

Trinity College

Trinity College Digital Repository

Senior Theses and Projects

Student Scholarship

Spring 2008

The Teachers Next Door: A Comparative Study of Preschool Teachers' Instructional Practices

Alexandra Schmidt
Trinity College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Schmidt, Alexandra, "The Teachers Next Door: A Comparative Study of Preschool Teachers' Instructional Practices". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2008.

Trinity College Digital Repository, <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/142>

The Teachers Next Door:
A Comparative Study of Preschool Teachers' Instructional Practices
Ali J. Schmidt
Trinity College, Hartford

Educational Studies 400: Senior Research Project

Ed Studies Program

Trinity College

Professor Andrea Dyrness

December 2007

Introduction

A child's development and future success in school and life depends on the experiences that they have before the age of five. Research has shown that preschool can significantly decrease early reading performance gaps particularly in low-income areas. However, in the state of Connecticut, not all preschool-age children are receiving a high-quality early childhood education with an age-appropriate curriculum and a well-trained staff. Since almost all preschools and day cares use appropriate curricula, it is important to assess the effect that teachers' instruction have on students' success and educational inequalities.

In order to be considered a quality preschool program and maintain their funding, early childhood teachers are expected to adhere to the program's mandatory curriculum. So by setting standards, education administrations make official decisions on the formal curriculum for early childhood education setting the baseline for what a teacher should teach in terms of content, skills, and topics. However, classroom teachers work in isolation to implement standards meaning they have the power to choose the way in which they teach to meet the standards or their instructional practices— planning of time, uses of books and other materials, organization and use of physical space, grouping of students, questions and assignments presented, patterns of discipline and control, and connections to the world outside of school.

In the United States there are various public preschool programs, private preschool programs, and day-care centers that differ widely in quality. In the state of Connecticut about 75 percent of 3- and 4-year-old children currently attend such programs. However, there is still an achievement gap in older grades between wealthier

and poorer districts. In 2000, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that 68% of low-income 4th graders cannot read at the proficient level. Preschool can significantly decrease early reading performance gaps, particularly in low-income areas. In addition, according to a report published by the Connecticut State Board of Education (2003) differences in the quality of early childhood education contributes to the achievement gap among older students.

Research has proven that a quality preschool education is partly characterized by the teachers' implementation of the curriculum. In other words, teachers play a role in supplying a quality education, especially to preschool-age children. Research has shown that responsive adults influence cognitive, emotional, and social learning. Further, children who are emotionally secure in their relationships with their teachers will use this base to explore the classroom, engage in pretend play, anticipate learning and promote their own self-regulation of behaviors and peer relations (SDE, 2007). Further, adults must observe children's changing needs and interests and build them into their planning. However, many teachers are not sufficiently trained on how to instruct their early childhood classrooms. In order to ensure quality child care, an analysis of current teachers' instructional practices may be helpful to the state of Connecticut, the city of Hartford, their early childhood educators, and their families.

My research aims to determine whether and how instructional practices of teachers using two developmentally-appropriate curricula differ, answering the research question how do teachers' instructional practices vary from urban pre-K programs in public settings to urban preschools in private settings? I argue that teachers at both

Cunningham Preschool Center¹ and Tucker Elementary School Pre-K² used similar curricula, lessons and explanations, materials, classroom organization, and received similar teacher training. However, at Tucker Elementary School a majority of the teachers' lessons were spent authoritatively controlling unruly students.

Not all parents can afford to enroll their children in private preschool programs, so it is important to develop agreement among private education providers and public schools so that all children will enter kindergarten at the same level.

Literature Review

The State of Connecticut is trying to fight the problem that not all preschool children receive quality education. In 2007, the Connecticut Early Childhood Research and Policy Council reported that 14,000 three-and four-year olds in low-income areas don't attend preschool (Cooper, 1). As a result, research has been conducted to ensure that all preschool-age children have access to high-quality classroom environments, emphasizing the components of early childhood education programs, classrooms, or teachers that predict quality.

Frede (1995) reviewed three types of studies on early childhood education classroom practices: comparing different curricula, ethnographic studies of varying community child care and preschool programs, and comparing programs that implement age-appropriate curricula differently. Knowing that a child's social, cognitive, and emotional development may be stimulated by certain program designs, curriculum, and teacher practices, Frede reviewed available research to acknowledge what programs practices promote positive child development. To compare different curricula, researchers that

¹ Pseudonym.

² Pseudonym.

Frede reviewed randomly assigned low-income children to one of several classrooms, each with a different curriculum. They found that there were no consistent differences in the impacts of the curricula. To examine teacher practices, Frede reviewed a study that used classroom observations in twelve preschools in South Carolina public schools to evaluate teachers' curriculum implementation. Through their study the researchers were able to identify 22 teachers' instructional practices that led to positive outcomes in Kindergarten and first grade, including taking advantage of "teachable moments" and encouraging children to think of positive ways to deal with their emotions and to construct their own solutions to conflicts. Using all three reviews Frede also concluded that teacher training make a difference in the outcomes of early childhood education on children. Like the South Caroline study Frede reviewed, I will observe and compare teachers' practices. However, without looking at student outcomes in later grades I will be unable to make judgments on the quality of the education.

Barnett, Frede, Mobasher, and Mohr (1988) used both quantitative research and qualitative research to determine whether public preschools in South Carolina containing many disadvantaged children were efficient. They used data of first grade students who had attended preschool to determine the effectiveness of the programs for school readiness. On the other hand, observations of 12 teachers and their preschool classrooms from the three major metropolitan regions of South Carolina were used to analyze the relationship between level of implementation of the curriculum and teacher characteristics. They found that the schools were efficient in implementing the High/Scope curriculum. Through their observations the researchers found that the teachers had only one or two years experience implementing the curriculum with little or

no training, but as years of experience increased their implementation was better.

Through my research, I will gain understanding on the effects that experience with preschool students has on teachers' instructional practices and whether location of the program affects the amount of training teachers receive.

In his recent article, Pianta (2007) analyzed results from two studies of the early childhood education system: the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (NICHD SECCYD) and the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) Multi-State Pre-K study. He claimed that in early childhood education the teacher's implementation of the curriculum affect learning and thus the quality of education that the children receive, but that most programs are determined "quality" without even assessing teaching methods. Pianta and his colleagues examined whether instructional and emotional support from teachers would benefit children at risk of low achievement in elementary school and found that at-risk children placed in such environments could achieve just as well as those children who were not at-risk, as determined by whether or not their mother had a college degree. In classroom observations, Pianta found that some children are engaged with teachers in classroom instruction while "other children, *even in the same program or grade*, spend most of their time passively sitting around, having few if any interactions with an adult, watching the teacher deal with behavior problems, exposed to only boring and rote instructional activities" (p. 47). This suggests that if teachers do not receive curriculum implementation training, preschool-age students will not have access to an essential high-quality education. Like Pianta (2007), my research locations enroll at-risk students and will examine how environment affects teachers' instructional

practices. Further, my study will examine the teacher-student interactions. It will build on Pianta's study by observing teachers and students in their natural environments instead of moving them into a different environment.

Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant, Clifford, Early, and Barbarin (2005) used results from the National Center for Early Development and Learning's Multi-State Pre-Kindergarten Study to determine what components of a child's preschool program, classroom, and teacher characteristics predict its quality. The study was conducted in six states and used snapshot assessments (20 seconds of observation followed by 40 seconds of coding) of two activity settings: free choice/centers (where children select what and where they would like to play and learn) and whole-group teacher-led activities (when the child is with other students in a teacher-initiated activity) to examine different teachers' approaches to curriculum implementation. They also studied the effect that program location, within an elementary school or not, had on its quality. Pianta et al. found that lower quality preschool program teachers' lacked training and child-centered beliefs. The researchers were able to conclude that teacher characteristics could predict program quality. They also found that location of the program, in or out of school building, had no significant relation to quality. Like, Pianta et al. (2005) my research will also determine how a program's location affects the teachers, specifically their teaching practices. However, as a smaller study I will compare only two schools also in contrasting settings and use longer observations than snapshots.

Barnett, Lamy, and Jung (2005) estimated the effects of state-funded preschool programs on kindergartener's academic skills. The study was conducted in pre-kindergartens in five states: Michigan, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and West

Virginia which provided education primarily through either public schools or private programs. They used two comparison groups: children who are in a state pre-kindergarten program and children who weren't but were close to the enrollment eligibility cutoff date defined by the state. Using various tests, children's cognitive and linguistic abilities, early mathematical skills, phonological skills, and print awareness abilities were assessed. Barnett et al. (2005) found that vocabulary, math skills, and understanding of print concepts all significantly increased due to preschool programs. Using qualification for free and reduced price lunch as a marker of socioeconomic status, Barnett et al. (2005) assessed the effectiveness of preschool on children from low-income families. They found significant effects based on income, such that low-income children had extra gains from preschool programs. Print awareness and vocabulary have been found to predict later reading abilities in early grades of elementary school. As mentioned, enrollment in preschool can help close the achievement gap. Since their studies contained both private and public preschool programs, Barnett et al. (2005) mentioned that public preschools with weak standards for teacher qualifications and low teacher salaries are less effective than private preschool programs, like Head Start. My study will build off this private versus public preschool comparison (Pianta et al., 2005; Barnett et al., 2005), and considers the findings of past studies that teachers' instructional practices, training, and implementation of the curriculum are important determining factors of a quality preschool program (Frede, 1995; Barnett et al., 1988; Pianta et al., 2005).

In order to conduct my study I must confirm that educational inequalities do exist. Past research found there were educational inequalities, whether based on class, race,

gender, or a combination of these factors. For example, Lee and Burkman (2000) stated that minority students tend to dropout of schools at higher rates than their white counterparts. They pointed out that although further research is needed, school environment, student characteristics and achievement, and school organization- including curricula- are factors that contribute to this trend. Research also found that an increase in student enrollment in high-quality preschool programs can close or decrease the achievement gap. Further, suggestions to teachers, particularly those in low-income areas, may support the development of high-quality early childhood education.

In global ratings of program quality and later development that included group size, physical environment, and staff training as variables researchers found that children who attend higher quality early childhood education centers score better on tests measuring social, language, and cognitive development. They also found that the prevalence of the certain factors that make a preschool high quality are absent in many early childhood schools serving low-income children (Frede, 1995). My research addresses factors that may or may not contribute to the quality of two preschool programs serving low-income children in Hartford, CT. My comparison of private set and public school set preschool programs will ensure that children are all receiving the quality preschool education they need for future success.

Discouraging studies have proven that teachers are expected to implement the curriculum with little or no help from more advanced educators. Kauffman, Johnson, Kardos, Liu, and Peske (2002) showed that new public school teachers received little or no guidance on what to teach or how to teach, or their instructional practices. This study used interviews with both urban and suburban school teachers as their research methods.

Teachers in both settings felt they received no guidance and struggled day to day to prepare their lessons. Little, Kagan, and Frelow (2003) used telephone surveys with 177 people in 20 states to study early learning standards across the country. One relevant finding was that many respondents verbalized that there were minimal programs to help with the implementation of early learning standards. Further, any guidance or training was short-term. Such research concludes that teachers are alone in determining their classroom practices.

Knowing that African American children face inequalities in education, Ladson-Billings (1994) used observations and interviews of classrooms and eight teachers to illustrate and emphasize instructional practices that effectively educate African American children. By conducting this study, Ladson-Billings establishes that some teachers' instructional practices create poor outcomes for African American children. Through her book she uses eight teacher instructional practices as examples of how other teachers should alter their instructional practices to decrease educational inequalities. Like Ladson-Billings, my research examines various teachers' instructional practices and their outcomes on a mostly minority student population. My study will investigate Kauffman et al. and Little et al.'s findings that teachers receive little guidance and provide suggestions, if needed, to teachers and administrators as Ladson-Billings did.

As a growing number of U.S. states, like Connecticut, are establishing public preschool education particularly in low-income areas, studies on the effectiveness and quality of such public programs are also increasing. However, there are few, if any, comparative studies of public and private preschools. My study will build on past and outdated research (Barnett et al., 1988) by using classroom observations of two

preschools in Hartford that serve low-income children. As a different type of study than surveys (Little et al., 2003) and study reviews (Frede, 1995) it will provide a look into the classroom where the learning actually occurs. With many of the studies suggesting that teachers do not have any help, I will determine whether this is the case in Hartford and if they vary for two different early childhood education programs. Further, past research evaluated the quality of the program using early childhood teachers' instructional practices, however, none compared the practices of teachers in private settings to those in public school settings. Equity between the two is necessary to be sure that all 3- and 4-year olds are entering kindergarten at the same level. Focusing on what teachers do in classrooms can help improve the instructional and social interactions teachers have with their students.

Methodology

In order to examine how teachers organized class time, this study utilized classroom observations and interviews as the two sources of data. I conducted observations in two preschools in Hartford, one in a private setting and one in a public school setting, to determine whether location of the program affected how and what teachers taught. School selection was based on their close proximity to my college and to each other. I observed the teachers at Cunningham Preschool Center and Tucker Elementary School both for 2 hours a week for 1 ½ months. In-depth notes were taken of the teachers' instructional practices (see Appendix B) during each program's Whole-Group Teacher-Led Circle Time and Centers/Free Choice activity time (see definitions in literature review of Pianta et al., 2005). Observations were used to witness the teachers' instructional practices in action.

Also, interviews were conducted with the four teachers observed most, two at each school. Interviews based on interview guide (see Appendix A) lasted about thirty minutes; however, each participant supplemented the interview with ten minutes of rich after-thoughts. Using interviews, I hoped to obtain background information on the curriculum, teacher training, and the teachers' explanations on the influences on their instructional practices. All four interviews were carried out in the classroom during the students' nap time, so both I and the teachers had to whisper. As a result, in-depth notes were more beneficial than tape recording.

The schools and teacher samples were small and should not be interpreted as representative of all private and public preschool programs in low-income urban areas nationwide.

Context

Cunningham Preschool Center.

Located in Hartford, Connecticut, this private preschool center is a full-day program that serves children from Hartford and surrounding suburban towns. In order to enroll, children must be at least three years old and parents must pay tuition. However, Care4Kids, Connecticut's child care subsidy program, helps cover the tuition cost of some low-income families who want to enroll their child in Cunningham. Cunningham Preschool Center is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a national voluntary accreditation program that sets professional standards for early childhood education programs while also helping families identify quality programs. Based on NAEYC requirements, the teacher to student ratio at Cunningham is always 1 to 10 or better.

At Cunningham they use the Creative Curriculum, a play-based curriculum created by Dodge, Colker, and Heroman (1998) required by NAEYC. This curriculum has a weekly theme to offer teachers guidance, but still freedom to be creative. It also includes guidance on a form of discipline called redirection, in which adults distract the child from their original intention and then quickly divert them to a safer alternative. The adult must explain to the child why their behavior is inappropriate and then either tell them they have a solution, or let them find a solution.

Head teachers at Cunningham must have a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education (ECE), while teacher assistants must have a child development associate (CDA). The teachers observed both had a bachelor's degree. The head teacher has a degree in early childhood, while the assistant had a degree in business administration as well as a CDA. The teachers had between one and four years of experience in teaching preschool children. Teachers received monthly training after-school for a couple of hours. They also received training about teamwork and dedication at different centers in the area. CPR and first aid training was required upon employment.

Tucker Elementary School Pre-K.

Located in a public elementary school in Hartford, CT this Pre-K program is a full-day preschool that only serves children from Hartford. In order to enroll, children must be four years old by December 31st and potty trained. This Pre-K program is funded by a School Readiness grant and parents are therefore required to pay a weekly fee between \$5 and \$100 based on the School Readiness Sliding Fee Scale and income. School Readiness is a competitive grant program for towns with a priority school and ranked one to fifty in lowest town wealth. At Tucker, the teacher to student ratio is 1 to 9.

At Tucker, they use the Curiosity Corner curriculum, a Success For All program chosen by the Hartford Board of Education. This curriculum is not required by School Readiness. It is scripted day-to-day with literacy-focused problem solving activities. Teachers are supplied with a weekly theme and a corresponding weekly theme book.

Head teachers at Tucker have to be state certified. CDAs have to have a CDA, or twelve early childhood education credits, or a bachelor's degree with twelve early childhood credits. Paraprofessionals must have an associate's degree. The observed head teacher received her masters in early childhood, along with eighteen extra credits, including many psychology credits. One observed CDA at Tucker had a bachelor's degree in secondary education. Teachers at Tucker had at least 7 years of experience teaching preschool children. For training, teachers received a two day professional training on the Curiosity Corner Curriculum when the Board of Education brought it into the public schools. They also receive bi-annual professional development on diversity and behavior issues. They also receive CPR, first aid, and health training.

Analysis

Similar Curricula. At Cunningham Preschool Center, a National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited program, they use the Creative Curriculum at the Pre-K at Tucker Elementary School, a School Readiness grant funded program, they use the Curiosity Corner Curriculum, a Success for All (SFA) program chosen by the Hartford board of education. Both curricula are scripted either day-to-day or week-to-week, offering detailed guidance to the teachers. Despite such guidance, all four teachers felt that there was still room for modification. For example, Ms. Goldman³

³ Pseudonym

from Tucker Pre-K revealed that “specifically this year it [the curriculum] moves fast for them [the students]. For example, this week they’re learning that bread is made from grain. We’re not there yet so we focus on the ‘b’ because they needed that more.”

Similarly, Ms. Anderson⁴ from Cunningham Preschool Center expressed “We still get to teach what we want based on the children’s development and what they need to work on.”

Similar Lessons & Explanations. Coincidentally, observations at both Cunningham and Tucker occurred during their whole-group circle times and free choice/centers allowing me to argue that lessons and explanations were similar. At both Cunningham and Tucker whole-group circle time started with songs about circle time rules, such as “Eyes watching, ears listening...” or “I look. I listen. So I can learn,” respectively. Afternoon whole-group circle time and free choice/centers reinforced what was learned in the morning at both preschools. At Cunningham during morning meeting the students and teacher discussed what would happen after pumpkin seeds were planted. During free choice/centers, the students planted pumpkin seeds in Dixie cups, watered them, and put them on the window sill for later observation. Similarly, at Tucker students learned about apples and pumpkins during morning whole-group circle time. During the afternoon, in the dramatic play free choice/center students were given instructions on how to pretend to make apple and pumpkin pie.

Similar Materials. With similar curricula, teachers at Tucker and Cunningham made use of similar materials in their classrooms. When asked about their resources, all four teachers stated that they had a lot of resources available. Ms. Sanders⁵ from

⁴ Pseudonym

⁵ Pseudonym.

Cunningham preschool center simply said “we have a lot of resources.” At the same time, Ms. Marx⁶ from Tucker pre-K claimed “...we really have more than what we need.” All classrooms were equipped with various electronics, such as computers and stereos, along with the other necessary preschool supplies, such as books and art supplies.

Similar classroom organization. Since the two classrooms had similar materials, they also had similar classroom organization. For example, free choice/centers were separated from the rug used for whole-group circle time. During free choice/centers time, the teachers had to make sure that only a certain amount of “friends” or students were working or playing in each center. None of the teachers checked to see if the free choice/centers groups varied daily and a lot of the time the same students were always playing or working together. During whole-group circle time, the teachers allowed the students to organize themselves. However, on occasion at both Tucker and Cunningham, the teachers asked the students to sit on the rug on top of the letter that their first name starts with.

Similar Teacher Training. Teachers at both Cunningham Preschool Center and Tucker Elementary School Pre-K were required to receive or be CPR and first aid trained after they were hired. At Cunningham Preschool Center, teachers received monthly after-school training for about two hours. Also, as Ms. Sanders mentions they “go to different centers and get different training about teamwork and dedication for the center.” At Tucker Elementary Pre-K they received intensive two-day professional training when the Curiosity Corner Curriculum was introduced in the Hartford Public Schools. Also, they have professional development twice a year in which as Ms. Marx expressed “they train

⁶ Pseudonym.

us about diversity, how to handle special cases.” Like Cunningham, Tucker teachers must also travel outside of McDonough to receive other training.

Lesson time organization & discipline. Lesson time organization differed between the teachers at Tucker Elementary Pre-K and Cunningham Preschool Center. During whole-group circle time, the teachers at Tucker sat in a chair while the teachers at Cunningham sat on the rug in a circle with the students; both positions displayed a different teacher role to the students and reflected their discipline practices. I argue that at Tucker teachers spent a majority of their lesson time authoritatively controlling unruly or misbehaving students. In interviews teachers at both schools acknowledged that behaviors were challenging. According to Ms. Goldman at Tucker, “behaviors” have been her biggest challenge. Ms. Sanders at Cunningham said her biggest challenge was “in behaviors...” However, Ms. Anderson also at Cunningham revealed that “distractions...people coming in the other preschool room” hinders whole-group circle time not behaviors. Despite whole-group circle time was equally disrupted by misbehavior at both schools, each with an average of four misbehaviors in a one hour observation.

At Tucker teachers’ discipline was very authoritative, like whole-group circle time, so that teachers were often standing over students when telling them what they were doing wrong. While at Cunningham, the teachers always got down to the child’s level to discuss their misbehavior. For example, when handling a temper tantrum teachers at Cunningham Preschool Center advised the child in a calm voice while eye level with him to “Relax body in cozy area” “Take a deep breath so you don’t get sick. You need to calm down and then maybe we can talk. It is so much better to use words.” At Tucker,

the teacher stands over the child who is having a tantrum and threatens “You want to go to the other classroom. I will take you.” Similarly, when handling a distraction of the child taking his or her shoe off during whole-group circle time, teachers at Tucker yell “If you don’t put that shoe on I will put it in the garbage.” While at Cunningham the teacher says, “No thank you. After you zip up your boot go sit in the library” and responds after whole-group circle time by bending down in front of the child and saying “Every time you do this you take away from circle time.” At Cunningham, it is evident their use of redirection. While at Tucker, although the teachers were always embarrassed to admit they use some form of threatening and time out.

As both teachers at Tucker expressed in their interviews, misbehaviors and discipline were a problem in their pre-K and parents played a large role. Ms. Marx at Tucker expressed, “you know what the discipline is the biggest problem when the parent is not helping you...” As a result, instead of interacting with the students during free choice/centers, as the teachers at Cunningham did, the teachers at Tucker filled out discipline forms for each student to bring home to their parents as an update on their child’s daily behaviors (see Appendix C).

Although the behavior problems at Tucker and Cunningham occurred in equal numbers, the discipline practices were different and had different outcomes in terms of lesson time organization. At Tucker during whole-group circle time, seven students were either self-removed and playing in the free choice/centers or teacher-removed and in either another classroom because of misbehavior or going to violin lessons. Despite varying reasons for leaving whole-group circle time, Ms. Goldman was left teaching only half of her students. This happened on multiple occasions. While at Cunningham, for the

majority of my observation all students were a part of lesson time, with maybe one or two missing at times. Students at Tucker may be receiving the same amount of lesson time as students at Cunningham.

Conclusion

Past research proved that teachers' instructional practices and school location determined the quality of preschool programs. My study found that after comparing teachers' instructional practices in private and public school settings, the programs were extremely similar except for their lesson plan organization and discipline. I also found that because of behaviors and discipline, certain students were left out of lesson time and therefore not involved in all opportunities to learn.

However, future research needs to examine the effectiveness of certain discipline practices. Researchers could use longitudinal studies with student outcomes in later grades to determine whether varying discipline practices affect the quality of the early childhood program. I also suggest that future research comparing teachers' instructional practices of opposing locations begin their research on the first day of the school year and continue until the last day to see if teachers' practices, including discipline, change according to their frustration with students' bad behaviors.

I would also recommend that teachers continue to receive training from other preschools programs to learn about various approaches to teaching practices. They may be able to adopt a certain practice that could be effective in their program.

References

- Barnett, W.S., Lamy, C., Jung, K. (2005). "The effects of state prekindergarten programs on young children's school readiness in five states." *Rutgers University, The National Institute for Early Education Research*.
- Cooper, J.W. (2007). *CBIA leader sees public preschool programs as step toward smarter workforce*. Hartford Courant.
<www.hartfordinfo.org/issues/documents/Education/htfd_courant_031607.asp>
- Frede, E.C. (1995). "The role of program quality in producing early childhood program benefits." *The Future of Children*, 5(3), pp. 115-132.
- Little, C.S., Kagan, S.L., Frelow, V.S. (2003). "Creating the Conditions for Success with Early Learning Standards: Results from a National Study of State-Level Standards for Children's Learning Prior to Kindergarten." *ECRP*, 5(2).
- Kauffman, D., Johnson, S.M., Kardos, S.M., Liu, E., & Peske, H.G., (2002). "Lost at Sea: New teachers' experiences with curriculum and assessment." *The Teachers College Record*, 104, 273-300.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Lazar, I., Darlington, R., Murray, H., Royce, J., Snipper, A., & Ramey, C. (1982), "Lasting Effects of Early Education: A Report from the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 47, p. 1-151.

- Lee, V.E. and Burkman, D.T. (2000). Dropping out of high school. *University of Michigan*, 1-42
- Pianta, R., Howes, C., Burchinal, M., Bryant, D., Clifford, R., Early, D., & Barabarin, O. (2005). "Features of pre-kindergarten programs, classrooms, and teachers: Do they predict observed classroom quality and child-teacher interactions?" *Applied Developmental Science*, 9(3), p. 144-159.
- Pianta, R. (2007). "Preschool is school, Sometimes." *Education Next*, 7(1), p. 44-49.
- Smith, S.L., Fairchild, M., & Groginsky, S., (1997). *Early childhood care and education: An investment that works*. Denver: National Conference of State Legislatures.
- State of Connecticut State Board of Education (2007). *A guide to early childhood program development*.
<www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Early/early_childhood_guide.pdf>
- State of Connecticut State Board of Education (2003). *Closing the achievement gaps: Removing the barriers to preschool in Connecticut*.
<<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Early/PreschoolReport.pdf>>

Appendix A.
Interview Guide

TEACHING BACKGROUND:

- How long have you been teaching preschool children?
- How long have you been teaching at [Cunningham Preschool Center⁷ or Tucker Elementary School⁸]?
- What kind of teacher training, if any, have you received from this school?

PRESCHOOL BACKGROUND:

- How is your center [pre-k] funded?
- Are students charged tuition?
- What are the enrollment requirements? What age are students able to enroll?
- What is your discipline policy, including suspension and/or expulsion?
- Can students withdraw from the center [pre-k]?
- What requirements, in terms of education background, are there for teachers?
- How is the center [pre-k] assessed in order to continue to receive funding?
- What is the teacher to student ratio here?

CURRICULUM and INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES:

- Is there a mandatory curriculum?
- Is there a mandatory student assessment?
- What or who has influenced how you teach [rhyming]?
- How do you handle discipline?
 - What has influenced how you handle it?
 - Would you say it is successful?
- How do you feel about the standards (mandatory curriculum)?
- How do you handle the differences, if there are any, between what you want to teach and what the standards make you teach?
- How do resources, or lack, of resources affect what you teach?
- Do you think your instructional practices result in successful implementation of the curriculum?
- In there anything that hinders your lesson times?
- Do you think your students receive a quality education preparing them for kindergarten and beyond?
- What has been your biggest challenge?
- What do you like best about teaching at [Cunningham Preschool Center or Tucker Elementary School]?

DEMOGRAPHICS:

- What level of education have you completed?
- How would you describe your ethnicity?

⁷ Pseudonym.

⁸ Pseudonym.

Appendix B.

Observed Components of Teachers' Instructional Practices

- Lessons
 - How they are introduced
 - Time spent on
 - Explanation of significance of
- Teacher Talk
 - Questions
 - Directions
 - Assignments
 - Control of behavior
- Student talk
 - General student talk
- Curricular materials
 - What they are, not context
 - Electronic resources (computers, calculators, etc.)
- Classroom
 - Organization
 - Grouping of students