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Family Preferences for Childcare in Central Kentucky

Sarah Taylor Vanover
Eastern Kentucky University

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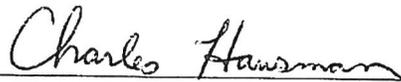
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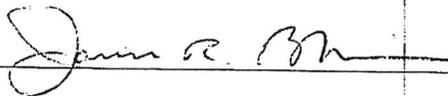
By

Sarah Helen Taylor Vanover

Dissertation Approval



Dr. Charles Hausman, Committee Chair



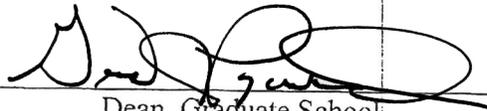
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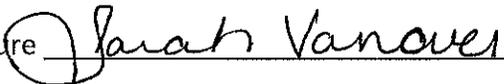
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By

SARAH HELEN TAYLOR VANOVER

Master of Education
Eastern Kentucky University
Richmond, Kentucky
2013

Bachelor of Science
University of Kentucky
Lexington, Kentucky
2002

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
May, 2016

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Rob, for reading every draft of my work and supporting me through every step of this journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee Chair, Dr. Charles Hausman, for all of his time and guidance as I completed my research. I would also like to thank the other members of my dissertation committee, Dr. James Bliss, Dr. Sonia Michael, and Dr. Lisa Gannoe, for dedicating their time, arranging their schedules, and giving their feedback to help me complete this research study. I also want to thank my parents, Jon and Jackie Taylor, for continuously encouraging me to pursue my education. Finally, I want to thank my brother-in-law, Aric Schadler, for assisting with my research development and statistical analysis throughout my research study.

ABSTRACT

Early childhood professionals have established a set list of characteristics that denote a high quality early care and education environment for children under the age of kindergarten, but these may not be the same characteristics that parents consider in the decision-making process. The researcher used survey research to obtain quantitative research data from 310 participants that live in Central Kentucky and have a child under the age of kindergarten currently in childcare. The participants completed a survey that used a Likert scale from 1 to 4 to rate 36 characteristics of childcare programs and were asked to select the three most important characteristics when selecting childcare for their children. The findings of this study are valuable to childcare program directors to help them meet the needs of the families enrolled in their programs and assist them with marketing their childcare program appropriately.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There has been extensive research on vital childcare characteristics for children under the age of five (Degotardi, 2010; Klein & Feldman, 2007; Ebbeck & Yim, 2009; Sosinsky & Kim, 2013; Weaver & Grace, 2010; Cryer, 2003). Degotardi (2010) established that two of the most essential quality markers for early childhood education include the ratio of children to adults and the education and experience levels of the childcare providers. The amount of language used in the classroom, the attachment relationship between the child and the provider, the classroom size, and the warmth and positive attitude of the childcare providers also have a profound impact on the quality of childcare offered to young children (Cryer, 2003; Ebbeck & Yim, 2009; Klein & Feldman, 2007). These are studies where professionals assessed quality early learning environments. Despite the research demonstrating which factors should be in place when parents select early childhood education, there are other practical factors that parents or guardians should consider as well. Parents often report that elements such as location, familiarity with the organization, hours of operation, and cost are determining factors for many families when selecting daycare for their children (Weaver & Grace, 2010).

With many different research sources highlighting the characteristics of childcare that they feel are the most important, it can be confusing for the family to select the highest quality childcare program. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is the largest professional organization in the world with a mission statement to benefit young children between birth and age eight. The NAEYC promotes professional development for all early childhood educators, but it also offers a nationally

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recognized accreditation program for the highest quality childcare programs. Currently, over 6,500 early childhood programs in the United States are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The accreditation process for NAEYC is extensive, and it can take a center well over a year to go through the self-study and begin to align its program with NAEYC standards, complete the program application process and self-assessment, complete the candidate verification process, and host the site visit by NAEYC's accreditation team. During the self-study, the program must compile an in-depth portfolio documenting how the center meets each of the 10 NAEYC standards. Those standards include relationships, curriculum, teaching, assessment of child progress, health, teachers, families, community relationships, physical environment, and leadership and management (NAEYC, 2008). These are the areas that the National Association for the Education of Young Children deems to be the most critical quality indicators for the early childhood classroom and the programs at large.

Even though the NAEYC has established the top 10 quality standards for early childhood education programs, those may not be the characteristics that parents are using to select childcare for their young children. Factors including cost, hours of operation, location, and family values may direct families to choose programs that do not meet the standards that the NAEYC established as high quality (Huff & Cotte, 2013; Jeon, Buettner, & Hur, 2014; Lee, 2010; Quart, 2013; Wise, 2002). Also, what one family needs from childcare may be significantly different from another.

Problem Statement

The factors that influence a family's childcare selection process can vary greatly. In a study by Lee (2010), same gender couples have a slightly different set of criteria

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when selecting childcare for their children. In Australia, Lee (2010) found that gay mothers look for a balance between quality early childhood indicators and cultural acceptance of the family within the childcare program. If one of the two factors is eliminated, same-sex couples often choose to select an accepting and nurturing environment. Most single-parent households must consider cost, hours of operation, and location of a center as equally important to the quality care indicators (Wise, 2002). It is unclear which selection of characteristics is most important to families when they select a childcare placement for their children.

The purpose of this study is to determine the full range of factors that families believe to be quality indicators, regardless of the family composition and identify which characteristics families value the most when selecting early childhood education for children under the age of five years old.

Research Questions

1. How do families rank the characteristics of childcare in order of importance?
2. What are the three most important characteristics to families during the selection process?

Significance of the Study

Directors of early childhood education facilities need to understand the characteristics that determine how families select childcare in order to prepare and market their programs. Keeping full enrollment is essential for the success of many organizations. Understanding the type of care families are seeking for their small children is crucial for the entire childcare industry. Currently, most early childhood education institutions are small businesses (Weaver & Grace, 2010). They are tasked with the

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challenge of providing children with the best possible care and meeting licensing/accreditation standards, while shaping their small business to meet the selection criteria of families seeking childcare for their small children. Sosinsky and Kim (2013) state that there are several factors about the family that determine how they select care for their children, including income, maternal education level, single-parent status, minority status, maternal work hours and schedule, and maternal beliefs about child care.

Boundaries of the Study

There are several independent variables that could be analyzed when evaluating why families select childcare, including socioeconomic status and cultural diversity. This study focused solely on which characteristics families, as a whole, feel are the most important when selecting childcare for their young children.

Hypothesis

The research hypothesis is that, despite the recent emphasis on what is essential in quality childcare, the top three childcare characteristics that families find to be essential for quality childcare include economic or convenience factors, as well as quality. Families must select what is essential for survival, as well as traits that will benefit their children.

Research Method

In order to obtain information about how families select childcare, the researcher prepared a survey to be distributed to families in Central Kentucky. To participate in the survey, the family must have a child under the age of Kindergarten that is currently enrolled in a childcare program. The survey began by asking for some basic demographic information about the family and its adult composition, and it followed by providing 36

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characteristics of childcare programs that can be thematically grouped into the 10 NAEYC standards and characteristics related to convenience, economics, and family values. The families were asked to rate each of these characteristics on a 1 to 4 scale in order to determine how important each characteristic is to the family as part of the selection process. At the end of the survey, the families were asked to list the three most important characteristics. Finally, the families were asked how they obtained information about the childcare programs that they considered.

Key Concepts and Terms

This study attempts to determine what families are seeking from childcare environments for children age five-years-old and younger. The following terms are defined in order to clarify their usage during the study.

Childcare refers to the early education program the child is enrolled in and the type of care (basic needs and education) that each family selects for their children when the child is apart from the adults in the family.

Childcare Provider refers to the adult caring for a young child in an early childhood education program. This title is also considered the classroom teacher.

Developmentally Appropriate refers to activities and materials that meet the learning needs and developmental milestones of the children enrolled in the childcare program.

Quality Indicators refer to characteristics of childcare that are considered to be the best practice by accrediting bodies and by a review of research-based literature.

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Satisficing refers to the decision-making process that occurs when the participant understands that one option is not possible, so he or she makes the best possible decision from the remaining options.

School Readiness Curriculum refers to an early childhood education curriculum that prepares the children to be successful when entering a kindergarten classroom. This type of curriculum furthers the children's development in cognitive skills and problem-solving, social and emotional development, language development, fine and gross motor skills, self-help skills, physical health and nutrition, and pre-academic skills.

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CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Weaver and Grace (2010) found that, internationally, parents defined high quality childcare as meeting the needs of the family, with the most important components relating to what the family could afford and the physical setting of the childcare facility. Parents in this study consistently rated emotional warmth, nurturing, and safety when determining where to place a child in childcare. This perspective follows Ebbeck and Yim's study (2009) that looked at the importance of emotional attachment and bonding between the provider and the child as a method of measuring quality childcare. A Gallup Organization study (2005) specifically addressed parent perceptions of childcare quality. That study found that the most critical factors for parents when selecting childcare are warmth, stimulating activities, good physical facilities, and provider credentials.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has an extensive accreditation process, and it can take a center well over a year to go through the self-study and begin to align its program with NAEYC standards, complete the program application process and self-assessment, complete the candidate verification process, and host the site visit by NAEYC's accreditation team. During the self-study, the program must compile an in-depth portfolio documenting how the center meets each of the ten NAEYC standards. Those standards include relationships, curriculum, teaching, assessment of child progress, health, teachers, families, community relationships, physical environment, and leadership and management (NAEYC, 2008). These are the areas that the National Association for the Education of Young Children deems to be the most critical quality indicators for the early childhood classroom and the programs at-large. Literature supports that these characteristics align with high-quality early

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childhood education environments (Brownlee, Berthelsen, & Segaran, 2009; Cryer, 2003; Degotardi, 2010; Ebbeck & Yim, 2009; Klein & Feldman, 2007; Taylor, Ishimine, Cloney, Cleveland, & Thorpe, 2013; Thomason & Paro 2013; Weaver & Grace, 2010; Wise, 2002).

Relationships

Research compiled by Ebbeck and Yim (2009) stresses the importance of relationship attachment between the caregiver and the children as the foundation for quality care for infants and young toddlers. The warmth and positive attitude of the childcare provider also can affect the relationship between the children and the caregiver (Cryer, 2003). Wise (2002) conducted an earlier study looking at what parents believed was the most important quality indicator. They selected a warm and loving relationship with the caregiver. All of the parent perceptions of quality childcare focused on positive and attached relationships between students and teachers, students and peers, and teachers and families.

Another sign of a high quality childcare program is having consistent caregivers that work with the same group of children each day. Consistent caregivers promote social and emotional development, particularly in the youngest children (Holochwost, DeMott, Buell, Yannetta, & Amsden, 2009). This caregiver stability allows for young children to develop secure attachment between the children and the adults that care for them; however, high rates of staff turnover can hinder a child's opportunity to bond with the adults that care for the child (Holochwost, et al., 2009).

Curriculum

Klein and Feldman (2007) determined that quality characteristics such as the amount of language interaction between the provider and the children have an impact on the quality of care, as well as a child's development. It is essential for childcare providers to provide language interaction for their students during play-based activities as well as basic care activities like feeding, diapering, and putting the children to sleep (Degotardi, 2010). Utilizing basic-care activities for language development can have a greater impact on encouraging language development and developing a bond between caregiver and child. Degotardi's (2010) study analyzed the complexity of the interaction, sensitivity of the interaction, the childcare provider's previous experience with infants, the infant-to-adult ratio in the classroom, the education level of the child care provider, and the age of the infant and found that every component had a significant impact on language development in the classroom.

Attachment is a key component to the language development process also. In a survey of childcare providers, all childcare staff that participated stated that being emotionally responsive to the child was one of the most important obligations of their jobs (Ebbeck & Yim, 2009). Childcare centers achieve this type of emotional connection in different ways. The primary caregiver model, involving face-to-face interaction and holding time throughout the day, seems to be the most popular method of establishing attachment with a small group of children (Ebbeck & Yim, 2009). This study also found that attachment relationships with opportunities for touch and sustained interaction supported a language-rich classroom model (Ebbeck & Yim, 2009).

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There is now a huge emphasis on making sure that all quality early childhood education programs provide a school-readiness curriculum. School-readiness can be defined as a curriculum that encourages children to master skills which will allow them to be prepared to start Kindergarten and achieve success (Hair, Halle, Terry-Humen, Lavelle, & Calkins, 2006). This school readiness curriculum should include pre-academic skills like counting and letter recognition; however, the curriculum must also address enthusiasm for learning, independence, self-help skills, social and emotional security, and the ability to follow directions. A school readiness curriculum also will prepare the entire family for the transition to elementary school by acclimating the family to the positive child outcomes that occur with higher levels of parent involvement (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010).

Bredenkamp and Copple (2009) found several essentials for a high-quality early childhood curriculum that include a balance between individual play and group play, indoor and outdoor play, and active and peaceful activities. These diverse skills prepare the children for independence, social interaction, and multi-sensory learning. These characteristics also allow children of different temperaments and learning styles to meet their individual needs.

Teaching

Degotardi (2010) also established that a low student-to-teacher ratio was an important quality characteristic for early childhood classrooms because lowering the student-to-teacher ratio allows each teacher to spend more individual time with the students, therefore allowing more individual language interactions. A study completed in Australia on quality early childhood classrooms used the CLASS assessment tool to rate

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teacher-child interactions on emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support (Taylor, et al., 2013). This study indicated that smaller classroom sizes and lower student-to-teacher ratios assisted with increased emotional support scores in order to increase individual interactions between children and adults. Cryer (2003) also included classroom size as an important quality element. This leads to more individual attention for each student from the teachers, and it can allow the children to make greater advances in social/emotional skills as well as cognitive development (Brownlee, Berthelsen, & Segaran, 2009).

The teaching style of the classroom can have a great impact on student success and a high-quality early childhood education environment. A collaborative teaching team allows the teachers to provide more attention to the individual students, allows general educators and special educators to partner to best serve the student population, and it enables early childhood professionals the opportunity to receive support from one another in the classroom (Hendler & Nakelski, 2008). Although some teaching responsibilities may overlap, a team teaching model allows each educator to focus on a specific teaching skill set and share more specialized training with his or her students (Hunt, Soto, Maier, Liborian, & Bae, 2004). This team teaching model also allows students and teachers of matching temperaments to bond more closely, which enables the teacher to motivate the student more closely.

A high-quality early childhood teaching environment includes more than teaching to the classroom as a whole. It involves individualized teaching to each student in the classroom. Early childhood professionals use assessment tools to evaluate each child's development and then create developmental goals for that child (Chen & McNamee,

2006). This style of teaching allows teachers to meet the needs of every student in the classroom despite a wide range of developmental abilities, and it also provides early childhood professionals the opportunity to scaffold each child individually for optimum development.

Assessment of Child Progress

Ongoing assessment of child progress is essential in a quality childcare program because it allows the childcare provider to understand the child's level of development and adapt the curriculum in order to best assist the child (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). Ongoing assessment provides information about the development of a child with special needs, but it also ensures that every child learns curricula and skills that are the most appropriate (Horn & Banerjee, 2009). The child's development can be assessed with several different tools: an informal assessment, a screening tool, and a diagnostic assessment. Informal assessment usually involves the childcare provider observing the child to measure performance compared to the performance of peers (Lonigan, Nicholas, & Lerner, 2011). Informal assessment can be conducted with checklists or a collected portfolio of the child's work. This type of assessment can assist the childcare provider in scaffolding the child to learn new skills, and although childcare providers usually improve at informal assessment with additional experience, there is no formal training or certification required. Also, this type of assessment may give the childcare provider an indication of a delay, but it is not formal enough to indicate the specific type of developmental delay with which the child may be struggling.

Another type of assessment used in a quality childcare environment is a screening tool. Screeners are brief, but standardized, tools that allow a childcare provider with

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minimal training to administer the assessment to a young child. These tools typically indicate if the child is meeting developmental milestones or if the child is below and may require more in-depth testing (Lonigan, et al., 2009). Even without further testing, the screening tool can allow the provider to see areas in which each child may need more time and attention in the classroom.

Finally, diagnostic assessment is the most intricate, standardized testing available for early childhood and frequently requires extensive training for the childcare provider or specialist that administers the test (Lonigan, et al., 2009). These tests have very high reliabilities and can offer very specific details about a child's developmental capabilities, but they may not be necessary for children who are typically-developing or showing a mild delay. Diagnostic assessment is rarely used in a typical childcare setting because a specialist who has been proven reliable with the tool must administer it. Public school preschool will have specialists trained to administer this type of assessment (as well as some select childcare settings). Most childcare programs will use a form of curriculum-based assessment and possibly a screening tool that can be used for referral purposes.

Along with providing early intervention as soon as possible, the major benefit of classroom assessment for the provider is to modify the classroom curriculum to meet the needs of all students (Horn & Banerjee, 2009). The childcare provider can create curricula that can be used by children with different developmental needs and then increase interaction with the curricula by allowing every child to engage with the environment and the activities. When the childcare provider has established goals for each child in the classroom based on his or her ability level, she can create activities with those goals and objectives embedded in the curricula (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009; Horn

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& Banerjee, 2009; Lonigan, et al., 2011). The assessment process is at its highest quality when childcare providers collaborate with the families to create an environment at home and school where the children are most likely to meet their goals (Finello, 2011).

Health

Childcare programs with high health and safety standards consistently rank high with parents seeking childcare for their young children (Wise, 2002). When childcare is low quality, children are at greater risk for infectious illnesses, injuries, and inadequate nurturing (Crowley, Jeon, & Rosenthal, 2013). However, quality childcare provides a healthy and safe environment when it offers benefits like developmentally appropriate care, fewer illnesses and injuries, health screenings, and early identification of health, development, and behavior concerns. Research has shown that childcare programs are most likely to achieve these health and safety benefits if they have access to a health consultant, like Kentucky's Child Care Health Consultants. A health consultant not only helps the teacher introduce healthy habits into the classroom, but also assists the children in taking care of their own hygiene needs. The Crowley et al. (2013) study also indicated that health and safety standards are more likely to be met when more unplanned inspections occur at a childcare program. If the program is held accountable by more than one accrediting body, the center is more likely to meet required health and safety standards.

Another component of a healthy classroom is appropriate nutrition. Childhood obesity numbers continue to grow, and children who are enrolled in full-time childcare consume up to 70% of their daily calorie intake during childcare (Mikkelsen, Husby, Shov, & Perez-Cueto, 2014). Early childhood, between the ages of birth through five

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years, is the best window to develop food preferences, and research shows that food interventions with young children are much more effective than waiting until children are even as old as kindergarten (Mikkelsen, et al., 2014).

Teachers

Degotardi's study (2010) stated that research has established the education/experience level of the teacher to be one of the most influential factors that determine quality levels for childcare. Degotardi did not assume that higher education levels instantly allowed the teacher to interact positively with young infants; however, her study indicated that after extensive early childhood training, caregivers were able to use more complex language interactions with the infants. These interactions led to stronger social/emotional ties and increased language skills. Thomason and Paro (2013) also analyzed teacher characteristics for quality teacher-child interactions. Their study found that teacher education and years of experience led to positive outcomes in student social/emotional development, but they found that improved cognitive outcomes were associated with the teacher's years of experience combined with high teacher job satisfaction. Most research studies on teacher education compared to teacher job experience show that the combination of the two components has a significant impact on quality early childhood education outcomes for young children, but there is no definitive data on which characteristic is the most influential (Degotardi, 2010; Thomason & Paro, 2013).

Families

Family involvement in early childhood education is not only associated with increased school readiness, and it shows a connection to increased continuity between

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home and school learning (Mendez, 2010). Families can be involved with their childcare program by volunteering their time to assist at the center, but other opportunities for involvement include participating in parent-teacher conferences, attending events held at the childcare program (e.g., family dinners, education programs for the family), and having continued communication with the classroom teachers about the development of the children. In order for the families to participate in these involvement opportunities, childcare providers must offer them. Mendez's study (2010) looked at parent involvement (or the extended family) in Head Start programs, and she found that the vast majority of parents who did participate in these activities were satisfied with their participation. The biggest barrier for involving parents in these opportunities was a conflict in work schedules. She also found that teachers who offered family involvement activities to families enrolled in their programs felt more connected to the family and were more able to offer holistic childcare to meet the needs of the family.

Community Relationships

Childcare centers give families access to many different types of resources that are important to both child and family well-being (Small, Jacobs, & Massengill, 2008). Some of the most common resources offered to families enrolled in a childcare program are medical referrals, dental and optometry referrals, child health information, domestic violence education, substance abuse education, referrals for children with disabilities, nutritional training, safety education, notification of community events, and information about the school system and the transfer to kindergarten. Families typically access these services either through formal referrals or through collaborative events. A formal referral may be initiated by the childcare provider, but the family may request the referral if they

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are in need of a particular service. The families can also access these resources through the center's collaborative partnership with local organizations. A collaborative effort could include allowing the organization to use room at the childcare facility, arranging meetings between the families and the community organization, or allowing the organization to sell materials at the childcare facility. When a childcare program partners with community organizations in this manner, the center initiates a holistic approach to childcare that meets the needs of the entire family so that everyone benefits. Many families may select a childcare center that has active community partnerships in order to receive a well-rounded childcare experience.

It is also essential for quality early childhood education programs to have community partnerships with local elementary school programs in order to assist families with the transition to Kindergarten (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010). This partnership begins with teaching a school readiness curriculum that will prepare the children for the expectations of Kindergarten curriculum. The partnership also includes giving families essential information about contacting the local schools to register for Kindergarten, giving them information about how to set up an Individualized Education Plan prior to the first day of school, or attending orientation events.

Physical Environment

Caring for Our Children states that the physical environment needs to begin with being clean and in good repair (AAP, APHA, & NRCHSCC, 2011). When furnishings and play materials are ripped and have jagged edges, they are much more likely to carry bacteria. Also, if materials have any type of sharp edges or broken pieces, then children are more likely to be injured by the material. The physical environment must be free from

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moisture, dust and excessive materials. The classroom must have access to water for hand-washing and cleaning purposes. Not only should the materials in the classroom be safe, but other structural maintenance should include windows and exterior doors in good repair. The center should maintain classroom materials with a regimen of cleaning and sanitizing, which is most likely mandated by state childcare regulations. Some key indicators of a high-quality physical environment include sufficient space in the classroom for all children with materials arranged in a manner that all children can safely access the materials in the classroom and other areas to which children have access: hallways, outdoor play areas, restrooms (Horn & Banerjee, 2009).

Along with the absence of broken and dirty items, Caring for Our Children establishes that the physical environment must provide a wide variety of indoor and outdoor play materials, multiples of activities so that children do not argue over a toy, and a variety of sensory experiences including sand and water play (AAP, APHA, & NRCHSCC, 2011). A classroom does not have to have all new materials in order to be a quality environment, but the materials should allow the children to have varied learning opportunities without risk of injury or excessive illness due to contamination. The outdoor environment must be developmentally appropriate for young toddlers and older preschoolers in order to minimize unintentional injury (Little & Wyver, 2010).

Leadership and Management

A study conducted in Australia by Weaver and Grace (2010) took a slightly different view about quality standards. Their research indicated that the three greatest factors influencing quality childcare are regulations, funding, and ownership structure. They contend that adhering to regulatory and accreditation requirements leads to higher

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health and safety standards and a stronger diet of school-readiness curricula. Proper funding for childcare programs allows for better teacher-to-staff ratios, lower staff turnover, higher levels of staff training, and improved staff-child interactions. The study indicated that a strong ownership structure, particularly in non-profit organizations, creates better staff-to-child ratios, better employment conditions, lower staff absences, reduced staff turnover, and lower work-related stress. The study also indicated that non-profit childcare programs scored higher on quality indicators than for-profit centers on categories like the physical environment, staff-to-child ratios, and developmentally appropriate curriculum. This is primarily due to the fact that non-profit organizations take any estimated profit and place that back into the programs and the staff support, whereas in for-profit centers, owners are the primary beneficiaries. The same study also looked at what staff members view as quality indicators compared to what parents view as quality indicators. Staff members believed that centers with set structural dimensions (established student-to-teacher ratios, maximum classroom sizes, and educational requirements) had the highest quality program; however, the parents believed that programs with high provider-child interactions were the highest quality.

Strong leadership and management can create a positive and inviting work environment for staff. A positive and inviting workplace can significantly reduce staff turnover in the early childhood classroom (Jovanovic, 2013). Childcare providers continue to stay in the field even if they prefer higher wages than the early childhood workforce can provide, but they may move from program to program to obtain the highest wages that the workplace can offer. Many early childhood providers have stated that benefits like a strong mentor, involvement in developing program policies,

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opportunities to select co-workers and support staff, unique professional development opportunities, and a strong benefit package (health insurance, dental care, and a retirement plan) will encourage childcare providers to stay at the same childcare program for an extended period of time and reduce turnover rates (Jovanovic, 2013).

Barriers to Selecting Quality Childcare

The most significant barrier to a family selecting quality childcare is cost (Quart, 2013). Although many studies do not include the cost factor as an indicator of quality childcare, it is essential to families that they can afford the price of the childcare setting so that it does not place undue financial burden on the family members in order to keep the child in childcare. Many families may know what quality indicators they would like to see in their children's childcare setting; however, the cost of the facility limits them from obtaining that quality of care.

If cost significantly limits the families' childcare options, families may be satisficing for the best option based on what childcare they can afford, instead of what is ultimately best for the young children in their care (Schwartz, Ben-Haim, & Dacso, 2011). The Robust model of satisficing would allow families to focus on what is "good enough" based on the financial resources the family can provide for childcare. If families are only looking for "good enough," then they may never consider options like a school-readiness curriculum, developmental assessments, or teachers with degrees in the field of early childhood education.

Quart (2013) states that the cost of quality childcare is no longer only a problem for families with lower income. Middle class and upper middle class families are struggling to pay tuition to quality childcare facilities even with two incomes in the

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home. Recent studies by Child Care Aware of America indicate that in 23 of 50 states the cost of childcare for two children is more than the cost of a mortgage for homeowners (Child Care Aware, 2013). In 30 of the 50 states, the cost of childcare for an infant exceeds the cost of tuition and fees at a four-year university. With costs this excessive, parents must often make the decision to forego quality childcare and select care that they can afford.

There are two different financial concerns for families looking for childcare. First, middle-class and upper-middle-class families are concerned with the overall cost of childcare and affording these costs (Quart, 2013). Second, families living in poverty are concerned with access to subsidized childcare and scholarship opportunities (Liu & Anderson, 2010).

Families often are unable to select a quality childcare program due to limited hours of operation. Working families must select full-day childcare programs, so half-day childcare settings will not meet their needs. However, not all full-day programs have the same hours of operations. A study by Huff and Cotte (2013) established that childcare programs with standard hours of operation from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM could not meet the needs of Canadian families, so families had to move children to centers closer to their place of employment in order to work as many hours as possible during that set time period.

Families with atypical work hours may struggle even more to find quality childcare that meets the needs of the family. Some atypical work shifts may be planned, as in the case of a parent who consistently works third shift, but other families may get less notice on when they are expected to be at work or may be on-call during nights and

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weekend hours. Bihan and Martin (2004) found that these families must often make precarious childcare arrangements that involve a combination of formal childcare, informal childcare (e.g., sitters), and friend/neighbor care. If these types of arrangements cannot be secured, then that usually leads to absenteeism from work, requesting leave without pay, or eventually the adult may lose his or her job, placing the family in more jeopardy.

Also, rural areas often do not provide access to the same type of quality childcare that can be found in cities (Brownlee, Berthelsen, & Segaran, 2009). A study by Jeon, Buettner, and Hur (2014) established that children from more affluent neighborhoods that attend preschool are more prepared for kindergarten than children from neighborhoods with more poverty; however, the study also acknowledged that families frequently feel ties to their neighborhood education programs regardless of the neighborhood affluence.

The location of childcare centers also appears to be a large determining factor on how families select childcare for their young children. A study by Small, Jacobs, and Massengill (2008) indicated that almost 78% of centers that were surveyed stated that “all or almost all” of the enrolled families lived in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Furthermore, neighborhoods with higher poverty rates had limited access to quality health care, legal representation, and childcare. In a large survey of parents in Maryland in 2003, the Maryland Committee for Children found that 80.4% of parents preferred a childcare program near their homes, and this factor was more important to some of the participants than hours of operation, cost, and even the quality of the childcare.

Families may consider the diversity of the childcare program when selecting a program to care for their children. The desire of most families is to find a childcare

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program that will care for their children in a manner similar to the way they would care for their children in the home (Zaman, Amin, Momjian, & Lei, 2012). This could refer to the discipline philosophy of the childcare program, the religious ceremonies and principles, or simply the social customs being taught at the program. This is exemplified when providers take the time to get to know each family and ask about the family preferences for encouraging their children, redirecting their children, and teaching independence to each child. Families may prefer that the cultural diversity of the childcare program mirror their own, or they may simply prefer that the program use a culturally sensitive childcare approach. Many families prefer an ethnically familiar childcare program so that children see and know teachers and families with a similar ethnic background. Ethnically diverse families may value this ecological aspect of the childcare program as greatly as a healthy and safe environment.

Family Priorities

Despite research from early education specialists that indicates the importance of student-to-teacher ratios, teacher education, and quality language interactions between child and provider, families select childcare qualities that are important to the family (Klein & Feldman, 2007). A study by Sosinsky and Kim (2013) looked at the factors that determine reasons families select care for their infant including income, single-parent status, maternal work hours and schedule, and family values about childcare. The study indicated that family structure like single-parent homes, the number of children in the family, and grandparents raising grandchildren affected the reasons that a family selected their childcare. These are factors that affect the families' financial status, but these factors can influence the priorities of the family.

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A study of same-gender couples in Australia showed that families with two mothers valued the essential quality indicators that early childhood research found essential; however, these families also had to look for childcare environments that did not discriminate against the family composition (Lee, 2010). In Australia, Lee (2010) found that gay mothers look for a balance between quality early childhood indicators and cultural acceptance of the family within the childcare program. If one of the two factors is eliminated, same-sex couples often choose to select an accepting and nurturing environment.

Single-parent homes often look for more logistical qualities when seeking childcare like the hours of operation, the cost, and the location of the childcare setting (Wise, 2002). Although quality indicators may be a high priority, if a parent is raising a child alone, the childcare setting must meet the availability needs of the parent as well.

More grandparents are now raising grandchildren than ever before, and these grandparents are making educational decisions for their families (Backhouse & Graham, 2012). Children are typically placed with grandparents as the primary custodians due to circumstances like parental drug and alcohol abuse, parent incarceration, parental mental health problems, child abuse and neglect charges against the parents, and early parental fatalities from cancer or car accidents. With traumatic experiences in the children's past already, the grandparents may be especially concerned with having consistent caregivers that establish solid attachments with their grandchildren (Meara, 2014; Backhouse & Graham, 2012). Also, since grandparents were not anticipating the costs of raising young children, the high cost of childcare may be very difficult for the grandparents (Backhouse & Graham, 2012). Finally, grandparents may be experiencing a wide range of negative

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emotions including the stress of raising another child, guilt for “failing” the first time they were parents, exhaustion, and depression. They often seek childcare programs that can provide community resources to help them move through this challenging lifestyle change.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to determine what characteristics of childcare are most important to the families of young children. This research study surveyed the families of children under the age of kindergarten that are currently paying for childcare and asked what they value when selecting care for their children.

Research Questions

1. How do families rank the characteristics of childcare in order of importance?
2. What are the three most important characteristics to families during the selection process?

Survey Questions

The researcher used the ten National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) program standards (relationships, curriculum, teaching, assessment of child progress, health, teachers, families, community relationships, physical environment, and leadership and management) to establish the quality childcare indicators. There were three quality characteristics listed on the survey for each NAEYC program standard. Under the characteristics of relationships, the researcher assessed the warmth and sensitive nature of the provider, the consistency of the caregivers, and how well the providers know the children and parents. The curriculum characteristics analyzed if the curriculum prepares the children for kindergarten, the child's opportunities for group and individual play, and purposeful conversations between the children and the provider. The teaching characteristics included if the center offers a collaborative teaching team, individualized curricula for students, and low teacher-to-student ratios. The characteristics of assessment leading to child progress included informal assessments

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throughout the curriculum, formal assessment with an established referral process when needed, and if the teachers individualize the curriculum based on the assessment data. Parents assessed the health and safety characteristics of a childcare center by rating if the program is safe and healthy, if the meals are healthy, and if the program is teaching healthy habits to the children. The three characteristics assessed about the teachers included if the teachers have the education and credentials to do their jobs, if they have the experience to do their jobs, and if they are happy to do their jobs. Under the characteristics of families, the survey evaluated if the center has ongoing communication with the families, if families are encouraged to participate in the program, and if family preferences are taken into consideration when setting goals. The survey assessed the program's community relationships to see if they have resources available for the transition from preschool to kindergarten, resources available for children with developmental delays, and resources available for children with medical and health needs. The three characteristics of the physical environment that were assessed were well-maintained toys and materials, the building and furnishings in good repair, and a safe place for outdoor play. Finally, the program management was assessed if the program meets licensing and accreditation requirements, if the program is financially sound, and if the program offers the employees a positive work environment. The researcher also included characteristics that might limit the families' abilities to choose a quality childcare program. These barriers were grouped into three thematic categories: economic factors, convenience factors and family values. The three characteristics for economics and convenience included if the family can afford the program, if the location is convenient, and if the hours of operation meet the family's needs. The three

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characteristics for family values included if the child is treated the same at school as home, if the program is ethnically and culturally diverse, and if the providers learn the family's preferences for how to care for the child.

Research Setting

The research setting for this study was Central Kentucky. Thirteen childcare programs agreed to participate in this research study. The director of each center gave initial approval for the researcher to invite participants to give information for the study (See Appendix A). Then the center directors invited the families enrolled in their programs to participate in the study. The community calendar website that distributed the survey has its primary audience in Central Kentucky. The public school system that distributed flyers to each of its elementary schools was also in Central Kentucky.

Research Sample

The target sample for this study was the parents or legal guardians of children currently enrolled in childcare programs in the Central Kentucky area. The participants had to have at least one child five years of age or younger that was enrolled in a Central Kentucky childcare program, and the participant had to be one of the individuals responsible for making payments on the child's tuition balance for the childcare program. Three hundred and ten parents/guardians from the thirteen participating childcare programs returned completed surveys. Demographic data from the survey participants show that a diverse base of families contributed data to the research study.

The researcher used an online survey to collect information from the participants (See Appendix B). The participants had the opportunity to choose the survey written in English or written in Spanish based on the language they preferred. Also, there were two

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levels of elimination to find a subject pool. The researcher contacted 120 childcare centers in Central Kentucky to ask those program directors to invite their families to participate in the study. The directors that agreed to participate asked their individual families to complete the online survey (See Appendix C), and those families chose whether or not they wanted to complete the survey. The childcare program directors could request a written copy of the survey if their parents preferred to respond on paper instead of the online survey. Likewise, the superintendent of the local public school system gave consent for the elementary school families to distribute fliers with the survey information on it, but the families then had to consent to participate as well. The community calendar posted the link to the survey on its social media page, and families had the opportunity to complete the survey if they wished to do so.

Data Collection

The researcher used a survey as the research method. The researcher contacted childcare programs in Central Kentucky and requested their participation in the study to distribute the survey through the center's email list (See Appendix C). Directors who were willing to participate contacted the researcher, signed a written release to participate, and received the electronic links for families to participate in the survey. The researcher provided parents and legal guardians a short survey to answer basic questions about what characteristics the adults value when selecting a childcare program (See Appendix B). The childcare programs had the opportunity to request paper copies of the survey if the program preferred to use hard copies. With regard to quality indicators, the researcher asked the adults to rate 36 characteristics of childcare (quality indicators and logistical factors) on a one-to-four Likert scale (1 = Not Important, 2 = Somewhat

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Important, 3 = Important, 4 = Very Important). The researcher also asked the families to select the three most important characteristics of childcare based on the preferences of the individual family from the total list of 36 characteristics. When the childcare programs distributed the survey link to their families, the researcher provided them with an introductory statement to send in the email or provide in the newsletter (See Appendix D). The same information was also distributed to 33 public elementary schools in the area on a paper flyer after the local superintendent offered consent. Families could choose to access the link online and complete the survey if they currently have a child enrolled in childcare.

In order to access as many families as possible, the researcher also contacted a local community calendar website that posts activities for families with young children. The researcher asked the community calendar to post the link to the survey on their website or social media page.

Data Analysis

The researcher reported descriptive statistics about the factors for childcare selection of the participants that completed the research study. These included mean scores and frequencies for each characteristic provided by participants. The researcher also analyzed what families believed to be the three most important characteristics of a childcare program and data regarding where the participants obtained information about the childcare programs that were considered.

Trustworthiness

Although each individual adult's ability to complete the English language (or Spanish) survey is different, the protocol for asking questions allowed the answers of the

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parents/legal guardians to give accurate answers. The survey was administered through an online survey website. The researcher asked questions that have one specific answer, and those scores were translated to a numeric score. The largest factor determining whether or not the interview information was accurate was if the participant gave honest answers. The researcher did not ask questions that would have a negative impact on the childcare facility that the participant patronizes, so there was no motivation to lie in order to preserve the relationship with the childcare program director. Also, since the online survey immediately collected the survey data, the participants' answers were confidential and anonymous and not visible to the program director. The answers that the participants gave to the researcher were recorded in the SPSS statistical software and reviewed for accuracy. The participants were assigned a number, instead of individual names, so there were no possible repercussions to the participants once the research study was made public.

Benefits & Risks of the Study

There are significant benefits to this study. Understanding what parents/legal guardians desire from their childcare program will not only assist childcare programs with marketing their programs, it will also help program directors design the curricula and safety components of the childcare program to meet the needs and priorities of the families. There are very few risks to the study.

Limitations

One limitation is that the final sample may not be an accurate representation of the population as a whole, and program directors reading the research results may make changes to their program based on a small, non-representative sample size. There is

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always some risk with self-reported data. The families may not understand the terminology, or their response may not accurately reflect their beliefs. Finally, the last possible limitation is the time from when the families selected childcare to the time they complete the survey. For example, if the family has a four-year-old preschool student, they may not remember the reasons they selected a childcare program four years ago when the child was an infant.

Summary

The results of this study reveal what characteristics families value most when selecting childcare for their young children and the importance of each individual characteristic on a list of attributes of childcare programs. The results are presented in the following chapter.

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CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

There has been extensive research on what childcare characteristics constitute quality childcare for children under the age of five (Degotardi, 2010; Klein & Feldman, 2007; Ebbeck & Yim, 2009; Sosinsky & Kim, 2013; Weaver & Grace, 2010; Cryer, 2003). The amount of language used in the classroom, student to teacher ratios, the education and experience of the childcare provider, the attachment relationship between the child and the provider, the classroom size, and the warmth and positive attitude of the childcare providers have a profound impact on the quality of childcare offered to young children (Cryer, 2003; Ebbeck & Yim, 2009; Klein & Feldman, (2007). Despite the research demonstrating which factors should be in place when parents select early childhood education, the families of young children often consider other factors in the selection process. Parents often report that elements such as location, familiarity with the organization, hours of operation, and cost are determining factors for them when selecting daycare for their children (Weaver & Grace, 2010).

The purpose of this research study was to survey parents and guardians of young children under the age of kindergarten to determine which factors are the most important to them in the childcare selection process. To collect the data for this research study, the researcher composed a survey using the ten National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) program standards (relationships, curriculum, teaching, assessment of child progress, health, teachers, families, community relationships, physical environment, and leadership and management) to establish the quality childcare indicators. There were three quality characteristics listed on the survey for each NAEYC program standard. To rate the importance of each characteristic, the participant rated its

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importance on a 1 to 4 Likert scale with 4 being the most important. The researcher also included characteristics that might limit the families' abilities to choose a quality childcare program: economic factors, convenience factors, and family values. Finally, the researcher asked families to select the three most important characteristics from the complete list of 36 traits of childcare centers.

The researcher contacted licensed childcare programs in the area and asked the center director for consent to distribute an electronic survey to the families enrolled in the childcare program (See Appendix B). Once the director offered consent (See Appendix A), the program staff at the childcare program distributed the survey link to the families with the understanding that participation was voluntary (See Appendix D). Thirteen childcare programs agreed to participate in the research study. The researcher also contacted the office of the superintendent at the local school system to ask for permission to distribute a paper flyer with information about the research study and the link to the online survey. The survey explained that only families that currently have a child enrolled in a childcare program were eligible to participate and reiterated that participation was voluntarily. Finally, the researcher contacted a local online community calendar to see if the calendar would post the online link to the family survey on their social media page. The survey was posted with information asking families to participate voluntarily if they lived or worked in Central Kentucky and currently had a child enrolled in a childcare program.

Family Responses

Three hundred ten participants completed the survey. They answered questions regarding the importance of relationships, curriculum, teaching, assessment of child

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progress, health, teachers, families, community relationships, physical environment, leadership and management, economics, convenience, and family values. After the participants ranked these items from 1 to 4 on a Likert scale, the mean score of the participants was calculated (See Appendix E). When the participants ranked the characteristics initially, they classified each item independently. Using descriptive statistics, the researcher compiled a list of each mean score and frequency for the 36 childcare characteristics (See Appendices E & F). The researcher found that the characteristics with the top five mean scores included a healthy and safe childcare environment, providers with a warm and nurturing nature, a program which meets all licensing and accreditation standards, ongoing communication between childcare providers and families, and hours of operation which are convenient for the families involved. The results from the surveys are compiled in Appendices E, F & G.

The characteristics with the five lowest mean scores include the cultural and ethnic diversity of the childcare program, the ability of the childcare program to refer a child to a medical professional if needed, the ability of the childcare program to refer a child for support services (e.g., speech pathologist or occupational therapist) if needed, the ability of the childcare program to provide a system (including a developmental assessment) to refer a child who may have a developmental delay, and the ability of a childcare program to consider family preferences when setting goals for a child.

Item Means and Frequencies

The first characteristic that families were asked to evaluate was the program's ability to refer a child for support services (e.g., speech pathologist, therapist, counselor) if the child shows signs of a developmental delay. Three hundred nine participants rated

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this characteristic for a mean score of 2.81. Of those participants, 36 individuals felt that this characteristic was not important (11.7% of the total responses). Eighty-three participants (26.9% of respondents) rated the characteristic as somewhat important, and 93 participants (30.1% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as important. Ninety-three participants (31.4% of respondents) rated this characteristic as very important.

Next, 308 participants scored the importance of a childcare program's convenient location, and those participants gave this characteristic a mean score of 3.3. Two participants (0.6% of the respondents) stated that this characteristic was not important. Fifty-six participants (18.2% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 99 participants (32.1% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. One hundred fifty-one participants (49% of the respondents) stated that this characteristic is very important when selecting childcare.

Three hundred seven participants responded to the importance of childcare programs having a system in place, using an assessment tool, to refer a child that may have a developmental delay, and the mean score for this characteristic was 2.96. Twenty-five participants (8.1% of the respondents) stated that this characteristic was not important. Sixty-five participants (21.2% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 114 participants (37.1% of the respondents) stated that this characteristic is important. One hundred three participants (33.6% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

The participants in the study were asked to rate the importance of a childcare program being a safe and healthy place, and 308 participants responded. The mean score for this characteristic is 3.98 with a maximum mean score of 4.0. There were no

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participants that rated this characteristic as not important or somewhat important. Five participants (1.6% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important, 303 participants (98.4% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred eight participants responded to the survey question asking how important it is for a childcare program to teach healthy practices (e.g., tooth brushing, handwashing) to the children enrolled in the program, and the mean rating was 3.5. Two participants (0.6% of the respondents) stated that this characteristic is not important. Seventeen participants (5.5% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as somewhat important, and 115 participants (37.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. One hundred seventy-four participants (56.5% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred nine participants rated the importance of a childcare program learning the families' preferences for how to care for their children, and the mean score for this characteristic is 3.33. One participant (0.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as not important. Forty participants (12.9% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important and 124 participants (40.1% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. One hundred forty-four participants (46.6% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Participants were asked to rate the importance of the building and furnishings of the childcare program being in good repair, and 307 participants responded to this question. The mean score for this characteristic is 3.48. There were no participants that ranked this characteristic as not important. Thirteen participants (4.2% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as somewhat important, and 133 participants (43.3%

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of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. One hundred sixty-one participants (52.4% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Next, the participants were asked to rate the importance of families being encouraged to be involved with the childcare program, and 308 participants responded to this question. The mean score for this characteristic is 3.26. Five participants (1.6% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as not important. Forty participants (13% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 134 participants (43.5% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. One hundred twenty-nine participants (41.9% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred nine participants rated the importance of having warm and sensitive childcare providers, and the mean score was 3.87. There were no participants that rated this characteristic as not important. Three participants (0.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as somewhat important, and 34 participants (11% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as important. Two hundred seventy-two participants (88% of the respondents) rated this characteristic of childcare programs as very important.

The survey participants were asked to rate the importance of children being treated at school in a similar manner to how they are treated at home. Three hundred seven participants rated this characteristic for a mean score of 3.31. Three participants (1% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as not important. Thirty-six participants (11.7% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 131 participants (42.7% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. One

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hundred thirty-seven participants (44.6% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred nine participants rated the importance of a childcare program having the resources to transition a child from an early childhood program to an elementary school program, and the mean score for this characteristic is 3.53. Five participants (1.6% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as not important. Twenty-five participants (8.1% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 81 participants (26.2% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. One hundred ninety-eight participants rated this characteristic as very important.

Survey participants were asked to rate the importance of a childcare program meeting all regulations and accreditation requirements. Three hundred nine participants responded to create a mean score of 3.8. There were no participants that rated this characteristic as not important. Five participants (1.6% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 51 participants (16.5% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as important. Two hundred fifty-three participants (81.9% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred seven participants responded when asked about the importance of low teacher-to-student ratios in a childcare program, and the mean score for this characteristic was 3.58. One participant (0.3% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as not important. Seven participants (2.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as somewhat important and 113 participants (36.8% of the respondents)

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scored this characteristic as important. One hundred eight-six participants (60.6% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred eight participants rated the importance of ongoing communication between childcare providers and the families, and the mean score was 3.78. No participants rated this characteristic as not important. Two participants (0.6% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 64 participants (20.8% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. Two hundred forty-two participants (78.6% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

The participants were asked to rate the importance of a childcare program having the ability to refer a child to a medical specialist, if needed. Three hundred seven participants completed this question, and the mean score was 2.55. Forty-three participants (14% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as not important. One hundred six participants (34.5% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as somewhat important and 104 participants (33.9% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as important. Fifty-four participants (17.6% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred seven participants rated the importance of childcare providers having the required education and credentials to perform their jobs, and the mean score for this characteristic is 3.6. One participant (0.3% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as not important. Fourteen participants (4.6% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 93 participants (30.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. One hundred ninety-nine participants (64.8% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

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Survey participants were asked to rate the importance of childcare providers individualizing the curriculum based on the needs of the children. Three hundred eight participants responded to this survey question, and the mean score for this characteristic is 3.16. Eight participants (2.6% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as not important. Forty-eight participants (15.6% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as somewhat important, and 139 participants (45.1% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as important. One hundred thirteen participants (36.7% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred eight participants rated the importance of childcare programs offering a supportive and warm environment for the employees, and the mean score for this characteristic is 3.51. One participant (0.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as not important. Seven participants (2.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as somewhat important, and 133 participants (43.2% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as important. One hundred sixty-seven participants (54.2% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred nine participants rated the importance of childcare programs offering children the opportunities to play in groups and to play individually each day, and the mean score of this characteristic is 3.58. There were no participants that ranked this characteristic as not important. Fourteen participants (4.5% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 103 participants (33.3% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as important. One hundred ninety-two participants (62.1% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as very important.

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Three hundred seven participants rated the importance of each childcare classroom having a teaching team that works together to benefit the children enrolled in the classroom, and the mean score for this characteristic is 3.49. One participant (0.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as not important. Twenty-three participants (7.5% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 107 participants (34.9% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. One hundred seventy-six participants (57.3% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred seven survey participants rated the importance of a childcare program being open during the needed hours of operation, and the mean score for this characteristic is 3.77. One participant (0.3% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as not important, and seven participants (2.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as somewhat important. Fifty-five survey participants (17.9% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as important, and 244 participants (79.5% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred eight survey participants ranked the importance of purposeful conversations in the early childhood classroom between children and providers, as well as between children and peers, that occur frequently, and the mean score was 3.45. There were no participants that rated this characteristic as not important. Twenty participants (6.5% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 128 participants (41.6% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. One hundred sixty participants (51.9% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

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The survey participants were asked to rate the importance of childcare providers being happy to do their jobs. Three hundred nine participants rated this characteristic, and the mean score is 3.76. There were no participants that scored this characteristic as not important. Seven participants (2.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as somewhat important, and 60 participants (19.4% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as important. Two hundred forty-two participants (78.3% of the respondents) ranked this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred eight participants rated the importance of a childcare program being ethnically and culturally diverse, and the mean score for this characteristic is 2.54. Forty participants (13% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as not important, and 103 participants (33.4% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important. One hundred twenty-three participants (39.9% of the respondents) ranked this characteristic as important, and 42 participants (13.6% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred nine participants rated the importance of childcare programs having well-maintained toys and materials, and the mean score is 3.39. There were no participants that rated this characteristic as not important. Nineteen participants (6.1% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 152 participants (49.2% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. One hundred and thirty-eight participants (44.7% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred eight participants rated the importance of a childcare program being financially sound and able to operate for an extended period of time, and the mean score for this characteristic is 3.52. There were no participants that rated this

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characteristic as not important. Fifteen participants (4.9% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 118 participants (38.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. One hundred seventy-five participants (56.8% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Survey participants were asked to rate the importance of childcare programs providing healthy meals to the children enrolled. Three hundred nine participants rated this characteristic, and the mean score is 3.39. Thirteen participants (4.2% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as not important, and 29 participants (9.4% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as somewhat important. Ninety-one participants (29.4% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important, and 176 participants (57% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred nine survey participants rated the importance of a childcare program having an outdoor play area that is safe and appropriate for the age and ability-level of the children, and the mean score for this characteristic is 3.73. No participants rated this characteristic not important. Five participants (1.6% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 72 participants (23.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. Two hundred thirty-two participants (75.1% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred six survey participants rated the importance of childcare programs using curriculum that prepares children for kindergarten, and the mean score for this characteristic is 3.61. Three participants (1% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as not important, and 19 participants (6.2% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as somewhat important. Seventy-three participants (23.9% of the respondents) rated this

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characteristic as important, and 211 participants (69% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

The survey participants rated the importance of childcare providers knowing the children and the families well, and 309 participants responded. The mean score was 3.5. No participants rated the score as not important. Fifteen participants (4.9% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 125 participants rated this characteristic as important. One hundred sixty-nine participants (54.7% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred ten survey respondents rated the importance of childcare providers having previous experience performing their jobs, and the mean score was 3.49. No participants rated this characteristic as not important. Twenty-two participants (7.1% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 114 participants (36.8% of the participants) rated this characteristic as important. One hundred seventy-four participants (56.1% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Survey participants were asked to rate the importance of childcare providers planning the classroom curriculum based on the child assessment data results in order to teach the skills that each child needs to learn, and 307 participants rated this characteristic. The mean score is 3.13. Seven participants (2.3% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as not important, and 51 participants (16.6% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as somewhat important. One hundred forty-five participants (47.2% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as important, and 104 participants (33.9% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as very important.

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Three hundred ten survey participants rated the importance of children having the same childcare providers each day, and the mean score was 3.49. One participant (0.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as not important, and 17 participants (5.5% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important. One hundred twenty-one participants (39.0% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as important, and 171 participants (55.2% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred seven participants rated the importance of childcare providers considering the family preferences before setting goals for the children, and the mean score was 3.02. Six survey participants (2.0% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as not important, and 67 participants (21.8% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as somewhat important. One hundred forty-nine participants (48.5% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important, and 85 participants (27.7% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Three hundred eight survey participants rated the importance of childcare programs being affordable, and the mean score was 3.29. No participants rated this characteristic as not important. Forty-seven participants (15.3% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as somewhat important, and 124 participants (40.3% of the respondents) rated this characteristic as important. One hundred thirty-seven participants (44.5% of the respondents) scored this characteristic as very important.

Top 3 Characteristics of Childcare

The researcher also used the data from the surveys to determine what families believed to be the most important characteristics of a childcare program if they were limited to only select three characteristics (See Appendix G). By far, families rated a

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healthy and safe environment as the most important characteristic of a quality childcare program, and 70% of the participants selected this characteristic as one of the top three factors for the selection process. The second most important characteristic was that childcare providers are warm and nurturing with the children. Thirty-two percent of families selected this trait as one of the top three characteristics. The third most important characteristic for the families that participated in the survey was the location of the childcare program. Eighteen percent of families selected this characteristic in their top three characteristics. There was a three-way tie for the fourth most important characteristic of a quality childcare program: ongoing communication between the childcare providers and the families, a school-readiness curriculum that prepares children for kindergarten, and affordable cost for the program. Each of these traits was selected by 15% of the participants responding to the survey.

The childcare program's ability to refer a child to a medical specialist, the childcare program's ability to operate with financial security, the childcare provider's ability to incorporate family preferences into goals for each child, the childcare program's teaching healthy practices (handwashing, tooth brushing, etc.), and the childcare program's having well-maintained toys and materials were ranked as the five lowest characteristics by the percent of families who selected these characteristics.

Decision Making Information

When the participants were asked where they obtained the information about the childcare program in order to make their decision, the participants (43.2%) used the information provided by a recommendation from a family member currently enrolled or by an employee of the childcare facility. Many participants also based their decision on

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the information provided during a tour of the facility (36.8%). Only 20% of the families obtained their information of the childcare program through the program website or by attending a preschool education fair.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Early childhood education professionals believe that quality early care and education environments include characteristics like a language-rich classroom environment, an attachment relationship between the child and the provider, smaller class sizes and student-to-teacher ratios, classrooms using developmental assessments to individualize curriculum, and a warm and positive attitude from the childcare providers (Cryer, 2003; Ebbeck & Yim, 2009; Klein & Feldman, 2007). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has established standards for high quality early childhood education programs including relationships, curriculum, teaching, assessment of child progress, health, teachers, families, community relationships, physical environment, and leadership and management (NAEYC, 2008). These are the areas that the NAEYC deems to be the most critical quality indicators for the early childhood classroom and the programs at large. Literature supports that these characteristics align with high-quality early childhood education environments (Brownlee, et al., 2009; Cryer, 2003; Degotardi, 2010; Ebbeck & Yim, 2009; Klein & Feldman, 2007; Taylor, et al., 2013; Thomason & Paro, 2013; Weaver & Grace, 2010; Wise, 2002).

In this study, the researcher used the NAEYC standards of quality early childhood education programs and created a list of childcare characteristics based on those standards. The researcher also included several additional characteristics regarding cost, convenience, and family values. These characteristics were placed on a survey and distributed to families in Central Kentucky who currently have a child under the age of kindergarten enrolled in a childcare program. The families were asked to rate the

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importance of each characteristic on a 1 to 4 Likert scale. After rating each characteristic, the participants were then asked to select the top three most important characteristics from the list. Finally, the participants were asked to indicate where they received the information they used to make their decision on a childcare program (e.g., a referral from an enrolled family, a tour of the facility, etc.). The research questions focused on how families rank the characteristics of childcare in order of importance and the three most important characteristics to families during the selection process. The researcher's hypothesis was, despite the professional emphasis on quality practices, families still place a strong emphasis on access characteristics like cost, hours of operation, and location.

Findings

When families had the opportunity to give each characteristic an individual score that was independent of all other characteristics, they rated many of the characteristics of childcare as important or very important. On a 1 to 4 Likert scale, the lowest mean score for any characteristic was only a 2.54 with 2 = Somewhat Important and 3 = Important. The high means show that ideally families consider most of these characteristics important when selecting a childcare program. Based on the mean scores provided on the survey, the top five characteristics, in order, included the health and safety of the program, the warmth and sensitivity of the providers, the degree to which the program complies with all regulations and accreditation requirements, the presence of ongoing communication between providers and families, and the convenience of the hours during which the program is open. The five characteristics with the lowest mean scores included the cultural and ethnic diversity of the childcare program, the ability of the childcare program to refer a child to a medical specialist, the ability of the childcare program to

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refer a child for support services (e.g., speech pathologist or therapist), the presence of a system at the childcare program (using an assessment tool) to refer a child for a possible developmental delay, and the consideration of family preferences when setting goals for the children.

When families were only allowed to select the top three most important characteristics of childcare programs, the data changed. The most important characteristic was a healthy and safe childcare program, and 70% of the respondents selected that characteristic as one of the most important. Next, 32% of the respondents selected they want childcare providers to be warm and sensitive. Those two traits are the same on both questions, but then the data begins to change across the two formats of questions. Eighteen percent of respondents selected that the location of the childcare program was a top three consideration. There was a three-way tie for fourth place with 15% of the respondents selecting the cost of the childcare program, ongoing communication between the childcare providers and the families, and a curriculum that prepares children for kindergarten as equally important traits. Based on the data when families had to select only three important traits of childcare, the lowest characteristics were the ability of the childcare program to refer a child to a medical specialist, the financial soundness of the childcare program and its ability to operate for an extended period of time, the consideration of family preferences when setting goals for the children, and the presence of instruction in health habits such as tooth brushing and handwashing.

Data Trends

When looking at the data on the complete list of childcare characteristics, there are several trends that are easy to find. The traits that consistently scored high were

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classified by health and safety, relationships, and access factors (cost, location, and hours of operation). The traits that scored the lowest between both sets of data include family assessment of child progress, the referral process, family involvement, and program diversity. These trends, consistent with the data found in the literature review, show that the families are focusing more on aspects of care than education when selecting a childcare local for young children. The education-based components that scored the highest included children transitioning well from preschool to kindergarten and the center providing a curriculum that focuses on school readiness. These goals primarily focus on the outcome of the education process. All of the education characteristics that focus on process and resources for quality education scored lower in both sets of data, particularly the use of developmental assessments. Another trend showed that families did not place high scores on characteristics that involved family involvement. These items include families being involved in the childcare program, providers using family preferences to set goals for the children, and providers treating the children similarly at school to the way they are treated at home. One other low scoring area was an ethnically and culturally diverse childcare program. These trends are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Emphasis on Care and Not Education

The families scored health, safety and caring relationships as the top characteristics for quality childcare. These are foundational traits for a childcare environment, and if the families must be apart from their children during the day, it is important to know that the children are healthy and safe and that someone is being affectionate with the children during the families' absence. Families desire their children

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to be safe and happy; however, if that is all the families desire, then they are selecting babysitting, not early education. A quality early education environment includes health, safety, and loving relationships, but a babysitting service rarely includes education. The difference in the two services includes adding educated professionals caring for the children, developmental assessments that allow teachers to understand the development levels of each of the children in their care, individualized curriculum that allows each student to learn at his or her own pace, and a language-rich environment that allows children to engage in conversation and prepare their vocabulary for literacy activities in the future (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009; Chen & McNamee, 2006; Cryer, 2003; Degotardi, 2010; Finello, 2011; Horn & Banerjee, 2009; Sosinsky & Kim, 2013). Since childcare programs exist that incorporate both basic care needs and early education, why do families value one set of characteristics more than the other? The research from this survey showed that families do value the outcome that their children are prepared for kindergarten, but they do not individually value many of the essential skills that make that possible. One explanation is that families do not understand what skills make a child ready for kindergarten and what early childhood educators need to spend time teaching the children in order to prepare them for kindergarten. A second explanation is that the emphasis on care over early education show that families still believe that “school” starts in kindergarten and not as early as the infant classroom.

Family Involvement

In this survey, families awarded lower scores to items that included family involvement. The one family participation trait that did score high was ongoing communication between the childcare providers and the families ($m = 3.78$); however, if

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the families in the survey do not prioritize assessments and individualized curriculum, then the survey suggests that this ongoing communication focuses on the basic needs of the children (e.g., happiness, safety, health). Increased parent involvement and participation in education activities during early childhood education increases a child's school readiness skills (Mendez, 2010). Mendez's study (2010) also shows that families who do participate in school functions report afterwards that they enjoy the experience. If families are not prioritizing family involvement in the infant, toddler, or preschool classroom, what is the source of this lack of involvement? Do families simply not have the time to be involved with their early education program, or do they not see the need? Since most early childhood education programs are small businesses that require the family to pay a fee, then families may view the establishment as an employee and not see the need to volunteer for the program. Also, families may still view early childhood education as babysitting instead of an educational institution preparing the children for elementary school. If the family does not value the program as a school, then they may not see the importance of offering their time to the organization. Finally, they may view their involvement as critical in the childcare selection phase. They talk to friends and relatives and tour the facility to make the best choice. Once they make this choice, they may see their involvement as unimportant because they believe their child is in a safe and nurturing environment.

Classroom Diversity

The survey respondents gave low scores to the diversity component when they could rate the score individually ($m=2.54$) and when they had to select the three most important characteristics (2%). The respondents to this survey were all from Central

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Kentucky. This finding could be centralized to the region. It is important to note that Central Kentucky has several large universities and many international businesses that do bring more cultural and ethnic diversity to the area than most parts of the state. Despite that regional diversity, it was not a priority for a characteristic of the childcare program. The reason that diversity does not rank higher for more families warrants further research.

Access Factors

The last questions that respondents answered on the survey were from where they received their information about the childcare program. The largest number of respondents stated they received their information from a currently enrolled family or from someone who previously had a child at the center (43.2%), not from the program itself. This poses the question of how much these families know about their childcare program and if the information is accurate. It also brings to light the fact that word of mouth has a great deal of power when it comes to marketing. The second most commonly cited source of information was an actual tour of the program with direct information from an employee (36.8%). The remaining 20% of respondents received information about the program from the school website or from a community or preschool fair. Collectively, these findings highlight that parents utilize and value personal and informal information more so than formal information.

Implications for Childcare Program Directors

The information from this research study has several implications for program directors. First, when parents are selecting childcare programs, it is essential for the program to have high standards of basic care. Families desire a program that minimizes

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illness and injury, and families want a childcare provider that nurtures their young children. Although this is common knowledge to all early childhood professionals, sometimes these standards may diminish in quality as the program tries to add additional services like music or Spanish classes or elaborate materials. Regardless of the other services a program offers, families desire that these two cornerstones (health/safety and relationships) be the foundation of the program.

Access to quality childcare is also an essential component for families. Survey respondents ranked location as a very important factor for a childcare program. This probably means that most families that would choose a certain childcare program already live in that area. The program director can focus marketing efforts within a distinct radius of the childcare program because those are the most likely participants. If the director is selecting a new location for a program, then he or she needs to pick an area with a higher population density of the families to whom the center wants to market its services. It is also essential not to place the cost so high that families do not have access to the center. If the cost begins to eliminate a large number of families, then it would be better to reduce the extra services that the program provides than to out price the primary patrons of the program. It is also important to make sure that the hours of operation allowing working families the time to drop off their children, complete the work day, and pick up their children with convenience.

Since the survey showed that the primary source of decision-making information came from other enrolled families instead of marketing tools like the company website or preschool fairs, program directors should consider placing their marketing budget into incentives for families that refer others to the program (e.g., a tuition discount). In today's

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society it is still essential for an early education program to have a website, but limiting the website budget may reallocate funds that can bring in more family referrals.

Although the survey results showed that families did not prioritize the educational components of early childhood education as highly as the basic care components, it is essential that childcare programs do not reduce these quality care indicators. It is still essential to individualize curriculum, hire staff with education in the field of early childhood education, and use child assessments to assist with curriculum planning. Instead of dropping these services, childcare programs need to invest time and resources into parent education. This may include a parent education program, parent-teacher conference that explains child assessment results in detail, or print and email communication with families detailing the essential skills for school readiness. In order for families to view childcare as an early education institution, as well as basic care for young children, childcare programs must be advocates for the field. Directors and providers must show families the importance of these indicators for their children's development and to prepare each child for kindergarten.

Implications for Early Education Policy

Survey respondents indicated from their responses that all three access factors (location, cost, and hours of operation) were extremely important when selecting childcare. If families must select a childcare location in their area due to limited transportation, the ability to get to work easily and still pick children up during operating hours, or due to cultural preferences, then there must be quality childcare programs accessible no matter where families live. This includes urban and rural areas, not just suburban communities. This also means that all families must be able to find a quality

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childcare program that they can afford for their children. If childcare costs are now challenging middle-class families, as well as families at or close to the poverty-level, then it is essential to find new ways to subsidize costs so that all children have access to early education programs and basic needs care (Child Care Aware, 2013).

Along with providing accessible childcare, policy makers need to shift their focus from educating families on the importance of early childhood education to the processes of early childhood education. Families still need to be told that early education is important, but instead of talking about early elementary test scores, policy makers need to explain the essential skills that are taught during this time period. Educators are already receiving this information. Professional development for early childhood educators provides information on essential skills that need to be taught during these early years, how these skills affect the child's whole development, and how the developmental milestones prepare the child for kindergarten. We need to share this type of information with families. Instead of giving out flyers that tell families that they need to enroll their children in Head Start or other preschool programs, families need to understand why these quality indicators benefit the children.

Implications for Further Research

There are several questions that arose from this research study that need to be examined further. First, it is essential to see why families still value basic care for their children over a program that combines early education and basic care needs. One possible explanation could be the education level of the family. If the family does not value the education system as a whole, then early childhood education will not be a high priority. It would be interesting to use a similar survey but collect information the parent education

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level as well. Another way to look the contrast between early education and basic care is to evaluate the families' background on early education. For example, does a teacher value early education more since that knowledge is already in his or her skill set. If two similar childcare programs could be selected, it would be interesting to see their responses to this type of survey in a before and after study when one program implements an extensive parent education program on the intricacies of early childhood education. Another option is to do research asking families what attributes they believe are essential to kindergarten readiness outcomes. If families believe that children should be prepared for kindergarten, then it may be essential to see what they believe makes a child ready for kindergarten.

Second, it is also important to look further into the lack of family involvement as a priority at the early childhood education level. Since Mendez's study (2010) emphasized a correlation between parent involvement and school readiness, perhaps it would benefit families to show a comparison study between childcare programs that offer parent involvement opportunities and those that do not. There is another opportunity for comparison to look at families volunteer habits. Do most families wait to volunteer at elementary school or do the families that do not volunteer at the early childhood programs do not volunteer at elementary school either?

Finally, more exploration is needed to see why or why not families prefer a culturally diverse classroom for their children. If specific benefits (e.g., empathy, tolerance) can be linked to diversity in the preschool classroom, would families place a higher value on that trait?

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APPENDIX A:

Signed Agreement for the Center Directors

Date _____

To Whom It May Concern:

I, _____, give consent to allow Sarah Taylor Vanover to offer the families at _____ child care program an opportunity to participate in an electronic survey (or written copy survey) and to collect information for her dissertation research project. Once I distribute the survey to the families at _____, they are not obligated to complete the survey and their information will remain anonymous. Please contact me with any additional questions about _____ childcare program's participation in this research study.

Printed Name _____

Title _____

Signature _____

Work Phone Number _____

APPENDIX B:

Survey on Quality Child Care Characteristics

Survey on Child Care Selection for Central Kentucky Families

Please answer the following questions about what is important to your family when selecting childcare for your young child.

1. Do you live or work in Lexington, Kentucky?

- Yes
- No

2. Do you have a child, age 5 or younger, who is currently in childcare?

- Yes
- No

3. Which example best describes the adults living in your home?

- Mother & Father
- Single Parent Family
- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
- Same-Gender Couple

Please rate the importance of the following characteristics of childcare programs based on what your family found to be important when selecting the child's CURRENT childcare.

Circle one of the numbers between 1 to 4.

1 = Not Important

2 = Somewhat Important

3 = Important

4 = Very Important

4. The childcare program can refer a child for support services (ex. a therapist or a counselor) if he or she shows a possible developmental delay.

1 2 3 4

5. The childcare program is in a convenient location.

1 2 3 4

6. The childcare program has a system in place, using their assessment tool, to refer a child who may have a developmental delay.

1 2 3 4

7. The childcare program is a safe and healthy place.

1 2 3 4

8. The childcare program teaches children healthy practices (ex. toothbrushing, handwashing, etc.).

1 2 3 4

9. The childcare providers learn the family preferences for caring for the child.

1 2 3 4

10. The building and furnishings are in good condition.

1 2 3 4

11. Parents are encouraged to be involved with the childcare program.

1 2 3 4

12. The childcare providers are warm and sensitive.

1 2 3 4

13. The children are treated at school similar to the manner that they are treated at home.

1 2 3 4

14. The childcare program has resources to help children transition from the early childhood center to an elementary school program.

1 2 3 4

15. The childcare program meets all regulations and accreditation requirements.

1 2 3 4

16. The childcare program has low staff-to-student ratios.

1 2 3 4

17. The childcare providers have ongoing communication with the family.

1 2 3 4

18. The childcare program can refer a child to a medical specialist, if needed.

1 2 3 4

19. The childcare providers have the required education and credentials to perform their jobs.

1 2 3 4

20. The childcare providers individualize curriculum for the children's needs.

1 2 3 4

21. The childcare program offers a supportive and warm environment for employees.

1 2 3 4

22. The childcare program has opportunities for group play and individual play.

1 2 3 4

23. Each classroom has a teaching team that works together to benefit the children.

1 2 3 4

24. The childcare program is open during the needed hours.

1 2 3 4

25. There are purposeful conversations in the classroom between children and providers and children and peers that occur frequently.

1 2 3 4

26. The childcare providers are happy to do their job.

1 2 3 4

27. The families enrolled in the childcare program are ethnically and culturally diverse.

1 2 3 4

28. The childcare program has well-maintained toys and materials.

1 2 3 4

29. The childcare program is financially sound and able to operate for an extended period of time.

1 2 3 4

30. The childcare program provides healthy meals.

1 2 3 4

31. The childcare program has an outdoor play area that is safe and appropriate for the age and ability-level of the children.

1 2 3 4

32. The childcare program uses informal assessments or development checklists to document and review children's strengths and weaknesses

1 2 3 4

33. The childcare program uses curriculum that prepares the children for kindergarten.

1 2 3 4

34. The childcare providers know the children and parents well.

1 2 3 4

35. The childcare providers have experience performing their job.

1 2 3 4

36. The childcare program plans its curriculum based off of child assessment results in order to teach the skills that the children need to learn.

1 2 3 4

37. The same childcare providers care for the children each day.

1 2 3 4

38. The childcare provider considers family preferences when setting goals for the children.

1 2 3 4

39. The cost of childcare program is affordable.

1 2 3 4

40. Please select the top three characteristics of childcare, from the characteristics above, that you believe are the most important when selecting childcare?

41. Where did you get your information about the childcare program before you enrolled your child?

- Program Website
- Tour of the Facility
- Recommendation of a Currently Enrolled Family
- Recommendation of an Employee
- Had an Older Child Previously Attend the Program
- Attended a Preschool Fair and Received Information
- Other

APPENDIX C:

Letter to Child Care Center Directors

June 8th, 2015

Dear Child Care Program Director,

My name is Sarah Taylor Vanover, and I am a doctoral candidate at Eastern Kentucky University. For my dissertation study, I am examining what characteristics families look for when selecting a childcare program for their young children. Because you are a Type 1, licensed childcare program in the Lexington area serving children from birth to five, I am inviting you to participate in this research study. Your participation in the study simply involves giving consent and distributing a survey to the families in your program who have a child under the age of kindergarten.

If you give your consent to distribute the survey to the families in your childcare program, each family who receives the survey will have the opportunity to volunteer to participate in the study or refuse participation. Participation is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty. There is no compensation for responding. The risks are minimal to participate in the study, because no family will be asked for specific contact information or information about their current childcare program. Families can complete the survey online in English or in Spanish, and the results will be immediately collected. If your program participants would prefer paper copies of the survey, then I can provide those as well. Although I am asking for director consent in June, the survey will not be distributed until the month of August, after the beginning of the new school year. The research study should conclude by Friday, September 11th, 2015. I ask that if you agree to invite families in your center to participate that you either send the link to the survey out to the families by email or include the link in your newsletter or on your group Facebook page for the program.

The information collected from this study will benefit childcare program directors because it will show what families are looking for when selecting childcare. This information will allow program directors to evaluate their own programs and see if the services offered at the center align with the services that families are seeking.

If you choose to participate in this study, please contact me by email at Sarah.vanover@aol.com to indicate your willingness for your center to participate in the study. I will email you a written agreement to sign and return to me allowing your center to participate. I will also send you the electronic link to the survey in August. Your response is appreciated by Friday, June 26th, 2015.

If you have any questions, please contact me at my home telephone number of 859-338-7807 or by email at Sarah.vanover@aol.com.

Sincerely,

Sarah Taylor Vanover

EKU Doctoral Student

APPENDIX D:

Introduction to Research Survey for Families

Monday, August 24th, 2015

A local doctoral student is doing research on what characteristics different families value when selecting childcare for their young children. She has asked our program to participate in her research study. She has created a survey that will allow you to rank the importance of different characteristics of quality childcare. The survey should take you ten minutes or less to complete. There is no compensation for completing this survey, and you are not required to participate. Your answers will be kept anonymous, and the data you provide will offer insight into what families most value when selecting childcare for their children under the age of Kindergarten. All surveys should be completed by Friday, September 11th.

APPENDIX E:

Means in Descending Order

Table E.1

Means in Descending Order

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The childcare program is a safe and healthy place.	308	3	4	3.98	.127
The childcare providers are warm and sensitive.	309	2	4	3.87	.364
The childcare program meets all regulations and accreditation requirements.	309	2	4	3.80	.438
The childcare providers have ongoing communication with the families.	308	2	4	3.78	.431
The childcare program is open during the needed hours.	307	1	4	3.77	.495
The childcare providers are happy to do their jobs.	309	2	4	3.76	.478
The childcare program has an outdoor play area that is safe and appropriate for the age and ability-level of the children.	309	2	4	3.73	.478

Table E.1 (continued)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The childcare providers have the required education and credentials to perform their jobs.	307	1	4	3.60	.594
The childcare program has a low teacher-to-student ratio.	307	1	4	3.58	.557
The childcare program has opportunities for children to play in groups and play by themselves.	309	2	4	3.58	.580
The childcare program has resources to help children transition from the early childhood center to an elementary school program.	309	1	4	3.53	.714
The childcare program is financially sound and able to operate for an extended period of time.	308	2	4	3.52	.590

Table E.1 (continued)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The childcare providers know the children and families well.	309	2	4	3.50	.590
The childcare program teaches children healthy practices (ex. toothbrushing, handwashing, etc.).	308	1	4	3.50	.633
Each classroom has a teaching team that works together to benefit the children.	307	1	4	3.49	.649
The same childcare providers care for the children each day.	310	1	4	3.49	.617
The childcare providers have experience performing their jobs.	310	2	4	3.49	.627
The building and furnishings are in good repair.	307	2	4	3.48	.579
There are purposeful conversations in the classroom between children and providers & children and peers that occur frequently.	308	2	4	3.45	.616

Table E.1 (continued)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The childcare program has well-maintained toys and materials.	309	2	4	3.39	.601
The childcare program learns the families' preferences for caring for the children.	309	1	4	3.33	.708
The children are treated at school similar to the manner that they are treated at home.	307	1	4	3.31	.713
The childcare program is in a convenient location.	308	1	4	3.30	.783
The cost of the childcare program is affordable.	308	2	4	3.29	.717
Families are encouraged to be involved with the childcare program.	308	1	4	3.26	.741
The childcare program uses informal assessments or developmental checklists to document and review the children's strengths and weaknesses.	305	1	4	3.16	.809

Table E.1 (continued)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The childcare provider plans the curriculum based off of child assessment results in order to teach the skills that each child needs to learn.	307	1	4	3.13	.763
The childcare providers consider family preferences when setting goals for the children.	307	1	4	3.02	.758
The childcare program has a system in place, using an assessment tool, to refer a child that may have a developmental delay.	307	1	4	2.96	.935
The childcare program can refer a child for support services (ex. a therapist or counselor) if he or she shows signs of a possible developmental delay.	309	1	4	2.81	1.008
The childcare program can refer a child to a medical specialist, if needed.	307	1	4	2.55	.939

Table E.1 (continued)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
The families enrolled in the childcare program are ethnically and culturally diverse.	308	1	4	2.54	.885

APPENDIX F:

Frequency Tables in Order of Survey

Table F.1

Frequencies in Order of Survey

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program can refer a child for support services (ex. a therapist or counselor) if he or she shows signs of a possible developmental delay.	Not Important	36	11.7	11.7
	Somewhat Important	83	26.9	38.5
	Important	93	30.1	68.6
	Very Important	97	31.4	100.0
	Total	309	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program is in a convenient location.	Not Important	2	.6	.6
	Somewhat Important	56	18.2	18.8
	Important	99	32.1	51.0
	Very Important	151	49.0	100.0
	Total	308	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program has a system in place, using an assessment tool, to refer a child that may have a developmental delay.	Not Important	25	8.1	8.1
	Somewhat Important	65	21.2	29.3
	Important	114	37.1	66.4
	Very Important	103	33.6	100.0
	Total	307	100.0	

Table F.1 (continued)

			Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program is a safe and healthy place.	Valid	Important	5	1.6	1.6
		Very Important	303	98.4	100.0
		Total	308	100.0	
			Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program teaches children healthy practices (ex. toothbrushing, handwashing, etc.).	Valid	Not Important	2	.6	.6
		Somewhat Important	17	5.5	6.2
		Important	115	37.3	43.5
		Very Important	174	56.5	100.0
		Total	308	100.0	
			Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program learns the families' preferences for caring for the children.	Valid	Not Important	1	.3	.3
		Somewhat Important	40	12.9	13.3
		Important	124	40.1	53.4
		Very Important	144	46.6	100.0
		Total	309	100.0	
			Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The building and furnishings are in good repair.	Valid	Somewhat Important	13	4.2	4.2
		Important	133	43.3	47.6
		Very Important	161	52.4	100.0
		Total	307	100.0	

Table F.1 (continued)

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The building and furnishings are in good repair.	Somewhat Important	13	4.2	4.2
	Valid Important	133	43.3	47.6
	Valid Very Important	161	52.4	100.0
	Total	307	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Families are encouraged to be involved with the childcare program.	Not Important	5	1.6	1.6
	Somewhat Important	40	13.0	14.6
	Valid Important	134	43.5	58.1
	Valid Very Important	129	41.9	100.0
	Total	308	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare providers are warm and sensitive.	Somewhat Important	3	1.0	1.0
	Valid Important	34	11.0	12.0
	Valid Very Important	272	88.0	100.0
	Total	309	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The children are treated at school similar to the manner that they are treated at home.	Not Important	3	1.0	1.0
	Somewhat Important	36	11.7	12.7
	Valid Important	131	42.7	55.4
	Valid Very Important	137	44.6	100.0
	Total	307	100.0	

Table F.1 (continued)

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program has resources to help children transition from the early childhood center to an elementary school program.	Not Important	5	1.6	1.6
	Somewhat Important	25	8.1	9.7
	Valid Important	81	26.2	35.9
	Very Important	198	64.1	100.0
	Total	309	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program meets all regulations and accreditation requirements.	Somewhat Important	5	1.6	1.6
	Valid Important	51	16.5	18.1
	Very Important	253	81.9	100.0
	Total	309	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program has a low teacher-to-student ratio.	Not Important	1	.3	.3
	Somewhat Important	7	2.3	2.6
	Valid Important	113	36.8	39.4
	Very Important	186	60.6	100.0
	Total	307	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare providers have ongoing communication with the families.	Somewhat Important	2	.6	.6
	Valid Important	64	20.8	21.4
	Very Important	242	78.6	100.0
	Total	308	100.0	

Table F.1 (continued)

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program can refer a child to a medical specialist, if needed.	Valid Not Important	43	14.0	14.0
	Somewhat Important	106	34.5	48.5
	Important	104	33.9	82.4
	Very Important	54	17.6	100.0
	Total	307	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare providers have the required education and credentials to perform their jobs.	Valid Not Important	1	.3	.3
	Somewhat Important	14	4.6	4.9
	Important	93	30.3	35.2
	Very Important	199	64.8	100.0
	Total	307	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare providers individualize curriculum for the children's needs.	Valid Not Important	8	2.6	2.6
	Somewhat Important	48	15.6	18.2
	Important	139	45.1	63.3
	Very Important	113	36.7	100.0
	Total	308	100.0	

Table F.1 (continued)

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program offers a supportive and warm environment for the employees.	Valid Not Important	1	.3	.3
	Somewhat Important	7	2.3	2.6
	Important	133	43.2	45.8
	Very Important	167	54.2	100.0
	Total	308	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program has opportunities for children to play in groups and play by themselves.	Valid Somewhat Important	14	4.5	4.5
	Important	103	33.3	37.9
	Very Important	192	62.1	100.0
	Total	309	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Each classroom has a teaching team that works together to benefit the children.	Valid Not Important	1	.3	.3
	Somewhat Important	23	7.5	7.8
	Important	107	34.9	42.7
	Very Important	176	57.3	100.0
	Total	307	100.0	

Table F.1 (continued)

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program is open during the needed hours.	Valid Not Important	1	.3	.3
	Somewhat Important	7	2.3	2.6
	Important	55	17.9	20.5
	Very Important	244	79.5	100.0
	Total	307	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
There are purposeful conversations in the classroom between children and providers & children and peers that occur frequently	Valid Somewhat Important	20	6.5	6.5
	Important	128	41.6	48.1
	Very Important	160	51.9	100.0
	Total	308	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare providers are happy to do their jobs.	Valid Somewhat Important	7	2.3	2.3
	Important	60	19.4	21.7
	Very Important	242	78.3	100.0
	Total	309	100.0	

Table F.1 (continued)

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The families enrolled in the childcare program are ethnically and culturally diverse.	Valid Not Important	40	13.0	13.0
	Somewhat Important	103	33.4	46.4
	Important	123	39.9	86.4
	Very Important	42	13.6	100.0
	Total	308	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program has well-maintained toys and materials.	Valid Somewhat Important	19	6.1	6.1
	Important	152	49.2	55.3
	Very Important	138	44.7	100.0
	Total	309	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program is financially sound and able to operate for an extended period of time.	Valid Somewhat Important	15	4.9	4.9
	Important	118	38.3	43.2
	Very Important	175	56.8	100.0
	Total	308	100.0	

Table F.1 (continued)

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program provides healthy meals.	Not Important	13	4.2	4.2
	Somewhat Important	29	9.4	13.6
	Valid Important	91	29.4	43.0
	Very Important	176	57.0	100.0
	Total	309	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program has an outdoor play area that is safe and appropriate for the age and ability-level of the children.	Somewhat Important	5	1.6	1.6
	Valid Important	72	23.3	24.9
	Very Important	232	75.1	100.0
	Total	309	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare program uses curriculum that prepares the children for kindergarten.	Not Important	3	1.0	1.0
	Somewhat Important	19	6.2	7.2
	Valid Important	73	23.9	31.0
	Very Important	211	69.0	100.0
	Total	306	100.0	

Table F.1 (continued)

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare providers know the children and families well.	Somewhat Important	15	4.9	4.9
	Important	125	40.5	45.3
	Valid Very Important	169	54.7	100.0
	Total	309	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare providers have experience performing their jobs.	Somewhat Important	22	7.1	7.1
	Important	114	36.8	43.9
	Valid Very Important	174	56.1	100.0
	Total	310	100.0	
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare provider plans the curriculum based off of child assessment results in order to teach the skills that each child needs to learn.	Not Important	7	2.3	2.3
	Somewhat Important	51	16.6	18.9
	Important	145	47.2	66.1
	Valid Very Important	104	33.9	100.0
	Total	307	100.0	

Table F.1 (continued)

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The same childcare providers care for the children each day.	Valid	Not Important	1	.3
		Somewhat Important	17	5.8
		Important	121	44.8
		Very Important	171	100.0
		Total	310	100.0
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The childcare providers consider family preferences when setting goals for the children	Valid	Not Important	6	2.0
		Somewhat Important	67	23.8
		Important	149	72.3
		Very Important	85	100.0
		Total	307	100.0
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
The cost of the childcare program is affordable.	Valid	Somewhat Important	47	15.3
		Important	124	55.5
		Very Important	137	100.0
		Total	308	100.0

APPENDIX G:

Top 3 Characteristics of Childcare

Table G.1

Top 3 Characteristics of Childcare

	N	Mean
The childcare program is a safe and healthy place.	310	.70
The childcare providers are warm and sensitive.	310	.32
The childcare program is in a convenient location.	310	.18
The childcare providers have ongoing communication with the families.	310	.15
The childcare program uses curriculum that prepares the children for kindergarten.	310	.15
The cost of the childcare program is affordable.	310	.15
The childcare program has a low teacher-to-student ratio.	310	.14
The childcare program is open during the needed hours.	310	.12
The childcare program meets all regulations and accreditation requirements.	310	.11
The childcare program has resources to help children transition from the early childhood center to an elementary school program.	310	.10
The childcare providers are happy to do their jobs.	310	.09
The childcare providers have the required education and credentials to perform their jobs.	310	.08
The childcare provider plans the curriculum based off of child assessment results in order to teach the skills that each child needs to learn.	310	.07
The childcare program provides healthy meals.	310	.07
Families are encouraged to be involved with the childcare program.	310	.06
The children are treated at school similar to the manner that they are treated at home.	310	.05
The childcare providers know the children and families well.	310	.05
The childcare providers individualize curriculum for the children's needs.	310	.05
The childcare program uses informal assessments or developmental checklists to document and review the children's strengths and weaknesses.	310	.05
The same childcare providers care for the children each day.	310	.04
The childcare program can refer a child for support services (ex. a therapist or counselor) if he or she shows signs of a possible developmental delay.	310	.04

Table G.1 (continued)

	N	Mean
The childcare program has an outdoor play area that is safe and appropriate for the age and ability-level of the children.	310	.04
The building and furnishings are in good repair.	310	.03
The childcare program has a system in place, using an assessment tool, to refer a child that may have a developmental delay.	310	.03
The childcare providers have experience performing their jobs.	310	.03
Each classroom has a teaching team that works together to benefit the children.	310	.03
The childcare program learns the families' preferences for caring for the children.	310	.03
The childcare program has opportunities for children to play in groups and play by themselves.	310	.03
The childcare program offers a supportive and warm environment for the employees.	310	.02
There are purposeful conversations in the classroom between children and providers & children and peers that occur frequently.	310	.02
The families enrolled in the childcare program are ethnically and culturally diverse.	310	.02
The childcare program has well-maintained toys and materials.	310	.02
The childcare program teaches children healthy practices (ex. toothbrushing, handwashing, etc.).	310	.01
The childcare providers consider family preferences when setting goals for the children.	310	.01
The childcare program is financially sound and able to operate for an extended period of time.	310	.01
The childcare program can refer a child to a medical specialist, if needed.	310	.00

APPENDIX H:
IRB Approval Form



Graduate Education and Research
Division of Sponsored Programs

EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
NOTICE OF IRB EXEMPTION STATUS

Jones 414, Coates CPO 20
521 Lancaster Avenue
Richmond, Kentucky 40475-3102

Protocol Number: 16-006

Institutional Review Board IRB00002836, DHHS FWA00003332

Principal Investigator: **Sarah Taylor Vanover** Faculty Advisor: **Dr. Charles Hausman**

Project Title: **Family Composition and Family Child Care Preferences in Central
Kentucky**

Exemption Date: **7/17/2015**

Approved by: **Dr. Sarah Morris, IRB Member**

This document confirms that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has granted exempt status for the above referenced research project as outlined in the application submitted for IRB review with an immediate effective date. Exempt status means that your research is exempt from further review for a period of three years from the original notification date if no changes are made to the original protocol. If you plan to continue the project beyond three years, you are required to reapply for exemption.

Principal Investigator Responsibilities: It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to ensure that all investigators and staff associated with this study meet the training requirements for conducting research involving human subjects and follow the approved protocol.

Adverse Events: Any adverse or unexpected events that occur in conjunction with this study must be reported to the IRB within ten calendar days of the occurrence.

Changes to Approved Research Protocol: If changes to the approved research protocol become necessary, a description of those changes must be submitted for IRB review and approval prior

to implementation. If the changes result in a change in your project's exempt status, you will be required to submit an application for expedited or full IRB review. Changes include, but are not limited to, those involving study personnel, subjects, and procedures.

Other Provisions of Approval, if applicable: None

Please contact Sponsored Programs at 859-622-3636 or send email to tiffany.hamblin@eku.edu or lisa.royalty@eku.edu with questions.

VITA

Sarah Taylor Vanover

Education

Doctorate of Education in Educational Policy and Leadership, Eastern Kentucky University, Graduation Date is May 2016

- Dissertation Topic: Family Preferences for Childcare in Central Kentucky

Masters of Science in Special Education, Emphasis on Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education, Eastern Kentucky University, 2013

- Research Project: Parent Perception on Quality Infant/Toddler Programs

Bachelor of Science in Family Studies, Emphasis in Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education, University of Kentucky, May 2002

- Phi Omicron Upsilon – Honor Society for Family and Consumer Sciences
- College of Human Environmental Sciences Student Ambassador
- Graduation Speaker, May 2002, College of Human Environmental Sciences

Credentials

Kentucky Teacher's Certificate, Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education, Educational Professional Standards Board, 2003 to Present

Kentucky Early Care and Education Director's Credential, #40775, Cabinet for Health and Family Services

Kentucky Early Care and Education Trainer's Credential, Level 5, #70761, Cabinet for Health and Family Services

AMS Early Childhood Montessori Certification, July 2004, Providence Montessori Teacher Education Program

Orff Level 1 Music Teacher Certification, July 2006, University of Kentucky Fine Arts Program

Kodaly Music Teacher Training with Dr. John Feierabend, July 2009, Hartt Music School, Hartford, CT

Certifications

Cradling Literacy Trainer, Certified by Zero to Three, August 2010

Trainer for “Orientation Training for Kentucky’s Early Care and Education Professionals”, Certified February 2011

Trainer for “Nurturing Parenting” Parent Education Program, Certified September 2011 by Dr. Stephen Bavolek

Work Experience

Early Head Start Partnership Coordinator, Community Action Council, Lexington, KY, February 2015 to Present

- Collect and aggregate required grant data
- Supervise and evaluate Early Head Start Specialists
- Initiate partnerships between Early Head Start and local childcare facilities
- Teach CDA coursework to Community Action Council teaching staff and parents
- Provide training to Early Head Start and Head Start classroom teachers on a variety of topics
- Remain CLASS Reliable and assess Head Start Classrooms

Executive Director, Child Development Center of the Bluegrass, Lexington, KY, December 2012 to December 2014

- Supervised and evaluated 80+ staff members
- Responsible for grant writing, fundraising events, marketing the program
- Coordinated facility management
- Create center policies for staff and families
- Collaborate with teaching staff and families to increase child learning
- Serve as KTIP principal for KTIP internship candidates

Training Administrator, Division of Child Care, Cabinet for Health and Family Services,
Frankfort, KY, Aug 2010 to December 2012

- Supervised the Kentucky Early Care and Education Trainer's Credential
- Served on statewide professional development work groups
- Developed content for statewide training curriculum including the Pediatric Abusive Head Trauma training
- Trained Child Care Health Consultants and licensing surveyors on Kentucky childcare regulations
- Assisted with writing Kentucky childcare regulations

Professional Development Trainer, Child Care Council of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, 2002
to Present

- Develop trainings for local childcare providers on a variety of topics
- Offer trainings during 2-hour to 6-hour workshops in Central Kentucky

Director of Child Care, Faith Lutheran Church Childcare, Lexington, KY, 2007 to 2010

- Supervise and evaluate fifteen staff members
- Select curriculum and policies for preschool classrooms for children age two to five years
- Collect tuition and create center budget
- Grant writing
- Teach music for preschool classrooms
- Communicate with parents and sponsor parent booster organization

Preschool Teacher, Seton Catholic School, Lexington, KY, 2006 to 2007

- Taught two half-day preschool classrooms
- Supervised and evaluated assistant teacher
- Planned curriculum and individual goals for 4-year-old students
- Conducted parent-teacher conferences twice per year

IECE Special Education Preschool Teacher, Shearer Elementary School, Clark County
Public Schools, Winchester, KY, 2004 to 2006

- Supervised three and four-year-old students with and without disabilities
- Conducted developmental assessments on students enrolled in the classroom
- Attended IEP meetings and assisted in planning of developmental goals
- Planned and implemented weekly lesson plans
- Served on professional learning community with other early childhood educators

Children's Minister (Part-Time), First Christian Church, Winchester, KY, 2003 to 2006

- Selected and implemented Sunday school curriculum for children's ministries
- Implemented Young Children and Worship Montessori-based worship curriculum for young children
- Recruited and supervised church volunteers to lead children's programs
- Planned special events and fundraisers for children's ministry programs

Montessori Preschool Teacher, Providence Montessori School, Lexington, KY, 2002 to 2004

- Received AMS Montessori certification for children ages three to six years old
- One of three teachers in a multi-age Montessori classroom with 27 children
- Followed structured Montessori lesson plans for math, language, and sensorial activities
- Created practical life, science, social studies, music, and art materials for the classroom
- Conducted assessments and parent-teacher conferences for three-year-old students
- Assisted with Parent Education Nights and enrollment interviews

Professional Organizations

Member of the Advisory Council for the Department of Consumer and Family Sciences
at Eastern Kentucky University, Member 2012

Member of the Professional Development Sub-Committee for the Governor's Early
Childhood Advisory Council of Kentucky, 2012

Member of the Early Childhood Mental Health Advisory Board for Kentucky, Member
2009 to 2012

Bluegrass Chapter of the Kentucky Association of Early Childhood Education

- President from 2005 to 2009

Kentucky Association of Early Childhood Education

- Vice President of Membership, 2009 to 2011
- Recording Secretary, 2005 to 2009

- Hospitality Chair, 2002 to 2005

Southern Early Childhood Association, Member since 2000

- Children's Book Reviewer for SECA Journal, *Dimensions*

National Association of Education for Young Children, Member since 2000

National Association for Music Educators, Member since 2007

Kentucky Music Educators' Association, Member since 2007

Early Childhood Music and Movement Association, Member since 2008

Regional & National Conference Presentations

American Montessori Society, Cincinnati, Ohio, May 2003, "Music in the Preschool Classroom".

American Montessori Society, Chicago, Illinois, April 2005, "Using Technically Correct Music Vocabulary in the Preschool Classroom".

National Association of Education for Young Children, Atlanta, Georgia, November 2006, "Spiritual Development in Young Children: Making the Concrete Abstract".

National Association of Education for Young Children, Dallas, Texas, November 2008, "Montessori Math Concepts for the Preschool Classroom".

Southern Early Childhood Association, Little Rock, Arkansas, January 2010, "A Year of Preschool Music Curriculum" and "Epilepsy and Seizures in Young Children".

Southern Early Childhood Association, Savannah, Georgia, January 2011. "Multiple Generations Working in the Early Childhood Classroom" and "Professionalism in Early Childhood Education".