

Determining the Perception and Necessity for a Child Development Laboratory in Local Communities

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Abstract

This pilot study evaluates the importance for the development of a high-quality, research-based child development laboratory at Southern University Baton Rouge. There exist a multitude of traditional and nontraditional child care options across the nation and the state of Louisiana. Many families opt to take care of their children themselves or let a close relative or friend care for their young child. As such, there are many parents who opt to work, but who prefer the opportunity for their child/ren to be in a warm, nurturing environment, rich in early childhood academics, cultural awareness, and strong social and cognitive development opportunities, which will adequately prepare their children for K-12 education. The purpose of this research is to determine if perception and need for an additional child development laboratory in East Baton Rouge (EBR) Parish. With a population over 400,000, there exist one laboratory in the parish, which serves only 175 children of the 29,472 children under age five (5) in the parish. There is a dire need for another research-based learning facility for early childhood in EBR parish.

Keywords: Child development, child care, early childhood

1.0 Overview

Societal changes among families and children dictate the establishment of improved conditions in academics and early learning. As children grow and develop, communities first begin to explore the process of helping through developmental outcomes which could be affected by child rearing environments (Provence & Lipton, 1962). As a result of these child rearing environments – centers – a number of investigations have been linked to adverse consequences of deprived early human relationships (Provence & Lipton, 1962). Because of these societal changes we must observe a variety of ways to design educational learning environments for early childhood. This defines the need for a variety of early child care environments such as traditional, nontraditional, and university laboratories. Traditional child care includes Early Head Start; church-based daycare; and private-owned child care centers (Barnett, 1995). Duncan and Magnuson (2013) described nontraditional child care as home/family-based child care centers and children who remain at home until school age (i.e. family member). There may be a need for an evaluation of these centers and the knowledge that they are imparting to assist in changing societal conditions which may negatively affect early learning. With these rapid changes, families must be better prepared to address the educational needs of their children and early learning centers must be ready to educate and prepare children to enter and succeed in K-12 educational environments. The overall purpose of this pilot study is to investigate the importance and knowledge of high-quality child care laboratories in local communities. Beneficiaries include the childcare laboratory (to conduct research and apply new trends); undergraduate students for practicum and internships; children accepted into the university child care laboratory and their families; and various departments across the Southern University System. Data collected from this pilot research study will be used to help traditional, nontraditional and university laboratories make corrections and present operations usable to better prepare early learners to enter K-12 education.

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These data will also be effective in promoting social, cognitive, emotional, and physical development of individuals and families over the human lifespan (USDA/NIFA Strategic Plan). In the century to come, young children will face emerging issues like globalization, health, diverse cultures, famine, population explosion and other social changes. These young children will need to learn good communication skills, and learn how to function on a social, economic, and political level (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). This becomes a foundation for opening a center which will have the following impacts on the Family and Consumer Sciences curriculum, specifically in the Child Development and Family Life program area: (1) curriculum growth in family and child development will strengthen programs in SUBR and the Family and Consumer Sciences Child Development department, and (2) to construct a full resource child development laboratory program that prepares undergraduate students and community child care providers so that they develop and become proficient in the knowledge base, skills, and teaching techniques within the academic setting. Ensuring access to reliable early childhood programs can provide children social and cognitive experiences that promote independence and confident attitudes towards learning (Elliot, 2006). Research has proven the strong positive impacts early childhood education programs have on student success later in life. Even so, it is also known that specific early childhood programs have more of an impact than others. Because university laboratories tend to charge more than traditional and nontraditional child care centers, the expectations are that those children who are in university laboratories will participate in research-based curriculum which will better prepare them for further educational attainment beginning in Kindergarten. Rosier & McDonald (2011) purports that readiness for school is predictive of long-term academic and occupational achievement. To develop families and communities, it is essential that researchers discover ways to educate people socially and cognitively. This level of education must begin during the early years of life in order to have a lasting impact through adulthood. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of learning in early years, there must be increased efforts in research to measure the success of centers which provide services to early learners. Thus, researchers must assess existing tools and curricula created to teach and prepare early learners.

1.1 Types of Centers

Researchers have found that the quality of child care is an important determinant of child care. Barnett found that the higher the quality of child care, the better cognitive and social development both while children were in child care and later in life (1995). As stated previously, there are three basic types of child care centers: university laboratories, nontraditional and traditional. University laboratories were created during the 1970's to provide a safe place for children while more mothers were entering the workforce, in particular on college and university campuses (Smith, 2017). To date, the most expensive child care are university laboratories, with as much as 25% more than the cost of traditional and nontraditional child care centers while home-based child care centers are about 75% as compared to traditional child care centers. Traditional child care centers include Early Head Start; church-based daycare; and private-owned child care centers (Barnett, 1995). Nontraditional child care centers include home/family-based child care centers and children who remain at home until school age (Duncan and Magnuson, 2013)

1.2 Impacts of Child Care Centers on Academic Performance

Early learning has evolved tremendously since theorists such as Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and his beliefs on psychosexual behaviors and development among early learners or John Piaget's (1856-1939) operational stages of cognitive development. Researchers and practitioners have since learned the importance of learning as early as in the mother's womb; strength of maternal relationships with infants; and the variety of ways in which children learn. The United States has even invested in, though not at the level needed, Early Head Start programs, to give our most at risk toddlers a chance at academic preparation and future success beginning at the early years. "The contribution of early childhood care and education to the healthy development and future well-being of children who are economically and socially disadvantaged has become a vital public issue with important implications for families, business, private philanthropy, and government" (Barnett, 1995). Previous research reviews concluded that short-term effects of child care can immediately increase IQ scores by as much as eight points (Remey, Bryant, & Suarez, 1985).

2.0 Plan of Operation and Methodology

The objective for this pilot project was to determine the perception and need of a child development laboratory in a local community. This laboratory would be directly related to a local public university. Convenience sampling method was applied by recruiting participants in Baton Rouge, LA. Researchers and students collected data from the Southern University (SU) community which consisted of Employees (faculty and staff), students and East Baton Rouge Parish (EBRP) residents.

There were a series of questions asked of individuals based on child care centers. Participation throughout the community was limitless. There was a total of 64 persons to participate in the survey; 28.1% employees; 46.9% students; and 25% community residents. The data was statically analyzed SPSS version 20.0 software package. Frequency distribution, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA), and *chi*-square tests were used for question testing. Individual ANOVA were employed when MANOVA was significant.

3.0 Products, Results and Measurable Outcomes

MONOVA on teaching and learning academics reveals that the group means of one resident group was significantly different in overall mode ($F= 3.54, P= 0.003$). Individual ANOVA showed that SU employees felt that teaching and learning academics for early learners was statistically significant ($F= 10.40, P= 0.000$). Results also showed that SU employees and students more strongly felt “teaching and learning academics for early learners” being extremely important ($M=5.00$) than EBRP residents ($M=4.68$). When participants were asked “what type of childcare center do you believe would better prepare young children for Kindergarten?”, researchers expected majority respondents would feel research based laboratories would be significant. When cross tabulating whether or not a respondent was employed at SU and what type of childcare center they believed would better prepare a child for Kindergarten, results from the Pearson *chi*-square showed statistical significance at $\chi^2 = 13.51, p=.009$. Moreover, employees of Southern University understood the difference between a daycare and research-based laboratory and also felt these research-based laboratories better prepared young children for Kindergarten. Researchers also found that of the three types of centers (home-based, traditional daycare center and research-based laboratory), 78% ($n=14$) of the Southern University employees who responded felt that research-based laboratories better prepare young children for Kindergarten. Of the 15 East Baton Rouge Parish (EBRP) residents who responded to the survey, majority ($n=7, 46.7\%$) felt that home based daycares would better prepare young children for Kindergarten. When asked “Do you understand the difference between a daycare and a research-based laboratory?”, 10 (66.7 %) of the 15 survey EBRP residents (the *chi*-square showed statistical significance at $\chi^2 = 9.61, p=.008$) responded to the survey stated they did not think research-based laboratories were important.

4.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The project objective was to determine the perception and need of a child development laboratory in a local community. Researchers of this pilot study found that University officials, administrators and the faculty and staff of the local university should focus on educating the local community on the purpose of research-based laboratories, their value in the community and university, and the advanced learning structure afforded to its students and families enrolled. With the continuous focus on education, teaching and learning effectiveness, schools are no longer equipped to teach children entering Kindergarten the basics. Standardized testing has made it such that lower grades are utilizing more time to focus on testing and measuring effectiveness. Laboratories provide high-quality child care which focus on research-based teaching and learning methodology for children as early as six weeks of age. Laboratories ultimately build capacity for readiness for youth entering K-12; teachers stronger and experienced in teaching and learning environments for early learners; convenience for students and faculty attending local universities; while simultaneously providing high quality child care for those who would otherwise not be able to afford this type of learning environments for their children. Typically families who receive financial support via Child Care Assistance Programs are limited to daycares, etc. who are not considered high-quality learning centers for their young children. This laboratory will accept child care assistance to allow equal opportunity which aid in closing the gap between economically disadvantaged and middle-upper class families. Accepting Child Care Assistance allows those who are economically disadvantaged children to enter school with the ability to perform as their more affluent peers. This would ultimately close achievement gaps nationally.

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