on the Head Start program they’re coming from.”

Gypsy noted her experiences teaching children from different centers:

They (students) kind of go from one extreme to the other. I have those that are very academically accomplished but still have issues with socialization, and then I have those who are very social who don’t have a lot of experience with academics. I think it probably depends on what particular Head Start center they attend and what the focus is.

Oprah also shared her views:
It depends on where they came from. Some of them have the bare minimum skills, most have the bare minimum skills. But some of my Head Start kids were just like the ones who had never been anywhere. I just think that it just depends on which Head Start school they go to.

Pat also specifically mentioned noticing a difference in centers, “It really just depends on the Head Start, you have some (students) that come more ready, depending on the Head Start and who the director is over there, so it just depends on location.”

Olivia described her experiences from one specific Head Start center, “The students that I receive from the Miracle Head Start center are always on top of things. Hats off to the teachers over there because one particular year I had eight students from there and my class was awesome.”

**Theme 3: Instructional impact.**

The theme of instructional impact emerged as participants discussed their experiences teaching former Head Start students. There were two subthemes: (a) methods and procedures and (b) planning.

**Methods and procedures.** Five teachers noted adjustments they had made to their instructional methods and procedures as a result of having former Head Start students in their classes. Foster stated, “Head Start students come in knowing more than children who haven’t had previous experiences so I have to adjust my grouping and some of my content. So I adjust my content so I’m moving them on further.”

Gypsy also noted her change in instructional methods, “Children who have been to Head Start are ready to jump right in and start moving. They’re anxious, they push you. I find myself teaching them more.”
Pat also mentioned adjusting her instruction:

Usually it takes almost the entire first semester for me to teach children how to master using scissors, pencils, crayons and the materials that we use. We are slowing moving into academics as we learn these things. Being in Head Start, they have already been exposed to those things, they’ve mastered those things so I can jump right into the academic part of it. It has allowed me to take the kids further. It allows me to be able to push them further and get them further in the year to better prepare them for first grade.

Olivia talked about instructional changes that she had made:

Instead of starting at the beginning teaching little things like rules or whatever, it’s almost like you’re just continuing what they had and you go on. You almost have to put the Head Start children on hold while you teach the kids who have never had it.

Kindergarten Teacher described how teaching Head Start students had impacted her instruction:

Having Head Start students in my class has greatly impacted the way I approach students on an individual level. Depending on which center they have come from, some children are more advanced in their skills and will need more challenging academics, so I adjust my instruction accordingly. Others will need more practice, so I adjust for their needs as well.

**Instructional planning.** Planning was the second subtheme that emerged within the framework of instructional impact. Several teachers stated that having former Head
Start students in their classes had affected the way they prepared for lessons and prepared for the entire school year.

Sage noted how she approached planning before school begins when she has Head Start students:

When we get those registration packets, I do look at where my students are coming from. When I see that I will have former Head Start students in the class, I can pretty much plan, you know, schedule the year for them. They come to me knowing so much, so I can go right into the curriculum with them. I don’t have to plan basic lessons for them, you know, lessons with preschool skills.

Olivia also talked about she plans for instruction with Head Start students:

I have to really think about and plan for them. Some of them are really high, so I have to constantly plan more challenging content for them. I have to give them challenging work. And they move on, and you can see how advanced they’re moving on, especially to become better readers. I have to stay on top of them. It’s awesome.

Granny related how she plans for instructional grouping because of having former Head Start students:

I have had to change the way I plan for groups and remediation. I have more remediation with students who have not been to Head Start, so I have to really plan what the instruction in groups will be. So few Head Start students need remediation so I have to really plan and think about what they will do in groups, as well as what they will be doing independently while I’m working with those other groups who need remediation.
Theme 4: Value of Head Start.

As participants described their experiences working with former Head Start students, the value of the Head Start program developed as a theme. Participants shared their views about how Head Start contributes to the readiness of children. Three distinct subthemes emerged during data analysis: (a) Head Start is a worthwhile program, (b) other readiness programs are better, and (c) Head Start is better than nothing.

Head Start is a worthwhile program. Three participants shared that Head Start adequately prepared students for kindergarten and said that thought Head Start was a valuable program. Kindergarten Teacher stated:

I have had very positive experiences teaching former Head Start children. They come to school more prepared and ready to move on to the next level of skills. It’s valuable, just wonderful. I’m so glad my students have access to the program.

Olivia also noted:

I’m excited when I have Head Start kids in my class. They’re excited about learning when they come in. It’s such an important program that I would even go as far as to say I think there should be a Head Start program in every school.

Foster expressed her thoughts about Head Start through a personal story:

My granddaughter went to Head Start so I got the chance to see from both sides of the spectrum and I was really impressed. Her mom was a single mom and she was not able to do a lot with her prior to her going to Head Start. Everything she got really came from Head Start and when she got ready for kindergarten she was ready. I was so impressed with the Head Start program and just seeing how it developed her. She is an A/B student all the way and I think it’s a large part of
getting that good head start from that program. She’s in third grade now and doing fine.

**Other programs are better.** When describing the Head Start program’s value, four teachers compared the Head Start program to other readiness programs from which they have received students. Reading Diva specifically spoke about the universal Pre-K program that is also in her building:

> I don’t know about the Head Start program, but our Pre-K program teaches writing, the kids use the computer, they have a curriculum that is aligned to ours, so I know that they get great preparation for kindergarten. I think they’re a little better.”

Olexa also specifically discussed the state-run universal Pre-K program:

> When I went into one of the other Pre-K classes I was totally impressed. They were very good. They were writing and they were making sure they were holding the pencil correctly and they were teaching them correct formation of letters in that little set time that I was there, and I was unannounced, they didn’t know that I was coming. They had other activities going on, a lot of play centers, but the ones who were at the centers were doing a fantastic job. And I was going, that’s what they need to be learning. I was absolutely impressed with their program and those are the kinds of things Head Start needs to be doing.

Gypsy also expressed her thoughts about the state sponsored Pre-K classroom in her building:

> The kids that came from the state program have really blossomed this year and have moved very rapidly. I think probably the reason is that some of the
programs they use in Pre-K are aligned with the programs that we use in kindergarten. Those Pre-K teachers really work closely with us. When we get our baseline test data and Thinklink data that shows where our weak points are in kindergarten we share that with them and they are able to work on some of those skills. We can’t do that with Head Start teachers so having that flexibility with the Pre-K teachers is a real plus.

Tracy also shared her experiences working with the state Pre-K program and Head Start:

Just personally speaking the kids that are coming from our Pre-K are more ready because they have a certified teacher. They know a bigger growth of knowledge because the certified teacher is better able to work collaboratively with the kindergarten teachers. For example, last year in February the Pre-K teacher had a student who was far beyond where the other kids were, so we worked together to let her start coming to my class. When I did my reading block she came to my class for that hour and a half. JCCEO [Head Start] has their own set curriculum and ways they do things so I’m sure I couldn’t pull anybody from their program. It’s just better.

**Better than nothing.** In describing their views of the Head Start program, three teachers mentioned that although Head Start needs to undergo some changes, it is a good option for the students for whom it was designed. Olexa stated:

It seems to me that most of the kids I have had from Head Start have been the, I guess, the most poor students and financially the families are struggling or very poor and I can tell that there’s not a lot of family structure for education in that home setting so they send them to Head Start. So the Head Start program is like
having to take them from the womb to that point. And so they’ve gotten them farther along than if they had come straight to the room. Children who come from other preschool programs generally tend to be more advanced than Head Start students; however, I don’t know if that’s an economic issue or a home issue more than a program issue. I am glad the Head Start program is there for them because I think if they learn anything at all, that’s more than they learn staying at home.

Oprah also described Head Start’s value for the poor, “I think that Head Start is a good program for people who cannot afford to pay daycare. I’d rather them have an option than no option.”

Finally, Granny shared her thoughts on the value of Head Start:

Head Start has made a tremendous bridge in those students that are socioeconomically deprived, so I think that we need to make sure that we work harder to find some money. It looks at the whole family and teaches families how to be involved. It addresses health issues and it’s beneficial and I don’t think we need to cut it out.

Summary

Chapter 4 included an analysis of data that were collected from personal interviews, observations, and teacher lesson plans and schedules. The themes and subthemes that emerged through data analysis were identified. Participant perceptions and reflections of their experiences teaching former Head Start students were detailed
using thick and rich description. Direct quotations from study participants were used to support the findings.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the research findings, outlines implications of the study, and proposes recommendations for further research. Previous chapters discussed in detail background information of the Head Start readiness program, outlined literature related to the study, highlighted data collection methods that were used in conducting the study, and examined the data that were collected.

Previous studies of the Head Start readiness program presented ambiguous results of the program regarding the transition to kindergarten for low income students (Bickel & Spatig, 1999; Haskins & Sawhill, 2003; Pigott & Israel, 2005; Zigler & Styfco, 2004). Despite extensive research, prior studies have been performed by analyzing standardized test data, report cards, and program observations. The purpose of this multiple case study was to contribute to the literature through inquiry into urban kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of former Head Start students and students’ readiness for school. Participants for this study included 11 kindergarten teachers in an urban school district in the southeastern United States who had taught former Head Start students. Data collected included interviews, observations, and curriculum documents.

The central research question that guided this study was: How do kindergarten teachers in an urban school district describe their experiences teaching children who were previously enrolled in a Head Start program? The sub questions were:

(1) How have kindergarten teachers’ beliefs about school readiness been
impacted by teaching students who were previously enrolled in a Head Start program?

(2) How has the instruction of kindergarten teachers been impacted by having students who were previously enrolled in Head Start in their classes.

(3) What attitudes do kindergarten teachers have about teaching children who were previously enrolled in Head Start?

**Major Findings**

Through cross case analysis, four themes were identified as emergent: (1) Kindergarten Readiness Issues, (2) Head Start Program, (3) Instructional Impact, and (4) Value of Head Start. Analysis of data yielded information related to the topics of academic content, social issues, instructional impact, and program development. The findings from this study strongly suggested that teachers believe clearly outlined beliefs, goals, and expectations aid in the understanding of readiness issues; alignment between programs is a critical component in school readiness; and relationship development between schools, preschools, and families help facilitate a smooth transition for children. Additionally, ongoing reflection and updates of instructional practices and program curriculum in relation to the developmental needs of children encourages and promotes students who are “ready” for school.

**Answering Research Questions**

The central research question that guided this study was: How do kindergarten teachers in an urban school district describe their experiences teaching children who were previously enrolled in a Head Start program? Answers to this question were derived
from three of the four themes: Head Start Program, Instructional Impact, and Value of the Head Start Program.

In sharing accounts of teaching former Head Start students, participants noted that experiences were varied depending on the specific Head Start center that students attended. Factors such as teacher quality, professional development, program structure, learning activities, and materials were identified by participants as potential problems that needed to be corrected in the local Head Start centers. Several participants discussed their lack knowledge of Head Start structure and programs – even where centers are located. These findings correspond with research by Snow and Paez (2004) who noted that higher quality Head Start programs generated more positive outcomes than programs of modest quality. However, the researcher of this current study found it interesting that even though all of the local Head Start centers had received national accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), as well as accreditation from the state licensing agency, program quality was still doubted by the teachers. This disconnect indicated the need for clearly specified program beliefs, goals, and outcomes by local Head Start program. Additionally, clearly outlined and detailed program beliefs and understandings from the local school district of readiness issues, such as definitions of readiness and expectations might minimize uncertainty. Further, activities such as site cross visitations – kindergarten teachers spend a day in a Head Start classroom and Head Start teachers go into kindergarten classrooms for a day - would help clarify understandings on both sides.

Data from this study also showed that experiences teaching former Head Start students differed among participants based on the socioeconomic status of the school site.
in which they taught. All of the participants who taught in schools with 80% or more of
the student population receiving free or reduced lunch (seven of the 11 participants)
reported positive experiences teaching former Head Start students. The remaining four
participants who taught in schools with 54% - 77% free and reduced lunch students most
often stated that other readiness programs were better or that Head Start was better than
students having nothing at all. Findings suggested that Head Start is most beneficial to
students who are from extremely low-socioeconomic status families. Consonant with
research by Pigott and Israel (2005), participants noted that when students are entering
kindergarten classes and schools in which most or all of the students are from low-
income families, Head Start does give those students an advantage; however, low-income
Head Start students who transition into middle income level schools do not necessarily
have an advantage and in many cases are considered slightly below grade level.

There were contrasting responses to sub question 2, “How has the instruction of
kindergarten teachers been impacted by having students who were previously enrolled in
Head Start?” Approximately half of the teachers indicated either some instructional
impact of teaching former Head Start students (six teachers) or no impact on instruction
at all (five teachers). Further, when stating the value of the Head Start program, data
varied with both positive and negative responses. These mixed results are consistent with
previous research by Currie and Thomas (2005) that showed uncertainty regarding
whether or not Head Start is an effective program for ensuring the readiness of at-risk
students. According to Currie and Thomas, evidence that is often cited in support of
Head Start actually comes from studies of well-funded preschool programs, such as the
Perry Preschool Project or Abecedarian Project. This researcher joins Currie and Thomas
in recommending further research on the effects of the Head Start program and local Head Start programs in particular. Findings for sub-question: (1) How have kindergarten teachers beliefs about school readiness been impacted by teaching student who were previously enrolled in a Head Start Program?” were found in the theme of kindergarten readiness issues. The majority of participants noted that teaching former Head Start children (or children from any specific readiness program) did not have an effect on their beliefs about readiness as much as the increase in kindergarten curriculum and standards. This perceived increase led participants to express beliefs that children must come to school with social and academic skills in order to be considered “ready”. These findings support the work of Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) who established that social skills are frequently more important than academic skills. However, findings contradicted the research of Wright et al. (2000) in which the authors noted that teachers in urban districts more often defined readiness in terms of knowledge of academic concepts and placed less importance on social skills. For the majority of participants in this study, readiness was defined in terms of a child being able to sit quietly and listen. One participant even stated, “If they can just sit there and listen and be quiet, even if they don’t know it, if they’re quiet they’re going to absorb it.”

In answering sub-question 3, “What attitudes do kindergarten teachers have about teaching children who were previously enrolled in Head Start?”, the participants again indicated diverse thoughts about teaching former Head Start students. Participants’ attitudes ranged from being excited to have former Head Start students in their class to being indifferent. They attributed this indifference to their feeling that Head Start
students were no more “ready” for school than students who had not attended any type of preschool program.

In sharing beliefs of school readiness, one notable point emerged from the research. Every participant expressed a strong belief in the necessity for some type of preschool experience before children come to kindergarten. All participants explicitly stated that they did not consider children to be “ready” for kindergarten if they (children) had not attended some type of preschool, Pre-K, or daycare. For children who came to kindergarten from home with a caregiver and had exposure to academic content, teachers still deemed these children as at a disadvantage because they had not been around other children and had not participated in group activities. As one participant explained, “a child coming straight from the house is almost like a newborn baby. They cry about everything and can’t handle anything.” This seemed to indicate that participants believed a high quality preschool program was the most influential factor that affected school readiness. However, absent a high quality program, some type of preschool, any kind of preschool – regardless of the quality – was better than nothing at all.

**Implications**

Research findings from this study might be useful for early childhood educators, Head Start program administrators, and local school administrators when making decisions about preschool programs and readiness issues. While study findings are not generalizable, the information may be transferable to other similar settings or to the aforementioned educators.
Implications for Early Childhood Educators

For early childhood educators, findings from this study highlight the importance of continued professional development and using current research, along with knowledge from everyday practice, to help inform beliefs and instructional methods. Data from this study revealed several disconnects or inconsistencies between participants’ beliefs, practices, and current early childhood research. Thoroughly understanding how children grow, develop, and learn and becoming intimately familiar with best practices that support children’s development in appropriate ways, may help early childhood teachers prepare children for school as children develop a love for learning. It seems imperative for early educators to endeavor to do what the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) challenges teachers to do: find our voice and actively engage in a dialogue with administration, the community, and parents to help deepen their understanding of early learning and create meaningful connections between what has historically been two separate education models; early childhood education and K-12 education (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2011).

Implications for Head Start Program Administrators

Insights from this study may provide valuable information for Head Start program administrators. Most apparent was the need for Head Start programs to provide clearly specified program goals, methods, and outcomes to parents, the community, and the school district in which the program resides. Hosting open house sessions, developing joint programs with the local school district, and providing ongoing professional development may help dispel myths, provide clarity, and aid in a smooth transition between educational programs.
Implications for Local School Administrators

Local school administrators may gain the greatest insights from this research study. This study outlined a pressing need for the local school district to develop an early childhood agenda and the need to promote that agenda to the community. Specific actions might include the following: clearly specifying and defining a district definition of school readiness and communicating that definition to readiness programs (daycares, etc.), Colleges/Universities, and parents. More importantly, providing professional development for the district’s early childhood educators is vital. The study has also highlighted the importance of increasing community collaboration and partnerships. Working with education stakeholders to help align curriculum, increase funding for early education, and expand access will help ensure ready schools as well as ready students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should address the areas of program alignment, relationship building, and readiness factors. The researcher recommendations are as follows:

1. Provide further study on how the alignment of PreK-3 programs impact the readiness of low–income students.
2. Conduct more research regarding the development of home, school, and community partnerships and its effect on school readiness.
3. Explore parental perceptions of readiness programs and the program’s effect on their child’s readiness for school.
4. Compare students of various programs and their readiness for school.
5. Explore specific components of the local Head Start program and how those components may impact the readiness of students.
Summary

Thousands of lower income students have attended the Head Start program, and numerous research studies have been conducted to determine the impact of attendance on the readiness of students entering school. Studies have produced equivocal results regarding the impact of Head Start on the readiness of students. This multiple case study contributes to the research literature by explaining urban kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of the readiness of former Head Start students. Participants shared multiple and varied perceptions about the readiness of former Head Start students. A number of participants greatly valued the Head Start program while others expressed the view that although not an ideal program, student participation in a Head Start program is better than not having attended any program at all.

Originally designed as a community program, Head Start was structured to bring together community resources such as educators, social workers, medical personnel, and parents to help decrease the gap between children from low income families and children from middle and upper income families. As one of the original program designers stated:

The planners knew that healthy development depends on the relationships the child has with important adults and we also recognize the local community’s influence on child development. We agreed to encourage ways for Head Start and the community to strengthen one another. In essence, the committee envisioned a whole-child approach to school readiness. (Zigler, 2010, p. 37)

In view of the equivocal results of this current study, ongoing and increased collaboration between multiple community groups is recommended to ensure the readiness of all students.
In recent years, the phrase “operating in silos” has been used in the education field to underscore the problem of programs, schools, content areas, and teachers functioning separately and individually. Each group may have their own values and beliefs, set their own goals, and even assess children differently. This researcher, through this study and through personal experience, has found that if the field of Early Childhood is to get off of a treadmill and onto a pathway (Goffin and Washington, 2007) it must begin to communicate within and across programs, share resources, and agree on its core values, purposes and outcomes with a common goal in mind; providing high quality education and care for all children.
References


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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL FORM
Form 4: IRB Approval Form
Identification and Certification of Research
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The Assurance number is FWA00005960 and it expires on January 24, 2017. The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56.

Principal Investigator: PARKER, STEPHANIE
Co-Investigator(s):
Protocol Number: E120203005
Protocol Title: Urban Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of Former Head Start Students and their Readiness for School

The above project was reviewed on 2/16/12. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This project qualifies as an exemption as defined in 45CF46.101, paragraph 2.

This project received EXEMPT review.
IRB Approval Date: 3/16/12
Date IRB Approval Issued: 3/16/12

Cari Oliver
Assistant Director, Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:
IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.
APPENDIX B

DISTRICT LEVEL PERMISSION LETTER
January 3, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

Stephanie Parker, a student at the University of Alabama, is conducting a study on “Urban Kindergarten Teachers’ Perception of Former Head Start Students and Their Readiness for School.” This study will explore the experiences and instruction of kindergarten teachers in an urban school district who are teaching students that were previously enrolled in a Head Start Program, the instructional impact on teachers of students previous attending Head Start, and the attitudes of first grade teachers about teaching students that attended Head Start. Ms. Parker will conduct her study from May 2012 through June 2012. Ms. Parker has permission to recruit and interview fifteen kindergarten teachers with the principal and teachers’ approval.

The Birmingham City School System approves this study as a means of gathering information for educational purposes. All information to be gathered will be done in a confidential and appropriate manner. At no time will Ms. Parker’s study be used in a way that would have potential risk to subjects. The names of the teachers, school system and all other information that would identify Birmingham City Schools will not be revealed in any published or oral form. Any additional research or study will require further approval of the school system.

Please contact the Birmingham Board of Education at (205) 231-4758 if there are any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

Martha S. Barber, Ed. D.
Chief Academic Officer
Recruitment Letter

Dear Educator:

I am Stephanie Parker, a doctoral candidate from the University of Alabama at Birmingham seeking participants for a study about the Head Start readiness program. The purpose of this study will be to explore the experiences and instruction of kindergarten teachers who are teaching/have taught students that were previously enrolled in a Head Start program.

You have been selected because you are a veteran kindergarten teacher who presently teaches/has taught former Head Start students. I want to know how your beliefs about school readiness have been impacted by teaching former Head Start students, and what experiences you have had teaching former Head Start students. The time frame for this study is from May 2012 until June 2012.

I am asking that you participate in a maximum of two face-to-face interviews that will require approximately one hour of your time, and write 3-5 entries in a reflective journal. With your permission, during the interview I will use an audio recorder to ensure accuracy for documentation. Your participation is completely voluntary and if you agree to participate, I will contact you to set up a time to meet that is most convenient for your schedule.

During the interview, I will ask you about your experiences associated with teaching former Head Start students. There are no right or wrong answers, and I am not attempting to prove or disprove a hypothesis. I only want to learn as much as I can about your experiences with this subject. A copy of the interview questions will be provided to you in advance. You may be asked clarifying questions during the interview so that you may give additional details and examples within your responses.

Any data collection will be kept completely confidential and your anonymity will be maintained. I will not use your name or the site where you are employed in the study. All information will be compiled into my dissertation and presented during my dissertation defense. You may withdraw from this study at any time without affecting your relationship with me and the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

You have the right to ask any questions about your involvement prior to your agreement to participate in this research. You may contact me at lv2teach@uab.edu or xxx-xxxx if I can provide you with any information about this study.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephanie H. Parker
APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE
Demographic Questionnaire

1. Name_______________________________________

2. School________________________________________

3. Number of Years Teaching Experience____________________

4. Number of Years Teaching Kindergarten____________________

5. Other Grades Taught________________________________

6. Have You Ever Taught Students Who Have Attended the Head Start Readiness Program?
   ______ Yes          ______ No

7. If Yes, Please List An Approximate Number of Former Head Start Students You Have Taught. _______________________________

8. If Chosen, Would You Be Willing To Participate in A Research Study That Will Explore the Experiences of Kindergarten Teachers Who Have Taught Former Head Start Students?
   ______ Yes          ______ No
   
   If Yes, Please Provide Your Contact Information

   Email Address _______________________________________

   Cell Phone Number ____________________________________

   Home Phone Number ____________________________________

   Thank You In Advance For Your Time.
APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT
Informed Consent Document

TITLE OF RESEARCH: Urban Kindergarten Teachers’ Perceptions of Former Head Start Students and Their Readiness for School

IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER:

INVESTIGATOR: Stephanie Parker

SPONSOR: University of Alabama at Birmingham Human Studies

EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study will investigate how kindergarten teachers respond to, teach and plan instruction for students who have attended a Head Start Program.

You are being asked to take part in the study because you are a tenured teacher, and because you are now teaching or have taught in the past, students who previously attended Head Start. This project will take place from May 2012 through June 2012. Because you will be one of fifteen teachers who will be interviewed, your part will not be large. One face-to-face tape-recorded interview lasting approximately 60 minutes will be carried out with you and one entry in a journal would be helpful to the study. The journal entry should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Before conducting the interview with you, I will give you a list of questions I want to ask in order to give you time to think about your answers. During these interviews you might also be asked some follow-up questions to bring out extra details. I may also schedule a follow-up interview to ask additional questions or to clarify prior responses. The follow-up interview will last approximately 30 minutes. I will do everything I can to ensure your privacy. You will have the chance to drop-out of the study at any time should you choose to do so. The information from this research will be used to help me complete requirements toward my dissertation. Again, I will protect your privacy by using a different name of your choice.
RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
The risks and trouble involved in this study are no more than the risks and trouble of day-to-day living.

BENEFITS
You may not gain directly from taking part in this study; however, this study may help guide future staff development and in-service programs in preschool readiness and early childhood education.

ALTERNATIVES
Your alternative is to not participate.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any data collection will be kept completely private and your privacy will be protected. You will be asked to self-select a different name to protect your privacy and that name will be used in the reporting of the research. All conversations will take place at a place of your choice, and the research will be talked about only by people directly involved in the study.

Research information that identifies you may be shared with the UAB Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).

All data, including the audio tapes, will be stored in a locked, metal file cabinet, and will be destroyed three years after the research is completed.

The results of the research may be published for scientific purposes; however, your identity will not be given out.

REFUSAL OR WITHDRAWL WITHOUT PENALTY
Taking part in this study is completely your choice. There will be no loss if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide not to be in the study, you will not lose any benefits you are owed. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with this college.

You may be taken out of the study if the research study ends early, or if you are not following the rules of the study.

COST OF PARTICIPATION
There will be no cost to you from taking part in this study.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
You will be given a $25.00 gift card for your participation in the study. You will receive the gift card following the completion of your interview.
SIGNIFICANT NEW FINDINGS
You will be told by Mrs. Parker if new information becomes available and might affect your choice to stay in the study.

QUESTIONS
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, you may contact Stephanie Parker. She will be glad to answer any of your questions. Mrs. Parker can be reached at lv2teach@uab.edu, or xxx-xxxx.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact Mr. Jonathan Miller. Mr. Miller is the Director of the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (OIRB) at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). Mr. Miller may be reached at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll-free number, press the option for “all other calls: or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the Office of the IRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

LEGAL RIGHTS
You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this informed consent form.

SIGNATURES
Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed document.

Signature of Participant                                    Date

Signature of Investigator                                   Date

Signature of Witness                                       Date
APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Interview Protocol

*Urban Kindergarten Teachers’ Perceptions of Former Head Start Students and Their Readiness for School*

Interviewer: *Stephanie Parker*

Interviewee (Pseudonym): ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

Time of Interview: ________________________________

Place: ________________________________

*The purpose of this study will be to explore the experiences and instruction of kindergarten teachers in an urban school district who are teaching/have taught students that were previously enrolled in a Head Start program.*

**Questions:**

1. (Icebreaker) Tell me about your educational background. How many years have you been a classroom teacher?

   **Probe:** How many years have you taught kindergarten? Have you always taught at this school? Any other grade level/school?

2. How would you define the term “readiness”?

3. Please describe what characteristics you think students need to possess in order to be ready for kindergarten?
**Probe:** Of the characteristics that you named, which one(s) do you consider most important?

4. Please describe how important is it to you that a student has had some type of experiences in preparing for school?

5. Approximately how many former Head Start students have you taught since you’ve been teaching kindergarten?

**Probe:** Are there any in your class this year?

6. Please describe your experiences teaching students who were former Head Start students.

7. Please describe the former Head Start students’ readiness for kindergarten when entering school.

**Probe:** Describe their readiness compared to other entering students who attended other preschool/daycare programs.

**Probe:** Describe their readiness compared to other entering students who had not attended any preschool/daycare program.

8. Please describe how teaching former Head Start students has impacted your instruction.

9. Please describe a “typical” day in your kindergarten classroom (i.e. scheduling, types of activities, etc.)

10. Some districts/schools/teachers make special efforts to ease the transition into kindergarten. Is anything done in your district/school or by you? Explain.
(Closing) Is there anything else that you are thinking about as a result of our conversation today that I haven’t asked you?

Thank you so much for your time. May I meet with you again or email you in the next few weeks if I need to clarify anything? Again, I want to assure you that confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and reporting process.