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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of living in dual parent or single parent families on the school readiness of preschool children. The subjects were 40 prekindergarten children attending a program for at-risk children in a suburban school district. The results of an annual preschool screening test were utilized to determine the effect of family structure on the readiness level of the students. Results indicated that children raised in dual family homes obtained higher readiness scores than children raised in single parent families. Family involvement through parent-child home activities was positively correlated with children's school readiness. The findings also suggested that collaboration between parents and teachers in the classroom provided parents with training and experiences that could be transferred to the home environment, thereby creating for the child a continuous learning atmosphere which fosters continued growth and development at school and at home. (MDM)

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Effect Of Family Structure On School Readiness?

Telia Y. Chilton

There are numerous early childhood education and child care programs. Early childhood education was founded on the principle of intervention/ prevention procedures enabling children to develop readiness skills that will enhance their progress in the educational process. Various views concerning the style of instruction continue to be debated. Headstart's philosophy strongly supports the premise that parents should be involved in the learning environment (pre-school classroom). Child/ Parent Centers advocate that parent training in the school setting allows for transfer of developmentally appropriate practices in the home At the present time, there seems to be a concern whether the family structure in the home has an effect on pre-school readiness. Findings that indicate a shift in family structures present a challenge for pre-school educators. Planning and adaptations of programs focus on meeting the needs of children from: single versus dual parent households, parent with negative attitudes toward play, low aspirations and expectations, strategies and schemata demonstrated in the home setting are diametrical opposite to practices adhered to in the pre-school classrooms. These dispositions adversely effect the cognitive and motivational demands of children. Exploration of methods to implement an early childhood progra using a holistic approach is needed to best serve young children and their parents.

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Given the information on changing family trends, pre-school educators will be able to assess the needs of children properly. Considerations to individualized programing and parent inclusion in the classroom setting and regular home visits will have a far reaching effect upon the education of pre-school children now and in the future.

The number of early childhood education and child care programs is growing, a by-product of the increase in working mothers and single parent families as well as research showing that such programs pay off academically and socially. Early intervention programs for children from low-income, single parent families were built n the premise that appropriate services from outside the family could compensa for the disadvantages which, it was believed, were responsible for the generally poor performance of these youngsters in school. Headstart was founded on the principle to help children do better in school.

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Can those who do poorly in school improve their performance significantly with the help of some form of intervention? The debate over this question is perhaps the oldest in the history of American education. Lazar and others (1977) completed an extensive longitudinal analysis of experimental preschool programs begun prior to 1969. They found that early childhood education has not only increased cognitive gains, but has also reduced the number of children assigned to special education classes as well as the number of children held back one or more grades.

Poor performance in school is seen as the result of the child's social, ethnic economic, physical condition, and parental structure; single or dual parentage . Measures to assist children to perform more competently would include: changes in the child's environment, coupled with an enriche education that encourages parent involvement and articulation between home and school. Intervention efforts in the early years prevents"drop out" in later years. Drop out tendencies are not decided when a child is sixteen years old. Parents who support schooling generally have children who stay in school. Parents need to play an active role in their children's schooling, and school people need to show them how. Early education, whether in or out of the home, whether by a teacher or a parent, can enable poor minority children to meet the requirements of public schools. Relationships existing between families and preschool enhance childrens' readiness skills. The two family composition patterns are single parent or dual-parent families.

Early childhood education advocates have different views on the style of instruction that should be administered by early childhood programs. Proponents have been unable to resolve a lingering dispute over academic versus "child centered" or developmentally appropriate practices. Elkind (1988) and others argue that by pushing instruction downward from 6 to 5 and 4 year-olds, educators fail to take child development into account.

David Weikart (1988) of the High/Scope Educational Research foundation, a strong supporter of delaying teacher-directed formal instruction. Such practices as he states, when introduced too early, increase the chance students will become socially maladjusted.

Carnine (1988), a professor at the University of Oregon and an advocate of direct instruction, challenged Weikart's conclusions - noting that the gap between disadvantaged students and their peers is present when they enter school and widens quickly. Carnine touted direct instruction as the best way to cut the gap quickly. An experiment at 48 sites - conducted by the New York State Department of Education, has demonstrated clearly that direct parent participation in preschool has a positive correlation to academic achievement in the elementary grades. We now know that the early years of a childs' life are critical for building the foundation for later learning.

Lazar (1981) supports preventive educational methods for young children. He surmises that childrens' success in the educational process is enhanced by allowing parents to be partners in the educational enterprise.

Lazar (1981) found a cluster of fine interrelated program characteristics related to positive outcomes:

1. Age of intervention - the earlier the better
2. Adult-child ratio - the fewer children the better
3. Number of home visits - the more the better
4. Direct participation of parents - the more the better
5. Services for families, not just the child - the more, the better.

Head Start, a pioneer program in early childhood education, has set the foundation for educating the young. Headstart has received positive and negative public opinions. We must be mindful that the youngster enrolled in pre-kindergarten programs spend the majority of their waking hours at home. To that end, parents should be a partner in the educational process of their child. Research has found that home-based, center-based, and combination programs do well in educating young children. Washington (1985) discuss four trends in family life which are particularly affecting Head Start and other programs serving low-income families (1) feminization of poverty (2) teenage parenting (3) increasing number of employed mothers and (4) increasing challenges to attaining economic self-sufficiency.

Jensen (1983) conducted a study total of 92 Head Start children who responded to the Piers Preschool Pictorial Self-Concept Scale. The relationship between scale scores and age, family structure, or gender was negligible. Responses to several scale items differed significantly when subjects were compared by gender of family structure.

Klein's and Pelow's (1982) research findings are concerned with the emergent recognition of the role of the father in early childrearing, the attitudes these fathers have towards their parenting role, and the identifiable impact they have on their progency. A discussion is presented concerning specific spheres of paternal influence on the child's development, and sex role development. The influence of paternal absence on the childs' development.

Do preschool children come to school ready to learn? Hodges (1984) explains how divorce has a cumulative effect on the pre-school child. Preschool teachers in this study indicated that children from divorced families evidenced behavior patterns of aggression, limited concentration and acted out toward parents. Thus, hampering attention span and stifling growth and development in readiness skills.

Johnson (1983) investigated relationships among socioeconomic status, family constellation, parental practices and pre-school-age children's awareness of and rationales for rules and conventions. According to Johnson, children's knowledge of rules and conventions were related to social class variables. Parental behaviors were found to be better

predictors of the level of children's knowledge than were demographic characteristics.

Corneluis (1988) examines the level of imaginative and social play of children in relation to family structure (single parent household versus dual parent household), maternal level of stress, and mother's beliefs and attitudes about play.

Love (1991) cited, The Even Start project in the Paudre (Colardao) School District involves a learning center where parents receive literacy instruction and are trained to become partners in their children's education. The program features separate parent and child activities, group activities, home visits from family monitors, field trips and support groups.

An investigation of children's imaginative and social play in relation to family structure conducted by Corneluis (1987) found a relationship between multiple social and cognitive skills. The purpose of Corneluis' study was to examine the level of imaginative and social play of children in relation to three family issues: (a) family structure (single versus dual-parent household) (b) mothers' level of stress and (c) mothers' beliefs and attitudes about play.

Domain (1986), a teacher at the Von Humboldt Child Parent Center, a unit of the Chicagc, Illinois, public schools located in the largely Hispanic Humboldt Park area, implemented a practicum designed to improve disadvantaged Black and Hispanic preschool children's language and audtory skills in a nonbilingual learning environment. To carry out the project, 10 multicultural workshops were conducted for children, their teachers, and (mostly single) parents. It was expected that the intervention would result in: (1) an increase in teachers' positive attitudes about teaching language and auditory skills to preschool children from diverse cultural background; (2) acquisition, by parents, of new teaching methods and improved understanding of the importance of teaching supportive home readiness skills; (3) improved language and auditory skills among participating preschool children; and (4) preschool children's increased understanding of the value of diversity, cultural difference, and ethnic pluralism. The practicum was evaluated by comparisons of pre- and post-tests administered to children, parents, and teachers. Children showed significant gains on their measures. Parents gained a new understanding of the importance of cooperation between home and school. Teachers' attitudes about teaching language and multicultural education became more positive.

Derrick (1977) stated that the intent of this study was to investigate cognitive performance among Head Start children and to draw implications from such performance to increase understanding of the educational needs of Head Start children from families headed by unwed-mothers. Specific questions addressed whether cognitive performance among Head Start childre differed on the basis of (1) three family types (those characterized by unwed-mother, father-absent, and father-present family structures) or

(Z) mother's age at time of subject's birth. Five measures of cognitive performance were used: mental age, general comprehension, vocabulary and verbal fluency, judgment and reasoning, and knowledge of prepositions. Data were obtained from 117 children attending one Head Start program in northwest Ohio. Multivariate analysis of variance revealed no significant difference in cognitive performance due family structures or sex of children. Children from families characterized as unwed-mother tended to have lower scores on four measures than did children from the other two family types. Scores on all measures were accelerated with increases in chronological age. (Results are discussed in terms of congruence with other research, and the need for longitudinal data is emphasized.)

Research findings indicate that home-based, center based and combination programs educate young children and prepare them to matriculate into the elementary school program. Multivariate analysis of variance in programs revealed no significant difference in cognitive performance due to family structures. The relationship between scale test scores, childs age, gender and family structure was negligble. Yet parents as partners in the educational process have many benefits to the total growth and development of their child. Findings indicate that parents acquire new teaching methods by volunteering in the classroom. As they participate in the classroom, they learn teaching skills, discipline methods that can be duplicated in the home environment. Therefore, parents as partners taking an active role in their child's education can be beneficial to the teaching/learning environment.

Procedures

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to determine the effect of dual parents and single parents on the school readiness of preschool children.

The population of this study will include 166 AT Risk Pre-kindergarten students. The students attend Project High Potential At Risk-Pre/k, Posen-Robbins School District 143½ which is located in a predominantly low and low-middle socio-economic neighborhood in south suburban Illinois. The population is integrated Euro-American, 40%, Black American, 40%, and Hispanic, 20%.

From the 166 pre-school students enrolled in the Project High Potential, a stratified sample of 40 students school records showed that 29 receiving average or above average scores on the Dial pre-school readiness test; 14 were from single family homes and 15 were from dual family homes. Those students receiving below average numbered 11; 6 from single families and 5 from dual families. A stratified sample of the total population was used.

Method Of Data Collection:

Each spring the Dial Pre-School Screening Test is administered for pre-school children in the communities of Posen and Robbins, School District 143½. Two samples were identified from the school records of those students who were raised in homes of single parentage and those raised in homes of dual parentage. The Dial Pre-School screening test results will be used in this study. The pretest scores were

observed to determine the effect of parent structure on readiness level of the students. The Dial Pre-School screening test will be administered to all students entering the Project High Potential At-Risk Pre-kindergarten Program. Pre-test only design will be employed to measure cognitive development, fine/gross motor adaptive behaviors and communication skills. The results of the test will assess specific areas of delays for each child taking the test. With use of the High scope curriculum as a guide, this information enables the teacher to structure an individual program that will enhance the growth and development of each child.

The findings were tabulated in terms of means and standard deviations. The "t" test was employed at the .05 level of confidence to determine if there is any statistically significant difference between the mean scores.

Findings of the Study

The samples for the study included students raised in either a single parent household or in a dual family household. Identification of family structure was derived from student records. Results from the search were used to further determine the readiness level students received from the DIAL Pre-school screening test. A "t" test ($p. < .05$) for samples was done on the two distinct family types to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between family structure and preschool readiness. Table 1 summarizes the statistical analyses.

Examination of the students' records, cumulative folders, indicates that the family structure showed differences in readiness scores obtained by pre-school students on the Dial Pre-School Readiness Test. The scores were observed in regard to the family structure; single versus dual parentage.

The t scores for the two groups identified (single versus dual parentage) show significant differences in the readiness levels of the students entering the Project High Potential Pre-School Program.

Overall, the data leads to the acceptance of research hypotheses: Children raised in dual family homes will obtain higher school readiness scores than those students raised in single parent families.

The findings indicate that the sample had a statistically significant level of confidence, affirming that pre-school readiness levels are affected by the family structure; single versus dual parentage.

The findings also suggest that family involvement contributes positively to pre-school readiness. The results on the Dial Pre-School readiness test confirmed that family involvement through parent/child home activities and experiential exposures positively correlates with pre-school readiness.

TABLE I

	GROUP		
	DUAL PARENTS	SINGLE PARENTS	
	Pre-School Screening	Pre-School Screening	t
	N=20	N=20	
M	16.8	10.8	3.79
SD	4.1	1.4	

Note: Maximum Score = 20

Test t at .05 level

Table t = 2.09

The difference in means is statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence.

The findings of this study suggest that parents and teachers working together in the classroom enhances the sharing of ideas and teaching/learning strategies that provide parents with training that can be transferred into the home environment, thereby creating a continuous learning atmosphere for the child, one that fosters continued growth and development, at school and at home.

The review of literature suggests that parent involvement increases pre-school readiness and that children raised in dual family homes are more successful in readiness skills than those raised in single family homes. Teachers, parents working together with students is beneficial to the teaching/learning environment.

The results of this study lend acceptance to the theory expressed in the review of literature, that family structure affects pre-school readiness. Additional research in this area is vital for the future prediction of effects on pre-school readiness. Continued research is needed to identify the effects of intervention programs on readiness.

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