EARLY EDUCATION FROM A PARENTAL PERSPECTIVE:
A Qualitative Study

A thesis presented

by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree with honors
of Bachelor of Arts
University of Michigan
March 2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examined the perceptions of early developmental education programs held by parents in disadvantaged communities regarding the impact of early development education programs on parents' lives. Furthermore, the thesis examined the implications of these findings on research methodologies. Social programs are created in response to social problems, typically occurring on a wide scale. In the United States, there has always been an emphasis placed on the effectiveness of government funded social programs. Early education programs are not any different and like most social programs, assessments play a major role in funding decisions and program continuation. Consequently, the history of early education programs has been one of controversy. Recently, programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start have had to deal with accusations from critics questioning their effectiveness. Research on the effectiveness of early education programs, such as Head Start and Early Head Start, has been mixed with some research pointing towards great success and others finding a number of shortcomings. These studies typically use quantitative research designs. The mixed evaluations of early education programs provide an opportunity for research exploring programs in light of consistently shifting funding structures and policy changes. I conducted and analyzed interviews of parents who currently have children in early educational programs and participate in parental programs offered by Great Start-Wayne, in order to examine their perceptions of these programs. The aim of my study was to analyze the insights of those most affected by the programs, as a means to highlight the success of programs through participant experiences and to illustrate the benefits and need for qualitative research designs. While my findings identify the presence of program satisfaction and appreciation among participants, the results also emphasize the need for suitable research methodologies.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Social programs, better known as welfare programs, have a long history in the United States, which dates back before the development of the 'welfare-state' as we know it today. Early American colonist transferred British Poor Laws to the American colonies. The British Poor Laws were legislation concerning public assistance for the poor, which recognized the state's obligation to the poor. The beginning of the modern welfare state is typically linked to the New Deal, which was a policy response to the conditions created by the Great Depression, but programs such as these existed previously. For example, the Civil War Pension Program passed in 1862 provided aid to Civil War Veterans and their families. Governments create social programs in response to social and economic problems. Welfare programs are created by social welfare policies (Segal, 2009). The development of policies in response to social conditions is also present throughout American history and has continued to shape the existence of social programs. For example, President Lyndon Johnson's institution of policies as part of his "War on Poverty" and "Great Society", President Clinton's welfare reform law of 1996 and President Obama's stimulus policies are all illustrations of the way in which social conditions shape policy. The objective of social programs is to address a particular situation by providing the necessary provisions for individuals that cannot do so for themselves, while attempting to counter social conditions such as poverty, disability, hunger, unemployment, homelessness, illiteracy as well as other social conditions. Current welfare programs include Medicaid, Food Stamps, Supplemental Security Income, Housing and Urban Development programs, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Head Start, Early Head Start, Work Study, Medicare and Social Security and these programs are funded as well as governed by the government (Segal, 2009).

Social programs are developed to serve a specific population. Early education social programs are no different. Early education programs such as Head Start were designed to offer children from low-income backgrounds a variety of comprehensive education and developmental services, in order to ensure school readiness. However, public attitudes about social programs vary. Moreover, social programs are a highly politicized issue, as they are government funded. Social programs rely heavily on program assessments. In the case of early education programs such as Head Start, program assessments are government sponsored. The results of program assessments affect funding, program modifications and future policy decisions regarding early education programs.

Early education programs have been a part of the United States history for over six decades. As early education programs have evolved, they have come to target their services towards a particular group—minorities, single-parent households, and low-income families—in many aspects such as program dynamics, services offered, and people served. Head Start was developed to provide assistance to low-income children and their families because children from low-income families experienced great difficulty in school. Researchers noted that children from disadvantaged backgrounds had increased rates of grade repetition, low literacy rates, and a higher occurrence of behavioral problems (Fenichel & Mann, 2001). Consequently, programs such as Head Start developed services that would combat factors that contributed to increased rates of grade repetition, low literacy rates, and a higher occurrence of behavioral problems among low-income children. Furthermore, research began to mount demonstrating the benefits of including parental services in early education curriculums, as parental services assisted in increasing school-readiness among low-income children. Studies suggested that offering assistance to parents as well as children could increase school-readiness among low-income

children. For example, Benasich, Brooks-Gunn and Clewell (1992) illustrated the benefits of early education programs on maternal literacy. The structure of early education programs, specifically Head Start, has expanded to become a comprehensive structure that supports the entire family.

Head Start and Early Head Start have had to deal with accusations from critics questioning their effectiveness. Research on the effectiveness of early education programs, such as Head Start and Early Head Start, has been mixed with some research pointing towards great success and others finding a number of shortcomings. The production of mixed study findings for early education programs has become increasingly problematic, as current economic conditions have lead to massive cuts in early education. However, the current economic downturn has produced policies such as the Economic Stimulus Act of 2008, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and the Worker, Homeownership and Business Assistance Act of 2009. Many of these policies have not only allotted funds to sustain pre-existing early education programs, but also have provided funding opportunities for new and innovative programs. The policies provided relief to early education programs, as the economic downturn had devastating effects on program budgets, especially in states like Michigan and California that were forced to deal with budget crises and deficits that led to cuts in the area of early developmental education.

Nevertheless, budgetary issues, economic conditions and assessments are not the only obstacles social programs must confront. Social programs also have to deal with the stigma associated with program participation, the role of stigma on the participants and the affects of stigma on the program's effectiveness. The stigmatization of welfare programs has a long history in the United States. Furthermore, the history of welfare programs in the United States is

embedded within complex socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic systems. The stigmatization of welfare recipients is linked to racial identity, as African Americans are overrepresented in media portrayals of welfare recipients, especially African American women. Images of the 'welfare mother' have become increasing more prominent in the media and popular culture over the years. Images of the 'welfare mother' in the media are problematic, as the 'welfare mother' is commonly depicted as an African American woman. The image of the 'welfare mother' has political ramifications, as the identification of the 'welfare mother' as a bad mother, lazy and underserving, influences public attitudes and discussions surrounding welfare reform (Collins, 2000; Gilens, 1999; Pateman, 1998). Unfortunately, there are many misconceptions surrounding the welfare state.

Many misconceptions surround the topic of welfare and therefore, the concept of the "welfare-state". These erroneous beliefs further complicate the conceptualization of educational programs as social programs. The misconceptions surrounding the topic of welfare include assumptions about recipient race and socio-economic status as well as program components and services. However, I will not go in-depth in regards to the misconceptions surrounding welfare, instead I will only briefly discuss a few key points. First, the word "welfare" has come to refer to food assistance, childcare, Medicaid and other services covered by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The association of the term welfare with certain programs such as food assistance and Medicaid is problematic, as this association is accompanied by the stigmatization of recipients of these programs. However, recipients of Social Security, Supplement Security Income, and Medicare do not experience the same stigma, despite the fact that these programs are also welfare programs. The government administers Social Security, Supplement Security Income, and Medicare programs to individuals in need, but public attitudes concerning recipients

of these programs are very different from attitudes concerning recipients of food assistance, childcare, Medicaid programs. For example, Social Security, Supplement Security Income, and Medicare program participants are perceived as individuals who are elderly or who have had employment at some point in their lives, and these characteristics lead to the identification of this population as 'deserving' of certain social services. Second, most Americans believe that the majority of welfare recipients are African American. However, the majority of welfare recipients are White, although African Americans are disproportionally represented among the population of welfare recipients (Howard, 2007). African Americans are overrepresented in stigmatized programs such as food assistance programs, public housing programs, early education programs, cash assistance programs and child care subsidies programs. Third, in popular culture welfare recipients are viewed as having certain racial or socio-economic characteristics. However, the demographics of welfare recipients vary across many categories, as the ages vary from small children who have lost parents to college students and from youthful single parents to middle-aged widows and elderly retirees (Sheldrick, Dyck, Michell, & Myers, 2006).

Participants' perceptions of social programs are important, as participants' perceptions of the programs they participate in have ramifications that extend to the social, personal and political realm. Seccombe, James, and Walters (1998) examine participants' perceptions of social programs. They conducted a study of 47 women who received cash assistance in 1995 using in-depth semi-structured interviews. They found that welfare recipients were conscious of societal attitudes concerning welfare. They noted that many of their participants believed the social construction of the 'welfare mother' as a 'bad mother' that abused the welfare system, but interviewees believed that their situation was different. Participants subscribed to the concept of fatalism, as interviewees viewed welfare and poverty as out of their control. However,

participants also identified welfare programs as empowering. For example, participants stated that welfare programs allowed them freedom from abusive spouses, the ability to care for their family when a spouse deserted and financial assistance for education. In the realm of education, parental perceptions are typically used to gain insight about the experiences of children in early education programs. Qadiri and Manhas (2009) discovered that parents associated positive attributes with preschool education such as safe environments, positive role models and healthy peer-to-peer interactions. Parents typically identified early childhood education as producing multiple benefits for their children. Parents believed that early childhood education programs assist in the development of behavioral and verbal skills. Qadiri and Manhas (2009) distributed a questionnaire that contained both open and close-ended questions to 200 parents with at least one child in the age group of 3 to 6 years. Several major points are highlighted by these two studies. First, parental experiences with early education programs are typically not examined in studies. In cases, were parental interviews do occur parental insights are solicited in regards to the parents' perceptions of their child's experiences with program and not their own. Since early education programs have come to include services for parents, it is problematic not to explore parental experiences and perceptions as well. Second, it is possible for social programs to simultaneously provide both positive and negative outcomes. For examples, participants may feel empowered by a certain aspect of a social program, while acknowledging and experiencing negative social ramification caused by participation in the same social program.

This thesis examines parental perceptions of early education programs of parents in disadvantaged communities. The aim of my study was to analyze the insights of those most affected by early education programs, as a means to highlight the success of programs through participant experiences and to illustrate the benefits and need for qualitative research designs.

Thus, my thesis was guided by the following research questions: How do early education programs affect the lives of parents in disadvantaged communities? What are the parental perceptions of early education programs in disadvantaged communities? What insights about early education programs are provided by parental interviews of parents in disadvantaged communities? What parental programs are parents in disadvantaged communities utilizing? Why are parents in disadvantaged communities utilizing certain parental early education programs? What parental programs are parents in disadvantaged communities not utilizing? Why are parents in disadvantaged communities not utilizing certain parental early education programs? In my thesis I discuss a brief history of early education programs as well as popular evaluation studies, in order to offer background on the topic. Furthermore, I briefly discuss qualitative and quantitative methods. My thesis includes perspectives on feminist methodology as well. My findings are based on in-depth interviews of parents who currently have children in early educational programs and participate in parental programs offered by early education programs in Michigan.

Early Education

Early education programs, also known as early childhood education programs or early developmental education programs, refer to the early learning programs that focus on children from birth until kindergarten (Fuerst & Petty, 1996). These programs emphasize the importance of cognitive development, nutritional diet, parental interactions, and emotional growth early on, as a means to support healthy learning and strong development. However, childcare and daycare centers are not generally included under this umbrella, as they do not always use educational approaches. Early education programs can be privately or publicly funded. Public funds can come from federal or state governments; the most common examples are federally funded Head

Start and Early Head Start and state funded Pre-K programs and Readiness programs. Private funds can come from a variety of sources such as private foundations, corporations, non-profit organizations, or religious institutions.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 created Head Start (Administration for Children and Families, 2002). It started as part of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" and the Great Society. Head Start is the longest-running two-generational program to address systemic poverty in the United States. Nearly 25 million pre-school aged children have benefited from Head Start (Administration for Children and Families, 2002). In 1994 the Secretary of Health and Human Services created the Advisory Committee on Services for Families with Infants and Toddlers in order to assist in the development of Early Head Start, which was created under the Office of Head Start in the Department of Health and Human Services. Early Head Start services children from birth to 3 and Head Start services children from 3 to 5 years of age (Administration for Children and Families, 2002). Head Start has experienced tremendous revisions in program structure, curriculum, services and constituents. Head Start went through its most intensive modifications in its latest re-authorization under President George W. Bush in 2007 when he signed the School Readiness Act of 2007. The School Readiness Act of 2007 called for higher teacher and classroom quality, increased school readiness, more comprehensive services, and increased coordination of efforts among programs and organizations (Administration for Children and Families, 2008).

Great Start Collaborative-Wayne

Great Start Collaborative-Wayne was created based upon Governor Granholm's State of the State address in February 2003. She pronounced that "all children in Michigan should have a great start" and this led to the development of Great Start. There is a Great Start Collaborative

(GSC) representing each of the counties in Michigan. Each Great Start cooperates and works toward similar policy, advocacy, and educational goals, while focusing on objectives specific to their respective county. Great Start Collaborative-Wayne's mission is to engage the entire community to assure a coordinated system of services and resources to assist all Wayne County families in providing a great start for their children from birth to five years of age. Great Start Collaborative-Wayne is state program, and thus funded by Michigan's state government. However, only the majority of the program's funding comes from the state and the exact amount of state funds varies yearly (Administration for Children and Families, 2006).

The organization does not have a traditional administrative staff at the organization's headquarters during regular business hours. Instead the organization has five consultants that accomplish the majority of their tasks offsite. However, the organization has an Administrative Assistant at Great Start Collaborative headquarters during the organization's hours of operation. Each consultant specializes in a different area. For example, the director, Toni Hartke, has experience with early childhood development programs such as Head Start Programs and preschool programs. The organization's other consultants are a community, a parent liaison, a marketing and a funding-raising consultant. The organization's headquarters is in Southgate, MI but the organization has centers throughout Wayne County. Great Start Collaborative-Wayne uses a center-based model. In a center-based model services are provided to children and families at the organization's center.

Great Start Collaborative-Wayne has a communal structure that allows a great deal of input from the organization's members. Great Start Collaborative allows parents to give input and hold seats on nearly all of the organization's committees. Furthermore, Great Start Collaborative-Wayne incorporates its constituents into the organization by allowing them to hold

valuable positions. Great Start Collaborative-Wayne focuses on ensuring that children from birth to five have a *"great start"* in life. However, since the children who the organization seeks to help are not at an age that allows them to be active in the organization, their parents are encouraged to become members and act on the behalf of their children at every level of the organization. This ensures that the organization remains conscious of its constituents' interests. Parents are present on all of the organization's action teams and committees. This is important because the organization's actions teams and committees are responsible for the majority of the decisions that the organization makes as well as the goals and activities that Great Start Collaborative-Wayne pursues.

The five action teams are as follows: Basic Needs; Economic Security & Child Safety; Early Care & Education; Parenting Education and Family Support; and Physical Health Care and Social-Emotional Health Care. Each of the action teams has at least one parent representative. Parents also participate on the Executive, Date Collections and Evaluations, Public Policy and Advocacy as well as Marketing and Communications committees. Additionally, Great Start Collaborative-Wayne has a Parent Coalition, which is composed strictly of parents that are members of other various committees. The parents on the coalition organize fundraisers, plan events and advocate for various issues. Another subdivision under the collaborative are the Great Start Collaborative Centers, which act as resources for parents and children by providing information as well as parenting, nutritional, literacy and early education classes.

Great Start Collaborative-Wayne's committees and teams have been the key initiators of major decision such as the organization's choice to push for new TANF legislations; host a Public Policy forum; and develop an universal waiver form for Head Start and Great Start Readiness Program. Great Start Collaborative-Wayne allows its members to have only one vote

on matters that come before the entire collaborative. The process is the same for all of the organization's committees, as members of the relevant committee are allotted one vote. However, if the matter affects a sizable portion of the organization's members, than the issue is put forth to the entire organization instead of just the relevant committee. This allows all of the members to be active decision-makers on issues that affect the organization as a whole and this works to empower parents in the organization (Block, 2008).

Great Start Collaborative-Wayne represents an innovative concept in Wayne County, as Great Start Collaborative-Wayne works to coordinate the efforts of early childhood development organizations in the county. The coordination of efforts among early childhood development programs ensures that individuals do not remain on wait lists when there are organizations that can serve them. Additionally, the coordination of efforts helps to prevent the duplication of services and to reduce competition for grants. Furthermore, collaboration grants have become increasing popular, as funding sources have declined due to current economic conditions.

Evaluations

Early Head Start and Head Start, as federal programs, are required to meet certain standards regarding curriculum, participants and results. While these standards may have slightly varied over the years due to emerging research, evaluations remain an important aspect. Nonetheless, studies are designed to evaluate the programs based on current standards of adequacy established by the government. Presently, The Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project is used to evaluate Early Head Start programs and the Head Start Impact Study is used to evaluate Head Start programs.

Early Head Start was created as a result of Head Start's reauthorization of 1994, which also required a national evaluation of the new program, thus, leading to the creation of the Early

Head Start Research and Evaluations Project. The Early Head Start Research and Evaluations Project is a three phase study, Phase One: Birth to Three Phase (1996-2001); Phase Two: Pre-Kindergarten Follow-up Phase (2001-2005); and Phase Three: Elementary School Follow-up (2005-2010). The project was funded in two separate instances. The first phase was mandated by congress and included an implementation study as well as an impact evaluation, which investigated the program's impact on children and families. Subsequently, in 2001 the Administration for Children and Families funded the second phase in order to build from the earlier research and track the children and families from the original study until kindergarten. The third phase was also funded by the Administration for Children and Families in 2005 as a means to continue tracking the children until fifth grade (Administration for Children and Families, 2006).

The first phase, Birth to three Phase, was designed to measure program effectiveness, processes and efficacy. It included a cross-site national study that utilized an implementation study, impact evaluation and site-specific research. The site-specific research was conducted by local research projects, which used grants to fund each university-based team. On the other hand, the implementation and impact study was conducted through a contract with Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., and Columbia University's Center for Children and Families. The purpose of the impact evaluation was designed to examine the impacts of the program on key child and family outcomes. Seventeen Early Head Start programs were selected to participate. In order to be eligible the sites had to meet the following criteria: representative programmatic approaches and settings, diverse family characteristics thought to be typical of early Head start families nationally, a viable research partner and the recruitment of twice as many families as the site could serve (for the control group). The impact evaluation used multiple methods of direct child

assessments, observations of parent-child relationships and the home environment, interviews with parents about child and family functioning as well as monitoring of services used by families. The implementation study was designed to provide critical information early on such as variations across programs, pathways to service quality and service needs. Data was collected from three rounds of site visits to the research programs through the use of program documents, self-administered staff surveys, the Head Start Family Information System (HSFIS) application and enrollment forms. The information from these various sources was synthesized using established qualitative analysis methods and a consensus-based approach. The local research projects were designed to address specific outcomes and program functions that reflected the uniqueness of each Early Head Start program. These local research studies identified site-specific outcomes and examined intra-site differential impacts and their reasons for them (Administration for Children and Families, 2006).

The second phase was designed in order to address important policy questions regarding childhood experiences after Early Head start. The same local universities from the first phase were enlisted for the second phase. The researchers conducted cross-site and site-specific research that built upon earlier research and followed the original children and families from the time they left the Early Head Start program until they entered kindergarten. In the third phase, roughly 1,900 children, their parents, and teachers in 17 sites across the United States were assessed until fifth grade based on previous standards. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. along with the National Center for Children and Families at Columbia University, Educational Testing Service, and the Early Head Start Research Consortium was responsible for the study design and implementation. The study used direct assessments of children's cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development; parent interviews; teacher questionnaires; and videotaping of maternal-

child interactions. The Early Head Start Research and Evaluations Project has found that Early Head Start children had lower levels of aggressive behavior, larger vocabularies, higher scores then the control group on assessments as well as slightly higher immunization rates. However, the final results have not been made available for the third phase of the study (Administration for Children and Families, 2006).

The current Head Start evaluation project is the Head Start Impact Study, which was mandated by Congress during Head Start's 1998 reauthorization. Westat, the Urban Institute, American Institutes for Research, and Decision Information Resources received the contract to conduct the study through spring of the children's first grade year in 2000 by the Department of Health and Human Services. The first goal of the study was to determine the effects of Head Start on a child's school readiness in comparison to the control group. The second goal of the study was to determine under which conditions Head Start works best and for which children. To do this the study examined the factors that affect the results of the program such as differences among children attending the program, differences in home environments, and the different types of Head Start programs available. It was a longitudinal study with approximately 5,000 three and four year old preschool children across 84 nationally representative agencies. Participants were randomly assigned. Data collection involved social and cognitive assessments as well as direct observations of the quality of various early childhood care settings. The Head Start Impact Study was conducted from 2000 until 2010. The study found that providing access to Head Start had a positive impact on children's preschool experiences and school readiness during their time in the program, but these advantages yielded minor differences in outcomes by the end of first grade (Administration for Children and Families).

Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

Qualitative methodologies use naturalistic approaches that examine occurrences in the contextual settings in which they occur. Qualitative research is effective in clarifying and obtaining culturally specific information about particular populations. Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that qualitative methods can be used to examine new phenomenon, gain new perspectives on existing issues or gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively. Qualitative research accounts for the complexities of societal dynamics by allowing exploration into social aspects and not restricting results to numerical data. Qualitative methods allow for the incorporation of experiences. On the other hand, the results of qualitative studies are not necessarily generalizable to other populations (Punch, 2005). The particular design of a qualitative study depends on the purpose of the research (Patton, 1990). Judgments about usefulness and credibility are left to the researcher and the reader, as "there is not a statistical test of significance to determine if results count" (Eisner, 1991, p. 39). Another benefit of qualitative research is the researcher, as the researcher is able to respond, interact, and provide immediate feedback; to interpret non-verbal communication; to collect information on multiple levels simultaneously; and to request clarity and probe further for explanations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The three common sampling methods used in qualitative research designs are purposive sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling. I used purposeful sampling, which seeks information-rich cases, which can be studied in-depth (Patton, 1990). Maximum variation sample is a type of purposeful sampling. Maximum variation sampling's purpose is to capture and describe central themes, which cut across participant and program variation. Typically, heterogeneity is viewed as a problem, especially among small samples but maximum variation sampling turns this weakness into a strength using the following logic: any common patterns that

emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central shared aspects or impact of a program. (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Patton, 1990). Qualitative interviewing utilizes open-ended questions that allow for individual variations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Open-ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are meaningful, culturally salient, unanticipated and explanatory in nature. Developing a standard list of questions allows interviewing to be systematic and comprehensive. A standard list of questions, questionnaire, is prepared to insure that the information obtained from each person is similar. However, there are no predetermined responses, and the interviewer is free to probe and explore as needed. The flexible nature of qualitative designs allows for modification of questions, as the researcher deems necessary (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). Qualitative interviews allow for the collection of data on personal histories and individual perspectives. Qualitative analysis identifies critical themes emerging out of the data (Patton, 1990). The purpose of qualitative data is to gain a rich and complex understanding of the specific social context and phenomenon.

Quantitative methods are those that use empirical investigations to gather numerical data. Quantitative research typically tests predictions. Quantitative research typically uses a representative sample, which allows for the generalization of the findings. The data from quantitative research is statistically reliable. Quantitative methods are important as they offer measurements of progression in studies, such as in the case of literacy rates, income stability, and cognitive improvement. Quantitative methods make it possible to easily summarize, analyze and compare results (Moore, 2001). Quantitative research methods are unable to account for certain interactions that transpire in the social arena. Cronbach (1975) states that "the time has come to exorcise the null hypothesis," (p. 124) as it ignores effects that are meaningful because they are

not statistically significant, and he gives various examples of theories that do not hold true in reality.

      Evaluation methods are usually either categorized as qualitative such as interviews and case studies or quantitative such as laboratory experiments and large-scale statistical studies. Each of these methods are unique and allow researchers to identify different factors but both methods have their limits, therefore the choice of which method to implement affects what can be found (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 2008). Quantitative and qualitative methods capture different dynamics. Typically, quantitative methods are the norm for early education evaluations. Nevertheless, qualitative methods are occasionally incorporated into early education evaluation's designs, but the main emphasis remains on quantitative results. Additionally, studies that interview parents typically focuses strictly on the child's experiences with early education programs and neglects parental experiences with early education programs. Thus, certain experiences are not present in the discussion of program effectiveness. Hence the majority of program modifications occur without the consideration of parental experiences with early education programs. The discussion of program effectiveness without the consideration of parental experiences with early education programs is problematic, as early education programs have expanded to include parental services, in order to provide assistance to low-income children and their families. The absence of the experiences of parents with early education programs from evaluations has major ramifications, as evaluations influence policy decisions concerning early education programs. Early education policies affect the lives of parents with children in early education programs. Therefore, I have chose to use qualitative research methods and to interview parents about their experiences with early education programs.

Feminist Practices in Methods

Feminist practices have long involved offering a critical critique to the hegemonic, misogynistic and oppressive status quo; this concept is also present in feminist methodologies. Feminist research stems from 'kitchen table' discussions and consciousness-raising meetings of the 1960's and 1970's. In the meetings women sat in groups and shared their experiences in hopes of better understanding the different ways systems of oppression affected each of them differently. Early consciousness-raising meetings laid the foundation for many contemporary feminist concepts and ideas (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; McCormack, 1989). I define feminist research as research that seeks to identify, explore and observe the unique ways marginalized individuals are affected differently by various issues, due to their relation to systems of power and oppression. Furthermore, feminist research uses alternative processes to provide creative solutions to issues affecting marginalized individuals. Marginalized individuals are typically excluded from participating as producers and contributors in the traditional creation of knowledge because of oppressive institutions and systematic exploitation (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). Therefore, feminist research has to be done for women and by women; but that does not mean men cannot participate in this process. However, all individuals involved in feminist research must have a stake in the outcomes and agency in the process. Feminist research should highlight diversity and methods should acknowledge that not all women's experiences are the same. Additionally, feminist research should acknowledge and challenge the position of power of the researcher, as interpreter and decision-maker (Stanley & Wise, 1983). Wadsworth and Hargreaves (2001) offer various criteria for feminist research. They state that research should focus on the benefits to the women involved and not the researcher; embrace women as subjects; respect and value the experiences of

women; reflect the concerns and interests of women; and represent the richness and diversity of experiences.

Stanley and Wise (1983) emphasize the need for feminist research to be grounded in an understanding of how and where women's oppression occurs as well as in the different ways women experience oppression. Furthermore, they stress the importance of the presence of feminist consciousness in feminist research, as they equate "doing feminism" with "doing feminist research". The topic of feminist research methodology has been surrounded by controversy from its onset. Debates about feminist research methods have developed around rather to reform existing methods by incorporating feminist morals, practices and ideas or to create new methods. McCormack (1989) describes debates surrounding feminist research methodology, as a choice between "subjective feminism versus objective feminism" and says that neither can offer what is needed and therefore it is a "no-win situation", as we are trying to "prove the unprovable" (p. 27-28). The debate over feminist research methodologies polarizes feminists and distorts our efforts to develop 'successful' feminist research methods.

Sandra Harding (1987) argues for a creation of a feminist philosophy of science as well as a feminist history of science, but not a rejection of science. She identifies the researcher as problematic. Some feminists call for an incorporation of quantitative and qualitative methods into feminist research (Bowles & Klein, 1983; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). McCormack (1989) identifies the problematic nature of the term positivism because it leads to the condemning of individuals executing any type of quantitative research, as the meaning of methodology is not static and feminist research must challenge and surpass what we deem acceptable. There is a vast amount of literature supporting both sides of the feminist research methodologies discussion and

many different opinions of what should be done, however, the resounding message in all of the literature is that current methods are not enough.

There are many different definitions of feminist and feminism. Additionally, this means that there is not a consensus on what is and is not considered feminist research or feminist methodology, while this in itself is problematic, it is not the only challenge. In research, feminists have to remain conscious of validity, credibility, and accuracy, as dismal or questioning can jeopardize the value of feminist data in the scientific community. Therefore, feminists must remain conscious of scientific procedures and rules. Feminist researchers are forced to resolve contradictions between feminism and research concepts and frameworks. For example, it is important to be upfront with interviewees, but research procedures typically require some ambiguity so as not to inform participants in such a way that impacts the data but this can hinder the process of "co-creation" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Moreover, traditional methodology calls for "objectivity", which requires the feminist researcher to separate herself from the people she is studying. The complexity and contextual nature of reality and of the research process is not taken into account and neither is the researcher's role in this social process. In traditional research extracting information becomes more important then sharing information (McRobbie, 1982). Research reports typically exclude: "social/personal characteristics of those doing the interviewing; interviewees' feelings about being interviewed and about the interview; interviewers' feelings about interviewees, and quality of interviewer-interviewee interaction; hospitality offered by interviewees to interviewers; attempts by interviewees to use interviewers as sources of information; and the extension of interviewer-interviewee encounters into more broadly based social relationships" (Oakley, 1981, p. 30).

Ribbens (1989) describes interviews as "pseudo-conversations" because it is a conversation that is concerned with collecting data and the interviewer is a tool and instrument of the process. She notes that the pseudo-conversation must combine the elements of a conservation and science. Thus the interview necessitates the manipulation of interviewees as passive objects and sources of data, to later be constructed by the researcher. Researchers have the power to represent the researched as similar or dissimilar as they see fit. The power to interpret the social existence of others gives the researcher the power to construct representations and the privilege to make knowledge claims (Griffin, 1994). McRobbie (1982) states, "traditional social science cannot prepare feminists for many of the discomforts of research" (p. 55). She goes on to say:

> To begin with there is the awkwardness and even humiliation of forging a relationship with those women, girls (or men) who will provide the source material of the project. Without them and without their trust the research simply cannot proceed. More precisely there are the ways in which we censor the asking of questions which may seem important for the research, but which feel unacceptably intrusive and nosy. One woman in Birmingham who was doing a short study of how girls read magazines found herself quite unable to ask the girls in question what their parents did for a living and what kind of house they lived in. Being female undoubtedly sensitizes us to the discomforts and small humiliations which doing research can provoke. Sometimes indeed it does feel like 'holidaying on the other people's misery'. This happened to me recently when I interviewed a nineteen year old young woman whom I had known for some time in Birmingham, and who had been bought up in care. There I was, almost enjoying the interviewing, pleased it was going well and relieved that Carol felt relaxed and talkative. Yet there was Carol, her eyes filling up with tears as she recounted how hard her life had been, how her mother had died giving birth … (p. 55-56).

A universal manual on feminist research methods does not exist, and therefore feminists are forced to determine how to reconcile instances of discomfort that arise during research on their own. The discomfort that occurs during research is intensified by the hierarchical structure of the researcher-researched relationship.

Feminist are people and therefore possess their own biases and flaws (Ramazano lu & Holland, 2002). **"There is no guarantee that good feminists will do good research,"** this is important to acknowledge, as feminists are only human (McCormack, 1989, p. 24). Women themselves promote injustice and benefit from the injustices and subordination of others. The researcher's perception of difference plays a significant role in the process, as it affects the interpretation and analysis. Furthermore, it is vital to highlight that the possession of similar characteristic may not be enough and that assumptions about commonalities, common interests and "womaness", should be avoided due to the complex nature of power relations among women because the educational status and the institutional affiliation of the researcher reinforce systems of power (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Feminist research has to overcome many obstacles, including institutional and funding constraints, as many institutions are hesitant to sanction feminist research and therefore there are fewer opportunities for training, development and creation of feminist methodological techniques. In cases where feminist research is present there is more pressure to be successful and produce valid results, as it is necessary to convince 'gatekeepers' of the value of feminist research (McRobbie, 1982). Moreover, the feminist researcher is forced to deal with another conflict, as she is an "inside outsider." The researcher holds a dominant position of authority in the researcher-researched relationship but she is subjugated in academia, as a feminist. This is complicated by the fact that self-interest is always present when executing research and this needs to be acknowledged. Research is not carried out in a vacuum (McRobbie, 1989), the implications of research and the flow of influences move in both directions. Women's experiences must be constantly incorporated into the ongoing research process (Driscoll & McFarland, 1989). Feminist research methodology must move towards contextualizing the researcher, the process, and the researched in nontraditional ways, which are

both creative and innovative. Driscoll and McFarland (1989) noted that, "the researcher should be in contact with the people she/he is studying; there should be a provision for feedback between researcher and informants; the researcher's own participation and experience should be a consciously used part of the research process; both conceptualization and the methods used for getting information should incorporate the interests and insights of the people being studied" (p. 189). This means that there must be a continuum of development accompanied by a conceptual framework. Driscoll and McFarland make a great point by highlighting the significance of the role of the researcher in the process. Additionally, they highlight a flaw in current research, its lack of acknowledgement of the role of the researcher throughout the development, design, and analysis.

METHOD

Participants

The nine individuals interviewed for this study were contacted through Great Start-Wayne and affiliates. All of the participants were members of the organization and had at least one child in an early education program at the time. Interested parents contacted me by phone, in response to flyers that were hung in Great Start locations, distributed in meetings and sent via email. Screening occurred to ensure that all interviewees were eligible parents. Eligible parents were defined as parents who currently had children from birth to five years of age and were a part of Great Start Collaborations-Wayne. All of the participants were identified as low-income, as federal early education programs such as Head Start are designed to service low-income children and families. Eight of the interviewees self identified as female and one as male. Four of the participants self identified as African American, one self identified as Other and the latter four self identified as Caucasian. The mean age of the participants was 29 years. All participants

were residents of the state of Michigan at the time but residential cities varied with four participants residing in Detroit, two in Redford, one in Southgate, one in Inkster and one in Taylor, but all participants were residents of Wayne County at the time of their respective interviews. Occupations varied among interviewees with two participants reporting being unemployed. I have grouped the participants' employment status but for occupational specifications please refer to Appendix B. There were 2 employed in retail positions, 2 held clerical positions, 1 held a position in the healthcare field and 1 was a current student. The levels of formal education varied among participants. Three participants held a high school diploma, 2 participants reported having at least some college education, 2 held an Associates degree, 1 was currently attending college and 1 reported the highest level of completion as junior high school. For specific education levels please refer to Appendix B. Marital status of participants was as follows: 7 never married, 1 divorced and 1 widowed. The mean household size of the participants was 5. The average number of children interviewees currently had in an early education program was 1. The mean number of children participants had was 3. The average number of years in the program was 2. Specific numerical values can be found in Appendix B. All participants self identified as American and heterosexual. For this study participants were not asked to identify religious affliction.

Procedure

Interviews typically lasted under thirty minutes and each interviewee received a gift card at the end of the study, as a gesture of appreciation for their participation. Nine Great Start Collaborative-Wayne parents were interviewed on a voluntary basis and it was clearly stated that individuals were not mandated to participate, as a means to create a relaxed and comfortable environment as well as to elicited truthful responses without fear of repercussions. At the

commencement of the interview participants were reminded that their actual names would not be used in the transcriptions or analysis of the study, to ensure privacy and encourage honesty. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and every participant was required to sign a consent form at the initiation of the interview. Interviews took place at locations familiar to interviewees to ensure accessibility but locations varied, with 5 interviews taking place at a Great Start center of the interviewee's choice and 4 taking place at a non-Great Start location, also chosen by the interviewee.

This study was partially designed based upon a study conducted by Pearlmutter (2003). Pearlmutter's (2003) study conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews, where participants were expected to respond to a set of open-ended questions. The study held group interviews in two different states and asked participants questions regarding their experiences with federal childcare subsidies in order to gauge how participants thought program modifications affecting childcare subsides would affect their lives. The participants were diverse across gender and racial categories. Prospective participants responded to a notice and a letter that explained the research and were recruited through an employment program and several social service agencies. Participants signed consent forms and sessions were audio recorded, transcribed and coded. The study design allowed the researchers to identify themes and concepts based on participants' perceptions concerning childcare subsidies. The data collected from interviews were transcribed and analyzed. I used a grounded theory approach to do multiple readings of the interview transcriptions to identify themes and patterns across interviews. Grounded theory is the conducting of research, gathering of data and grouping of like concepts in order to create a theory on the basis of the data collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Measures

       All interviews were done on a one-on-one basis. Interviews were in-depth and semi-structured. An interview questionnaire was created and used during all interviews. All questions were open-ended and the complete interview questionnaire is located in Appendix A. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and transferred to a personal laptop. At the beginning of the interview each participant signed a consent form, which can be found in Appendix A. A thirty-five dollar Meijer gift card was given to each participant upon completion of the interview. Pseudonyms were developed for each participant for privacy purposes. Digital files were composed without identifying information and sent to a transcriber in Detroit, MI. Transcriptions were examined to identify common themes and grounded theory was employed for the analysis.

RESULTS

       All interviewees shared positive sentiments in regards to Great Start Collaborative-Wayne. However, interviewees usually highlighted different program aspects as positive. Participants went on to identify playgroups, literacy programs, childcare and daycare programs, as well as health programs as the most helpful and successful. The majority of participants articulated that things would be difficult if they did not have access to the resources the program offered. Almost all of the interviewees stated that the various resources offered by Great Start were helpful and the program was generally described using words such as "excellent", "supportive", "beneficial" and "insightful". Other positive sentiments expressed across participant interviews were in regards to feelings about the organization's staff. Participants typically described staff members as "helpful", "friendly", "knowledgeable", "nice", "kind", "caring" and "responsive."

It was common for participants to share positive experiences regarding the organizations ability to assist them in a time of need. For example Winnie T., a participant from Taylor, Michigan spoke highly of the health programs, specifically the dental and medical services, which the organization helped her secure for her child. She spoke highly of the programs, citing the importance of healthcare for her child's future. Wanda R. shared a similar experience during a time when the organization assisted in receiving donations from a food bank:

> My ex-husband's child support checks were not scheduled to start for another month and I wasn't sure how I was going to feed my daughter. I had already borrowed money from my family and I really didn't know what else to do, but one of the participants on the coalition told me to talk to the committee chair about Focus Hope. I learned that I was eligible for Focus Hope's mother and children program. Every month Focus Hope provided my child and I with food and I can stay in the program until my daughter turns six.

A pattern that was present across the interviews of African American participants was the tendency to express feelings of satisfaction regarding parental courses such as stress management seminars, resume workshops and professional development opportunities. African American interviewees also conveyed positive sentiments about their experiences with the courses, as they often described being "happy", "excited", "appreciative", "thankful" and "delighted" with experiences in parental courses.

The services identified as being the least used by participants were couples workshops, mental and psychological services, special education programs and English courses. Additionally, participants expressed dissatisfaction with program times, the frequency of various programs and services, and bureaucratic procedures. Interviewee, Wanda, describes her dissatisfaction as follows:

> I needed to get help with my DTE bill, I knew something could be done but I was unsure of what. They [Great Start] partner with an organization that helps low-income families with heating cost but I

had to go through a lot. They [Great Start] gave me the basic info
but I had to provide a lot of papers and things. They [Great Start]
had someone help me but the process was still very confusing.
There was a lot of back and forth, and I didn't really understand
the referral process. I'm glad its over though.

This is just one example of dissatisfaction relating to bureaucratic procedures, but other interviewees also voiced concerns about the matter that involved issues that related to experiences at agencies they had been referred to such as poor treatment, poor services, congested centers, and inadequate resources.

A pattern identified among the interviews of female participants was the concern for the future of the program. The women expressed concerns about a variety of issues such as teacher certification, budget modifications, program facilities, curriculum expansion, literacy libraries and program innovations. The concerns of the women usually came in the form of references to knowledge of incidents experienced by other organizations with funding issues. For example, Whitney D. refer to funding complications surrounding Detroit Public Schools:

I believe that if they cut early education funds then we are going to
lose a lot of program resources. When education receives cut, we
lose quality teachers. Look at Detroit Public Schools. Their
[Detroit Public Schools] students aren't really learning and the
schools are closing left and right. I am dreading sending my son to
first grade, I can only imagine the condition of Detroit Public
Schools by the time he's six. I don't want to see the same thing
happen to this program. I really enjoy it [Great Start] but I just
don't know if it [Great Start] could stand major cuts.

An examination of residential location produced a trend, as participants who stayed in rural and less densely populated areas were more likely than individuals who lived in major cities such as Detroit, to report issues with transportation. One of the female participants, Wendy, recalled an incident that involved a staff member picking her up for a meeting, "I didn't have a way but I had already missed a lot of meetings. I didn't know what to do, so I just called ahead to let them know I couldn't come but the receptionist head the phone to one of the staff members. I

told her my issue and she said she could be at my house in fifteen minutes. I was very happy and surprised." However, Olivia had a very different experience with transportation issues. She reflected on the event, "I waited for almost an hour for a bus and by the time I got to the diaper drive all of the diapers were gone and I had to take the bus all the way back. I didn't even get to have fun because I was so upset, I didn't want to socialize. I really didn't know what else to do so I stayed at the function but I was disappointed, I was really looking forward to the event all week."

While there were some program critiques expressed, I noted that in at least 7 of the 9 interviews, criticisms and critiques of the organization or its programs were followed by praises. It was common for a participant to share a specific experience then highlight something that they wished to change or disliked, followed by a praise of the program. I identify this as the 'back and forth' effect, a tactic used by participants in this study to offset the perceived feeling of guilt resonating from critiquing the program and used as a means to resolve participants' internal conflict.

Many of the interviewees offered recommendations for the organization. One of the suggestions was for the organization to allow children to participate in the program past the age of 5. Other suggestions were for increasing the number of agencies, changing the times of current programs, and adding additional childcare and support programs. Moreover, many communicated a need for increased program resources and more funding. Participants expressed a desire for increasing the number of times an existing activity occurred or wished the organization could offer additional resources such as job fairs, extended daycare options, more services for children with disabilities and longer classroom instruction times.

Billie, the only male participant, was the only interviewee to recommend that the program increase its outreach to dads, in order to increase paternal participation in the organization. Billie believed that increased paternal participation in the organization would allow dads to become more involved in the nurturing and educating of their children. Additionally, during the interview Billie suggested that the organization should expand its repertoire to include more physical activities by establishing partnerships with organizations that would offer opportunities to participate in activities such as camping, marathons, and nature walks. The participant went on to say, "I think it would be a good idea to incorporate this sort of stuff in too. I want my kids to be smart and do good in school, but I want them to know other stuff too."

During the interview of Olivia, the only participant who identified as Other, it was interesting to note her reference to culture and her desire for more culturally relevant activities. Upon being asked to clarify Olivia explained it by saying, "it would be nice to have activities around other celebrations and holidays as well". Olivia's comments refer to the various themed activities that take place around holidays such as Christmas crafts, Easter hunts and Halloween parties. However, it is valuable to insert that the activities are chosen based on the demographics of the particular center's community. Thus communities with different population demographics may have activities that vary respectively. Another, cultural reference made by Olivia concerned a longing for the incorporation of various ethnic dishes into the menus for nutritional courses.

Additionally, I noticed that the 5 participants that had at least some college education were likely to refer to education as a vehicle for success, a mechanism for opportunities and a means of gaining access. In these instances, phrases such as "door opener", " education is key" and "its [education] fundamental" were used. However, it was noted that individuals with at least

some college education were less likely to report the use of educational services such as GED seminars, resume workshops or professional development opportunities.

Another pattern I noticed across interviews was that participant appreciation did not necessarily equate to tangible gains, as there was a tendency among participants to express appreciation for services that did not produce concrete benefits or changes. For example, participants who spoke highly of GED programs, resume workshops and other employment assistance programs, did not necessarily speak of these employment assistance programs helping them obtain a job. I suggest that the above trend needs to be further explored.

DISCUSSION

I make several speculations about my findings. First, I speculate that participant's identification of certain programs as successful and helpful is related to the pressure exerted on families in the current economic conditions, such as in the case of participants Winnie S. and Wanda R. The current economy makes affording services such as daycare, dental insurance, medical care and even food very difficult. Next, issues with transportation are possibly related to rural area's infrastructure not be able to effectively support public transportation as well as the tendency of structures to be located at sizeable distances from each other. Then, the programs that participants utilize are related to their characteristics and therefore so are the programs that participants do not utilize. For example, most of the interviewees self-identified as single, therefore, couples workshop may not have been very useful to this specific sample population. Subsequently, I deduce that participant appreciation of employment assistance programs is linked to benefits not directly related to obtaining employment. Employment assistance programs may provide participants with intangible benefits. The benefits of the employment assistance

programs may be rooted in the social rather than economic realm. For example, earning a GED could empower participants and boost their confidence.

Finally, the most interesting speculation relates to my observations about the 'back and forth' effect. I believe that the 'back and forth' effect stems from participants' ties and history with the program, and therefore participants do not want to appear ungrateful for the resources and services that the organization has provided. I theorize that this may have occurred for three reasons. First, I deduce that the participants develop a relationship with the organization due to on-going interactions and disbursement of resources, which leads to the deterrence of critiques by participants. Second, I believe that it is possible that my previous position as an intern with Great Start may have affected participants' responses, as they may have been hesitant to offer critiques due to a perceived association between the organization and myself. However, the position ended in 2009. Third, I deduce that some participants become reliant upon the resources that the organization provides, as low-income families may not readily have access to nutritional, occupational, medical or counseling services on their own. I speculate that the presence of reliance may also deter participants from offering critiques against the organization.

It is imperative to explore the presence of reliance, as it could affect the comfort of parents in expressing negative or critical sentiments about various early education programs; and therefore it could affect their responses to questions in my study and studies in general, which could skew data and analyses. Moreover, this could mean that recommendations for improvements that could potentially increase program effectiveness and precision are not given. A related issue is the implications that this discomfort may have for organizations such as Great Start-Wayne because the organization emphasizes the role of parents and is structured so that parents have an opportunity to participate on the various levels of the organizations. The

structure is intended to be an empowerment tool, used to allow parents to be apart of the decision-making and take ownership in the process and functioning of Great Start, in order to encourage 'co-creation' and 'co-production'. So what does it mean for the organization if parents do not feel comfortable to critique the program or express negative sentiments? What does this say about the perceptions parents have about their stake and 'ownership' in the organization? These are some of the issues that arise due to the concept of reliance, as its occurrence could have numerous repercussions for the organization's mission, vision, structure, reputation and even creditability.

When I commenced my thesis I supposed that my research would challenge results from traditional longitudinal studies that produced negative and mixed evaluation reports about Early Head Start, Head Start programs and various early education programs. Specifically, I theorized that in-depth semi-structured interviews with parents from disadvantaged communities with children in early education programs would shed light on previous evaluations of early education programs in order to better explain the various phenomena and reveal the beneficial nature of early education programs through participant perspectives. I suspected that from parents' reports I would discover that the previous studies had failed to examine a certain aspect or consider a particular factor, especially as it relates to findings concluding that benefits of early education programs fade by first grade and that parental support programs were not an effective use of early education funds. Additionally, I anticipated that I would uncover other elements due to the tendency of sizeable studies to exclude the experiences of marginalized individuals from their findings. In many cases, the individuals that are excluded are most in need of these services and who while participating in such programs have the most significant gains. Moreover, I presumed that parental interviews would illustrate that the resources (parenting workshops, relationship

seminars, occupational support endeavors and GED courses) offered by various programs were advantageous and in turn positively affected their roles as parents. Additionally, I speculated that the interviewing of parents with children in early education programs would offer an additional and unique level of understanding, as parents typically have the most interactions with their child and therefore have a holistic take on their child's progression.

Despite the above speculations, my keys findings actually rested with the discovery of the problematic nature of the interviewing situation for individuals in marginalized communities. My transcriptions, findings or analysis are unable to reflect the awkward and tense emotional environment of the interviews. I noticed a general sense of uneasiness that arose when some interviewees proceeded to criticize or share negative sentiments about the program. Moreover, most of the interviews were very formal, despite my efforts to create an inviting, non-hierarchical and informal environment. I conducted interviews at familiar locations and refrained from taking notes during the interviews. Moreover, I made sure not to use extravagant equipment during the interview, aside from a digital recorder. I am unsure of the exact causality of the formalness experienced in the interviews but I speculated that it may be associated with the privilege or 'perceived' privilege that interviewees may have associated with me. Since this was not the nature of my thesis I cannot identify the exact reason, but I theorize that class and educational status could have played a role, as many of the interviewees highest level of completion was high school or less. This fact may only be intensified by my affiliation with the University of Michigan and its prestigious reputation. Furthermore, I noted that many of the participants caught the bus or walked to interviews, while I drove. However, I must state that these are my own personal observations, and therefore are related to my own perception of the

world and my relation to it. I do not present any supporting scientific evidence for these observations, only personal knowledge of these instances, as they were personally experienced.

My findings have broad implications for future research and methods, study designs and policies. Often in the United States studies are developed to evaluate the effectiveness of various programs, especially in the case of social programs. These results are often used to make vital decisions regarding program funding, continuation, modification, mission, expansion, constituents, and direction. In some cases, programs deemed effective are used as models for other programs and future endeavors. The same is true for effective study designs, as they are reproduced in future evaluations as well as used for the evaluation of other programs. Evaluation studies are particularly important in the case of federally funded programs such as Early Head Start and Head Start, which rely on these evaluations as the fundamental basis for their case and evidence supporting renewal of the program, its funding and sometimes increases as well as proposal for expansion (in the case of creating Early Head Start), but sometimes this means that negative reports lead to funding cuts. In times of economic hardship and budget crisis, spending is reduced and cuts are made in various areas, but the amount of cuts and choices of what to cut varies each time and so do the contributing factors. However, programs deemed 'ineffective', that do not yield 'appropriate' results or that do not seem to be serving their purpose are at risk of being cut in both time of prosperity and hardship. All of these things have major ramifications for policy and legislation, as they affect the drafting of policy proposals for cuts and increases and legislation for new programs. This means that the methods used during research endeavors have far reaching influence and therefore it is vital that we critically examine all aspects of methodology to understand its role in political, personal and economic spheres. Especially, since

methods thought to be scientifically successful are repeatedly used and eventually become ingrained and 'traditional'.

Research methodologies need to be developed with the needs of individual communities in mind, as 'one sizes fits all' and 'cookie cutter' solutions will not be successful because they do not account for the presence of diversity or marginalization. Studies have to be designed in such a way that allows for the empowerment and input of the researched population. Policies have to be established that keep in mind the existence of power-relations, garner grassroots support and value the interests of the targeted communities over those of executives, politicians and experts. Successful early education policies for disadvantaged communities have to take into consideration the differential ways in which the lives of underprivileged individuals are affected by policies and legislations as well as the different ways that underprivileged individuals utilize these programs. Successful early education policies must be developed with the perceptions of disadvantaged individuals in mind and the role of stigma must not be ignored. Additionally, successful policies must have community-based initiatives, instead of 'top-down' programs that are distributed to the masses from high-level executives, experts and administrators. My findings support a need for new methods, which must be created from a new imagery that considers possibilities outside 'normalized' scientific methods. These methods must allow for variations and flexibility. The new imagery must incorporate elements of grassroots organizing, consciousness-raising, community based initiatives, co-creation and co-production as well as an appreciation and valuing of all types of knowledge. The new imagery for research methodologies must strive to understand the risk and benefits of the researched population, remaining conscious of social factors such as stigma. The new methods must stem from the individual to the scientific, not vice versa. The establishment of new research methodologies is a necessity, as the

traditional methods are inadequate. Pluralism is needed in research designs and methods as well as an expansion of what is identified as 'adequate' methods. However, when creating these new methods and imagery, we must remember not to recreate the current power-relations, restrictions on knowledge, and oppressive and inflexible structures of today. Unfortunately, at this time I do not have any suggestions specific examples in regards to what new methods would look like, but I argue that the development of new methods must be a collective effort.

Limitations

It is possible that the design of the study was not representative, as the parents who participated in my interviews are likely to be those parents who are most involved with the organization because flyers were posted at Great Start Centers, distributed at meetings and emailed by staff, which means in order to obtain information about my study a participant must be active member in the organization on some level. Moreover, continuous participation could also be linked to satisfaction with the organization, as seen in continual membership. Furthermore, participation is a privilege, as some parents cannot afford to donate 30 minutes of their time due to social, economic and personal circumstances. In more extreme cases, some parents do not have time to be involved in certain programs such as Great Start and therefore, the study will not be able to account for the perceptions of this parental population. However, to counter this issue efforts have been built into the study's design to offer flexibility in interview location and times. There are several Great Start approved interview sites, which was done with several things in mind; one being the different communities served by each center as well as the diverse demographics of the different cities in which the various centers operate. Many, not all, Great Start Collaborative-Wayne sites offer childcare assistance, which enabled parents that could not afford childcare to participate. Additionally, participants were able to select their

interview location. They had the option of choosing a Great Start Center, which they were familiar with from their meetings and may have obtained the flyer from or a non-Great Start location. The only requirement for a non-Great Start location were that the location had to be a public facility that would permit for the privacy and recording of the interview, typically participants choose locations near their home, job, or child's school. All of these methods were instituted in order to diversify the sample population by increasing accessibility. However, this is a small study, and therefore, the findings cannot be generalized as the data was collected from a small sample of a general population.

Another limitation of the study is my bias, as I approached the study with the intention of highlighting the success of the organization. Participants could have pick-up on my intention of underlining the organization's success and been deterred from sharing negative experiences. It is possible that my bias hindered the findings of my study by enabling me from approaching the research in an objective matter. However, it is important to note that the chosen research topic is reflective of the researcher's beliefs, experience and interest.

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APPENDIX A

Want to participate in a study?

I am an undergraduate student at the University of Michigan, majoring in Women's Studies & Political Science, working on my senior thesis. I need willing participants for a **confidential** study about the experiences of parents with Great Start.

In order to participate you must:

- Must currently be involved with Great Start
- Must have a child who is currently in an early education program
- Must be willing to talk about your experiences with me in a forty-five minute interview

You do not need to divulge your real identity to be in the study, if you do not feel comfortable.

If interested please call Katila Howard (248) 716-0545

I will set up interviews with interested parents that contact me.

To acknowledge my appreciation of your time and willingness to share your stories, the parents who successfully complete interviews will receive a **$35 Meijer's Gift Card**.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

"Parent's Experiences with Early Education programs"

Primary Investigator: Katila Howard
Undergraduate Student
Women's Studies/Political Science
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

Thesis Advisor: Rosario Ceballo, Ph.D
Associate Professor
Women's Studies and Psychology
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

Thesis Advisor: Mika Lavaque-Manty, Ph.D
Associate Professor
Political Science
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

Description of Study
Thank you very much for participating in an interview for my research. Your participation is completely <u>voluntary</u>. You can choose not to participate at any time or change your mind, and you can stop answering questions at any time.

Your participation will be very helpful in providing information about a group that is often marginalized and whose experiences are not often heard. I'm very interested in hearing about your experiences with Great Start. I will ask you a series of open-ended interview questions. The entire interview should take about forty-five minutes.

Risks and Benefits
Some of my questions may be personal, and may focus on your feelings about your experiences with the program as well as other personal experiences. There is a risk that you may experience feelings of anxiety, anger, or sadness as you answer some of the questions. I encourage you to seek counseling if this interview brings out issues that you'd like to talk to someone about and therefore, you will be provided with a list of counseling resources. You may request a break at any time or refuse to answer a question at any time.

Confidentiality
All of the information that you share is <u>confidential</u>. I will never include your name or any of your identification information with the information that I receive from you. I will keep notes and recordings from our interview on a secure laptop with privacy control settings to ensure confidentiality. All identifying material, including this signed consent form will be stored separately in a locked file cabinet. Other than myself, my advisors, who are overseeing my project, will have access to these records.

If you do not wish to be tape recorded, I will take handwritten notes that will not be shown to anyone else. Records will be kept <u>confidential </u>to the extent provided by federal, state, and local law. However, university and government officials responsible for monitoring this study may inspect these records. One copy of this document will be kept together with research records of this study. Also, you will be given a copy to keep.

Compensation
You will not incur any financial cost due to your participation in this study. As a thank you for participating in this study, you will receive a thirty-five dollar Meijer's gift certificate as well as the intangible benefit of sharing your story.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or comments about this study, you may contact the principle investigator, Katila Howard at any time, (248) 716-0545 or email at hkatila@umich.edu.

You can also contact my advisors on the University of Michigan campus: 2219 Easthall, 530 Church, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, (734) 936-6049, email: rosarioc@umich.edu or 7640 Haven Hall, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, (734) 615-9142, email: mmanty@umich.edu.

Should you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Review Board, 540 E. Liberty Street, Suite 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, (734) 936-0933, email: irbhsbs@umich.edu.

Study Participation

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY:

I have read [or been informed] of the information given above. Katila Howard has offered to answer any questions I may have concerning the study. I hereby consent to participate in the study.

_____
Signature/Name   Date

CONSENT TO BE TAPE-RECORDED:

Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview tape-recorded. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____
Signature/Name   Date

March 19, 2010

Ms. Toni Hartke
Director
Great Start Collaborative-Wayne
One Heritage Place
Suite 230
Southgate, MI 48195

Dear Mrs. Hartke:

I am an undergraduate student at the University of Michigan, majoring in Women's Studies & Political Science. I am currently working on my senior honors thesis. As part of my project, I am conducting a study entitled parental perceptions of early education programs. This study aims to examine the experiences of parents who currently have children in early education programs in the local area. My aim is to interview twenty Great Start parents who currently have children in an early education program.
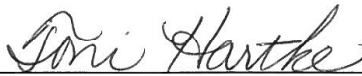
My plan is to use Great Start Collaborative-Wayne & Great Start Parent Coalition to recruit parents for my study. I would like to have flyers distributed through Great Start, so that parents who are interested in participating can contact me. The identities of the parents interviewed will be kept completely confidential, and they will receive a ten dollar Meijer's gift card in appreciation of their time. If possible, I would also like to use Great Start as a potential place to meet parents to be interviewed and screened, so that they are talking to me in a safe, supportive environment.

If you are still able to help me with these activities, please sign in the space provided at the bottom of this letter. A copy of this letter will be furnished to the Institutional Review Board at the University of Michigan in support of my application for the study. Thank you very much for all of your help and your time.

Sincerely,

Katila Howard

Acknowledgement of Cooperation___*Toni Hartke*_____
                                      Toni Hartke
                           Director of Great Start Collaborative-Wayne

VOICE MAIL SCRIPT

Hi, you have reached Katila Howard at 248-716-0545. I'm so glad that you are interested in participating in my study, and I very much want to talk to you. If you feel comfortable, please leave your phone number along with a fake name and I will call you back. If not, please call back so that I can set up a time to talk to you. Thanks again for your interest in the study.

ORAL SCRIPT

I am an undergraduate student at the University of Michigan, majoring in Women's Studies & Political Science. I am currently working on my senior honors thesis. As part of my project, I am conducting a study about the experiences of parents who have children in early education programs. This study aims to examine the experiences of parents who currently have children in early education programs in the local area, and in order to do this I am interviewing parents involved in Great Start. Would you be interested in participating in the study? If so, we can schedule an interview for a later date. The interview will take 45 minutes. You will receive a thirty-five dollar Meijer's gift certificate, ass a token of my appreciation. All information is confidential. Your input would help provide information about a group whose experiences are not often heard.

COUNSELING & SUPPORT RESOURCES

Family Service Inc
15565 Northland Drive Suite 505 West
Southfield MI 48075
Phone: (248) 483-3100

Henry Ford Behavioral Services: Henry Ford Health System-Corporate
1 Ford Place
Detroit, MI 48202
(313) 876-8708

Guidance Center
13101 Allen Road
Southgate, MI 48195-2216
(734) 374-8006

Professional Outreach Counseling Services
25507 Ecorse Road
Taylor, MI 48180-1555
(313) 292-7640

SCREENING SCRIPT

Do you currently have a child(ren) in early education?

Are you currently a member of Great Start?

Are you currently a member of Great Start's staff?

Participant's Name:
Pseudonym: Date of Interview:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Could you tell me about how you came to be involved in the program? Why?
   [where & when did you first hear about/become familiar with the program]

2. How long have you been with the program?
   [what has been your reason for being with the program for ___time]

3. How would you describe your involvement with the early education program in the last year?

4. How many children do you currently have in early education programs?

5. What do you think is the current purpose/mission of the program?
   [does the program live-up to its purpose/mission, in your opinion?]

6. Could you tell me about your experiences with the program this past year?
   [why were these experiences good?]

7. Can you describe a time when you were disappointed with the program this past year?
   [what about this disappointed you the most?]

8. How have the services offered by the program affected your life this past year?
   [do you view these as positives or negatives?]

9. Do you think some of the services are not helpful?
   [Can you give examples?] [how have they not been helpful?]

10. Do you think some of the services are helpful?
    [which ones?] [how have they helped you in your life?]

11. How do you think things would be different for you if you and your family were not a part of the program?

12. If you could change anything about the program what would it be?
    [why?] [how would you change it?]

13. What would you say to a researcher who wants to know if the program is working?
    [where would you tell them to look?]

14. What does it mean for a program to be 'working'?
    [what does a program need to do in order to 'work'?]

15. What would you use to evaluate the program?
   [why?] [what would you measure?]

16. How would you evaluate the program this past year, on a scale of 1(poor) to 10(excellent)?
   [what elements influenced your rating decision?]

17. Could you describe your relationship with program staff and administrators?
   [how would you rate this relationship on a scale of 1(poor) to 10(excellent)?]
   [what elements influenced your rating decision?]

18. Could you describe your relationship with other participants in the program?
   [how would you rate this relationship on a scale of 1(poor) to 10(excellent)?]
   [what elements influenced your rating decision?]

19. How would you describe the relationship between the staff and administrators of the program?
   [how would you rate this relationship on a scale of 1(poor) to 10(excellent)?]
   [what elements influenced your rating decision?]

20. What role do you think these relationships had on the program?

21. Is there anything I haven't asked that you would like to tell me or anything I should make sure to ask other people that I interview?

Thanks, again, for talking with me today, I really appreciate your time and willingness to help with this study. Do you have any other questions?

Demographic Questions

Age:
Race/Ethnicity:
Gender:
# of children in program:
Total # of children:
# of years in program:
Residential City:
Occupation:
Education Level:
# of people who live in house:
Marital Status:
Sexual Orientation:
Nationality:

APPENDIX B