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Jennifer L. Fundus
University of Nebraska at Omaha

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Exploring the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales-Revised (ECERS-R)
Evaluation on Preschool Children’s Pre-academic Progress

By
Jennifer L. Fundus

A DISSERTATION
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Major: Educational Administration
Under the Supervision of Dr. Kay A. Keiser, Ed.D

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Supervisory Committee
Kay A. Keiser, Ed.D. Chair
Peter J. Smith, Ed.D.
Jeanne L. Surface, Ed.D.
Neal F. Grandgenett, Ph.D.
ABSTRACT
Exploring the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales-Revised (ECERS-R) Evaluation on Preschool Children’s Pre-academic Progress
Jennifer Fundus, Ed.D
University of Nebraska at Omaha
Advisor: Dr. Kay A. Keiser, Ed.D

The purpose of this study was to determine the physical, social, cognitive, and language outcomes of targeted Title I preschool students participating in programs not meeting and programs meeting Nebraska Department of Education, Early Childhood Evaluation Rating Scales-Revised (ECERS-R) requirements. As more requirements are being required for preschools to require, the exploration of the effectiveness of these requirements needs to be explored.

The independent variable conditions for the study was children’s participation in two research school district preschool programs meeting the NDE ECERS-R requirements and two research school district preschool programs not meeting the NDE ECERS-R requirements. The study’s dependent measures were Creative Curriculum assessments for
1. Physical Skills,
2. Cognitive Skills,
3. Social Skills, and
4. Language Skills.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Public school systems have provided special education services to young children since 1975, when federal law was passed. Over the years, children with and without special education needs have been served within homes, community settings, and school-based preschool programs (Marvin, LaCost, Grady, Mooney, 2004). It was not until recently that school systems have been questioned about the quality of their programs by professional organizations, parents, and federal law makers. In Nebraska, school-based preschool programs must meet the Nebraska Department of Education Rule 11 guidelines, however, there has been little in the rule regarding program quality until recently. Rule 11 guidelines have provided public schools regulations that they must meet in order to receive state and federal preschool funding.

In 2006, Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) initiated the Results Matter movement in order to be in compliance with federal regulations. Results Matter examined three areas: student outcomes, parent involvement, and program quality. Quality programs are essential for young children to grow and gain skills, however, it is a huge undertaking that many public school systems are struggling to implement all the components. Prior to the 2006-2007 school year, Nebraska school districts implemented their own curriculum and assessments to monitor student progress within school-based preschool settings. The variance was great among districts and classrooms within districts. As a part of the Results Matter initiative was to implement quality curricula and assessments state-wide. A task force lead by the Nebraska of Department of Education began working to identify research-based curricula and assessment which would show
student progress for young children. National Association for Education for Young Children (NAEYC), a national early childhood organization, claims that the curriculum should be a plan to guide children to explore and gain concepts that are developmentally appropriate (Horn, 2009; Zan, 2005). The task force wanted to find curricula and assessments which met the needs of the wide range of preschool learners as well many school districts within the state.

In order for Nebraska to implement high quality preschool programs within the state, the task force started exploring high quality curricula that was research-based. The task force agreed that a quality curriculum focuses on the physical environment, social-emotional environment, and the teaching-learning environment. These factors provided children many opportunities to engage in lessons, by using student-lead activities. Quality curricula also are based off of the skills that typically developing students should obtain, and then educators can provide modifications for children with disabilities. Student progress should be monitored through their daily interactions and participation; and promotes high expectations for all children (Horn, 2009).

Nebraska Department of Education’s task force selected three curricula for school district’s to choose from: High-Scope COR, Creative Curriculum, and Assessment, Evaluation, Programming Systems (AEPS). These curricula were research-based and provide developmentally appropriate activities. Assessments were not new to early childhood education. For many years teachers have used assessments to verify children with special needs. However, these tools have not traditionally been used for on-going assessment and monitoring student day to day growth. The curriculum needed to provide a map for instruction, the assessment measures the progress desired learning outcomes
(Luze & Hughes, 2008). When NDE introduced the curriculum and assessment components of the Results Matter initiative, many staff members felt anxious and nervous. School-based preschool teachers within my district had to change the way they viewed assessment and how they collected data on student progress. Hojnoski, Gischar, and Missall (2009) report many early childhood educators feel that data collection is essential. However, many preschool educators have not collected data consistently nor do they know how to use the data they have collected. There were three curriculum assessments used within the state of Nebraska: High-Scope COR, Creative Curriculum, and AEPS. Each of these curricula provides an on-line system to assist teachers in analyzing, organizing, and reporting their data to other team members, parents, and administrators.

 Shortly after the implementation of the curriculum assessments, the NDE task force looked at the fidelity of the data that was being collected. It is essential that all team members collected data using accuracy and consistency (Gomez, Walls, Baird, 2007). Each year, school districts submitted a fidelity plan along with their Rule 11 compliance report, outlining their district’s plan to implement data fidelity. In addition to the plan, any provider (teachers, occupational and physical therapists, speech/language pathologists) who collected assessment data must be tested on their abilities to collect data accurately on a yearly basis. Providers watched a video, and then completed the assessment tool (High-Scope COR, Creative Curriculum, and AEPS) that their district had adopted. Providers then were given a percentage score based on the number of items they scored correctly on the High-Scope COR, Creative Curriculum, or AEPS. Even though the fidelity process had been met with a great deal of resistance, as an
administrator it is extremely beneficial to receive the data and to use it to plan staff development. By using fidelity it allows teams of providers to have all clearly defined steps in collecting data (Gomez et al, 2007).

Throughout the implementation process it was important that the task force selected a research-based curriculum and assessment and ensured that the content and assessments were delivered with fidelity. However, the next challenge was to educate the leaders of the preschool programs. Traditionally in Nebraska, school-based preschool programs were placed within elementary buildings. Many times, there were one maybe two programs within a kindergarten through sixth grade school. Historically, the elementary principal had a kindergarten through sixth grade background, with little training in preschool education; therefore, the administrator lacked the knowledge to support their preschool teachers (Marvin et al, 2004). Administrator support seemed to be one of the major contributing factors for a preschool program’s success nationwide (Lieber, 2000). In a preliminary study conducted by Marvin (2004) found that administrative support was essential to the success of school-based programs. Even though many preschool programs were placed within an elementary school where the building principal may not have the depth of knowledge about preschool programs; districts have established someone within their district who has knowledge about early childhood education. This was a teacher leader, a director of student services, and in some districts even a supervisor or director of early childhood. However, two-thirds of the teachers surveyed responded that their administrator relied on them to provide knowledge within early childhood education, even though someone within the district was identified as the one to have knowledge within the field. Even though
administrative support was reported to be a major factor of school-based preschool programs success, the perception among staff is that administrators have little knowledge about their job responsibilities (Casto & Sipple, 2011).

In Nebraska according to Rule 11, public schools’ preschool programs which receive state and federal funding were required to complete the ECERS in half of their preschool sections by December 2010. This process was completed annually. Each district then developed an action plan around their areas of improvement. Nebraska was not the only state to use the ECERS to measure program quality, many other states as well as preschool and childcare programs internationally used the tool to analyze data on program quality.

The ECERS truly focused on child led activities and child interests. Even though educators provided instruction to the children, it is in a different method than the traditional teacher lead instruction. Most of the day was built around purposeful play activities. Children were encouraged to play within centers that interest them. Then the staff members provided learning opportunities within the centers. This style of teaching was impromptu which makes many educators uncomfortable because they are not in control of exact lessons that they taught. However, the ECERS tool reinforced that children learn from each other and incidental teaching rather than lecture or direct teaching.

In order for a preschool program to be successful it must have an outlined curriculum and assessment, administrative support, parent involvement, high quality staff, and way to measure program quality. In Nebraska, the state department has started implementing components to ensure quality public school preschool programs by
structuring Rule 11 compliance to encompass parent participation, program quality, and implementing research-based curricula and assessments, and ECERS-R. However ECERS-R required expanding additional funds for many hours in training. Therefore, the goal of this study is help determine the effectiveness of the ECERS-R.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the physical, social, cognitive, and language outcomes of targeted Title I preschool students participating in programs not meeting and programs meeting Nebraska Department of Education, Early Childhood Evaluation Rating Scales-Revised (ECERS-R) requirements.

**Research Question**

To analyze achievement of Targeted Title 1 students who participated in the district’s preschool program, the following question will guide this study.

**Overarching Pretest-Posttest Achievement Research Question.** Is there a significant difference between preschool children in programs meeting and not meeting ECERS-R on the Creative Curriculum assessment scores for?

1. Physical skills,
2. Cognitive skills,
3. Social skills, and
4. Language skills,

between fall 2010 pretest and spring 2011 posttest?

**Definition of terms**

**Creative Curriculum.** Creative Curriculum is a play-based curriculum which builds on student strengths and interests.
**Creative Curriculum Assessment.** The Creative Curriculum assessment is divided into four different domains to provide teachers with an on-going data to monitor student progress.

**ECERS-R.** ECERS-R is an evaluation tool that measures the day to day quality of preschools and childcare programs.

**Pre-Academic Skills.** Pre-Academic Skills refers to in this study skills that are taught to students which lay the foundation for later development of the skills.

**Pre-kindergarten.** Pre-kindergarten refers to the first formal academic classroom-based learning environment that a child customarily attends in the United States. It begins around the age of four or five in order to prepare for the more didactic and academically intensive kindergarten, the traditional "first" class that school children participate in.

**Preschool.** Preschool is an educational institution for children too young for elementary school. In this study all programs for 4-5 year olds will be referred to as preschool programs.

**Results Matter.** Result Matters was implemented in 2006 to meet federal requirements. Results Matter examines three areas: student outcomes, parent involvement, and program quality.

**Rule 11.** The Nebraska Department of Education guidelines for preschool programs within Nebraska to provide consistency among grant preschools and school district preschools.
**Universal Preschool.** Universal preschools serve all children the year before children enter kindergarten. Students do not need to meet income eligible or learning requirements.

**Assumptions**

This study had several strong features. All students were enrolled in preschool the year before they entered kindergarten. All preschool teachers had a minimum of a four year bachelor’s degree. Each preschool teacher went through the same district training on the ECERS-R. The district’s preschool programs were funded equally and all have allocated two paraprofessionals per classroom. All preschool teachers strived to meet the ECERS-R requirement. All study district preschool teachers were certified in early childhood education and had two or more years of teaching experience in the Targeted Title 1 preschool programs. Furthermore, all preschool teachers and paraprofessionals completed the school districts required training program. Finally, all study teachers successfully completed the ECERS-R and Creative Curriculum administration and inter-rater-reliability training program (Cryer, Clifford, & Harms, 2005).

**Limitations/Delimitations of the Study**

This study had minimal limitations and delimitations. One limitation of this study was that the researcher is the administrator of the program. The delimitations of this study were that this study only takes place in one suburban school district. Also, only Targeted Title 1 student progress was monitored and students with special education needs were excluded from this study. The study monitored student progress over one year not multiple years, so it limited the ability to generalize results for other populations.
Significance of Study

Contribution to Research. A review of professional literature suggested that more research is needed on the subject of preschool quality within the public school setting. Furthermore, the results of this study were shared with the district’s superintendent of the impact of the ECERS-R on preschool children’s pre-academic progress as measured on the Creative Curriculum.

Contribution to practice. Bellevue Public Schools decided whether or not to approach the ECERS-R evaluation tool in the same manner as it currently is being implemented or to alter the approach based on children achievement based on the outcome of this study.

Contribution to policy. The results of this study offered insight on how ECERS-R impacts children’s pre-academic progress. The results of this study were shared with the Nebraska Department of Education Early Childhood department which assisted them on the emphasis that should be given on the ECERS-R evaluation tool.

Organization of the Study

The literature review relevant to this research study was presented in Chapter 2. This chapter reviewed professional literature related to universal preschool programs nationally and internationally, high quality preschool programs, high quality staff, high quality curriculum, accountability, and a description of Bellevue Public Schools’ preschool program. Chapter 3 described the research design, methodology, independent variables, dependent variables, and procedures used to gather and analyze the data of the study. This included a detailed synthesis of participants, a comprehensive list of dependent variables, the dependent measures, and the data analysis used to statistically
determine if the null hypothesis is rejected for the research question. Results of the study were outlined in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Universal Preschool Programs

The concept of universal preschool began in the 1960s. Preschools at that time targeted low income children or children with disabilities (Henry, Gordon, & Rickman, 2006). Over the past four decades, preschool programs changed to meet more of the young children population (Cascio, 2010; Finn, 2010; Goldsmith & Meyer, 2006; et al.). The preschool programs evolved due to teachers and parents being concerned about children’s school readiness skills, early brain research, increased number of mothers working, and economists’ promotion of preschool programs.

Universal preschools have been a push by many policy makers and educators, however, not everyone feels like universal preschool education is the right approach to educating our young children. There were already established daycares, churches, and agencies that already provide preschool programs. Many opponents feel universal preschool took away from small businesses in this country (Finn, 2010; Goldsmith & Meyer, 2006). Parents of young children should have had a choice to pick their child’s educational path instead of the government dictated “who” and “when” their young child should be educated. Universal preschool programs cost a lot of money to maintain high quality, and many people in opposition want to know who will pay for this large expense. Allowing diverse programs allowed for programs to compete with each other therefore increasing overall quality of programs (Henry et al, 2006).

When President Obama was elected many advocates for universal preschool were hopeful that money would be allocated to early education. However, was little to no
attention by the administration focused on early education. Opponents of universal programs feared that if preschool programs are controlled at the federal level that it would jeopardize the effectiveness of the programs because it would be difficult to measure program outcomes. Many educators believed that universal preschool was the silver bullet to fix public schools systems, however, it was one piece of the big picture, and needed to become an integral part of education as whole.

Universal preschool programs ensured that all children, no matter their economic status, have a strong foundation for success as students. This foundation occurred during the early years of a child’s life (Doggett & Wat, 2010; Finn, 2010; Goldsmith & Meyer, 2006; Nebraska Board of Education, 2005; Stephens, 2010). Universal preschool programs provided public preschool education for three and four year olds; some programs mainly focus on students the year before they are to enter into kindergarten. Universal preschool programs operated using a comprehensive school readiness model by using curricula to monitor success (Diamond & Powell, 2011; Henry, et al, 2006).

**High Quality Preschools**

In order for preschool programs to be successful, it was essential that programs implement components to provide high quality learning environments. As time goes on there was more and more evidence that high quality early childhood education can improve a child’s economic and social outcomes over their life. A high quality universal pre-kindergarten program lowered the dropout rates, grade retention, and decreases the number of low performing schools (Cascio, 2010; Diamond & Powell, 2011; Doggett & Wat, 2010; Finn, 2010). Students also had considerably higher skills in literacy, math, and vocabulary and language comprehension than students who have not attended a
preschool program. Research showed that high quality childcare and preschool programs impact long term student success in elementary school. Quality programs incorporated embedded instruction on social skills, decision making, and self-confidence within the daily routines of the day. These skills were essential to learning, however, many times are difficult to teach. Therefore, embedding them within daily activities provided real life learning experiences for the children. (Cassidy, Hestenes, Hansen, Hegde, Shim, & Hestenes, 2005).

Access to high quality preschool education was uneven, especially for children who were at risk attending Head Start and Title 1 programs. Preschools were supposed to have a beneficial effect on a child’s development, however, if the program was not quality, it could actually hinder a child’s development (Hall, et al, 2009). Pre-kindergarten programs that focused on high student achievement help close the learning gap, and minimized special education referrals.

Measuring the quality within school-based preschool programs was a challenge (Branson & Demchak, 2011). One commonly used measure to assess program quality is the Early Childhood Environments Rating Scales (ECERS-R). This tool measured the day to day quality of childcare and preschool programs. The ECERS-R was a forty-three item scale that measures classroom structure, instruction, student-adult interactions, hygiene, and daily routines (Henry, Gordon, & Richman, 2006). It was a requirement that an observer observes for approximately two and half to three hours. Items were scored using scores one (lowest score) through seven (highest score), with five being a good score. The ECERS-R tool was used for many years to evaluate program quality within Head-Start and programs who have met the National Association for Education of
Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation criteria (Jones-Branch, 2004; Whitebook, Sukai, Howes, 2004).

Establishing program and child outcome standards was the first step towards raising the quality of preschool programs. Child outcomes evaluated student progress and overall growth while program outcomes evaluate the program quality and the influences it had on child development (Azzi-Lessing, 2009).

Georgia was the first state to implement universal preschool programs for four year olds in 1993. The state policy makers wanted to implement a pre-kindergarten program that educated all four year olds, regardless of their economic status (Mitchell, Ripple, & Chanana, 1998). To measure quality and progress on its learning targets the state chose an evaluation tool in the beginning to maintain high quality programs. The overall goals, for the programs in Georgia were school readiness and long term school success. The state also had high standards for curriculum. All programs must use Creative Curriculum, High/Scope, Bank Street, High Reach Framework, or Montessori. Local districts were able to decide on the curriculum and assessment that best meets their community’s needs. Current data suggested that Georgia’s preschool programs were neither the highest quality programs nor the lowest quality programs.

In New Jersey, policy makers had determined that high quality preschool programs include: small classes, low child-adult ratios, comprehensive learning guidelines, developmentally appropriate curriculum and assessments, and quality teachers who understand child development. New Jersey required the same training requirements for preschool teachers as their elementary teachers. In addition all teachers met five days a week for 180 days a year. Programs needed to collaborate with childcare providers,
emphasize nutrition and social emotional well being. Each local district developed their own learning objectives as well as curriculum and assessment measurement tools (Mitchell, et al, 1998).

Michigan also had a universal preschool program, and then the program followed the children from preschool until 10 years of age (Nebraska Board of Education, 2005). All universal preschool programs in Michigan met the state licensing requirements, follow the Michigan preschool guidelines and had parent involvement activities. The results found that overall academically children participated in the universal preschool program did better than their counterparts who did not participate in the universal preschool program.

**High Quality Staff.** High quality preschool staff members encouraged meaningful interactions between adults and children, therefore, providing high quality care, which in return made high quality preschool programs (Degotardi, 2010; Diamond & Powell, 2011; Love, 2010; Nebraska Board of Education, 2005). Although, it was important that practitioners have high qualifications, it was even more essential that they practice positive interactions with the children. Many public school preschools served children who are at-risk; therefore, they had not always had the most positive interactions with staff. Positive impacts of a positive preschool program and teacher actually provided the nurturing young children need to overcome some of the negatives experiences they have had in their young life.

More and more programs were now requiring that preschool teachers have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree to ensure that their teachers were highly qualified. Flexibility, encouragement, clear boundaries, and teaching expectations all allow
preschool teachers to know what was expected of them and set goals for personal improvement, which in return allows them to take pride in teaching young children (Goldsmith & Meyer, 2006). When a program maintained a teacher with the minimum of a bachelor’s degree and emphasizes social interactions will have overall higher quality classroom environments. Maintaining high quality preschool staff was difficult when wages are low and there were little opportunities for staff development (Diamond & Powell, 2011).

High quality educators who were employed within a preschool program for an extended amount of time also influence program quality. There were many factors which influenced recruiting and retaining high quality preschool educators: low wages, student to staff ratio, and formal education and staff development while employed. Low wages and formal education issues typically affected community preschool programs (Cassidy, Hestenes, et al., 2005). However, if programs maintained quality support through their infrastructure it helped teachers feel supported. Preschool coaches allowed teachers to receive staff development opportunities as they worked with the children (Branson & Demchak, 2011). Since preschool teachers had little time for staff in-service, training needs to be intentional and meaningful. A strong professional development plan allowed preschool teachers to understand how to meet the wide variety of needs of students they taught as well as feel supported as a teacher.

In Nebraska, the concern was for not only retaining and keeping high quality teachers but also administrators and paraprofessionals working in the area of early childhood education. Paraprofessionals, preschool teachers, and administrators need to
understand child development and best practices within the field (Nebraska Board of Education, 2005).

**High Quality Curriculum.** High quality preschool programs needed a well-defined curriculum and assessment. However, there seemed to be a lot of confusion around the meaning of curriculum in preschool programs. Preschool programs do not teach skills through paper-pencil methods as traditional education may occur; however, preschool learning occurred through play and interactions with adults and children. High quality preschool curricula taught students the meanings of words, how to express themselves, how to interact with students appropriately, appropriate social skills, and healthy attitudes toward learning and how to control their motor movements. Preschool programs had an emphasis on developmental practices appropriate for children ages 3-5 years old, instead of the push down effect from kindergarten and first grades. Children learned best when material is presented to them at their developmental levels.

High quality curriculum in preschool programs in Nebraska should provided a strong foundation for learning and development in the areas of literacy, language, mathematics, problem solving, social emotional well-being, creative thinking, and physical motor development.

**Preschool Programs That Are Successful.** As school districts had started to provide preschool programs for young children, schools referred to programs such as Early Head Start and Head Start programs that were established nearly forty years ago. These programs were designed to serve children of low income birth through five years old (Love, 2010). Early Head Start and Head Start was a national program that provides a comprehensive, developmental service for low income children and their families.
There was a strong parent and community component to allow families to connect with resources outside the program. The Head Start program had program standards that ensure high quality within their programs. Head Start programs focused on developing student cognitive, vocabulary, and social emotional development (Cascio, 2010). There were five components of Head Start and Early Head Start programs which included enhancing child growth, empower parents to become primary nurturers of their children, provide children with quality health, education, and nutritional services, link families to community services, ensure parents were part of the decision making process for their child. Services were provided within center settings as well as the child’s home. Early Head Start and Head Start programs nationally remain programs that were considered high quality, however, over the years the funding had significantly been cut, leaving the program to provide services that were not at their highest potential.

In 1993, in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, the school system provided high quality preschool services to at-risk four year old children. The school district provided grant funds to support the preschool services, in 2005, the grants ran out. Therefore, the school district was struggling to finance preschool programs. The same year, a former educator was elected mayor of Tuscaloosa. The mayor promised the citizens of Tuscaloosa high quality preschool for children at-risk. The school district and community worked together to provide a high quality preschool program by recruiting volunteers, pooling funds, capitalizing resources already in the school district (such as music and physical education classes), and business partnerships. In 2010, Tuscaloosa schools provided preschool services to 275 students, and had 16 classrooms. Each teacher held a teaching certificate and kindergarten literacy skills have increased. There were many critics in
Tuscaloosa, stating that only one year of preschool services do not fully close the learning gap; as this may be true, students were entering kindergarten with more learning experiences than before the city opened preschool services. Overall, the city of Tuscaloosa was proud of their high quality preschool services they provided to the at-risk children within their community (Stephens, 2010).

In the 1960s New York State started a preschool program for children meeting their income requirements and limited exposure to early learning opportunities. The program was called Targeted Prekindergarten. In 1997, New York State re-organized their prekindergarten program allowing all four year olds to attend a state funded program. When school districts accepted state funds for universal prekindergarten programs, they had to subcontract at least 10% of the funds to a community-based organization. This allowed programming for children and their families to be offered in a variety of settings, not just schools; it also allows for some community programs to provide quality programs for four year olds which provide childcare. Another intent of this forces policy makers from all the different interest groups to work together to provide quality prekindergarten services to four year olds. It seemed that overall; parents, community members, and policy makers are satisfied with the success in New York State. Parents are allowed to have a choice in their child’s preschool program and forces interest groups to work together (Casto & Sipple, 2011).

**International Preschool Models.** Not only had preschool programs been successful nationally but there have also been success internationally. In a study completed in Belgium, it focused on whether or not children attending preschool programs influenced whether or not they were retained in kindergarten or first grade.
The study consisted of 3,633 children. The study determined that when children attended a preschool program they were less likely to be referred to special education, experience school failure, or retention. It also showed that children living in poverty are more likely to be retained because they typically do not get to experience a preschool experience and lack the school readiness skills to help them be successful in the primary grades (Gadeyne, Onghena, & Gkesquiere, 2008).

**Transition into Kindergarten.** The successful, high quality preschool programs made transitions for children into kindergarten a high priority. For most families kindergarten symbolizes the first year of formal education, therefore, it was essential that the transition from preschool is a success (Clark & Zygmunt-Filwalk, 2008; Quintero, & McIntyre, 2011). The transition was also difficult for parents and children as they transitioned from providers they are comfortable with to ones they do not know. Many times, the transition also involved a move in schools or settings (Duda & Minick, 2006; Dail & McGee, 2008). The transition from preschool to kindergarten was the most critical transition a child will go through (Margett, 2007). Early school transitions were important because the attitudes and reputations established early on will follow the students through many years of schooling. Successful transitions not only included the student, but also the student’s parents and caregivers.

Because transitions were so important is it important that agencies have a transition process outlined for parents, therefore, expectations were established early on (Parette, Quesenberry, & Blum, 2010). Many schools offered transition activities that were designed to help students and parents be prepared to learn in the new environment. Summer school classes or evening classes allowed the student to begin interacting with
other students their same age and learning the new expectations. Orientation for the student’s family was essential; this provided an outline of the new expectations for learning and behavior within kindergarten (Howard, 2008; Hughes, 2010; Invernizzi, Landrum, Techman, & Townsend, 2010). Compassion, reassurance, clear communication, and consistency from teachers, parents, and administration allowed for a smooth transition to kindergarten.

Another important element of ensuring high quality preschool programs was family involvement. Family involvement was essential to an early childhood program’s success. Parents and guardians of preschool children were their first and best teacher. Parent involvement contributed to their child’s social, emotional, and academic success. Involving parents in their child’s education in early childhood encourages them to continue to be involved throughout their child’s educational career. Programs involved parents through community activities, home-visits, class trips, classroom and school activities, and positive interactions (Allen, 2007; Freeman, & Knopf, 2007; McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007; Wilford, 2004). In early childhood education, educators were not only educating children but also their parents. In many school and community-based programs an educator worked with a child for multiple years, which allowed them to build long-term relationships with families. Parent involvement was linked to relationships teachers and parents built. The more parents perceived their child’s teacher was interested not only in their child’s learning capabilities but also their family, the more parents wanted to become involved (Arnold, Zeljo, & Doctoroff, 2008).
Family involvement within preschool programs was extremely important. When families felt comfortable with staff members and the program, it provided smoother transitions for the child to kindergarten. Transitions within early childhood education seemed to be difficult for children and their families. Transitions were from one teacher to another, from one program to another or even moving into kindergarten. The more preschool educators prepared families for their child’s transition, the less stressful it would be for everyone involved. In the past, many educators only focused on preparing families of students with special education needs for transitions, however, over the years, preparing all children for transitions had proven to be helpful.

**Accountability**

**Mandates without funding.** As school districts try to implement high quality preschool programs, they struggled with implementing mandates with little to no funding for state departments of education. An increased number of policy makers are interested in early childhood education. Policy makers and educators cannot deny the outstanding research done on the positive effects that preschool has on student achievement; however, they were implementing these strategies without providing adequate funding for them to be successful (Finn, 2010; Nores & Barnett, 2010). The growing financial commitment by states in preschool programs helped increase the quality by creating. Until recently, many preschool programs had not had data to prove that they made a difference; therefore, it had been difficult to convince policy makers to allocate funds to prekindergarten programs without data to show that they made a difference. However, funding and accountability made a difference whether or not students meet learning
targets. Without these strings attached there was little motivation for teachers to set the standards high (Cascio, 2010; Stephens, 2010).

As the interest in universal preschool programs continued to grow, research suggest more positive effects for children, however, it was yet to be determined whether or not policy makers will support these programs by allocating funding. Over the past five years, Iowa, Maryland, Nebraska, New Jersey, and Rhode Island, have added preschool to their overall state aid formulas which allowed some funding to go to local schools to assist with the costs. Universal pre-kindergarten provides quality education for all students and eliminated segregation between the haves and the have not’s. Policy makers needed to continue to be creative to find ways to support universal pre-kindergarten programs to invest in our young children’s future.

**Benefits of Using Universal tools to maintain quality.** With the increased interest in the benefits of preschool programs, it was essential that school districts and states have a consistent way to monitor progress. Until recently many school districts and states monitored progress in a variety of ways that are not always consistent (Azzi-Lessing, 2009; Nores & Barnett, 2010.). When school districts and states used multiple tools to monitor progress, many times data is misinterpreted or misused. Consistent evaluation tools that were used to measure quality help inform policy makers know when students are meeting their learning outcomes.

Not only was it essential that there is a consistent evaluation tool used within preschool programs, but program quality also must be measured on a regular basis.

Universal preschool evaluation tools examined the inputs such as the teacher’s
credentials, class size, and curriculum as well as its outputs such as student outcomes, program quality, and student readiness for kindergarten.

**Description of the district’s preschool program.** Bellevue Public Schools strived to meet state department requirements while maintaining high quality preschool programs for students and their families. The district had twelve preschool programs, which serve Targeted Title 1 students and students with special education needs. Each program has two sessions, which were three hours: a morning session, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and an afternoon session, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. All preschool students were offered to participate in lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The programs were staffed with one certified early childhood special education teacher and two paraprofessionals, which meet NDE Rule 11 requirements. The district’s preschool programs followed the district calendar and are in session from August to May. Students were given the option to attend the district’s free summer school program. The Creative Curriculum was implemented within all twelve district programs. The Creative Curriculum was one of three NDE approved curricula and assessments. The Creative Curriculum was a play-based curriculum which allows students to gain skills through preferred activities.

The ECERS-R requirement was also implemented within all twelve district programs. The ECERS-R was a rating scale that looks at the quality of preschool programs. All preschool programs within Nebraska received state aid or grant funds had to complete the ECERS-R requirement by December 2010. NDE determined an overall score of a five is passing. Programs scoring under five were required to write a corrective action plan. All preschool programs in Nebraska receiving state aid or grant funds needed to complete the ECERS-R requirement on an annual basis.
Description of Creative Curriculum and Assessment. Creative Curriculum was a play-based curriculum which builds on students’ strengths and interests. Creative Curriculum was a comprehensive curriculum and assessment provides preschool teachers with a map of activities. It also provided an outline of skills for those students’ ages’ three to five. Creative Curriculum provided teachers the flexibility to adjust their activities based on the students within their classroom.

The Creative Curriculum Assessment was divided into four different domains: Physical, Cognitive, Social, and Language. The Creative Curriculum Assessment provided teachers to conduct on-going observations throughout a period of time. The assessment was divided into four seasons: fall, winter, spring, and summer. During the 2010-2011 school year the checkpoints dates were fall; August 15 through October 29; winter; October 30 through February 14; spring; February 15 through May 31, and summer; June 1 through August 14. Since the district’s preschools were not in session during the summer checkpoint, data was not collected. The Creative Curriculum was divided into six sections to determine the level of the student’s skills. The six sections of assessments were: Forerunner 1, Forerunner 2, Forerunner 3, Step 1, Step 2, and Step 3. There was not an observed section, if for some reason the teacher did not observe the skill. Since preschool students developed skills at variety of rates, the six sections of assessments allowed students to show growth within the four areas of development (Social, Physical, Cognitive, and Language). The forerunner sections of the assessment were for students who are not at age level development. Step 1 means students were introduced to the skills that they were using inconsistently; Step 2 is for the students who
acquired skills but were still not using it inconsistently, and Step 3 means the child had mastered the skill.

**Description of ECERS-R rating scale.** The ECERS-R was developed at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. ECERS-R, preschool edition, is an evaluation rating scale used to evaluate quality within private and school-based preschool programs. ECERS was developed in 1980 to assist with early childhood research and program development. It was revised in 1997. The ECERS-R was organized into forty-three items, which then are categorized into seven categories. The ECERS-R seven categories include: Space and Furnishings; Personal Care Routines; Language-Reasoning; Activities; Interactions; Program Structure; Parents and Staff. The ECERS-R had extensive field studies which has made the rating scale reliable and valid for preschool classrooms. The ECERS-R is based off of a seven point scale. Items scored a one are deemed inadequate; scores of three are meeting some requirements; scores of five are meeting requirements; scores of seven are exceeding the requirements. Each of the forty-three items was scored using the scale one to seven (Cryer, et al, 2005). To score the ECERS-R the evaluator must have a thorough understanding of the scoring scale. ECERS-R scores on a seven point scale, with a score of one being the lowest score and seven being the highest score.

Space and Furnishings had eight items within this sub-section. ECERS-R evaluates indoor and outdoor spaces and furnishings for safety and condition. Room arrangement for play was also essential in this area. Each classroom must have a space for privacy for students who want to be alone. Children’s work should be displayed throughout the classroom and at student eye level. Personal care routines focused on
items which ensured healthy practices within preschool settings. Hand-washing and sanctizing items were essential in the personal care routines section. Language Reasoning encouraged positive interactions between students as well as staff within the classroom. This section also focused on how language skills used for students to problem solve and used while they looked at books. Activities included the variety of learning center options for students to choose and the lessons within the centers. Toys and materials within centers were accessible to the students; which meant students were able to have access to them without assistance from an adult. Throughout the learning centers, teachers had materials which promoted diversity. Interactions focused on supervision of the preschool students as well as discipline strategies used within the classroom. It was essential that all adults worked within the preschool classroom were using the same discipline strategies. Adults promoted interactions among students. Program Structure ensured that the majority of the student’s day was spent in play activities inside and outside. Students engaged in free play which means students were allowed to play in the centers of their interest. All classrooms should make provisions for students with disabilities. The last section examined interactions between parents and staff members within the classroom. Staff members communicated to parents on a regular basis. Staff members within the preschool classroom must be evaluated on a regular basis to ensure high quality staff members were teaching preschool students.

**Training for preschool teachers and paraprofessionals.** Each school year, the Director of Early Childhood developed a training plan for all preschool staff, which focuses on district and NDE initiatives. NDE Rule 11 required that paraprofessionals and teachers received twelve hours of in-service on an annual basis. Therefore the district
developed an extensive training schedule to meet the needs of the staff working within the preschool programs. Staff members were paid to attend the trainings. Trainings were held during day or evening. Training durations varied between two hours to four hours. The following trainings were required. The trainings were taught by the Director of Early Childhood or staff within the district with the expertise on the topic.

The required trainings for preschool teachers and paraprofessionals were:

1. August 12-preschool expectations for the year and changes within early childhood programs;
2. August 26-understanding teaming and coaching;
3. September 17-Creative Curriculum and Assessment, reviewing important components; October 25-understanding the importance of literacy and how to incorporate the skills into the child’s day;
4. October 28-understanding the ECERS-R requirements;
5. November 4-CPR/1st Aid certification;
6. November 9-engaging children in meaningful play activities;
8. February 8-inter-rater reliability training to ensure all practitioners are scoring Creative Curriculum with fidelity.

In addition to district trainings, the Director of Early Childhood sent early childhood teachers to a variety of conferences on ECERS-R and Creative Curriculum. In preparation for the ECERS-R requirement, the district sent six teachers and the Director of Early Childhood to the NDE ECERS-R training. The six day training allowed the
district’s staff to become reliable using the ECERS-R rating scale. The training provided opportunities for the teachers to use the rating scale to evaluate other preschool programs within the metropolitan area. In addition to evaluating other preschool programs, teachers were provided an extensive overview of the ECERS-R. After the training, the teachers then provided in-district training to all staff members who work within the preschool classrooms, which included the teachers, paraprofessionals, occupational therapists, physical therapists, vision teachers, and speech/language pathologists. The training consisted of all the components that needed to be implemented within the preschool programs to meet the ECERS-R requirements. After the training the teachers who attended the NDE training, evaluated a preschool program within the district using the ECERS-R rating scale. Teachers were able to use these results to make changes within their classrooms prior to the NDE ECERS-R evaluation. All four preschool programs within this study, had teachers who went through this in-district training.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This chapter described participants, procedures, independent variable descriptions, dependent measures and instrumentation, research questions, and data analysis.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the physical, social, cognitive, and language outcomes of Targeted Title I preschool students that participated in programs not meeting and programs meeting Nebraska Department of Education, Early Childhood Evaluation Rating Scales-Revised (ECERS-R) requirements.

Research Design

The pretest-posttest 2-group comparative efficacy study design included Group 1 was a naturally formed group of preschool students \((n = 37)\) from schools meeting the ECERS-R criteria. Group 2 was a naturally formed group of preschool students \((n = 24)\) from schools not meeting the ECERS-R criteria. The study constants were all preschool age student study participants \((N = 61)\) were enrolled in the same school district preschool programs. The study pretest and posttest dependent measures were:

1. Physical skills,
2. Cognitive skills,
3. Social skills,
4. Language skills

as measured on the Creative Curriculum assessment.
Participants

The maximum accrual for this study was \( N = 61 \). Preschool students who participated in the study were enrolled during the 2010 and 2011 school year in the Bellevue Public Schools preschool program. Students attended preschool classes in four schools meeting the requirements for Targeted Title 1 designation. All preschool student study participants met the school districts Targeted Title 1 program criteria for placement based on combinations of the following conditions: (a) Ages and Stages Developmental Screening, (b) family language other than English, (c) at least one parent was in their teen years when the preschool enrollee was born, (d) at least one parent did not graduate from high school, and (e) the preschool enrollee was born earlier than 37 weeks of gestation and/or weighed under five pounds at birth. Study participants consisted of a naturally formed group of preschool girls \( n = 17 \) enrolled in a preschool program that did not meet the ECERS-R requirement; a naturally formed group of preschool boys \( n = 20 \) enrolled in a preschool program that did not meet the ECERS-R requirement; a naturally formed group of preschool girls \( n = 10 \) enrolled in a preschool program that did meet the ECERS-R requirement; and a naturally formed group of preschool boys \( n = 14 \) enrolled in a preschool program that did meet the ECERS-R requirement. The gender of the total study participants \( N = 61 \) was girls \( n = 27 \) (44%) and boys \( n = 34 \) (56%). The age range of the study participants was congruent with the research school district’s preschool gender demographics. The age range of the students in both groups was from 4 years to 5 years. All students attend BPS preschool the year before they were age eligible for kindergarten. The age range of the study participants was congruent with the research school district’s preschool age demographics. The ethnic origin of the students who
participated in the Bellevue Public Schools preschool program meeting the Title 1 criteria
during the 2010-2011 school year was White not Hispanic, \( n = 53 \) (78%), Black not
Hispanic, \( n = 8 \) (12%), Asian, \( n = 4 \) (6%), Hispanic, \( n = 2 \) (3%), and American Indian \( n = 1 \) (1%). The racial and ethnic origin of the study participants was congruent with the
research school district’s racial and ethnic demographics. Study participants consisted of
four-year to five-year old students who meet Targeted Title 1 criteria required for
program admission to a Bellevue Public Schools’ preschool program. Study participant
students were in attendance in preschool classes in four schools meeting the requirements
for Targeted Title 1 designation.

**Research Question**

The research question used to analyze achievement of Targeted Title 1 students
who participated in the district’s preschool program.

Was there a significant difference between preschool children in programs
meeting and not meeting ECERS-R on the Creative Curriculum assessment scores for

1. physical skills,
2. cognitive skills,
3. social skills, and
4. language skills,

between fall 2010 pretest and spring 2011 posttest?

**Analysis.** Data was analyzed using two-way analyzes of variance (ANOVA) with
factors of time (pretest/posttest) and groups (schools meeting the ECERS-R requirements
and schools not meeting the ECERS-R requirements). ANOVA was a parametric test of
significance used to determine whether a significant difference exists between two or
more means at a selected probability level. An ANOVA was selected as it is efficient and keeps the error rate under control. Because of the small sample size, the significance level is .05.

Data Collection Procedures

All study Creative Curriculum and ECERS-R data was retrospective, archival, and routinely collected school information. Permission from the appropriate school research personnel was obtained. Naturally formed groups of 33 and 35 students in the other included achievement data gathered from the Creative Curriculum. Aggregated group data, descriptive statistics, and parametric statistical analysis will be used and reported with means and standard deviations in tables.

The independent variable conditions for the study was children’s participation in two research school district preschool programs meeting the NDE ECERS-R requirements and two research school district preschool programs not meeting the NDE ECERS-R requirements. In order for a preschool program to meet the NDE ECERS-R requirements independent program evaluators must award the program an average overall score of five or better, on a one to seven scale, in the following domain areas: (a) space and furnishings, (b) personal care routines, (c) language reasoning, (d) activities, (e) Interactions, (f) program structure, and (g) interactions between parents and staff. All independent program evaluators were licensed early childhood special educators who received NDE training to ensure inter-rater reliability and domain score fidelity. In the research schools not meeting the NDE ECERS-R requirements the average overall score in one school was 4.80 and the average overall score in the other school not meeting the NDE ECERS-R requirements was 4.95. In the research schools meeting the NDE
ECERS-R requirements the average overall score in one school was 5.15 and average overall score in the other school meeting the NDE ECERS-R requirements was 5.65.

The study’s dependent measures were Creative Curriculum assessments for

1. Physical Skills,
2. Cognitive Skills,
3. Social Skills, and
4. Language Skills.

The Physical section of the Creative Curriculum Assessment contains eight skills. The skills focused on student’s ability to use his large and small muscles during activities such as jumping, climbing, and balancing. The Cognitive section of the Creative Curriculum Assessment contained fifteen skills. The skills focused on the students’ ability to problem solve, compare and contrast items, pretend play, and understand numbers and shapes. The Social section of the Creative Curriculum Assessment contained thirteen skills. The skills focused on the child’s ability to adjust to new situations, interact with others, and demonstrate independence. The Language section of the Creative Curriculum Assessment contained twelve skills. The skills focused on the student’s ability to follow directions, understanding language, meaning of letters and words, and participation in conversations.
Chapter 4

Results

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the physical, social, cognitive, and language outcomes of Targeted Title I preschool students participating in programs not meeting and programs meeting Nebraska Department of Education, Early Childhood Evaluation Rating Scales-Revised (ECERS-R) requirements.

Research Question

The research question used to analyze achievement of Targeted Title 1 students who participated in the district’s preschool program.

Was there a significant difference between preschool children in programs meeting and not meeting ECERS-R on the Creative Curriculum assessment scores for

1. Physical skills,
2. Cognitive skills,
3. Social skills, and
4. Language skills,

between fall 2010 pretest and spring 2011 posttest?

For Physical, there was a statistically significant main effect for time (pretest/posttest), $F(1, 59) = 101.28, p < .0005, d = 1.3$. There was no significant interaction between time (pretest/posttest) and ECERS-R (met, not met), $F(1, 59) = 1.352, p = .25$ and no significant main effect for ECERS-R (met, not met), $F(1,59) = 0.076, p = .78$. The statistically main effect for time indicated that participants improved from pretest ($M = 1.59, SD = 0.67$) to posttest ($M = 2.46, SD = 0.62$). For Physical the descriptive statistics are displayed on Table 5 and the ANOVA is on Table 6.
For Cognitive, there was a statistically significant main effect for time (pretest/posttest), $F(1, 59) = 134.474, p < .0005, d = 1.7$. There was no significant interaction between time (pretest/posttest) and ECERS-R (met, not met), $F(1, 59) = .119, p = .73$ and no significant main effect for ECERS-R (met, not met), $F(1, 59) = 0.015, p = .90$. The statistically main effect for time indicated that participants improved from pretest ($M = 1.49, SD = 0.54$) to posttest ($M = 2.44, SD = 0.56$). For Cognitive the descriptive statistics are displayed on Table 3 and the ANOVA is on Table 4.

For Social Emotional, there was a statistically significant main effect for time (pretest/posttest), $F(1, 59) = 113.189, p < .0005, d = 1.6$. There was no significant interaction between time (pretest/posttest) and ECERS-R (met, not met), $F(1, 59) = 2.287, p = .14$ and no significant main effect for ECERS-R (met, not met), $F(1, 59) = 0.469, p = .50$. The statistically main effect for time indicated that participants improved from pretest ($M = 1.64, SD = 0.61$) to posttest ($M = 2.59, SD = 0.56$). For Social Emotional the descriptive statistics are displayed on Table 1 and the ANOVA is on Table 2.

For Language, there was a statistically significant main effect for time (pretest/posttest), $F(1, 59) = 15.72, p < .0005, d = 0.56$. There was no significant interaction between time (pretest/posttest) and ECERS-R (met, not met), $F(1, 59) = 0.036, p = .85$ and no significant main effect for ECERS-R (met, not met), $F(1, 59) = 1.646, p = .205$. The statistically main effect for time indicated that participants improved from pretest ($M = 2.05, SD = 0.80$) to posttest ($M = 2.44, SD = 0.59$). For Language the descriptive statistics are displayed on Table 7 and the ANOVA is on Table 8.
Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Physical Domain*

*Creative Curriculum Pretest and Posttest 2010.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pretest</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met ECERS ($n = 37$)</td>
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<td>Not Met ($n = 24$)</td>
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<td>Total ($N = 61$)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Posttest</strong></td>
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Table 2

*ANOVA for Physical Domain*

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*ns = not significant*
Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics for Cognitive Domain*

*Creative Curriculum Pretest and Posttest 2010.*

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Posttest</strong></td>
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<tr>
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Table 4

ANOVA for Cognitive Domain

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ns = not significant
Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Social Emotional Domain

Creative Curriculum Pretest and Posttest 2010.

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<tr>
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### ANOVA for Social Emotional Domain

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*ns = not significant*
Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Language Domain

Creative Curriculum Pretest and Posttest 2010.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Pretest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met ECERS (n = 37)</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Met (n = 24)</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N = 61)</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Posttest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met ECERS (n = 37)</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Met (n = 24)</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N = 61)</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

ANOVA for Language Domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Between Subjects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECERS-R status</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.157</td>
<td>1.646</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0.293</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Within Subjects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.601</td>
<td>15.720</td>
<td>&lt;.0005</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time*ECERS-R</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>0.849</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0.293</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ns = not significant
Chapter 5

Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the physical, social, cognitive, and language outcomes of Targeted Title I preschool students that participated in programs not meeting and programs meeting Nebraska Department of Education, Early Childhood Evaluation Rating Scales-Revised (ECERS-R) requirements. Sixty-one students participated in this study.

The ECERS-R is used by the Nebraska Department of Education to determine preschool quality. Meeting the ECERS-R means that a program’s overall score is a 5.0 or better on a 7.0 point score, which means that the program is a quality program. In this study the researcher wanted to determine if the ECERS-R actually had an impact on student achievement.

Conclusions

The following conclusions may be drawn from the study for the research question.

Research Question

Was there a significant difference between preschool children in programs meeting and not meeting ECERS-R on the Creative Curriculum assessment scores for

1. Physical skills,
2. Cognitive skills,
3. Social skills, and
4. Language skills,
between fall 2010 pretest and spring 2011 posttest?

The research question was used to determine whether or not if meeting or not meeting the ECERS-R NDE requirement impacted student achievement. Students in all preschool classes regardless if they met the ECERS-R evaluation requirement made progress on the Creative Curriculum and Assessment during the 2010-2011 school year. The study showed that there was no significant difference on student achievement if their classroom met or did not meet the ECERS-R requirement.

Discussion

Public school systems have provided special education services to young children since 1975, when federal law was passed. Over the years, children with and without special education needs have been served within homes, community settings, and school-based preschool programs (Marvin, et al, 2004). It was not until recently that school systems have been questioned about the quality of their programs by professional organizations, parents, and federal law makers. In Nebraska, one way to measure quality within public schools preschool programs is to use the ECERS-R. The ECERS-R requires school districts to spend a great deal of money to purchase materials to supply the recommended centers. In addition to the supplies needed, teachers and paraprofessional’s need on-going training. In times of budget cuts for school systems, it is necessary to know that the money being spent is affecting student achievement, and in case money being spent in preschool programs is closing the achievement gap for children entering kindergarten.
ECERS-R is the measure to determine program quality and Creative Curriculum is a curriculum and assessment used to measure student achievement. Creative Curriculum is divided into two assessments ages birth to three and ages three to five. In this study the assessment for three to five year olds was used. Students show progress based on the level of knowledge and skills acquired under each section. In Chapter 3, a chart demonstrates the skills under each of the four developmental domains: physical skills, social emotional skills, cognitive skills, and language skills. These skills then are divided up into sub skills under the domain. Teachers are given a rubric to help measure student skills based on the three different levels: forerunner, level 1, level 2, and level 3. For example, if you refer to the chart in Appendix A, the first skill under the social emotional domain is the sub skill: shows ability to adjust to new situations. Teachers then look at the Creative Curriculum assessment rubric to determine which level the student demonstrates the majority of the time according to their observations, parent report, and anecdotal notes. Then the sub section: shows ability to adjust to new situations is divided into the four levels. The forerunner is the lowest level of skills; in using this example it would be that the child interacts with teachers when family member is nearby; is able to move away from family member; checks back occasionally (“social referencing”). Step 1 is when the child is demonstrating skills such as Treats arrival and departure as routine parts of the day (e.g., says good-bye to family members without undue stress; accepts comfort from teacher). Step 2 is when a child is demonstrating skills such as accepts changes in daily schedules and routines (e.g., eagerly participates in a field trip; accepts visitors to classroom). Step 3 is when a child is demonstrating skills such as functioning with increasing independence in school (e.g., readily goes to
other parts of the building for scheduled activities; willingly delivers a message from classroom teacher to the office). Step 3 means that the child is functioning at a five year old level and has the pre-academic skills in that sub section ready for kindergarten. Creative Curriculum allows teachers to easily access skills’ rubric via an online system. This system allows teachers to keep their anecdotal notes and allows parents to have access to their child’s progress on an ongoing basis. Teachers are required to enter their data three times a year to monitor a child’s growth from fall, winter, and spring. The online system also gives teachers suggestions on how to differentiate skills to meet the child’s needs. The system also allows for a parent and teacher to see what next skills are for the child to learn. This system is allows teachers and parents to monitor the child’s progress throughout the year.

The Creative Curriculum assessment is structured so all students make progress throughout the year, even if accommodations were made. Therefore, it is not shocking that students made progress. However, in Nebraska preschools are designed to examine the entire child and teachers are challenged to demonstrate in all four domains of development. In Bellevue Public Schools, students regardless of their needs made progress in all four developmental domains, which means teachers were constantly teaching around the Creative Curriculum rubrics and following the outlined district activities which were aligned with the skills within the assessment.

In this study all students showed progress on the Creative Curriculum assessment in Bellevue Public Schools regardless if there classroom passed the ECERS-R requirement. Therefore, the on-going question for many educators is the ECERS-R a worthwhile measurement of quality within preschool programs (Cryer, et al, 2005)? The
ECERS-R tool has been used in many preschool programs since the 1980’s and has provided a great guide for program improvement. However, when using this measure to evaluate quality the school district should evaluate which sections the program is scoring lower in because some of the subsections do not measure quality instruction. In Nebraska, ECERS-R evaluations are conducted yearly. This study has shown that programs can be high quality even without meeting the ECERS-R score of a five. Therefore, maybe NDE should consider conducting the ECERS-R evaluation tool less frequently depending on the subsections that a program scores lower in.

Since this study shows that students can continue to make progress on the Creative Curriculum assessment regardless of the ECERS-R score, it makes educators wonder whether or not the time and money school districts are spending is worth it or if the time and money would be better spent on other resources. In Bellevue Public Schools, most of the trainings on program quality are based around the ECERS-R. Even though the ECERS-R gives the district a good guideline for training maybe it should not be the only item used. In addition to the training the district spends a great deal of resources to purchase the materials for the ECERS-R (Cryer, et al, 2005).

In this study students made progress regardless if their program made progress or not. In exploring the areas that the schools that did not meet the ECERS-R scored the lowest in were areas that did not necessarily impact achievement. For example both schools did not score high in the sanitation or hygiene sections. Even though these areas are important they do not directly impact student achievement. All four schools scored high in the areas of staff interactions, literacy, and language, which relate to the Creative Curriculum assessment domains and skills needs for pre-academic success. Therefore,
this could be one factor why the students in all four programs showed growth. In addition, all four schools follow a well laid out curriculum which covers pre-academic skills which is tied to the assessment that students need to be taught prior to kindergarten. The teachers in each of the four programs all followed the curriculum daily to ensure students were learning what they needed to learn. The Bellevue Public Schools has implemented all the components of the ECERS-R and Creative Curriculum assessment to make their preschool programs high quality. The programs implemented the same curriculum, hired highly skilled paraprofessionals and teachers, provided parent participation and smooth transitions into kindergarten these factor all contributed to the student achievement (Cryer, et al, 2005).

**Implications for practice.** This study supports the research that highly quality preschool programs, does promote student achievement. However, quality cannot be merely centered around one assessment tool such as the ECERS-R. Even though the ECERS-R provides guidelines to assist teachers to improve their instruction it does not mean that if a teacher does not meet the requirement that students are not learning within the preschool classroom (Cassidy, et al, 2005).

**Implications for policy.** A great deal of money, time, and effort has gone into the implementation of the ECERS-R evaluation tool. The seven components all of the ECERS-R assists teachers and programs to reflect where they currently are scoring, then make a plan for improvement (Jones-Branch, 2004). However, NDE should not merely take this one assessment result as the overarching measure for student success within preschool classrooms. NDE may want to concern evaluating classrooms only in the area in which they need to improve instead of all seven areas each year.
**Implications for further research.** On-going research in this area will assist NDE to know if the results in Bellevue Public Schools are typical within other school districts across the state. In addition, research could also determine if there needs to be a standard for the ECERS-R evaluator. Currently in Nebraska, school districts can decide if the preschool teacher within the classroom will score the ECERS-R themselves or have an outside evaluator come in and score the ECERS-R evaluation tool. In Bellevue Public Schools outside evaluators were used, therefore, it would be interesting to determine if the evaluator impacts the ECERS-R scores. Another area for more research would be to determine if the area in need influenced student achievement. For example, in Bellevue Public Schools, the schools that did not meet the ECERS-R requirement were in non-academic such as hand washing and sanitation and not in the pre-academic areas.

**Bellevue Public Schools Preschool Program Success.** This research demonstrates students are achieving within the district’s preschool program regardless if they met the ECERS-R evaluation requirements. It is evident that the preschool teachers and administrators are focused on student achievement and are using the ECERS-R merely as a measure for continuous improvement and not a measure of student achievement. The smiles on the teachers and students’ faces each and every day show that students and staff members enjoy coming to school each day and want to work as a team to learn and grow.


Appendix A

The below skills outline the specific skills in each section of the Creative Curriculum assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Skills</th>
<th>Cognitive Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demonstrates basic loco motor skills (running, jumping, hopping, galloping)</td>
<td>1. Observes objects and events with curiosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Shows balance while moving</td>
<td>2. Approaches problems flexibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Climbs up and down</td>
<td>3. Shows persistence in approaching tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pedals and steers a tricycle (or other wheeled vehicle)</td>
<td>4. Explores cause and effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Demonstrates throwing, kicking, and catching skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Controls small muscles in hands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Coordinates eye-hand movement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Uses tools for writing and drawing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Social Emotional Skills | 1. Shows ability to adjust to new situations  
| | 2. Demonstrates appropriate trust in adults  
| | 3. Recognizes own feelings and  |
| 5. Applies knowledge or experience to a new context  
| 6. Classifies objects  
| 7. Compares/measures  
| 8. Arranges objects in a series  
| 9. Recognizes patterns and can repeat them  
| 10. Shows awareness of time concepts and sequence  
| 11. Shows awareness of position in space  
| 12. Uses one-to-one correspondence  
| 13. Uses numbers and counting  
| 14. Takes on pretend roles and situations  
| 15. Makes believe with objects  
<p>| 16. Makes and interprets representations  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Skills</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Manages them appropriately</td>
<td>4. Stands up for rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Demonstrates self-direction and independence</td>
<td>5. Demonstrates self-direction and independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Takes responsibility for own well-being</td>
<td>6. Takes responsibility for own well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Respects and cares for classroom environment and materials</td>
<td>8. Follows classroom routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Plays well with other children</td>
<td>10. Plays well with other children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Recognizes the feelings of others and responds appropriately</td>
<td>11. Recognizes the feelings of others and responds appropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Shares and respects the rights of others</td>
<td>12. Shares and respects the rights of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Uses thinking skills to resolve conflicts</td>
<td>13. Uses thinking skills to resolve conflicts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hears and discriminates the sounds of language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Expresses self using words and expanded sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Understands and follows oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Answers questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Asks questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Actively participates in conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Enjoys and values reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Demonstrates understanding of print concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Demonstrates knowledge of the alphabet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Uses emerging reading skills to make meaning from print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Comprehends and interprets meaning from books and other texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Understands the purpose of writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Writes letters and words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>