STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM QUALITY ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN STANDARDS

by

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ABSTRACT

FARHAD JAVIDI-NAMIN. Students' perceptions of early childhood program quality according to the national association for the education of young children standards (Under the direction of DR. JOHN GRETES)

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the extent to which one community college was preparing its early childhood education students for employment in the field according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) professional preparation standards, based on the perceptions of program graduates and majors enrolled in at least one Early Childhood Education course during the fall 2009 and spring 2010 semester.

By analyzing the perceptions of early childhood students and graduates of their preparation to meet the nineteen key indicators of associate degree program quality established by NAEYC, the study provided insight into what students and graduates perceived as the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Program faculty could use this information to enhance program quality, complete a program review and prepare for NAEYC re-accreditation.

The researcher developed a survey to investigate the perceptions of early childhood students and graduates of their preparation to meet the nineteen key indicators of associate degree program quality established by NAEYC. The instrument could be used by other early childhood associate degree programs to examine students' and graduates' perceptions of program quality related to NAEYC standards. The researcher established the face validity and content validity of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha (1951) was used to estimate the internal consistency of the survey items. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to .960. The research literature suggested that there was a

relationship between teacher preparation and child outcomes in early childhood education.

A survey was conducted in the summer of 2010 with a sample of one hundred twenty-seven students in and graduates of the early childhood education program at a community college in the southeastern United States.

Perhaps the most significant finding to emerge from this study was that participants perceived themselves as "well prepared" to meet all five of NAEYC's professional preparation standards for associate degree programs. Demographic characteristics including ethnic background, place of employment, current position, children served and quality of place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status, did not have an effect on participants' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC Standards 2, 3 or 5. There was a difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC Standard 1 based on the quality of their place of employment, and of their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC Standard 4 based on their current position and the quality of their place of employment. Participants perceived child guidance coursework, interactions with classmates, hands-on experiences and child development coursework to be the most beneficial aspects of the program. Participants perceived a need for greater or additional preparation in the areas of child guidance, curriculum planning and/or implementation, and working with families and communities.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my love, my best friend, my mother, Delshad Yaghoobi.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is "to serve and act on behalf of the needs, rights and well-being of all young children with primary focus on the provision of educational and developmental services and resources" (NAEYC, 2010, Bylaws Article 1, Section 1.1, para. 1). To achieve this mission, NAEYC established as one of its goals "improving professional practice and working conditions in early childhood education" (NAEYC, 2010, Bylaws Article 1, Section 1.1, para. 2). Consistent with this goal, the organization established and opened to the public in 2006 the NAEYC Early Childhood Associate Degree Program Accreditation System. The NAEYC Commission on Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation awards accreditation to associate degree programs that demonstrate evidence of meeting the organization's Professional Preparation Standards. The standards are performance based and aligned with the national standards for baccalaureate and graduate programs in early childhood teacher education. The document, NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Associate Degree Programs Approved by NAEYC Governing Board, 2003, describes the standards as follows.

Standard 1. Promoting Child Development and Learning

Students prepared in associate degree programs use their understanding of young children's characteristics and needs, and of multiple interacting influences on

children's development and learning, to create environments that are healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging for all children.

Standard 2. Building Family and Community Relationships

Students prepared in associate degree programs know about, understand and value the importance and complex characteristics of children's families and communities. They use this understanding to create respectful, reciprocal relationships that support and empower families, and to involve all families in their children's development and learning.

Standard 3. Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families

Students prepared in associate degree programs know about and understand the goals, benefits and uses of assessment. They know about and use systematic observations, documentation and other effective assessment strategies in a responsible way, in partnership with families and other professionals, to positively influence children's development.

Standard 4. Teaching and Learning

Students prepared in associate degree programs integrate their understanding of and relationship with children and families; their understanding of developmentally effective approaches to teaching and learning; and their knowledge of academic disciplines to design, implement and evaluate experiences that promote positive development and learning for all young children.

Standard 5. Becoming a Professional

Students prepared in associate degree programs identify and conduct themselves

> as members of the early childhood profession. They know and use ethical guidelines and other professional standards related to early childhood practice. They are continuous, collaborative learners who demonstrate knowledgeable, reflective and critical perspectives on their work, making informed decisions that integrate knowledge from a variety of sources. They are informed advocates for sound educational practices and policies. (NAEYC, 2003, p. 11)

The two-year accreditation process includes application for an eligibility review, submission of a self study report, a site visit conducted by a peer review team and an accreditation decision made by NAEYC's Commission on Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation, a national Commission of early childhood professionals appointed by NAEYC's Governing Board (C. Sargeant, personal communication, December 1, 2010).

Trained peer reviewers make recommendations regarding accreditation based primarily on student performance on several assessments selected by the institution. Program faculty must demonstrate that the selected assignments, the rubrics used to evaluate student performance and the data emerging from the rubrics are aligned with the NAEYC standards. Program faculty must also show that students have the knowledge, skills and dispositions that NAEYC expects of beginning teachers by documenting acceptable performance in each standards area. If the peer reviewers conclude that students complete the program with acceptable performance in all of the five standard areas, they recommend national accreditation. There are three accreditation decision categories: Nationally Accredited, Nationally Accredited with Conditions and Not Nationally Accredited (Hyson, Tomlinson & Morris, 2009, para. 12).

More than a hundred associate degree programs earned accreditation during the first five years of operation. There are accredited associate degree programs in twenty-four states. More than 100 additional programs are currently in self study in fourteen additional states (NAEYC, 2010, para. 2).

One of the early childhood education associate degree programs supporting NAEYC professional preparation standards was the focus of the study. The early childhood faculty at this institution supported the mission and goals of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and recognized the value of being NAEYC accredited. By using the NAEYC standards as guides to program improvement, institutions can enhance desirable elements of early childhood associate degree programs, such as program quality. Additionally, accredited associate degree programs have the potential to attract more students and to produce students who may be especially attractive to employers because of the quality of their preparation. Accreditation can also provide an effective tool for program assessment within community colleges.

The institution's early childhood education program applied for an eligibility review in the fall of 2004, engaged in self-study from the fall of 2004 through the spring of 2006 and submitted its self study report in the fall of 2006. A three-member peer review team visited the program in February of 2007 and the Commission notified the institution of its decision, Nationally Accredited with Conditions, in August of 2007. The institution's program was publicly listed as Nationally Accredited but the Commission identified significant areas for improvement with respect to the five accreditation standards. All conditions were removed in January of 2010.

During the site visit, the peer review team spent two and a half days on the campuses of the college observing the early childhood education program first-hand. In its efforts to determine whether the program met each of NAEYC's five standards, the team met briefly with a small group of current students and program graduates selected by the early childhood education faculty. During the exit conference at the conclusion of the site visit, the peer review team indicated that the feedback from the students and graduates was generally positive. However, no specific information about students' or graduates' perceptions was provided. It was not known which of NAEYC five Professional Preparation Standards the students and graduates felt they were well-prepared or ill-prepared to meet.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was twofold. The first purpose was to evaluate the extent to which one community college was preparing its early childhood education students for employment in the field according to NAEYC professional preparation standards, based on the perceptions of program graduates and majors enrolled in at least one Early Childhood Education course during the fall 2009 and spring 2010 semester. The second purpose of the study was to develop a valid and reliable instrument that could be used by other early childhood education programs to examine students' and graduates' perceptions of program quality related to NAEYC standards.

Research Questions

The study investigated the following research questions:

1. What are students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 1, Promoting Child Development and Learning?

2. What are students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 2, Building Family and Community Relationships?
3. What are students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 3, Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families?
4. What are students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 4, Teaching and Learning?
5. What are students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 5, Becoming a Professional?
6. What differences exist in early childhood pr students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standards based on the following demographics: ethnic background, place of employment, position, the children respondents work with, and the quality of respondents' place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status?
7. What do students/graduates perceive to be the most beneficial aspects of the program?
8. In which aspects of the program do students/graduates perceive a need for additional or better preparation?

The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the research questions. The researcher developed a survey to investigate the perceptions of students and graduates of the quality of the program under study. The 16th edition of the

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used for descriptive and statistical analysis of the data. The researcher employed a content analysis approach to analyze the responses to the open-ended survey items.

Significance of the Study

The early childhood education program under study may use information about the program's perceived strengths and weaknesses to enhance program quality, community relationships, commitment to access and equity, and other desirable elements of early childhood associate degree programs. The program may also use the results to prepare for NAEYC re-accreditation and for program review. In addition, the college may use the results of the study to fulfill its commitments to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

The study provides a tool that could be used by other NAEYC accredited associate degree programs to examine students' and graduates' perceptions of program quality related to NAEYC standards. The researcher established the face validity and content validity of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha (1951) was used to estimate the internal consistency of the survey items. Alpha was calculated for each of the five NAEYC standards. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to .960.

According to Buell and Peters (2003), research is needed that examines how changes in accreditation and licensure affect the quality of teachers available and teachers' ability to serve the children and families in their programs.

Assumptions

A self-report online survey was used to collect students' perceptions of the quality of the early childhood education program. The researcher assumed that the participants would respond truthfully.

Definition of Key Terms

Because the researcher was investigating the quality of early childhood education associate degree programs based on NAEYC standards of professional preparation, the study involved the use of the following terms:

1. Early childhood – The period in the human lifespan beginning at birth and lasting through age eight.
2. Associate degree - An academic degree, either an Associate in Science, an Associate in Applied Science or an Associate in Arts, awarded by community colleges, junior colleges, four-year universities, business colleges and some bachelor's degree-granting colleges/universities upon completion of a course of study usually lasting two years (Hyson & Duru, 2004).

Summary

The present chapter introduced the study, Students' Perceptions of Early Childhood Program Quality According to National Association for the Education of Young Children Standards. The National Association for the Education of Young Children was identified and NAEYC professional preparation standards for associate degree students were described. The purpose and significance of the study were explained. The research questions were presented. The researcher's assumption that

participants would respond truthfully was stated. The key terms, early childhood and associate degree, were defined.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature and research to provide a background for the study, with emphasis on the professionalization of early childhood education and professional competencies in early childhood education.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of literature related to the topic of professional competencies in early childhood education. The chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) professionalization of early childhood education, (b) need for professional qualifications in early childhood education, (c) role of higher education and specialized training in early childhood education, (d) defining quality in early childhood teacher education programs, (e) using standards to assess quality in teacher preparation, (e) perceptions of teachers, (f) relationship between teacher beliefs and teacher practices, and (g) summary.

Professionalization of Early Childhood Education

This section provides a review of selected literature on the professionalization of early childhood education.

According to the National Research Council (2001), early childhood educators have only recently been viewed as distinctive professionals with experience, knowledge and special personal capacities. According to Lambert, Sibley, and Lawrence (2010), the early childhood profession is experiencing a shift from a culture of compliance toward a culture of professionalism.

According to Harvey, "A profession is a group of people who share a common occupation, have completed a set of requirements to enter that occupation, and agree to abide by specified standards of practice" (as cited in Lambert, Sibley, & Lawrence, 2010, p. 67). Burbules and Densmore (1991) stated, "A professional is an

autonomous practitioner who possesses specialized knowledge and skills, applies those skills using independent professional judgment, and takes responsibility for their own professional conduct, reflective practice and professional growth" (as cited in Lambert et al., p. 67).

Lambert et al., (2010) identified several features that professions have in common. According to the authors, "professions control who enters their field. This can be accomplished by establishing minimum qualifications for those recognized as members of the profession" (p. 67). According to Burbules and Densmore (1991) and Harvey (2009), "professions establish guidelines for the appropriate roles and responsibilities of their members. Many professions include in these definitions the common goals and commitments its members share as they strive to serve the public good" (as cited in Lambert et al., 2010, p. 67).

According to the Australian Council of Professions (2004),

> Professions translate these guidelines into systems of self-regulation. These systems often include formal codes that establish standards of practice, ranging from criteria for the minimum required to constitute adequate service delivery, to ethical standards for acceptable professional conduct, to standards for high-quality practice, all of which extend beyond an individual practitioner's own moral or ethical commitments to establish a group consensus. (as cited in Lambert et al., 2010, p.67)

According to Lambert et al., (2010), "Professions that have achieved consensus regarding who can practice and what practitioners do, focus on more advanced and collective activities, often facilitated through professional

organizations. Specifically, professions recognize excellence. Formalized levels of distinction, awards for professional accomplishment, and acknowledgement of career milestones are strategies that professions use to identify practitioners of high quality for both the membership and those served by the profession" (p. 68). Boone (2001) stated, "professions have organized systems of support for their members that include ongoing, high quality research-based and standards-driven professional development (as cited in Lambert et al., 2010, p. 68).

According to Caulfield (1997), professionalism is not an end in itself but an ongoing effort, a process of becoming.

> Professionalism refers to the utilization of specialized knowledge that its members need to accomplish specific outcomes. It involves a shared set of skills that are used to improve the quality of caregiving practices and interactions between professional caregivers and the children and families that they work with in their respective programs. (p. 263)

Caulfield discussed professionalism in the context of required caregiving beliefs and practices in working with infants and toddlers. He stated: "Professional caregivers' shared set of beliefs and practices transcends the level of education and experience they possess and the types of care they provide. Adherence to the common threads requires constant, ongoing professional development" (p. 262). Caulfield identified specialized knowledge of child development, observation and assessment, adherence to a shared code of ethics and partnership with families as the common threads in early childhood professionalism for infant and toddler caregivers.

Katz (1985) identified eight criteria that must be met before a field of endeavor may be termed a profession. Those criteria are described below.

Social Necessity. The work performed by members of a profession must be essential to the functioning of society. Katz argued that the evidence bearing on whether or not the work of early childhood educators is essential to society is "mixed at best" (Katz, 1985, p. 9).

Altruism. Professions are service-oriented as opposed to profit-oriented. Professions have clients, not customers or consumers. Professionals are expected to perform their duties with unselfish dedication. According to Katz, "The service ideal and client-centeredness of professions seems clearly characteristic of teaching in general and early childhood teaching in particular" (Katz, 1985, p. 11).

Autonomy. Professionals are not constrained in the performance of their work by the controls or demands of others. Employers do not dictate the nature of practice but rather hire professionals to exercise judgment based on specialized knowledge, skills and techniques. The client is also autonomous in that "he or she does not dictate to the practitioner what services are to be rendered or how they are to be received" (Katz, 1985, p. 11). Katz argued that issues concerning autonomy with respect to clients are complex for early childhood professionals. She identified three client groups: parents, children and the larger society or prosperity. She suggested that the latter is the educator's ultimate client and added that our communities "want the young to be both cooperative and competitive. They want conformity and initiative" (p. 14). Because of these often contradictory expectations, it is difficult to say that early childhood teachers have achieved this criterion.

Code of Ethics. Professional societies subscribe to a code of ethics intended to protect the best interests of their clients and to "minimize yielding to the temptations inherent in the practice of the profession" (Katz, 1985, p. 14). Katz noted that NAEYC had formed a committee to develop a code for its members. The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment, Revised 2005, appears on the organization's website (NAEYC, 2005).

Distance from Client. The client-practitioner relationship is characterized by distance or detached concern, which is intended to "minimize the temptation to develop favorites among children and parents, and to inhibit the tendency to respond to clients in terms of personal predilection or impulses rather than on the basis of reasoned judgment." Katz emphasized that the emotional distance between early childhood teachers and the children they serve "should be an optimum one in that it permits the teacher to be responsive, caring, and compassionate, as well as to exercise professional judgment and bring knowledge to bear on responses to children" (Katz, 1985, p. 17).

Standards of Practice. Katz stated that professions adopt standards of practice below which no practitioner should fall; that standards are meant to ensure that all practitioners apply the standard procedures in the course of exercising professional judgment and are based on the standard predicaments that all members of the profession regularly encounter; and that performance standards are universalistic rather than particularistic. Katz argued that one of the major tasks for the early childhood profession was "to develop and articulate our perceptions of professional standards" (Katz, 1985, p. 19).

Prolonged Training. Professions require their entrants to undergo prolonged specialized training in order to ensure the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Institutions providing said training must be licensed or accredited and must "offer trainees a common core of knowledge and techniques so that the entire membership of the profession shares a common allusionary base" (Katz, 1985, p. 21). Katz noted that in the early childhood field, "It is not clear what kind and amount of training is required for high quality professional performance" (p. 22).

Specialized Knowledge. Professions are occupations whose practices are based on specialized knowledge known only to practitioners of the profession. Practitioners are members of professional organizations that take responsibility for disseminating new knowledge relevant to the practice. Katz nominated ten principles for inclusion in the early childhood education body of knowledge.

1. Teaching strategies and curriculum decisions are best when they take into account both the potential value of immediate experiences and their long-term benefits
2. Young children's learning is optimized when children are engaged in interaction and in active rather than passive activities
3. Many of the experiences or factors that influence development and learning are likely to be most beneficial when they occur in optimum rather than extreme amounts, intensities, or frequencies
4. The curriculum for young children is oriented toward helping them to make better sense of their own environment and experiences

5. Many aspects of development and learning have the characteristic of a recursive cycle in that once a child has a behavior pattern, the chances are that others will respond to him or her in such a way that the pattern will be strengthened
6. The more informal the learning environment, the more access the teacher has to information about where the child is in terms of development n learning
7. The three basic functions of language – communication, expression and reason – are acquired and strengthened through conversation rather than by passive exposure or systematic instruction
8. Young children's development and learning are enhanced by a curriculum including activities and materials that provide them with content for conversation that is relevant, vivid, interesting, familiar, and/or significant to them
9. Appropriate teaching strategies and curricula are those that take into account the acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions, especially the dispositions to go on learning and to apply the knowledge and skills acquired
10. The younger children are, the greater the variety of teaching strategies and the greater the flexibility of curriculum required. (Katz, 1985, pp. 26-29)

Need for Professional Qualifications in Early Childhood Education

The importance of teachers to high-quality early education cannot be overemphasized. Research indicates that the most powerful influences on whether

and what children learn occur in the teacher's interactions with them, in the real-time decisions the teacher makes throughout the day (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000). It is the teacher's classroom plans and organization, sensitivity and responsiveness to all the children, and moment-to-moment interactions with them that have the greatest impact on children's development and learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). The way teachers design learning experiences, how they engage children and respond to them, how they adapt their teaching and interactions to children's background and the feedback they give, also influence children's learning.

Children's earliest experiences can substantially affect their development and learning. For example, Early Head Start, a comprehensive program for children under age 3 and their families, has been shown to promote cognitive, language, social and emotional development (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2001), high-quality preschool programs benefit children (particularly low-income children) more than mediocre or poor programs do. Findings on the impact of teaching quality in the early grades show similar results (Harme & Pianta, 2001).

In addition to this relationship of overall program and school quality to later school success, research has identified a number of specific predictors of later achievement. In the language and literacy domain, vocabulary knowledge and other aspects of oral language are important predictors of children's reading comprehension (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). Even when children with limited vocabulary manage to acquire basic decoding skills, they still often encounter difficulty around grade 3 or 4 when they begin needing to read more advanced text in various subjects (Snow,

2007). Vocabulary deficits impede comprehension and subsequently acquisition of knowledge necessary to succeed across the curriculum (Snow, 2005). Early childhood programs need to start early with proactive vocabulary development. Teachers need to engage children who are lagging in vocabulary and oral development in language interactions throughout the day, including reading to them in small groups and talking with them about the stories, and engaging them in conversation on a given topic over many exchanges (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001).

Research by the National Early Literacy Panel (2008) suggested that young children's alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness are significant predictors of later proficiency in reading and writing. The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) was convened in 2002 to conduct a synthesis of the scientific research on the development of early literacy skills in children from birth to age five. NELP's primary goal was to identify interventions, parenting activities and instructional practices that promote the development of children's early literacy skills. The panel adopted a method that allowed for the identification and selection of published studies relevant to the panel's questions, a coding system that allowed for the combination and comparison of studies, and an appropriate method of statistical analysis. Electronic searches were conducted using PsycINFO and the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). These were supplemented with hand searches of major research journals, reference checks of past literature reviews and nominations from experts in the field of early literacy. More than 8,000 potential articles were screened to determine their relevance to the research questions and their consistency with all selection criteria established by the panel and approximately 500 research articles

were used in the meta-analyses conducted by the panel. The meta-analyses summarized both correlational data showing the relationships between children's early abilities and skills and later literacy development and experimental data that showed the impact of instructional interventions on children's learning. The panel found that conventional reading and writing skills - decoding, oral reading fluency, reading comprehension, writing and spelling - that are developed in the years from birth to age 5 have a clear and consistently strong relationship with later conventional literacy skills. Additionally, six variables representing early literacy skills had medium to large predictive relationships with later measures of literacy development. These six variables included: alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming (RAN) of letters or digits, rapid automatic naming (RAN) of objects or colors, the ability to write letters in isolation on request or to write one's own name, and the ability to remember spoken information for a short period of time. The early childhood profession now recognizes that gaining literacy foundations is an important aspect of children's experience before kindergarten (International Reading Association & NAEYC, 1998).

Research also suggests that children's social and emotional competencies predict their classroom functioning. Linares (2005) found a relationship between emotional competence and both enhanced cognitive performance and academic achievement. Linares examined the effects of the Unique Minds School Program, a teacher led program designed to promote cognitive-social-emotional skills, including self-sufficiency, problem-solving, social-emotional competence and a positive classroom climate. During two consecutive school years, 119 public school students

and their teachers were assessed in the fall and spring of grade four and again in the spring of grade five. Compared to students in the control school, students in the intervention group showed gains in student self-efficacy, problem solving, social-emotional competencies and math grades.

Several factors in the emotional and social domain, including independence, responsibility, self-regulation and cooperation, predict how well children make the transition to school and how well they perform in the early grades. McClelland, Acock, and Morrison (2006) investigated the relationship between kindergarten learning-related skills and reading and math trajectories in 538 children between kindergarten and sixth grade, and how children with poor learning-related skills performed in reading and math throughout elementary school. Trained research assistants administered the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT-R; Markwardt, 1989) in two 30-minute sessions to all children between kindergarten and second grade in the fall and spring of kindergarten and in the spring of first and second grade. Testing and teacher ratings for the Cooper-Farran Behavior Rating Scales were collected 2 months after the beginning of kindergarten. Between third and sixth grade, teachers gave children the math and reading tests from the North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests in the spring of each school year.

> Latent growth curves indicated that learning-related skills had a unique effect on children's reading and math scores between kindergarten and sixth grade and predicted growth in reading and math between kindergarten and second grade. In addition, children with poor learning-related skills performed lower than their higher-rated peers on measures of reading and mathematics between

> kindergarten and sixth grade, with the gap widening between kindergarten and second grade. Between third and sixth grade, this gap persisted but did not widen. (p. 471)

Teachers need to have knowledge about child development and learning in general, about the individual children in their care and about the sequences in which a domain's specific concepts and skills are learned in order to make decisions with informed intentionality. Teachers also need a well-developed repertoire of teaching strategies to use for different purposes (Horowitz, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, et al., 2005).

Role of Higher Education and Specialized Training in Early Childhood Education

The scientific literature suggests that there is a relationship between teacher preparation and child outcomes in early childhood education.

The National Day Care Study (NDCS) (Ruopp, Travers, Glantz, & Coelen, 1979) sought to guide the construction of national child care standards by identifying the key provisions of child care quality in center-based, full-day programs that best predict good outcomes for children. The study showed that qualifications of caregivers affect quality of care. According to Travers and Goodson (1980),

> While years of formal education, degrees attained and years of experience per se made no discernable difference in quality of care, those caregivers who had education or training specifically related to young children (e.g., in early childhood education, day care, special education or child psychology) provided more special and intellectual stimulation to children in their care

than did other caregivers, and the children scored higher on standardized tests." (p. 27)

While these findings underscored the importance of specialized preparation for child care quality, they did not address questions related to college degrees, as the only information collected about staff was years of education, or the level or intensity of training.

A study by Berk (1985) provided evidence that more formal education was related to positive teacher behaviors. The study examined relationships between behaviors toward children and a variety of caregiver characteristics - formal education, child-oriented attitudes, satisfaction with child care employment, and commitment to the child care field as a career. Narrative descriptions of the behavior of 37 Caucasian caregivers responsible for groups of three- to five-year-old children in 12 child care centers in one Midwestern city were collected and then coded according to the Prescott, Jones, and Kritchevsky (1967) observational system. Additionally, teachers answered attitude and job satisfaction questionnaires and provided information about their educational background and child-related preparation. Higher education, as well as child-related preparation, was associated with several qualities of caregiver behavior - decreases in restriction and increases in encouragement, development of children's verbal skills, and the use of indirect forms of guidance. Education was positively associated with caregiver commitment to child care as a career. Teachers with at least two years of college demonstrated more responsive encouragement of children, and teacher behaviors involving development

of verbal skills were almost three times more frequent among college-educated teachers than among those with high school only.

Honig and Hirallal (1998) studied the behaviors of 81 teachers working with preschool children in 24 urban childcare centers. The teachers were observed using the ABC (Adult Behaviors in Caregiving) Scale (Honig & Lally, 1973), which permitted examination of clusters of positive and negative behaviors in the following areas: language facilitation, concept promotion, socioemotional inputs, and caregiving and cleanup (of children and the environment). The teachers provided responses to questions about their number of years of formal schooling, years in child care, years at the same center, own parenting status, and how many Early Childhood Education/Child Development courses and workshops they had ever completed. Teachers were categorized as high or low in education, experience and training, based on the following distinctions: high school through an AA degree (low) vs. BA degree or higher (high); one to four training courses (low) vs. five or more courses (high); and one to three years of experience (low) vs. four or more years (high). Hierarchical stepwise regression and ANOVAs revealed that early childhood education/child development training were crucially implicated in ensuring more positive interactions between teachers and preschoolers. According to Honig and Hirallal (1998), "When all positive teacher interactions tallied in the classroom were combined, early childhood education/child development training accounted for over 62% of the variance in teacher inputs." With respect to teacher facilitation of language, social, and emotional development, ECE/CD training accounted for most of the variance in predicting teacher behavior, with education making a smaller but significant

contribution. With respect to concept development, only ECE/CD training contributed. Neither years of experience nor stability in one's child care position increased teacher enrichments of children's learning or socio-emotional development in any way. A high degree of formal education did not ensure positive teacher support for young children if training and experience were low.

A study by Marshall and colleagues (2001) examined quality in 90 full-day, year-round, center-based classrooms serving children 2.9 years to 5 years of age, randomly selected to proportionately represent the types of care in the state of Massachusetts. Data collectors observed classrooms for 3 to 4 hours and used the revised version of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 1998) to assess classroom quality. Data collectors also interviewed providers about their education and training. Better program quality was associated with better-educated teachers, but because distinctions were made only between those with AA degrees or higher and those with less than an AA degree, it was not possible to determine the particular contribution of the BA degree over and above the two-year degree.

The National Child Care Staffing Study (NCCSS) (Whitebrook et al., 1990) examined the quality of care in 227 child care centers, randomly selected from five diverse U.S. metropolitan areas. Observation using the ECERS, ITERS and Caregiver Interaction Scale were conducted in infant, toddler and preschool classrooms in each center. Background information on teacher education and training was collected from 865 teachers and 444 assistant teachers. The researchers found that more formal education was "better," in that it was the strongest predictor of both

appropriate caregiving at the classroom level and individual teacher sensitivity. Teachers with some college-level early childhood training or a bachelor's degree in the field engaged in more appropriate caregiving and were more sensitive and less detached than teachers with training at the vocational school level or lower. Children in programs with more sensitive teachers and more responsive caregiving received higher language scores, spent less time aimlessly wandering and exhibited a higher level of peer play. The study also found that teachers with a bachelor's degree (with or without specialized training at the college level) were more sensitive, less detached and less harsh than teachers with no BA and either no training or training at the vocational school level or lower. With respect to appropriate caregiving, findings varied by age of child. Preschool teachers were more appropriate when they had either a BA degree (with or without specialized training) or had no BA but college-level specialized training. While establishing the important role of the bachelor's degree, the NCCSS does not provide clear information about teachers who have only an AA degree, with or without specialized training and therefore does not provide insight into what is gained by earning a BA vs. an AA degree. In this sample, most BA-level teachers also had completed ECE coursework at the college level.

Norris (2000) examined differences in the quality of care offered by family child care providers with varying levels of in-service training. Researchers visited 70 licensed family child care providers. Quality of care was measured by the Family Day Care Environment Rating Scale (FDCERS). ANCOVAs indicated that family child care providers who continuously participated in in-service training throughout their career were rated higher than providers who never participated in in-service training

and providers who intermittently attended training during their career on the total FDCERS score as well as the Language and Reasoning, Learning Activities, and Basic Care Subscales.

Clarifying what is meant by specialized training in early childhood education and under what circumstances it advances teacher behavior is critical. Researchers have found it difficult to collect reliable information that helps to clarify how the amount, intensity, content and quality of instruction influence its effectiveness. This is partially due to the fact that teachers themselves are often unable to recall their training and educational histories. Some studies focus on training completed in the last year while others consider the number of courses a teacher has completed over the course of a career. Few studies focus on the actual content of training and the formal education level of training may or may not be specified in the research designs (Arnett, 1989). There are suggestions from the literature that an integrated program of training – such as the CDA or degree programs with a supervised teaching component – contribute to more effective and longer lasting teaching practices.

Defining Quality in Early Childhood Teacher Education Programs

According to data collected in 2004 by Maxwell, Lim, and Early (2006), more than 1,200 institutions of higher education offer some kind of degree program in early childhood education. Of these, approximately 40% offer a bachelor's degree and 60% an associate's degree, with some institutions offering both. Based on national average graduation rates, these programs are producing at least 36,000 graduates per year. These teachers have the potential to influence the future development and

learning of children in the programs in which they work (as cited in Hyson, Tomlinson, & Morris, 2009, para.5).

Despite this potential, recent studies raise questions about whether the benefit of having teachers with a bachelor's or associate's degree is being realized.

Early (2007) suggested that policies focused solely on increasing teachers' education are insufficient for improving classroom quality and maximizing children's academic gains. Early used seven major studies of early care and education to predict classroom quality and children's academic outcomes from the educational attainment and major of teachers of 4-year-olds. The goal of the study was to analyze several large data sets using similarly defined variables and equivalent model specification to examine the possible effect of teacher education on classroom quality and/or children's academic skills. The researchers termed this analysis strategy "replicated secondary data analysis." It involved selecting studies that contain similar information, gathered in a similar way, and using common analysis protocols across data sets so that any differences in relations among the variables are attributable to the sample or study circumstances, rather than to different data collections strategies, variable operalizations or analysis techniques. All seven participating studies had to meet three criteria: (1) contain data about teachers' education, (2) contain observed classroom quality data, and (3) contain direct assessments of children's academic skills during the 4-year-old year, plus pretest data that could be used to control for prior child functioning. All seven studies were based on a sample that was randomly selected to represent a known population, and were therefore statistically representative. The seven studies included in the analysis were: Early Head Start

Follow-Up (2002), Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES 2003), Georgia Early Care Study (GECS, 2003, 2004), More at Four (MAF) Evaluation (2005), National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL 2005), Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (2005), and Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research (PCER) Program (2003).

Early Head Start (EHS) Follow-Up (2002). The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the EHS program. Low income families and children who were eligible for EHS were selected from 17 sites, when their infants were less than 17 months old. Participating children were born between July 1996 and September 1998. The families and children were randomly assigned to revive EHS services or to a control condition. The children were followed every year from birth to age 3. Follow-up data were gathered again immediately before kindergarten (as cited in Early, 2007).

Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES 2003). The purpose of this study was to describe the quality of Head Start programs in a nationally representative sample. The sample consisted of 63 randomly selected Head Start programs, stratified by census region, percent minority and urbanicity. The study featured four phases of data collection and followed 3- and 4 - year old Head Start children from program entry through the spring the spring of kindergarten (as cited in Early, 2007).

Georgia Early Care Study (GECS, 2003, 2004). This study examined the development and experiences of children attending public and private preschool in Georgia. The sample included 630 children and 128 classrooms, representing all full-

day, full-year preschools in Georgia, including Head Start, Georgia Pre-K and private programs. Counties were stratified by the number of 4-year-olds. Four to eight counties were selected per strata. Preschools were selected within each county from lists obtained from the three agencies that administered each program. Within each selected site, one classroom was randomly selected. Five children in each participating classroom were randomly selected for participation from the children whose parents consented to have their child participate (as cited in Early, 2007).

More at Four (MAF) Evaluation (2005). The purpose of this study was to examine the quality of the MAF program, a statewide prekindergarten initiative for at-risk 4-year-olds in North Carolina, and outcomes for children participating in MAF. The classroom quality sample included 233 classrooms, randomly selected over two program years from all those in operation across the state. A subsample of 98 of these classrooms was randomly selected for child assessments, and those participating in the MAF program within these classrooms were recruited for the study. A sample of 785 children was included across the two years from these 98 classrooms (as cited in Early, 2007).

National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL 2005). NCEDL conducted two studies of state-funded pre-kindergarten: the Multi-State Study of Pre-Kindergarten and the Study of State-Wide Early Education Programs (SWEEP). Both studies sought to describe state-funded pre-kindergarten programs in states that had large, well-established programs. In each of eleven participating states, one classroom serving primarily 4-year-olds was randomly selected. Within

each classroom, four children who were old enough to attend kindergarten the following year were selected (as cited in Early, 2007).

Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (2005). This study examined the relationship between child-care experiences and characteristics and children's developmental outcomes. The participating children were a conditional random sample selected shortly after birth during hospital visits at 10 locations across the United States. The researchers collected data in whatever care and education setting the children attended (as cited in Early, 2007).

Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research (PCER) Program (2003). This program was designed to conduct small-scale assessments of the effectiveness of available preschool curricula that had not been rigorously evaluated. The PCER Program began in 2002 when the United States Department of Education awarded grants to seven researchers to implement several widely used preschool curricula. The Research Triangle Institute served as the national evaluation coordinator and conducted assessments using a common assessment protocol and a randomized experimental design. Participating schools or classrooms were randomly assigned to intervention or control conditions (as cited in Early, 2007).

The results of Early's study call into question previous research that has tended to associate higher levels of teacher education with better teaching and better outcomes for children (e.g., Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, & Howes, 2002; NICHD Early Childhood Research Network, 2000; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997, as cited in Hyson et al., 2009).

The findings indicate largely null or contradictory associations, indicating that

> policies focused solely on increasing teachers' education will not suffice for improving classroom quality or maximizing children's academic gains. Instead, raising the effectiveness of early childhood education likely will require a broad range of professional development activities and supports targeted toward teachers' interactions with children.

Hyson et al., (2009) noted that none of these studies examined quality in teacher education programs. According to the authors,

> It is unlikely that a degree from a low-quality program would result in excellent or perhaps even adequate teaching and, therefore, in significant benefits for children. For this reason, a productive step may be to examine the extent to which high quality may or may not be present in early childhood teacher education programs." (Hyson et al., 2009, para. 6)

Although there is agreement that early childhood teacher professional development should be of high quality, the nature of that quality has not been consistently defined. Frequently, high quality is described (1) in terms of teacher behaviors that are correlated with a positive impact on children's development and learning (e.g., when teachers provide specific and engaging feedback to children, children show improved social competence) (Wilson, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2007 as cited in Hyson et al., 2009) or (2) when such information is available, in terms of direct benefits to young children and their families (Hyson et al., 2009).

According to Hyson et al., (2009),

> Within the higher education system of teacher preparation, there has been a move away from so-called "input-based" criteria for quality (such as hours of

> seat time or course credits in specific content), toward output- or results-based criteria, such as knowledge or skills demonstrated by graduating students. (para.8)

Using Standards to Assess Quality in Teacher Preparation

Standards provide one approach to defining and assessing quality in teacher preparation. Katz (1985) stated that one of the major tasks for early childhood professionals "is to develop and articulate our perceptions of professional standards" (p. 17). Toward this end, Katz recommended enumerating and describing the standard predicaments that all early childhood educators confront in the course of their day-to-day work. She suggested comparing the responses of professionally trained teachers with the responses of untrained persons in order to highlight how professional judgment comes into play.

Not-for-profit organizations have established standards for members of the teaching profession and for teacher preparation programs. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission, the Council for Professional Recognition and the National Association for the Education of Young Children are among those organizations.

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is recognized by the U. S. Department of Education as the accrediting body for colleges and universities that prepare teachers and other professional specialists for work in elementary and secondary schools in the United States. According to the Council, the NCATE accreditation system is "a voluntary peer review process that involves a

comprehensive evaluation of the professional education unit (the school, college, department, or other administrative body that is primarily responsible for the preparation of teachers and other professional school personnel)" (NCATE, 2010). The review is based on the NCATE Unit Standards, a set of research-based national standards developed by all sectors of the teaching profession. The standards, as described on the organization's website, appear below.

> Standard 1: Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Dispositions
>
> Candidates preparing to work in schools as teachers or other school professionals know and demonstrate the content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and skills, pedagogical and professional knowledge and skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn. Assessments indicate that candidates meet professional, state, and institutional standards.
>
> Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation
>
> The unit has an assessment system that collects and analyzes data on applicant qualifications, candidate and graduate performance, and unit operations to evaluate and improve the performance of candidates, the unit, and its programs.
>
> Standard 3: Field Experiences and Clinical Practice
>
> The unit and its school partners design, implement, and evaluate field experiences and clinical practice so that teacher candidates and other school professionals develop and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn.

Standard 4: Diversity

The unit designs, implements, and evaluates curriculum and provides experiences for candidates to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn. Assessments indicate that candidates can demonstrate and apply proficiencies related to diversity. Experiences provided for candidates include working with diverse populations, including higher education and P–12 school faculty, candidates, and students in P–12 schools.

Standard 5: Faculty Qualifications, Performance, and Development

Faculty are qualified and model best professional practices in scholarship, service, and teaching, including the assessment of their own effectiveness as related to candidate performance. They also collaborate with colleagues in the disciplines and schools. The unit systematically evaluates faculty performance and facilitates professional development.

Standard 6: Unit Governance and Resources

The unit has the leadership, authority, budget, personnel, facilities, and resources, including information technology resources, for the preparation of candidates to meet professional, state, and institutional standards. (NCATE, 2010)

Using the NCATE unit standards, a group of examiners, known as the Board of Examiners (BOE), conducts an on-site visit and evaluates the unit's capacity to effectively deliver its programs. The professional education unit seeking accreditation must include in its review all programs in the institution for the initial and advanced

preparation of teachers and other professional education personnel to work in preschool through 12th-grade settings.

The North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission

The Mission of the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission is to ensure that every student in the North Carolina Public Schools will have a knowledgeable, skilled, compassionate teacher. In order to achieve this goal, the Commission has established rigorous standards for all teaching professionals in the state of North Carolina. These standards are the basis for teacher preparation, teacher evaluation, and professional development in the state of North Carolina. According to the Commission website, "Colleges and universities are changing their programs; a new teacher evaluation instrument is being created; and professional development is taking on a new look based on these Standards" (NCPTSC, 2010, para. 2). The five standards and their key elements, as described on the organization's website, appear below.

Standard 1: Teachers Demonstrate Leadership

Key element a: Teachers lead in their classrooms. This key element involves: taking responsibility for all students' learning; communicating vision to students; using data to organize, plan and set goals; using a variety of assessment data throughout the year to evaluate progress; establishing a safe and orderly environment; empowering students (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 1 section, para. 1).

Key element b: Teachers demonstrate leadership in the school. This key element involves: working collaboratively with all school personnel to create

a professional learning community; analyzing data; developing goals and strategies through the school improvement plan; assisting in determining the school budget and professional development; participating in the hiring process; collaborating with colleagues to mentor and support teachers to improve effectiveness (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 1 section, para. 2).

Key element c: Teachers lead the teaching profession. This key element involves: striving to improve the profession; contributing to the establishment of positive working conditions; participating in decision-making structures; promoting professional growth (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 1 section, para. 3).

Key element d: Teachers advocate for schools and students. This key element involves: advocating for positive change in policies and practices affecting student learning; participating in the implementation of initiatives to improve education (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 1 section, para. 4).

Key element e: Teachers demonstrate high ethical standards. This key element involves: demonstrating ethical principles; upholding the Code of Ethics and Standards for Professional Conduct (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 1 section, para. 5).

Standard 2: Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students

Key element a: Teachers provide an environment in which each child has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults. This key element involves encouraging an environment that is inviting, respectful, supportive, inclusive and flexible (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 2 section, para. 1).

Key element b: Teachers embrace diversity in the school community and in the world. This key element involves: demonstrating knowledge of diverse cultures; select materials and developing lessons that counteract stereotypes and incorporate contributions; recognizing the influences on a child's development, personality and performance; considering and incorporating different points of view (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 2 section, para. 2).

Key element c: Teachers treat students as individuals. This key element involves: maintaining high expectations for all students; appreciating differences and value contributions by building positive, appropriate relationships (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 2 section, para. 3).

Key element d: Teachers adapt their teaching for the benefit of students with special needs. This key element involves: collaborating with specialists; engaging students and ensuring they meet the needs of their students through inclusion and other models of effective practice (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 2 section, para. 4).

Key element e: Teachers work collaboratively with the families and significant adults in the lives of their students. This key element involves: improving communication and collaboration between the school and the home and community; promoting trust and understanding and building partnerships with the school community; seeking solutions to overcome obstacles that prevent family and community involvement (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 2 section, para. 5).

Standard 3: Teachers Know the Content They Teach

Key element a: Teachers align their instruction with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. This key element involves: teaching the North Carolina Standard Course of Study; developing and applying strategies to make the curriculum rigorous and relevant; developing literacy skills appropriate to their specialty area (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 3 section, para. 1).

Key element b: Teachers know the content appropriate to their teaching specialty. This key element involves: knowing the subject beyond the content they teach; directing students' curiosity into an interest in learning (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 3 section, para. 2).

Key element c: Teachers recognize the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines. This key element involves: knowing links between grade/subject and the North Carolina Standard Course of Study; relating content to other disciplines; promoting global awareness and its relevance (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 3 section, para. 3).

Key element d: Teachers make instruction relevant to students. This key element involves: incorporating life skills which include leadership, ethics, accountability, adaptability, personal productivity, personal responsibility, people skills, self-direction and social responsibility; demonstrating the relationship between the core content and 21st Century content that includes global awareness, health and wellness awareness, civic literacy, and financial,

economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 3 section, para. 4).

Standard 4: Teachers Facilitate Learning for their Students

Key element a: Teachers know the ways in which learning takes place, and they know the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students. This key element involves: knowing how students think and learn; understanding the influences on student learning; differentiating instruction; keep abreast of evolving research; adapt resources to address the strengths and weaknesses of students (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 4 section, para. 1).

Key element b: Teachers plan instruction appropriate for their students. This key element involves: collaborating with colleagues; use data for short and long range planning; engage students in the learning process; monitoring and modifying plans to enhance student learning; responding to the cultural diversity and learning needs of students (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 4 section, para. 2).

Key element c: Teachers use a variety of instructional methods. This key element involves: choosing methods and materials as they strive to eliminate achievement gaps; employing a wide range of techniques using information and communication technology, learning styles, and differentiated instruction students (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 4 section, para. 3).

Key element d: Teachers integrate and utilize technology in their instruction. This key element involves: knowing the appropriate use of technology;

helping students use technology to learn content, think critically, solve problems, discern reliability, use information, communicate, innovate, and collaborate students (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 4 section, para. 4).

Key element e: Teachers help students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This key element involves: encouraging students to ask questions, think creatively, develop and test innovative ideas, synthesize knowledge and draw conclusions; helping students exercise and communicate sound reasoning, understand connections, make complex choices, and frame, analyze, and solve problems students (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 4 section, para. 5).

Key element f: Teachers help students work in teams and develop leadership qualities. This key element involves: teaching the importance of cooperation and collaboration; organizing learning teams in order to help students define roles, strengthen social ties, improve communication and collaborative skills, interact with people from different cultures and backgrounds, and develop leadership qualities students (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 4 section, para. 6).

Key element g: Teachers communicate effectively. This key element involves: communicating clearly with students in a variety of ways; assisting students in articulating thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively students (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 4 section, para. 7).

Key element h: Teachers use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned. This key element involves: using multiple indicators, both formative and summative, to evaluate student progress; providing

opportunities for self-assessment; using assessment systems to inform instruction and demonstrate evidence of students' 21st Century knowledge, skills, performance, and dispositions students (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 4 section, para. 8).

Standard 5: Teachers Reflect on their Practice

Key element a: Teachers analyze student learning. This key element involves: thinking systematically and critically about learning in their classroom: collecting and analyzing student performance data to improve effectiveness students (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 5 section, para. 1).

Key element b: Teachers link professional growth to their professional goals. This key element involves participating in continued, high quality professional development students (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 5 section, para. 2).

Key element c: Teachers function effectively in a complex, dynamic environment. This key element involves actively investigating and considering new ideas that improve teaching and learning; adapting practice based on data (NCPTSC, 2010, Standard 5 section, para. 3).

The Council for Professional Recognition

The mission of the Council for Professional Recognition is to promote the improved performance and recognition of professionals in early childhood care and education (Council for Professional Recognition, 2010). Consistent with its goal of meeting the growing need for qualified child care staff, the Council administers the Child Development Associate (CDA) National Credentialing Program. The CDA Program is designed to assess and credential early childhood professionals based on

performance. More than 200,000 caregivers have obtained the CDA Credential since its inception in 1975. Nearly 15,000 child care providers apply for the CDA Credential annually. Forty-nine states and the District of Columbia incorporate the Credential into their child care center licensing regulations (Council for Professional Recognition, 2010).

The Council established Competency Standards to evaluate caregivers' performance with children and families during the CDA assessment process. The Competency Standards are divided into the following six Competency Goals.

Goal I. To establish and maintain a safe, healthy learning environment

Goal II. To advance physical and intellectual competence

Goal III. To support social and emotional development and to provide positive guidance

Goal IV. To establish positive and productive relationships with families

Goal V. To ensure a well-run, purposeful program responsive to participant needs

Goal VI. To maintain a commitment to professionalism (Council for Professional Recognition, 2010).

Candidates for CDA assessment must be 18 years of age or older, hold a high school diploma or GED, have 480 hours of experience working with children within the past five years and have 120 clock hours of formal child care education within the past five years. Candidates must also provide evidence of their competence from the following three sources:

1. The Professional Resource File, a collection of reference materials related to the candidate's work.
2. The Parent Opinion Questionnaires, which provide feedback from parents with children in the candidate's classroom or family child care home.
3. The CDA Assessment Observation Instrument, used to guide and document observation ratings of the candidate's skills while working with children as lead teacher (Council for Professional Recognition, 2010).

Additionally, candidates must attend a Verification Visit led by a Council representative. During the visit the representative reviews the candidate's professional resource file, administers a two-hour, multiple choice examination taken by the candidate, and conducts an oral interview to evaluate the candidate's skills and knowledge. A council committee subsequently reviews the candidate's documentation and renders a decision whether to award the credential.

NAEYC Professional Preparation Standards

According to Hyson et al., (2009), "The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards for early childhood professional preparation . . . are the only national standards for programs that prepare early childhood educators."

> In effect, these standards define high-quality professional preparation in terms of sets of competencies that well-prepared graduates should possess. As defined in the five NAEYC standards and detailed in their key elements, high-quality programs produce students who have knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions within each of five areas: Standard - knowing how

> young children develop and learn (e.g., being able to create environments in which all children thrive); Standard 2 - building family and community relationships (e.g., developing respectful, reciprocal relationships with families); Standard 3 - using assessment responsibly (e.g., knowing about observation and documentation); Standard 4 - teaching to promote children's learning (e.g., making evidence-based decisions about curriculum, using a range of appropriate, effective teaching practices, having essential content knowledge in areas such as literacy and math); and Standard 5 - becoming a professional in the early childhood field (e.g., being able to advocate for children, using ethical guidelines). (Hyson et al., 2009, para. 9)

The NAEYC Associate Standards are part of a larger history of standards-setting efforts by NAEYC. NAEYC began developing guidelines for higher education programs preparing early childhood professionals in 1980. Those guidelines, for programs preparing future early childhood teachers at the baccalaureate or initial master's degree level in NCATE-affiliated institutions, were first approved in 1982. Guidelines for advanced master's/doctoral degree programs and for associate degree programs were first developed and approved in 1988. The guidelines were last revised and approved in 1994. In 1999 NAEYC began revision of the 1994 guidelines for the initial licensure level, and later for the advanced level. A major goal of the revisions was to create more fully performance-based standards that would place less focus on courses and credit hours and more focus on "outputs" - evidence that students had mastered the competencies reflected in the standards. NAEYC's new Initial Licensure Standards were approved by NCATE in 2001. By

Spring 2003, all four- or five-year early childhood teacher education programs seeking NCATE accreditation had to provide NAEYC with documentation to show they were in compliance with those 2001 Initial Licensure Standards. NCATE approved NAEYC's new Advanced Standards in 2002. All advanced master's and doctoral early childhood professional preparation programs seeking NCATE accreditation had to comply with those 2002 Advanced Standards by spring 2004. Revision of the 1994 Guidelines for associate degree programs began in 2002, and NAEYC's Governing Board approved the revised standards in July 2003 (NAEYC, 2003).

Perceptions of Teachers

The present study examined the perceptions of students and graduates of the quality of their early childhood education program according to NAEYC professional preparation standards. A similar study, conducted at the University of North Carolina Charlotte to provide insight into graduates' perceptions of the quality of the university's teacher preparation programs, served as a model for the present study and is described below. A review of the research on the relationship between teacher beliefs and teacher practices supported the assumption of a basic congruence between early childhood teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices.

Graduates' Perceptions of their Level of Preparation as Defined by the North Carolina Professional Teacher Standards

In the spring of 2009 the University of North Carolina Charlotte (UNCC) College of Education (COED) conducted a survey of recent graduates to learn about the level of teacher preparation and the quality of the programs offered in the

university's teacher licensure programs. This survey was designed to assess the graduates' perceptions of their level of preparation as defined by the North Carolina Professional Teacher Standards. The research team was comprised of five doctoral students, including the researcher for the present study, enrolled in the Survey Research course RSCH 8112. Under the guidance of their instructor and the college's assessment coordinator, the students designed and disseminated a web-based survey. Questions from a previously administered UNCC Initial Licensure Graduate Survey and the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards (NCPTS) were used to design questions for the 2009 survey. The final instrument consisted of 44 items: 25 multiple-choice items relating to the NCPTS and how well the graduates had been prepared to teach; twelve items relating to student demographics, licensure specifics and employment information; and seven open-ended items. The participants were 96 COED graduates in 2006 and 2007 who had completed one of several licensure programs.

One of the open-ended items asked graduates to identify the areas, concepts or skills in which they felt best prepared. Several recurring themes surfaced upon review of the responses. Respondents perceived that they were adequately prepared to plan instruction and align said instruction with the needs of their students through differentiation. With regard to content knowledge and pedagogy specific to multiple core subjects, assessment planning, integration and knowledge of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, respondents also perceived themselves as prepared. The ability to deal effectively with diversity was a recurring theme, as was collaboration and the ability to work well with others. Yet another recurring theme was the ability

to communicate effectively with key stakeholders. Finally, respondents perceived that they were prepared to deal with the demands of technology.

Another open-ended item asked graduates to identify the areas, concepts or skills they felt needed greater emphasis. Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated that the topic, classroom management, required greater emphasis. A second theme was how to communicate effectively with parents. A third theme was how to handle the politics found in schools, including interacting with the principal and relationships with colleagues. Respondents also felt that the topics, time management and organizational skills, should have greater emphasis. Still others felt that dealing with diverse learners, from children with exceptionalities to English Language Learners and students of poverty, deserved greater emphasis. Contrary to those who felt they were best prepared to deal with technology, an equal number of respondents felt that they needed greater emphasis on technology.

Relationship between Teacher Beliefs and Teacher Practices

Smith (1992) reviewed the literature on teacher beliefs and concluded that, while more research in this area was needed in general (Pajares, 1992, as cited in Smith, 1992, p. 3), "earlier work in early education settings does provide some guidance about the utility of measuring teacher beliefs. In general, the attitudes and values held by teachers of young children appear to be related to teacher effectiveness" (Feeney & Chun, 1985; Spodek, 1987, as cited in Smith, 1992, p. 3)."

According to Spodek (1988b), the implicit theories that teachers hold are the foundation of professional behavior. Sodek "stressed the importance of understanding the perceptions, constructs and beliefs that underlie teacher

effectiveness in the classroom" and "argued that teachers construct their own conceptions of development, curriculum and instruction and they interpret their practical and theoretical knowledge, and as they act to integrate these constructions into their practice" (as cited in Smith, 1992, p. 3).

According to Smith, researchers have found incongruencies between teacher beliefs and teacher practices in early childhood education. Verma and Peters (1975) "found a discrepancy between day care teacher reports about their beliefs and their observed classroom practices. While beliefs were more developmental than behavioral, practices were more behavioral than developmental" (as cited in Smith, 1992, p. 4). March and Feema (1988) "also found such discrepancies between beliefs and practices in their study of kindergarten teachers, elementary principals and supervisors" (as cited in Smith, 1992, p. 4). However, Wing (1989), "in examining the congruence between the beliefs and practices of preschool teachers, found a basic agreement in settings where teachers had a clear and systematic set of theoretical principles and had support for putting their principles into action" (as cited in Smith, 1992, p. 4). Smith and Shepard (1988), "in their examination of the relationship between kindergarten teachers' beliefs about and practices concerning kindergarten readiness and retention in grade, again found basic agreement" (as cited in Smith, 1992, p. 4). Spidell (1988) "looked at preschool teachers' beliefs about play and found their actions related to their beliefs" (as cited in Smith, 1992, p. 4). In addition, Kagan and Smith (1985) "found kindergarten teachers' self reports about beliefs and behaviors to be strongly consistent with their observed practices" (as cited in Smith, 1992, p. 4). Charlesworth et al. (1990) "also found support for a consistency

between kindergarten teachers' beliefs and their instructional activities" (as cited in Smith, 1992, p. 4).

Smith (1992) stated that, while the evidence was somewhat mixed, "the preponderance supports the assumption of a basic congruence between early childhood teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices" (p. 4).

This congruence, the lack of a student perceptions scale based on the NAEYC professional preparation standards, and the focus of research on the professional development of teachers, indicated that the development of an instrument to assess the perceptions of students and graduates of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standards would be worthwhile.

Summary

The present chapter presented a review of the literature and research to provide a background for this study, with emphasis on the professionalization of early childhood education and professional competencies in early childhood education. The need for professional qualifications in early childhood education was examined, as were definitions of quality in early childhood teacher education preparation. One approach to defining and assessing quality in early childhood teacher preparation, standards, was considered. The history of NAEYC professional preparations standards for associate degree students was discussed. A review of the research on the relationship between teacher beliefs and teacher practices was presented to establish the significance of the present study.

Chapter 3 describes the method and procedures that were used to gather data for the study. This chapter provides an overview of the method applied to test the research questions and to reach conclusions.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This chapter describes the methods and procedures that guided this study. The chapter includes the following sections: (a) research questions, (b) statement of hypotheses, (c) population and sample, (d) instrument, (e) pilot study, (f) data collection, (g) research design and data analysis and (h) summary.

The purpose of this study was twofold. The first purpose was to evaluate the extent to which one community college was preparing its early childhood education students for employment in the field according to NAEYC professional preparation standards, based on the perceptions of program graduates and majors enrolled in at least one Early Childhood Education course during the fall 2009 and spring 2010 semester. The second purpose of the study was to develop a valid and reliable instrument that could be used by other early childhood education programs to examine students' and graduates perceptions of program quality related to NAEYC standards.

Research Questions

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to investigate the research questions. The following research questions were addressed using quantitative methods:

1. What are students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 1, Promoting Child Development and Learning?

2. What are students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 2, Building Family and Community Relationships?
3. What are students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 3, Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families?
4. What are early childhood professionals' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 4, Teaching and Learning?
5. What are students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 5, Becoming a Professional?
6. What differences exist in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standards based on the following demographics: ethnic background, place of employment, position, the children respondents work with, and the quality of respondents' place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status?

The following research questions were addressed using quantitative methods:

1. What do students/graduates perceive to be the most beneficial aspects of the program?
2. In which aspects of the program do students/graduates perceive a need for additional or better preparation?

Statement of Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were developed to address the quantitative research questions.

1. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' ethnic background and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 1.
2. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' ethnic background and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 2.
3. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' ethnic background and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 3.
4. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' ethnic background and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 4.
5. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' ethnic background and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 5.
6. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' place of employment and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 1.

7. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' place of employment and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 2.
8. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' place of employment and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 3.
9. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' place of employment and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 4.
10. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' place of employment and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 5.
11. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' current position and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 1.
12. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' current position and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 2.
13. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' current position and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 3.

14. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' current position and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 4.
15. There is no relationship between students'/graduates' current position and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 5.
16. There is no relationship between the children that students'/graduates' work with and the students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 1.
17. There is no relationship between the children that students'/graduates' work with and the students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 2.
18. There is no relationship between the children that students'/graduates' work with and the students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 3.
19. There is no relationship between the children that students'/graduates' work with and the students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 4.
20. There is no relationship between the children that students'/graduates' work with and the students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 5.
21. There is no relationship between the quality of students'/graduates' place of employment, as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC

accreditation status, and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 1.

22. There is no relationship between the quality of students'/graduates' place of employment, as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status, and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 2.
23. There is no relationship between the quality of students'/graduates' place of employment, as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status, and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 3.
24. There is no relationship between the quality of students'/graduates' place of employment, as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status, and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 4.
25. There is no relationship between the quality of students'/graduates' place of employment, as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status, and their perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 5.

Population and Sample

The institution under study was a community college located in a metropolitan area in the southeastern United States. The institution's mission was to advance the life-long educational development of students consistent with their needs, interests and abilities while strengthening the economic, social and cultural life of its diverse

community. The college provided pre-baccalaureate and career-focused educational programs and services on six campuses located throughout the region. The college also had a comprehensive distance education program, offering more than 250 classes online each semester.

The mission of the early childhood education program under study was to prepare individuals to implement developmentally appropriate practices that facilitate the optimal development of children in a variety of settings, including family child care homes, child development centers, Head Start programs and after school enrichment programs. The program offered an associate in applied science degree and four certificates. The associate in applied science program required 75 semester credit hours; 55 semester credit hours of major course work and 20 semester credit hours of general education course work. The college had an articulation agreement with a local four-year institution which allowed students to transfer to the four-year college upon completion of the A.A.S. degree in Early Childhood Education and additional course work. During the fall 2009 semester, approximately 1,100 students were enrolled in early childhood courses at the institution under study (C. Sargeant, personal communication, October 30, 2010).

The program under study served a diverse group of students. According to the institution's Office of Planning and Research, of the 1,155 students enrolled in early childhood education courses in 2009-2010, 754 were Black, Non-Hispanic; 300 were White, Non-Hispanic; 46 were Hispanic; and 55 were Other/Unknown/Multiple, Asian/Pacific Islander or American Indian/Alaskan. Seven hundred seventy-seven students were enrolled in the associate degree program part-time, 213 were enrolled

full-time; 141 students were enrolled in one of the program's four certificate programs part-time, 24 were enrolled full-time (P. Earls, personal communication, October 4, 2010). According to the program's 2010 Annual Program Review, the vast majority of the students were female. Nearly 50% of the students were between the ages of 30 and 50. Fourteen percent of the students were age 51 or older. Many of the program's students were non-traditional students who had had a long gap between high school graduation and re-entering academia. More than 50% of the students required developmental (remedial) courses in Math, English and Reading (C. Sargeant, personal communication, January 2, 2011). Table 1 shows enrollment and graduation data for the early childhood program under study.

Table 1

Early Childhood Program Enrollment and Graduation Data

Program Enrollments													
Program Code and Program	1997 1998	1998 1999	1999 2000	2000 2001	2001 2002	2002 2003	2003 2004	2004 2005	2005 2006	2006 2007	2007 2008	2008 2009	2009 2010
A55220 early childhood	212	270	301	305	307	301	412	500	617	802	838	907	1001
C55220 early childhood			12	13	28	23	28	42	35	133	170	189	176
C55290 infant toddler care												10	11
C55290 infant toddler care													
Program Graduates													
A55220 early childhood	10	13	10	13	9	17	15	18	19	12	25	20	33
C55220 early childhood			7	10	12	2	8	8	10	35	47	29	11
C55290 infant toddler care											27	15	5

The target population for the study consisted of graduates of the early childhood education associate degree program and program majors enrolled in at least one Early Childhood Education course during the fall 2009 and spring 2010 semester. The following section describes the characteristics of the target population and sample.

Ethnic Background

As shown in Table 2, according to 2009-2010 enrollments, 26% of the students in the early childhood program under study were White, Non-Hispanic; 65% were Black or African-American, Non-Hispanic; 2% were Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander; 4% were Hispanic, Latino Spanish; 3% were Other. Twenty-nine percent of survey respondents were White, Non-Hispanic; 68% were Black or African American, Non-Hispanic; 1% were Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander; 1% were Hispanic, Latino, Spanish; 1% were Other.

Table 2

Comparison of Early Childhood Program Students' Ethnic Background and Survey Respondents' Ethnic Background

Ethnicity	Survey	Percentage	2009-2010 Enrollments	Percentage
White, Non-Hispanic	35	29	300	26
Black or African American, Non-Hispanic	81	68	754	65
Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander	1	1	20	2
Hispanic, Latino, Spanish	1	1	46	4
Other (Please specify)	1	1	35	3
Total	119		1155	

Status in the Early Childhood Education Program

As shown in Table 3, according to 2009-2010 enrollments, 990 students (86%) in the early childhood education program under study were enrolled in the

associate degree program; 165 students (14%) in the early childhood education program under study were enrolled in a certificate program.

Table 3

Early Childhood Unduplicated Headcount, 2009-2010

	FTPT		
Program	Full-Time	Part-Time	Total
A55220	213	777	990
C55220C1	9	51	60
C55220C2	4	41	45
C55220C3	8	41	49
C55290	3	8	11
All	237	918	1155

* A55220 indicates Early Childhood Education associate degree student
* C552 indicates Early Childhood Education certificate student

As shown in Tables 4-9, 17 respondents (13.4%) were graduates of the early childhood education associate degree program under study; 91 respondents (71.7%) were students in the early childhood education associate degree program; 24 respondents (18.9%) were graduates of an early childhood certificate program; 9 respondents (7.1%) were students in an early childhood certificate program; 9 respondents (7.1%) were taking classes in the early childhood education program but were not pursuing a degree or certificate. Table 11 provides a comparison between the population and the sample based on status in the early childhood program.

Table 4

Associate Degree Program Graduate, Sample Data

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	110	86.6	86.6
Yes	17	13.4	100.0
Total	127	100.0	

Table 5

Associate Degree Program Student, Sample Data

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	36	28.3	28.3
Yes	91	71.7	100.0
Total	127	100.0	

Table 6

Certificate Program Graduate, Sample Data

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	103	81.1	81.1
Yes	24	18.9	100.0
Total	127	100.0	

Table 7

Certificate Program Student, Sample Data

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	118	92.9	92.9
Yes	9	7.1	100.0
Total	127	100.0	

Table 8

Taking Classes in the Early Childhood Program but Not Pursuing a Degree or Certificate, Sample Data

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	118	92.9	92.9
Yes	9	7.1	100.0
Total	127	100.0	

Table 9

Population and Sample Comparison, Status in Early Childhood Program

	Associate Degree Graduate	Associate Degree Graduate Percentage	Associate Degree Student	Associate Degree Student Percentage	Certificate Graduate	Certificate Graduate Percentage	Certificate Student	Certificate Student Percentage	Total
Population	33	3	1001	87	16	1	187	16	1155
Sample	17	13	91	72	24	19	9	7	127

Number of Credits Completed

As shown in Table 10, 52.3% of respondents who indicated that they were students in the early childhood education program under study stated that they had completed 50 or more credits in the program; 47.7% indicated that they had completed fewer than 50 credits.

Table 10

Credit Hours Completed, Sample Data

	Frequency	Percent	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Fewer than 50 credits	52	40.9	47.7	47.7
50 credits or more	57	44.9	52.3	100.0
Total	109	85.8	100.0	

A member of the early childhood program's Accreditation Committee approached the researcher during the summer of 2009 to request that he design a study to investigate the perceptions of the program's students of the quality of the program. The researcher completed the institution's Research Proposal Form and Survey Request Form and submitted them to the college's office of planning and research in November of 2009. The institution's Vice President for Learning approved the researcher's proposal in December of 2009. The researcher contacted the Chair of early childhood education program in the fall of 2009. The program's faculty voted to support the study in the fall of 2009. The program's dean declared his support for the study in January of 2010. The researcher obtained approval from the National Association for the Education of Young Children to reference its professional preparation standards in February of 2010. The researcher received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the Office of Research Compliance

Research & Federal Relations at the University of North Carolina Charlotte on May 27, 2010. A copy of the IRB approval email is found in Appendix C.

Instrument

The researcher developed a survey to examine students' and graduates perceptions of program quality related to NAEYC standards. The survey consisted of three parts: (1) information about graduates'/students' status in the early childhood program under study, (2) graduates'/students' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standards and open-ended questions, and (3) graduates'/students' demographic information. A copy of the instrument is found in Appendix A.

The second part of the survey employed nineteen items and was designed to obtain graduates'/students' perceptions of the extent to which the institution under study was preparing its early childhood education students for employment in the field according to NAEYC professional preparation standards. NAEYC's five standards for professional preparation, a description of each standard and the key elements for each standard are described below.

NAEYC standard 1, Promoting Child Development and Learning, employed three items that asked respondents about perceptions of their ability to apply their understanding of young children's characteristics and needs, and of multiple interacting influences on children's development and learning, to create environments that are healthy, respectful, supportive and challenging for all children. Specifically, respondents evaluated their proficiency related to the three key elements of NAEYC standard 1: (1) knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and

needs; (2) knowing and understanding the multiple influences on development and learning; (3) using developmental knowledge to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments (NAEYC, 2003, pp. 12-13). Respondents completed a five-point Likert scale with the following response options: unprepared, minimally prepared, prepared, well prepared, very well prepared.

NAEYC standard 2, Building Family and Community Relationships, employed three items that asked respondents about perceptions of their understanding of the complex characteristics of children's families and communities and their ability to use this understanding to create respectful, reciprocal the relationships that support and empower families, and to involve all families in their children's development and learning. Specifically, respondents evaluated their proficiency related to the three key elements of NAEYC standard 2: (1) knowing about and understanding family and community characteristics; (2) supporting and empowering families and communities through respectful, reciprocal relationships; (3) involving families and communities in their children's development and learning (NAEYC, 2003, p. 14). Respondents completed a five-point Likert scale with the following response options: unprepared, minimally prepared, prepared, well prepared, very well prepared.

NAEYC standard 3, Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families, employed four items that ask respondents about perceptions of their understanding of the goals, benefits and uses of assessment as well as their ability to use systematic observations, documentation and other effective assessment strategies in a responsible way, in partnership with families and other professionals, to positively influence children's development. Specifically,

respondents evaluated their proficiency related to the four key elements of NAEYC standard 3: (1) understanding the goals, benefits and uses of assessment; (2) knowing about and using observation, documentation and other appropriate assessment tools and approaches; (3) understanding and practicing responsible assessment; (4) knowing about assessment partnerships with families and other professionals (NAEYC, 2003, pp. 15-16). Respondents completed a five-point Likert scale with the following response options: unprepared, minimally prepared, prepared, well prepared, very well prepared.

NAEYC standard 4, Teaching and Learning, employed four items that asked respondents about perceptions of their ability to integrate their understanding of and relationship with children and families, their understanding of developmentally effective approaches to teaching and learning, and their knowledge of academic disciplines to design, implement and evaluate experiences that promote positive development and learning for all young children. Specifically, respondents evaluated their proficiency related to the four key elements of NAEYC standard 4: (1) connecting with children and families (knowing, understanding and using positive relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation for their work with young children); (2) using developmentally effective approaches (knowing, understanding and using a wide array of effective approaches, strategies and tools to positively influence children's development and learning); (3) understanding content knowledge in early education (understanding the importance of each content area in young children's learning); (4) building meaningful curriculum (using their own knowledge and other resources to design, implement and evaluate meaningful, challenging

curriculum that promotes comprehensive developmental and learning outcomes for all young children (NAEYC, 2003, pp. 17-18). Respondents completed a five-point Likert scale with the following response options: unprepared, minimally prepared, prepared, well prepared, very well prepared.

NAEYC standard 5, Becoming a Professional, employed five items that asked respondents about perceptions of their identification with the early childhood profession; their use of ethical guidelines and other professional standards related to early childhood practice and their ability to make informed decisions that integrate knowledge from a variety of sources and their service as advocates for sound educational practices and policies. Specifically, respondents evaluated their proficiency related to the five key elements of NAEYC standard 5: (1) identifying and involving oneself with the early childhood field; (2) knowing about and upholding ethical standards and other professional guidelines; (3) engaging in continuous, collaborative learning to inform practice; (4) Integrating knowledgeable, reflective and critical perspectives on early education; (5) Engaging in informed advocacy for children and the profession (NAEYC, 2003, pp. 19-20). Respondents completed a five-point Likert scale with the following response options: unprepared, minimally prepared, prepared, well prepared, very well prepared.

The questions were developed by the researcher with input from the college's Early Childhood Education faculty and Office of Planning and Research. Links were embedded into the questions that enabled the respondents to access additional information about the standards.

The second part of the survey also contained two open-ended items. These items provided respondents an opportunity to elaborate on certain aspects of their preparation. The researcher employed the four principles identified by Yin (2003) for conducing social science research to analyze the responses to the open-ended items.

The third part of the survey contained items pertaining to graduates'/students' demographic information, including factors that may have indicated differential group perceptions. The demographic variables applied in the study included: ethnic background, place of employment, position, the children respondents work with, the quality of respondents' place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status.

The complete survey consisted of twenty-nine items. The estimated time of completion for participants was approximately 15 minutes.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher took measures to guard against bias in recording, processing and reporting results. He attempted to reduce instrumentation bias and error by making obvious the criteria by which respondents were to respond to each question. All questions were brief and applicable to all respondents. The researcher attempted to eliminate over-demanding recall bias by asking participants about their current perceptions. No leading or loaded questions were employed. The researcher attempted to reduce sampling error by omitting survey items that used unfamiliar (to respondents) terms (so that respondents wouldn't guess at meaning). Links were embedded into the questions to enable the respondents to access clarifying information about the standards.

The second part of the survey employed nineteen items and was designed to obtain graduates'/students' perceptions of the extent to which the institution under study was preparing its early childhood education students for employment in the field according to NAEYC professional preparation standards. The items stated the key elements of each of the standards as articulated by NAEYC and were not the researcher's interpretations of the standards. Links were embedded into the questions that enabled the respondents to access additional information about the standards. The additional information was taken directly from NAEYC's supporting explanations for each of the standards; it was not the researcher's elaborations.

The researcher established the face validity of the instrument. To determine whether survey items 1-19 in the second part of the survey measure NAEYC Standards, the researcher asked two Early Childhood faculty members to independently examine items 1-19 and to sort those items into two piles: Pile One, items that measure NAEYC standards and Pile Two, items that don't measure NAEYC standards. Both faculty members independently indicated that all items measured the NAEYC standards. The percentage of agreement was 100.

The researcher established the content validity of the instrument. To determine what about the NAEYC Standards each item measured, the researcher asked two faculty members from the Early Childhood program to independently examine all nineteen key elements of the NAEYC Standards. The faculty members were then asked to match each of the nineteen survey items with their corresponding standards. Both faculty members associated the individual survey items with their corresponding standards with 100% agreement.

Pilot Study

The early childhood faculty provided feedback on the survey to the researcher in January of 2010. In February 2010, the researcher collaborated with a faculty member from the early childhood program under study to conduct a pilot study. The faculty member identified and contacted on behalf of the researcher students from the program whose programs of study indicated that they were not enrolled in early childhood courses during the fall 2009 or spring 2010 semester. A total of thirteen students agreed to participate in the pilot study. All of the students were female.

The students were asked several questions about the format and relevance of the survey, and the time involved in completing it. Three students completed the survey within nine minutes of distribution. Three students completed the survey within twelve minutes of distribution. Seven students completed the survey within fifteen minutes of distribution. Twelve students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "the survey questions were easy to understand." One student responded "neutral" for this item. Twelve students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "the document, 'More Information about the Standards' was helpful in explaining the standards." One student responded "neutral" for this item. Eleven students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "the order of the questions made sense." Two students responded "neutral" for this item. Nine students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "the length of the survey was fine." Three students responded "neutral" for this item. One student responded "disagree" for this item. Based on the results of the pilot study, the researcher concluded that the format and length of the survey were satisfactory. Table 11 shows the results of the pilot study.

Table 11

Pilot Study Results

Statement	Frequency of "strongly agree" responses	Frequency of "agree" responses	Frequency of "neutral" responses	Frequency of "disagree" responses	Frequency of "strongly disagree" responses
The survey questions were easy to understand.	7	5	1	0	0
The document, "More Information about the Standards" was helpful in explaining the standards.	8	4	1	0	0
The order of the questions made sense.	5	6	2	0	0
The length of the survey was fine.	6	3	3	1	0

Note. N=13

Internal consistency measures estimate how consistently individuals respond to the items within a scale. The internal consistency reliability of each subscale was considered acceptable if Cronbach's alpha was greater than or equal to .70. Internal consistency reliability of all subscales was considered acceptable because all Cronbach's alpha values were greater than .70. Inter-item correlations for survey items comprising each scale were also examined. They varied from .48 to .90, which was deemed acceptable.

Data Collection

The survey was developed using Teleform, a web survey tool supported by the institution. Teleform is a web site with tools to design and conduct online surveys

hosted on secure servers. Each survey was given a unique web address (URL) where respondents could take the survey.

The institution's Office of Planning and Research provided the names and college email addresses of 938 program graduates and majors who were enrolled in at least one Early Childhood Education course during the fall 2009 and spring 2010 semester. A link to the survey was emailed to all 938 prospective participants. Thirty-five emails were returned to the researcher. Of the 903 selected, 127 completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 14%. No respondents refused to provide consent to participate in the study.

Sometimes, in survey sampling, individuals chosen for the sample are unwilling or unable to participate in the survey. Non-response bias is the bias that results when respondents differ in meaningful ways from non-respondents. Non-response is often a problem with mail surveys, where the response rate can be very low. The researcher understood that potentially many members of the target population would not be enrolled in classes during the dissemination period and would therefore not be checking their college email. He also understood that many of the program graduates targeted for participation in the study would never receive the emails. Once graduated from the program, students would have no reason to check their college email, and the college did not have a system for routinely updating graduates' email addresses.

Potential participants received between two and five emails. The investigator used Microsoft Office Mail Merge to personalize the emails. The first email was sent in early June and invited graduates/students to participate in the study. A copy of

this email is in Appendix B. The email notified graduates/students that: (1) the survey was being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral dissertation at UNC Charlotte and the name of the investigator; (2) their participation was voluntary and those who chose not to participate would not be penalized; (3) survey responses would be anonymous and confidential; (4) the type of survey data to be collected, (5) survey responses would be stored in a secure location with access limited to the investigator, (6) results would be reported in aggregate using unidentifiable information, and (7) a direct link to the online survey would be emailed to them in mid-June.

The second email was sent on June 10. This email announced activation of the survey and provided a direct link to the online survey. A maximum of two additional emails were sent to potential participants, on June 17 and June 24. The survey was closed on June 25. Most researchers support the use of reminder emails following the first invitation email to increase response rates (Shannon & Bradshaw, 2002). Also, the time between the reminder emails was kept short to increase the response rate (Archer, 2003).

Participants completed the online survey during a two-week administration period in mid-June. Once participants accessed the survey, simple but explicit instructions were provided for completing it. Graduates/students were able to access the survey 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, as long as they had Internet access. Responses were anonymous and confidential. Participants did not provide any personal identification data. At the end of the administration period, data was

downloaded and imported into the 16th edition of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis.

Research Design and Data Analysis

The survey instrument was designed to answer the research questions stated in Chapter 1. The 16th edition of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used for descriptive and statistical analysis of the data.

The perception of students/graduates of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 1, Promoting Child Development and Learning (Research Question One) was computed as a separate mean and standard deviation for each item.

The perception of students/graduates of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 2, Building Family and Community Relationships (Research Question Two) was computed as a separate mean and standard deviation for each item.

The perception of students/graduates of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 3, Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families (Research Question Three) was be computed as a separate mean and standard deviation for each item.

The perception of students/graduates of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 4, Teaching and Learning (Research Question Four) was computed as a separate mean and standard deviation for each item.

The perception of students/graduates of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 5, Becoming a Professional (Research Question Five) was computed as a separate mean and standard deviation for each item.

A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine what differences existed in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standards based on the demographics indicated below. For each, a one-way ANOVA was calculated where the independent variable was the demographic subgroup variable and the dependent variables were the scores for each NAECY Standard. The demographic subgroup variables are indicated below.

1. Ethnicity
    a. White, Non-Hispanic
    b. Black or African American, Non-Hispanic
    c. Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander
    d. Hispanic, Latino, Spanish
    e. Native American or American Indian
    f. Other (Please specify)
2. Current Place of Employment
    a. Child development center
    b. Family child care home
    c. Head Start program
    d. Program affiliated with a church or other religious institution
    e. Public elementary school
    f. Private elementary school

g. Not-for-profit agency serving children, youth or families

h. Not employed at this time

3. Position

    a. Lead teacher

    b. Teacher assistant

    c. Administrator

    d. Substitute teacher

    e. Floater

    f. Not employed

    g. Other (Please specify)

4. Children Served

    a. Infants (birth-12 months old)

    b. Toddlers (13-35 months)

    c. Preschoolers (3 years-5 years old, not in kindergarten)

    d. Kindergartners

    e. Children in grades 1-3

    f. Children of various ages

    g. Children with exceptionality

    h. NA

5. Quality of Current Place of Employment

    a. Not licensed by the State of North Carolina

    b. Licensed by the State of North Carolina, 1 star rating

    c. Licensed by the State of North Carolina, 2 star rating

d. Licensed by the State of North Carolina, 3 star rating

e. Licensed by the State of North Carolina, 4 star rating

f. Licensed by the State of North Carolina, 5 star rating

g. Accredited by NAEYC

The researcher employed a textual or content analysis approach to analyze the responses to the open-ended questions. The researcher employed the four principles identified by Yin (2003) for conducing social science research in their analysis of the responses to the open-ended items. Respondents' statements were clustered into themes independently by the researcher and a faculty member from the early childhood education program under study. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion by the coders. Table 3 provides a summary of the data analysis procedures employed in the study.

Table 12

Summary of Data Analysis Procedures

Research Question	Data Analysis Techniques
Question 1 What are early childhood students' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC Professional Preparation Standard 1, Promoting Child Development and Learning?	Descriptive statistics, Mean, Standard Deviation
Question 2 What are early childhood students' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC Professional Preparation Standard 2, Building Family and	Descriptive statistics, Mean, Standard Deviation

Community Relationships?	
Question 3 What are early childhood students' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC Professional Preparation Standard 3, Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families?	Descriptive statistics, Mean, Standard Deviation
Question 4 What are early childhood students' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC Professional Preparation Standard 4, Teaching and Learning?	Descriptive statistics, Mean, Standard Deviation
Question 5 What are early childhood students' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC Professional Preparation Standard 5, Becoming a Professional?	Descriptive statistics, Mean, Standard Deviation
Question 6 What differences exist in early childhood students' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC Professional Preparation Standards based on the following demographics: ethnic background, place of employment, position, children served, and the quality of students' place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status.	A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Question 7 What do students/graduates perceive to be the most beneficial aspects of their program?	Content Analysis
Question 8 In which aspects of their program do students/graduates perceive a need for additional or better preparation?	Content Analysis

Summary

The present chapter presented the methods and procedures that guided this research study. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the extent to which one community college was preparing its early childhood education students for employment in the field according to NAEYC professional preparation standards, based on the perceptions of program graduates and majors who were enrolled in at least one Early Childhood course during the fall 2009 and spring 2010 semester.

Chapter 4 will report the results of analyses and findings that emerged from the study. A statistical analysis of the data will be completed and tables will show findings related to the research questions. Chapter 5 will include a summary of the study and conclusions drawn from the data analysis, a discussion of the findings and their implications for practice, and recommendations for further study and research.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis and findings of the study. The primary purpose of the study was to evaluate the extent to which one community college was preparing its early childhood education students for employment in the field according to NAEYC professional preparation standards, based on the perceptions of program graduates and majors who were enrolled in at least one Early Childhood Education course during the fall 2009 or spring 2010 semester. Specifically, participants were asked to consider their preparation to meet each of NAEYC's professional preparation standards for associate degree students: NAEYC Standard 1, Promoting Child Development and Learning; NAEYC Standard 2, Building Family and Community Relationships; NAEYC Standard 3, Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families; NAEYC Standard 4, Teaching and Learning (e.g., making evidence-based decisions about curriculum, using a range of appropriate, effective teaching practices, having essential content knowledge in areas such as literacy and math); and NAEYC Standard 5 - Becoming a Professional (e.g., being able to advocate for children, using ethical guidelines). The study also investigated whether there were differences in students'/graduates' perceptions based on the following demographics: ethnic background, place of employment, position, children served and the quality of respondents' place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status. Additionally, the study investigated what

students/graduates perceived to be the most beneficial aspects of the program, and in which aspects of the program students/graduates perceived a need for additional or better preparation.

Survey Development and Pilot Study

The early childhood faculty provided feedback on the survey to the researcher in January of 2010. On February 11, 2010 the survey items were piloted by a group thirteen early childhood education students who were similar to, but not within, the target population for the survey. The students were asked several questions about the format and relevance of the survey, and the time involved in completing it. Three students completed the survey within nine minutes of distribution. Three students completed the survey within twelve minutes of distribution. Seven students completed the survey within fifteen minutes of distribution. Twelve students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "the survey questions were easy to understand." One student responded "neutral" for this item. Twelve students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "the document, 'More Information about the Standards' was helpful in explaining the standards." One student responded "neutral" for this item. Eleven students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "the order of the questions made sense." Two students responded "neutral" for this item. Nine students "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "the length of the survey was fine." Three students responded "neutral" for this item. One student responded "disagree" for this item.

Findings Related to the Research Questions

The findings are presented according to the research questions that guided the study. In this study, an alpha level of less than or equal to 0.05 was used in all of the

statistical analyses. In Part II of the survey, participants were asked to respond to a five point Likert scale with a "1" indicating "unprepared," a "2" indicating "minimally prepared," a "3" indicating "prepared," a "4" indicating "well prepared," and a "5" indicating "very well prepared." The following section describes the findings related to each of the six research questions. The researcher conducted a one-way ANOVA to compare the means of the demographic groups for each NAEYC Standard. Cronbach's alpha (1951) was used to estimate internal consistency. The widely-accepted social science cut-off is that alpha should be .70 or higher for a set of items to be considered reliable. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to .960.

Research Question 1

For research question 1, the survey asked for students'/graduates' perceptions in three categories (key indicators) of their knowledge of child development and learning. The mean and standard deviation were calculated to determine graduates'/students' perceptions for each key indicator of the standard. One hundred nineteen participants responded to these survey items. The overall composite mean for NAEYC Standard 1 was 4.1849 (SD=.75252), which fell into the "well prepared" category. Respondents perceived that they were well prepared to meet NAEYC Standard 1.

Research Question 2

For research question 2, the survey asked for students'/graduates' perceptions in three categories (key indicators) of their ability to build family and community relationships. The mean and standard deviation were calculated to determine graduates'/students' perceptions for each key indicator of the standard. One hundred

eighteen participants responded to this survey item. The overall composite mean for NAEYC Standard 2 was 4.1215 (SD=.86140), which fell into the "well prepared" category. Respondents perceived that they were well prepared to meet NAEYC Standard 2.

Research Question 3

For research question 3, the survey asked for students'/graduates' perceptions in four categories (key indicators) of their ability to observe, document and assess to support young children and families The mean and standard deviation were calculated to determine graduates'/students' perceptions for each key indicator of the standard. One hundred nineteen participants responded to these survey items. The overall composite mean for NAEYC Standard 3 was 4.0812 (SD=.88674), which fell into the "well prepared" category. Respondents perceived that they were well prepared to meet NAEYC Standard 3.

Research Question 4

For research question 4, the survey asked for students'/graduates' perceptions in four categories (key indicators) of their ability to teach to promote children's learning. The mean and standard deviation were calculated to determine graduates'/students' perceptions for each key indicator of the standard. One hundred nineteen participants responded to these survey items. The overall composite mean for NAEYC Standard 4 was 4.0987 (SD=.82930), which fell into the "well prepared" category. Respondents perceived that they were well prepared to meet NAEYC Standard 4.

Research Question 5

For research question 5, the survey asked for students'/graduates' perceptions in four categories (key indicators) of their becoming a professional in the early childhood field. The mean and standard deviation were calculated to determine graduates'/students' perceptions for each key indicator of the standard. One hundred nineteen participants responded to these survey items. The overall composite mean for NAEYC Standard 5 was 4.1101 (SD=.82155), which fell into the "well prepared" category. Respondents perceived that they were well prepared to meet NAEYC Standard 5. Table 14 provides the descriptive statistics for questions 1-19.

Table 13

Descriptive Statistics, Respondents' Perceptions of their Preparation to Meet NAEYC Standards

Questions	Unprepared	Minimally prepared	Prepared	Well prepared	Very well prepared	Total	Total Well Prepared or Very Well Prepared	Percentage Well Prepared or Very Well Prepared
q1_stand1	0	2	25	48	49	124	97	78
q2_stand1	0	1	28	41	54	124	95	77
q3_stand1	0	3	19	46	55	123	101	82
q4_stand2	0	2	28	42	50	122	92	75
q5_stand2	0	6	26	40	50	122	90	74
q6_stand2	1	6	26	35	54	122	89	73
q7_stand3	0	7	27	34	56	124	90	73
q8_stand3	0	7	24	37	56	124	93	75
q9_stand3	0	9	24	42	48	123	90	73
q10_stand3	0	13	22	43	46	124	89	72
q11_stand4	0	2	20	45	57	124	102	82
q12_stand4	0	4	26	45	48	123	93	76
q13_stand4	2	5	28	41	47	123	88	72
q14_stand4	2	6	26	38	50	122	88	72
q15_stand5	0	6	19	47	51	123	98	80
q16_stand5	1	2	24	43	54	124	97	78
q17_stand5	0	4	27	41	50	122	91	75
q18_stand5	1	6	27	40	49	123	89	72
q19_stand5	1	8	26	42	42	119	84	71

Research Question 6

For research question 6, the survey investigated what differences existed in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standards based on the following demographics: ethnic background, place of employment, position, children respondents worked with, and quality of respondents' place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status.

Ethnic Background

The survey asked students/graduates to indicate which of the following best described their ethnic background: White, Non-Hispanic; Black or African American, Non-Hispanic; Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander; Hispanic, Latino, Spanish; Native American or American Indian; Other.

NAEYC Standard 1: Promoting Child Development and Learning

Since $p>\alpha$, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 1 between White, Non-Hispanic graduates/students (M =4.1905, SD =.78084) and Black or African American, Non-Hispanic graduates/students (M =4.1893, SD =.72253). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(118) = 1.973$, $p = .103 > .05$.

NAEYC Standard 2: Building Family and Community Relationships

Since $p>\alpha$, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 2 between White, Non-Hispanic students/graduates (M =4.1048, SD =.93505) and Black or African American, Non-Hispanic students (M

=4.1250, *SD* =.82229). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, *F*(117) =1.247, *p*=.*295*>.05.

NAEYC Standard 3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 3 between White, Non-Hispanic students/graduates (*M* =4.2286, *SD* =.77263) and Black or African American, Non-Hispanic students (*M* =4.0329, *SD* =.91673). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, *F*(118) =1.711, *p*=.*152*>.05.

NAEYC Standard 4: Teaching and Learning

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 4 between White, Non-Hispanic students/graduates (*M* =4.1571, *SD* =.85982) and Black or African American, Non-Hispanic students (*M* =4.0926, *SD* =.80082). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, *F*(118) =1.756, *p*=.*143*>.05.

NAEYC Standard 5: Becoming a Professional

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 5 between White, Non-Hispanic students/graduates (*M* =4.2400, *SD* =.77125) and Black or African American, Non-Hispanic (*M* =4.0654, *SD* =.81653). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, *F*(123) =.824, *p*=.441>.05. Table 15 shows the descriptive data for the demographic variable Ethnicity. Table 16 shows the results of the ANOVA for the demographic variable Ethnicity.

Table 14

Descriptive Statistics for the Demographic Variable Ethnicity

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
st1	White, Non-Hispanic	35	4.1905	.78084	.13199	3.9222	4.4587	3.00	5.00
	Black or African American, Non-Hispanic	81	4.1893	.72253	.08028	4.0295	4.3491	2.33	5.00
	Others	8	4.3750	.95015	.33593	3.5807	5.1693	2.33	5.00
	Total	124	4.2016	.74937	.06730	4.0684	4.3348	2.33	5.00
st2	White, Non-Hispanic	35	4.1048	.93505	.15805	3.7836	4.4260	2.00	5.00
	Black or African American, Non-Hispanic	80	4.1250	.82229	.09193	3.9420	4.3080	2.00	5.00
	Others	8	4.2083	.87173	.30820	3.4795	4.9371	2.67	5.00
	Total	123	4.1247	.85187	.07681	3.9726	4.2767	2.00	5.00
st3	White, Non-Hispanic	35	4.2286	.77263	.13060	3.9632	4.4940	2.75	5.00
	Black or African American, Non-Hispanic	81	4.0329	.91673	.10186	3.8302	4.2356	2.00	5.00
	Others	8	3.8438	1.00834	.35650	3.0008	4.6867	2.25	5.00
	Total	124	4.0759	.88364	.07935	3.9189	4.2330	2.00	5.00
st4	White, Non-Hispanic	35	4.1571	.85982	.14534	3.8618	4.4525	2.50	5.00
	Black or African American, Non-Hispanic	81	4.0926	.80082	.08898	3.9155	4.2697	2.00	5.00
	Others	8	4.0625	.97055	.34314	3.2511	4.8739	2.25	5.00
	Total	124	4.1089	.82223	.07384	3.9627	4.2550	2.00	5.00
st5	White, Non-Hispanic	35	4.2400	.77125	.13036	3.9751	4.5049	2.80	5.00
	Black or African American, Non-Hispanic	81	4.0654	.81653	.09073	3.8849	4.2460	1.60	5.00
	Others	8	3.9000	1.01980	.36056	3.0474	4.7526	2.00	5.00
	Total	124	4.1040	.81621	.07330	3.9589	4.2491	1.60	5.00

Table 15

Analysis of Variance for the Demographic Variable Ethnicity

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
st1	Between Groups	.257	2	.129	.226	.798
	Within Groups	68.814	121	.569		
	Total	69.071	123			
st2	Between Groups	.070	2	.035	.047	.954
	Within Groups	88.463	120	.737		
	Total	88.533	122			
st3	Between Groups	1.397	2	.698	.893	.412

	Within Groups	94.645	121	.782		
	Total	96.042	123			
st4	Between Groups	.120	2	.060	.088	.916
	Within Groups	83.035	121	.686		
	Total	83.155	123			
st5	Between Groups	1.101	2	.550	.824	.441
	Within Groups	80.842	121	.668		
	Total	81.943	123			

Place of Employment

The survey asked students/graduates to indicate which of the following best described their place of employment: child development center; family child care home; Head Start program; program affiliated with a church or other religious institution; public elementary school; private elementary school; not-for-profit agency serving children, youth or families; not employed at this time.

NAEYC Standard 1: Promoting Child Development and Learning

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 1 based on their place of employment: child development center (*M* =4.3214, *SD* =.72743), family child care home (*M* =4.4722, *SD* =.55883), Head Start program (M =4.5000, SD =.70711), program affiliated with a church or other religious institution (M =4.0000, SD =.88192), public elementary school (M =4.1481, SD =.62608), not-for-profit agency serving children, youth or families (M =4.1905, SD =.83571), or not employed at this time (M =3.9667, SD =.87253). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(118) = 1.056$, $p = .394 > .05$.

NAEYC Standard 2: Building Family and Community Relationships

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 2 based on their place of employment: child

development center (M =4.2679, SD =.82246), family child care home (M =4.4444, SD =.43423), Head Start program (M =4.8333, SD =.23570), program affiliated with a church or other religious institution (M =4.3333, SD =.94281), public elementary school (M =3.8889, SD =.88192), not-for-profit agency serving children, youth or families (M =4.1905, SD =.83571), or not employed at this time (M =3.8111, SD =.99687). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(117) = 1.604$, $p = .153 > .05$.

NAEYC Standard 3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families

Since $p > \alpha$, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 3 based on their place of employment: child development center (M =4.2753, SD =.82998), family child care home (M =4.0208, SD =.83570), Head Start program (M =4.8750, SD =.17678), program affiliated with a church or other religious institute (M =3.7500, SD =.50000), public elementary school (M =4.0000, SD =1.00778), not-for-profit agency serving children, youth or families (M =3.5000, SD =.82916), or not employed at this time (M =3.9000, SD =.99481). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(118) = 1.533$, $p = .174 > .05$.

NAEYC Standard 4: Teaching and Learning

Since $p > \alpha$, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 4 based on their place of employment: child development center (M =4.3482, SD =.74266), family child care home (M =4.1875, SD =.62272), Head Start program (M =4.5000, SD =.35355), program affiliated with

a church or other religious institute (M =3.5833, SD =.14434), public elementary school (M =4.0000, SD =.97628), not-for-profit agency serving children, youth or families (M =3.7857, SD =.95119), or not employed at this time(M =3.8500, SD =.94823). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(118) = 1.821$, $p = .101 > .05$.

NAEYC Standard 5: Becoming a Professional

Since $p > \alpha$, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 5 based on their place of employment: child development center (M =4.2920, SD =.74893), family child care home (M =4.2167, SD =.66310), Head Start program (M =4.9000, SD =.14142), program affiliated with a church or other religious institution (M =3.8000, SD =.60000), public elementary school (M =3.9278, SD =.87289), not-for-profit agency serving children, youth or families (M =4.0571, SD =.97785), or not employed at this time (M =3.8467, SD =.92875). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(118) = 1.499$, $p = .185 > .05$. Table 17 shows the descriptive data for the demographic variable Place of Employment. Table 18 shows the results of the ANOVA for the demographic variable Place of Employment.

Table 16

Descriptive Statistics for the Demographic Variable Place of Employment

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
st1	Child development center	56	4.3214	.72743	.09721	4.1266	4.5162	3.00	5.00
	Family child care home	12	4.4722	.55883	.16132	4.1172	4.8273	3.33	5.00
	Head Start program	2	4.5000	.70711	.50000	-1.8531	10.8531	4.00	5.00

	Program affiliated with a church or other religious institut	3	4.0000	.88192	.50918	1.8092	6.1908	3.00	4.67
	Public elementary school	9	4.1481	.62608	.20869	3.6669	4.6294	3.00	5.00
	Not-for-profit agency serving children, youth or families	7	4.1905	.83571	.31587	3.4176	4.9634	3.00	5.00
	Not employed at this time	30	3.9667	.87253	.15930	3.6409	4.2925	2.33	5.00
	Total	119	4.2213	.75699	.06939	4.0839	4.3587	2.33	5.00
st2	Child development center	56	4.2679	.82246	.10991	4.0476	4.4881	2.33	5.00
	Family child care home	12	4.4444	.43423	.12535	4.1686	4.7203	4.00	5.00
	Head Start program	2	4.8333	.23570	.16667	2.7156	6.9510	4.67	5.00
	Program affiliated with a church or other religious institut	2	4.3333	.94281	.66667	-4.1375	12.8041	3.67	5.00
	Public elementary school	9	3.8889	.88192	.29397	3.2110	4.5668	2.33	5.00
	Not-for-profit agency serving children, youth or families	7	4.1905	.83571	.31587	3.4176	4.9634	3.00	5.00
	Not employed at this time	30	3.8111	.99687	.18200	3.4389	4.1833	2.00	5.00
	Total	118	4.1469	.85905	.07908	3.9903	4.3035	2.00	5.00
st3	Child development center	56	4.2753	.82998	.11091	4.0530	4.4976	2.75	5.00
	Family child care home	12	4.0208	.83570	.24125	3.4899	4.5518	2.00	5.00
	Head Start program	2	4.8750	.17678	.12500	3.2867	6.4633	4.75	5.00
	Program affiliated with a church or other religious institut	3	3.7500	.50000	.28868	2.5079	4.9921	3.25	4.25
	Public elementary school	9	4.0000	1.00778	.33593	3.2254	4.7746	2.00	5.00
	Not-for-profit agency serving children, youth or families	7	3.5000	.82916	.31339	2.7332	4.2668	2.50	5.00
	Not employed at this time	30	3.9000	.99481	.18163	3.5285	4.2715	2.00	5.00
	Total	119	4.0854	.89348	.08191	3.9232	4.2476	2.00	5.00
st4	Child development center	56	4.3482	.74266	.09924	4.1493	4.5471	2.50	5.00
	Family child care home	12	4.1875	.62272	.17976	3.7918	4.5832	3.25	5.00

	Head Start program	2	4.5000	.35355	.25000	1.3234	7.6766	4.25	4.75
	Program affiliated with a church or other religious institut	3	3.5833	.14434	.08333	3.2248	3.9419	3.50	3.75
	Public elementary school	9	4.0000	.97628	.32543	3.2496	4.7504	2.00	5.00
	Not-for-profit agency serving children, youth or families	7	3.7857	.95119	.35952	2.9060	4.6654	2.50	5.00
	Not employed at this time	30	3.8500	.94823	.17312	3.4959	4.2041	2.00	5.00
	Total	119	4.1303	.82906	.07600	3.9798	4.2808	2.00	5.00
st5	Child development center	56	4.2920	.74893	.10008	4.0914	4.4925	2.60	5.00
	Family child care home	12	4.2167	.66310	.19142	3.7954	4.6380	2.60	5.00
	Head Start program	2	4.9000	.14142	.10000	3.6294	6.1706	4.80	5.00
	Program affiliated with a church or other religious institut	3	3.8000	.60000	.34641	2.3095	5.2905	3.20	4.40
	Public elementary school	9	3.9278	.87289	.29096	3.2568	4.5987	2.20	5.00
	Not-for-profit agency serving children, youth or families	7	4.0571	.97785	.36959	3.1528	4.9615	2.60	5.00
	Not employed at this time	30	3.8467	.92875	.16957	3.4999	4.1935	1.60	5.00
	Total	119	4.1286	.81904	.07508	3.9799	4.2773	1.60	5.00

Table 17

Analysis of Variance for the Demographic Variable Place of Employment

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
st1	Between Groups	3.619	6	.603	1.056	.394
	Within Groups	63.998	112	.571		
	Total	67.617	118			
st2	Between Groups	6.889	6	1.148	1.604	.153
	Within Groups	79.454	111	.716		
	Total	86.343	117			
st3	Between Groups	7.150	6	1.192	1.533	.174
	Within Groups	87.051	112	.777		
	Total	94.201	118			
st4	Between Groups	7.210	6	1.202	1.821	.101
	Within Groups	73.896	112	.660		

	Total	81.106	118			
st5	Between Groups	5.885	6	.981	1.499	.185
	Within Groups	73.273	112	.654		
	Total	79.158	118			

Current Position

The survey asked graduates/students to indicate which of the following best described their current position: lead teacher, teacher assistant, administrator, substitute teacher, not employed, other.

NAEYC Standard 1: Promoting Child Development and Learning

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 1 based on their current position: lead teacher (M =4.2917, SD =.68976), teacher assistant (M =4.4510, SD =.60025), administrator (M =4.3077, SD =.78718), not employed (M =3.8611, SD =.87320), other (M =4.1333, SD =.76777). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(121) = 2.032$, $p = .094 > .05$.

NAEYC Standard 2: Building Family and Community Relationships

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 2 based on their current position: lead teacher (M =4.2014, SD =.82152), teacher assistant (M =4.3137, SD =.77702), administrator (M =4.3611, SD =.77144), not employed (M =3.7639, SD =.98530), other (M =4.1167, SD =.82558). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(120) = 1.631$, $p = .171 > .05$.

NAEYC Standard 3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 3 based on their current position: lead teacher (M =4.0660, SD =.86123), teacher assistant (M =4.3971, SD =.71293), administrator (M =4.4038, SD =.76061), not employed (M =3.7708, SD =1.03450), other (M =3.9625, SD =.89691). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(121) = 1.838$, $p = .126 > .05$.

NAEYC Standard 4: Teaching and Learning

Since p<α, there was a difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 4 based on their current position: lead teacher (M =4.2656, SD =.69841), teacher assistant (M =4.3676, SD =.70222), administrator (M =4.4231, SD =.64859), not employed (M =3.7604, SD =.97935), other (M =3.7625, SD =.91578). Therefore the researcher rejected the null hypothesis, $F(121) = 3.529$, $p = .009 < .05$.

NAEYC Standard 5: Becoming a Professional

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 5 based on their current position: lead teacher (M =4.1979, SD =.74612), teacher assistant (M =4.2941, SD =.67497), administrator (M =4.4462, SD =.80892), not employed (M =3.7667, SD =.95765), other (M =3.9100, SD =.77724). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(121) = 2.393$, $p = .055 > .05$. Table 19 shows the descriptive data for the demographic variable Position. Table 20 shows the results of the ANOVA for the demographic variable Position.

Table 18

Descriptive Statistics for the Demographic Variable Position

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
st1	Lead teacher	48	4.2917	.68976	.09956	4.0914	4.4920	3.00	5.00
	Teacher assistant	17	4.4510	.60025	.14558	4.1424	4.7596	3.00	5.00
	Administrator	13	4.3077	.78718	.21833	3.8320	4.7834	3.00	5.00
	Not employed	24	3.8611	.87320	.17824	3.4924	4.2298	2.33	5.00
	Other (Please specify)	20	4.1333	.76777	.17168	3.7740	4.4927	3.00	5.00
	Total	122	4.2049	.75387	.06825	4.0698	4.3400	2.33	5.00
st2	Lead teacher	48	4.2014	.82152	.11858	3.9628	4.4399	2.33	5.00
	Teacher assistant	17	4.3137	.77702	.18845	3.9142	4.7132	3.00	5.00
	Administrator	12	4.3611	.77144	.22270	3.8710	4.8513	3.00	5.00
	Not employed	24	3.7639	.98530	.20112	3.3478	4.1799	2.00	5.00
	Other (Please specify)	20	4.1167	.82558	.18460	3.7303	4.5030	2.33	5.00
	Total	121	4.1322	.85579	.07780	3.9782	4.2863	2.00	5.00
st3	Lead teacher	48	4.0660	.86123	.12431	3.8159	4.3160	2.75	5.00
	Teacher assistant	17	4.3971	.71293	.17291	4.0305	4.7636	3.00	5.00
	Administrator	13	4.4038	.76061	.21095	3.9442	4.8635	3.00	5.00
	Not employed	24	3.7708	1.03450	.21117	3.3340	4.2077	2.00	5.00
	Other (Please specify)	20	3.9625	.89691	.20055	3.5427	4.3823	2.00	5.00
	Total	122	4.0731	.88831	.08042	3.9139	4.2323	2.00	5.00
st4	Lead teacher	48	4.2656	.69841	.10081	4.0628	4.4684	3.00	5.00
	Teacher assistant	17	4.3676	.70222	.17031	4.0066	4.7287	3.00	5.00
	Administrator	13	4.4231	.64859	.17989	4.0311	4.8150	3.00	5.00
	Not employed	24	3.7604	.97935	.19991	3.3469	4.1740	2.00	5.00
	Other (Please specify)	20	3.7625	.91578	.20477	3.3339	4.1911	2.00	5.00
	Total	122	4.1148	.82707	.07488	3.9665	4.2630	2.00	5.00
st5	Lead teacher	48	4.1979	.74612	.10769	3.9813	4.4146	2.60	5.00
	Teacher assistant	17	4.2941	.67497	.16370	3.9471	4.6412	3.00	5.00
	Administrator	13	4.4462	.80892	.22436	3.9573	4.9350	3.00	5.00
	Not employed	24	3.7667	.95765	.19548	3.3623	4.1710	1.60	5.00
	Other (Please specify)	20	3.9100	.77724	.17380	3.5462	4.2738	2.20	5.00
	Total	122	4.1057	.81271	.07358	3.9601	4.2514	1.60	5.00

Table 19

Analysis of Variance for the Demographic Variable Position

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
st1	Between Groups	4.467	4	1.117	2.032	.094
	Within Groups	64.299	117	.550		
	Total	68.766	121			
st2	Between Groups	4.679	4	1.170	1.631	.171
	Within Groups	83.205	116	.717		
	Total	87.884	120			
st3	Between Groups	5.646	4	1.412	1.838	.126

	Within Groups	89.834	117	.768		
	Total	95.480	121			
st4	Between Groups	8.911	4	2.228	3.529	.009
	Within Groups	73.858	117	.631		
	Total	82.768	121			
st5	Between Groups	6.043	4	1.511	2.393	.055
	Within Groups	73.878	117	.631		
	Total	79.921	121			

Children Served

The survey asked students/graduates to indicate which of the following best described the children they worked with and to select all response choices that applied: infants (birth-12 months old), toddlers (13-35 months), preschoolers (3 years-5 years old, not in kindergarten), kindergartners, children in grades 1-3, children of various ages, children with an exceptionality, NA.

NAEYC Standard 1: Promoting Child Development and Learning

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 1 based on the children they worked with: infants (M =3.9167, SD =.83333), toddlers (M =4.2340, SD =.72146), preschoolers (M =3.9524, SD =.82616), kindergartners (M =4.2000, SD =.96032), children in grades 1-3 (M =4.4167, SD =.95743), children with an exceptionality (M =3.7778, SD =1.07152), NA (M =4.2778, SD =.90472). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(123) = .408$, $p = .896 > .05$.

NAEYC Standard 2: Building Family and Community Relationships

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 2 based on the children they worked with: infants (M =3.7500, SD =.87665), toddlers (M =4.1454, SD =.84463), preschoolers (M =3.9524, SD =1.19301), kindergartners (M =4.0667, SD =.92496), children in grades 1-3 (M

=4.6667, SD =.57735), children with an exceptionality (M =3.6667, SD =1.15470), NA (M =4.2778, SD =.64693). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(122) = .476$, $p = .850 > .05$.

NAEYC Standard 3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 3 based on the children they worked with: infants (M =4.3750, SD =.59512), toddlers (M =4.1188, SD =.88744), preschoolers (M =3.8214, SD =.70289), kindergartners (M =4.1000, SD =.87678), children in grades 1-3 (M =3.8125, SD =1.00778), children with an exceptionality (M =3.3333, SD =1.52753), NA (M =4.0417, SD =1.00519). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(123) = .522$, $p = .817 > .05$.

NAEYC Standard 4: Teaching and Learning

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 4 based on the children they worked with: infants (M =3.8750, SD =.85391), toddlers (M =4.1197, SD =.83258), preschoolers (M =4.1071, SD =.81467), kindergartners (M =4.3000, SD =.69372), children in grades 1-3 (M =4.1250, SD =.92421), children with an exceptionality (M =3.6667, SD =1.15470), NA (M =4.1667, SD =.93095). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(123) = .208$, $p = .983 > .05$.

NAEYC Standard 5: Becoming a Professional

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 5 based on the children they worked with: infants (M

=3.8000, SD =.90921), toddlers (M =4.1287, SD =.82519), preschoolers (M =4.0571, SD =.92170), kindergartners (M =4.1600, SD =.47749), children in grades 1-3 (M =3.9000, SD =.80829), children with an exceptionality (M =3.7333, SD =1.10151), NA (M =4.2667, SD =.95219). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, $F(123) = .248$, $p = .972 > .05$. Table 21 shows the descriptive data for the demographic variable Children Served. Table 22 shows the results of the ANOVA for the demographic variable Children Served.

Table 20

Descriptive Statistics for the Demographic Variable Children Served

				Std.	Std.	95% Confidence Interval			
		N	Mean	Deviation	Error	for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
st1	.00	4	3.9167	.83333	.41667	2.5906	5.2427	3.00	5.00
	.13	94	4.2340	.72146	.07441	4.0863	4.3818	2.33	5.00
	.25	7	3.9524	.82616	.31226	3.1883	4.7165	3.00	5.00
	.38	5	4.2000	.96032	.42947	3.0076	5.3924	3.00	5.00
	.50	4	4.4167	.95743	.47871	2.8932	5.9401	3.00	5.00
	.75	3	3.7778	1.07152	.61864	1.1160	6.4396	3.00	5.00
	.88	6	4.2778	.90472	.36935	3.3283	5.2272	3.00	5.00
	Total	123	4.2016	.74937	.06730	4.0684	4.3348	2.33	5.00
st2	.00	4	3.7500	.87665	.43833	2.3551	5.1449	3.00	5.00
	.13	94	4.1454	.84463	.08712	3.9724	4.3184	2.00	5.00
	.25	7	3.9524	1.19301	.45092	2.8490	5.0557	2.33	5.00
	.38	5	4.0667	.92496	.41366	2.9182	5.2152	3.00	5.00
	.50	3	4.6667	.57735	.33333	3.2324	6.1009	4.00	5.00
	.75	3	3.6667	1.15470	.66667	.7982	6.5351	3.00	5.00
	.88	6	4.2778	.64693	.26411	3.5989	4.9567	3.33	5.00
	Total	122	4.1247	.85187	.07681	3.9726	4.2767	2.00	5.00
st3	.00	4	4.3750	.59512	.29756	3.4280	5.3220	3.75	5.00
	.13	94	4.1188	.88744	.09153	3.9370	4.3006	2.00	5.00
	.25	7	3.8214	.70289	.26567	3.1714	4.4715	2.75	5.00
	.38	5	4.1000	.87678	.39211	3.0113	5.1887	3.25	5.00
	.50	4	3.8125	1.00778	.50389	2.2089	5.4161	2.75	5.00
	.75	3	3.3333	1.52753	.88192	-.4612	7.1279	2.00	5.00
	.88	6	4.0417	1.00519	.41037	2.9868	5.0966	2.50	5.00

	Total	123	4.0759	.88364	.07935	3.9189	4.2330	2.00	5.00
st4	.00	4	3.8750	.85391	.42696	2.5162	5.2338	3.00	5.00
	.13	94	4.1197	.83258	.08587	3.9492	4.2902	2.00	5.00
	.25	7	4.1071	.81467	.30792	3.3537	4.8606	2.75	5.00
	.38	5	4.3000	.69372	.31024	3.4386	5.1614	3.50	5.00
	.50	4	4.1250	.92421	.46211	2.6544	5.5956	3.00	5.00
	.75	3	3.6667	1.15470	.66667	.7982	6.5351	3.00	5.00
	.88	6	4.1667	.93095	.38006	3.1897	5.1436	2.50	5.00
	Total	123	4.1089	.82223	.07384	3.9627	4.2550	2.00	5.00
st5	.00	4	3.8000	.90921	.45461	2.3532	5.2468	3.00	5.00
	.13	94	4.1287	.82519	.08511	3.9597	4.2977	1.60	5.00
	.25	7	4.0571	.92170	.34837	3.2047	4.9096	2.80	5.00
	.38	5	4.1600	.47749	.21354	3.5671	4.7529	3.80	5.00
	.50	4	3.9000	.80829	.40415	2.6138	5.1862	3.20	4.60
	.75	3	3.7333	1.10151	.63596	.9970	6.4696	3.00	5.00
	.88	6	4.2667	.95219	.38873	3.2674	5.2659	2.60	5.00
	Total	123	4.1040	.81621	.07330	3.9589	4.2491	1.60	5.00

Table 21

Analysis of Variance for the Demographic Variable Children Served

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
st1	Between Groups	1.658	7	.237	.408	.896
	Within Groups	67.413	116	.581		
	Total	69.071	123			
st2	Between Groups	2.493	7	.356	.476	.850
	Within Groups	86.040	115	.748		
	Total	88.533	122			
st3	Between Groups	2.932	7	.419	.522	.817
	Within Groups	93.110	116	.803		
	Total	96.042	123			
st4	Between Groups	1.032	7	.147	.208	.983
	Within Groups	82.123	116	.708		
	Total	83.155	123			
st5	Between Groups	1.206	7	.172	.248	.972
	Within Groups	80.737	116	.696		
	Total	81.943	123			

Quality of Place of Employment

As Measured by Licensing Status, Star Rating and NAEYC Accreditation Status

The survey asked students/graduates to indicate which of the following best described their current place of employment and to select all response choices that applied: not licensed by the State of North Carolina; licensed by the State of North Carolina, 1 star rating; licensed by the State of North Carolina, 2 star rating; licensed by the State of North Carolina, 3 star rating; licensed by the State of North Carolina, 4 star rating; licensed by the State of North Carolina, 5 star rating; accredited by NAEYC; NA.

NAEYC Standard 1: Promoting Child Development and Learning

Since $p<\alpha$, there was a difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 1 based on the quality of their place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status: No selection (M =4.4167, SD =.68718), Selected one (M =4.1455, SD =.75895), Selected Two (NAEYC and either 4 Star or 5 Star) (M =4.7333, SD =.40976). Therefore the researcher rejected the null hypothesis, $F(124) = 3.093$, $p= .049<05$.

NAEYC Standard 2: Building Family and Community Relationships

Since $p>\alpha$, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 2 based on the quality of their place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status: No selection (M =4.1667, SD =.79349), Selected one (M =4.0948, SD =.86077), Selected Two (NAEYC and either 4 Star or 5 Star) (M =4.4333, SD =.78646). Therefore we reject the null hypothesis, $F(123) = .725$, $p= .486>.05$.

NAEYC Standard 3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families

Since p> α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 3 based on the quality of their place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status: No selection (M =4.6250, SD =.59512), Selected one (M =4.0447, SD =.89231), Selected Two (NAEYC and either 4 Star or 5 Star) (M =4.2000, SD =.86442). Therefore we reject the null hypothesis, F(124) = .939, p=.394>.05.

NAEYC Standard 4: Teaching and Learning

Since p<α, there was a difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 4 based on the quality of their place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status: No selection (M =4.3750, SD =.75000), Selected one (M =4.0409, SD =.83125), Selected Two (NAEYC and either 4 Star or 5 Star) (M =4.7500, SD =.37268). Therefore the researcher rejected the null hypothesis, F(124) = 3.790, p=.025<.05.

NAEYC Standard 5: Becoming a Professional

Since p>α, there was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet Standard 5 based on the quality of their place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status: No selection (M =4.0500, SD =.82260), Selected one (M =4.0755, SD =.83093), Selected Two (NAEYC and either 4 Star or 5 Star) (M =4.4400, SD =.61680). Therefore the researcher accepted the null hypothesis, F(124) = .922, p= .400>.05. Table 23 shows the descriptive data for the demographic variable Quality of Place of Employment.

Table 24 shows the results of the ANOVA for the demographic variable Quality of Place of Employment.

Table 22

Descriptive Statistics for the Demographic Variable Quality of Place of Employment

				Std.	Std.	95% Confidence Interval			
		N	Mean	Deviation	Error	for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
st1	.00	4	4.4167	.68718	.34359	3.3232	5.5101	3.67	5.00
	.13	110	4.1455	.75895	.07236	4.0020	4.2889	2.33	5.00
	.25	10	4.7333	.40976	.12958	4.4402	5.0265	4.00	5.00
	Total	124	4.2016	.74937	.06730	4.0684	4.3348	2.33	5.00
st2	.00	4	4.1667	.79349	.39675	2.9040	5.4293	3.33	5.00
	.13	109	4.0948	.86077	.08245	3.9314	4.2582	2.00	5.00
	.25	10	4.4333	.78646	.24870	3.8707	4.9959	3.00	5.00
	Total	123	4.1247	.85187	.07681	3.9726	4.2767	2.00	5.00
st3	.00	4	4.6250	.59512	.29756	3.6780	5.5720	3.75	5.00
	.13	110	4.0447	.89231	.08508	3.8761	4.2133	2.00	5.00
	.25	10	4.2000	.86442	.27335	3.5816	4.8184	3.00	5.00
	Total	124	4.0759	.88364	.07935	3.9189	4.2330	2.00	5.00
st4	.00	4	4.3750	.75000	.37500	3.1816	5.5684	3.50	5.00
	.13	110	4.0409	.83125	.07926	3.8838	4.1980	2.00	5.00
	.25	10	4.7500	.37268	.11785	4.4834	5.0166	4.00	5.00
	Total	124	4.1089	.82223	.07384	3.9627	4.2550	2.00	5.00
st5	.00	4	4.0500	.82260	.41130	2.7411	5.3589	3.00	5.00
	.13	110	4.0755	.83093	.07923	3.9184	4.2325	1.60	5.00
	.25	10	4.4400	.61680	.19505	3.9988	4.8812	3.60	5.00
	Total	124	4.1040	.81621	.07330	3.9589	4.2491	1.60	5.00

Table 23

Analysis of Variance for the Demographic Variable Quality of Place of Employment

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
st1	Between Groups	3.359	2	1.680	3.093	.049
	Within Groups	65.712	121	.543		
	Total	69.071	123			
st2	Between Groups	1.057	2	.529	.725	.486
	Within Groups	87.476	120	.729		

	Total	88.533	122			
st3	Between Groups	1.467	2	.734	.939	.394
	Within Groups	94.575	121	.782		
	Total	96.042	123			
st4	Between Groups	4.902	2	2.451	3.790	.025
	Within Groups	78.253	121	.647		
	Total	83.155	123			
st5	Between Groups	1.230	2	.615	.922	.400
	Within Groups	80.713	121	.667		
	Total	81.943	123			

Open-Ended Questions

The following research questions were addressed using quantitative methods:

1. What do students/graduates perceive to be the most beneficial aspects of the program?
2. In which aspects of the program do students/graduates perceive a need for additional or better preparation?

The survey asked respondents to indicate what aspects of the early childhood program they perceived to be most beneficial and in what aspects of the program they perceived a need for additional or better preparation. The researcher employed a textual or content analysis approach to analyze the responses to the open-ended questions. Respondents' statements were coded and clustered into themes independently by the investigator and a faculty member from the early childhood education program under study. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion by the coders.

The coders employed the four principles identified by Yin (2003) for conducing social science research in their analysis of the responses to the open-ended

items. First, they attended to all of the evidence. The coders analyzed all responses to open-ended question 1 and all responses to open-ended question 2. Second, the coders addressed major rival interpretations. Several respondents identified individual instructors as being among the best and worst aspects their preparation. The early childhood instructor who participated in coding the open-ended responses suggested that comments related to specific instructors be excluded. She reasoned that students could have negative perceptions of individual instructors because they (the students) received low grades in courses taught by those instructors, and that low grades could reflect students' aptitude and/or effort rather that the quality of the early childhood program under study. Third, the coders attempted to address the most significant aspects of the study in their analysis of the responses to the open-ended items. In particular, they focused on responses that were associated with one or more key aspects of NAEYC's five professional preparation standards. Responses that were unclear and/or unrelated to the NAEYC standards were excluded from analysis. Fourth, the coders relied on prior expert knowledge. The early childhood faculty member suggested that specific terms be used to identify each of the themes based on her knowledge of the discipline. Additionally, she suggested that certain themes be combined, based on her knowledge of the early childhood program under study.

Open-Ended Question 1

For the first open-ended item, "What aspects of your program were most beneficial for you?" the investigator identified the following themes: child guidance, interaction with classmates, hands-on experiences and child development coursework. NAEYC Standards related to these themes include: Standard 1,

Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs; Standard 2, Building Family and Community Relationships; Standard 3, Observing, Documenting and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families; Standard 4, Teaching and Learning and Standard 5, becoming a Professional.

A total of 105 respondents responded to open-ended question 1. The coders determined that 45 of the responses were unclear and/or unrelated to the NAEYC standards, and excluded those responses from the analysis. A total of 60 responses pertained to the NAEYC standards.

Of the 60 standards-related responses, 13 (22%) related to the theme, child guidance. This theme relates to NAEYC Standard 4, Teaching and Learning (in particular, key element 1, *knowing about, understanding and using positive relationships and supportive interactions* and key element 2*, knowing about, understanding and using effective approaches, strategies and tools for early education*)**.** Respondents' comments related to this theme included: "The Child Guidance class taught me more than most of the other classes," "What I learned in Child Guidance (has) been especially helpful to me," "I feel the guidance aspects (have) been most beneficial to me," "I found my child guidance class to be most beneficial to me," "Guidance for Young Children," "Classes such as Child Guidance . . . were very beneficial to my everyday work experience," and "Active listening is most beneficial for me because now I listen first instead of reacting first."

Of the 60 standards-related responses, 10 (17%) related to the theme, interaction with classmates. This theme relates to Standard 5, Becoming a

Professional (in particular, key element 1, *identifying and involving oneself with the early childhood field* and key element 3, *engaging in continuous, collaborative learning to inform practice*). Respondents' comments related to this theme included: "When we go to class and can listen, give feedback, and taking in what other classmates have to say. You never know what help someone else in a class can give, including our teachers," "Meeting with other early childhood educators to discuss ideas and strategy," "Hearing and learning from the other students in my classes about their teaching position in the classroom," "Attending classes and getting an understanding of what is being taught in class and being able to (talk about it) to (incorporate) into your field of work," "Being in class with other teachers who could relate and give ideas to help out in situations that occur in the class."

Of the 60 standards-related responses, 18 (30%) related to the theme, hands-on experiences. This theme included comments concerning direct observations of/interactions with children and activities that afforded opportunities to apply skills and concepts, including those covered in activities/lab classes and service-learning assignments. This theme relates to the following NAEYC Standards: Standard 1,Promoting Child Development and Learning (in particular, key element 3, *using knowledge of child development to create healthy, respectful, supportive and challenging learning environments*); Standard 2, Building Family and Community Relationships (in particular, key element 2, *supporting and empowering families and communities through respectful, reciprocal relationships* and key element 3, *involving families and communities in their children's development and learning*); Standard 3, Observing, Documenting and Assessing to Support Young Children and

Families (in particular, key element 2, *knowing about and using observation, documentation and other appropriate assessment tools and approaches* and key element 3, *understanding and practicing responsible assessment*); Standard 4, Teaching and Learning (in particular, key element 1, *knowing about, understanding and using positive relationships and positive interactions*, key element 2, *knowing, understanding and using effective approaches, strategies and tools for early education*, and key element 4, *using own knowledge and other resources to design, implement and evaluate meaningful, challenging curriculum to promote positive outcomes for children*); and Standard 5 (key elements 1 through 5, *identifying and involving oneself with the early childhood field, knowing about and upholding ethical standards and other professional guidelines, engaging in continuous, collaborative learning to inform practice, integrating knowledgeable, reflective and critical perspectives on early education,* and *engaging in informed advocacy for children and the early childhood profession*). Respondents' comments related to this theme included: "I really enjoyed the co-op/practicum courses. Although it was a pain to visit other centers, it was beneficial to see another center in action. It was also very beneficial to spend time in my classroom working on various skills . . . " "My co-op work within a school setting and being able to learn and be involved in the curriculum of a classroom setting. Watching, observing not only the students but (also) the staff," "The interactions with children and observing young children were most beneficial to me," "Practicum courses were very helpful," "Practicum classes," "The courses that taught how to implement (various) practices," "The hands on labs in

several areas were helpful, such as creative activities, exploration activities," "The hands on student teaching (co-op) (was) very beneficial," "The hands on classes."

Of the 60 standards-related responses, 12 (20%) related to the theme, child development coursework. This theme relates to the following NAEYC Standards: Standard 1, Promoting Child Development and Learning (key elements 1 through 3, *knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs*, *knowing and understanding the various influences on children's development and learning*, *using knowledge of child development to create healthy, respectful, supportive and challenging learning environments for young children*); Standard 2, Building Family and Community Relationships (in particular, key element 3, *involving families and communities in their children's development and learning*); and Standard 4, Teaching and Learning (in particular, key element 4, *using own knowledge and other resources to design, implement and evaluate meaningful, challenging curriculum to promote positive outcomes for children).* Respondents' comments related to this theme included: "The developmental stages of the children that we serve," "Child development one and two," "It was all beneficial and necessary, especially learning how children develop," "I think the classes in child development helped me prepare for practicum."

Open-Ended Question 2

For the second open-ended item, "What areas, concepts or skills do/did you feel you need/needed better preparation?" the investigator identified the following themes: child guidance, curriculum planning and/or implementation, and working with families and communities. NAEYC Standards related to these themes include:

Standard 1, Promoting Child Development and Learning; Standard 2, Building Family and Community Relationships; Standard 3, Observing, Documenting and Assessing to Support Children and Families.

A total of 93 respondents responded to open-ended question 2. The coders determined that 49 of the responses were unclear and/or unrelated to the NAEYC standards, and excluded those responses from the analysis. A total of 44 responses pertained to the NAEYC standards.

Of the 44 standards-related responses, 6 (14%) related to the theme, child guidance. This theme relates to NAEYC Standard 4, Teaching and Learning (in particular, key element 1, *knowing about, understanding and using positive relationships and supportive interactions* and key element 2*, knowing about, understanding and using effective approaches, strategies and tools for early education*)**.** Respondents' comments related to this theme included: "Better preparation in behavior management," "Guidance and discipline," "Children in problem solving skills," "Guidance/Counseling," "and "I need better preparation on guidance, learning to negotiate with children."

Of the 44 standards-related responses, 9 (20%) related to the theme, curriculum planning and/or implementation. This theme relates to the following NAEYC Standards: Standard 1, Promoting Child Development and Learning (in particular, key element 3, *using knowledge of child development to create healthy, respectful, supportive and challenging learning environments*); Standard 3, Observing, Documenting and Assessing to Support Children and Families (in particular, key element 2, *knowing about and using observation, documentation and*

other appropriate assessment tools and approaches); Standard 4, Teaching and Learning (in particular, key element 1, *knowing about, understanding and using positive relationships and positive interactions*, key element 2, *knowing, understanding and using effective approaches, strategies and tools for early education*, key element 3, *knowing and understanding the importance, central concepts, inquiry tools and structures of content areas or academic disciplines*, and key element 4, *using own knowledge and other resources to design, implement and evaluate meaningful, challenging curriculum to promote positive outcomes for children.* Respondents' comments related to this theme included: "I need a better understanding of how to prepare educational lesson plans for various age groups," "I need better preparation in curriculum planning but I a m taking this course next semester," "I think I need better preparation on curriculum," "I think I need more preparation on how to develop and maintain an effective curriculum. I would like to know more about how much impact I will actually have on it, as opposed to the school itself," "I really would have preferred more activity type courses geared towards infants and toddlers," "Knowing how to do the curriculum," "Curriculum planning," "The concept of knowing what (are) appropriate learning materials for children of all ages," "I can always learn more about the "teaching and learning" aspects."

Of the 44 standards-related responses, 9 (20%) related to the theme, working with families and communities. This theme relates to NAEYC Standard 2, Building Family and Community Relationships (key elements 1 through 3*, knowing about and understanding family and community characteristics*, *supporting and empowering*

families and communities through respectful, reciprocal relations, *involving families and communities in children's development and learning).* Respondents' comments related to this theme included: "Getting parents involved in their child's education," "I need to have a better communication with the parents and other members of the child('s) family," "I think I was less prepared in the areas concerning the families and the communities," "I would like more information about how to get the community involved with educating young children. I feel more confident in forming partnerships with families and colleagues, but not as confident with the surrounding community," "Working with families, getting them involved," "Interacting with parents, getting to know the child before they come to class," "I would say I needed more help in being a parent('s) (advocate)."

The complete transcript of the responses to the open-ended items appears in Appendix D.

Summary

The present chapter presented the results of the data analysis and findings of the study. Respondents' perceptions of their level of preparation to meet each of the five NAEYC Standards for associate degree students were reported. In addition, respondents' perceptions were examined with selected demographic variables, including: ethnic background, place of employment, position, children served, the quality of respondents' place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status.

Chapter 5 will provide a summary of the study and conclusions drawn from the data analysis, a discussion of the findings and recommendations for further study and research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings of the study, a discussion of the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and recommendations for the program under study based on the findings.

The importance of teachers to high-quality early education cannot be overemphasized. Research indicates that the most powerful influences on whether and what children learn occur in their teacher's interactions with them (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000). While the scientific literature suggests a relationship between teacher preparation and child outcomes in early childhood education (Berk, 1985), researchers have found it difficult to collect reliable information that helps to clarify how the amount, intensity, content and quality of instruction influence its effectiveness. Early (2007) suggested that policies focused solely on increasing teachers' education are insufficient for improving classroom quality and maximizing children's academic gains. Standards provide one approach to defining and assessing quality in teacher preparation. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards for early childhood professional preparation are the only national standards for programs that prepare early childhood educators (Hyson et al., 2009). NAEYC's professional preparation standards define high-quality professional preparation in terms of sets of competencies that well-prepared graduates should possess. The NAEYC Commission on Early Childhood Associate Degree

Accreditation awards accreditation to associate degree programs that demonstrate evidence of meeting the organization's Professional Preparation Standards. According to Buell and Peters (2003), research is needed that examines how changes in accreditation and licensure actually affect the quality of teachers available and teachers' ability to serve the children and families in their programs.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of the study was twofold. The first purpose was to evaluate the extent to which one community college was preparing its early childhood education students for employment in the field according to NAEYC professional preparation standards, based on the perceptions of program graduates and majors enrolled in at least one Early Childhood Education course during the fall 2009 and spring 2010 semester. The second purpose of the study was to develop a valid and reliable instrument that could be used by other early childhood education programs to examine students' and graduates' perceptions of program quality related to NAEYC standards. The study investigated early childhood professionals' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 1, Promoting Child Development and Learning; NAEYC professional preparation standard 2, Building Family and Community Relationships; NAEYC professional preparation standard 3, Observing, Documenting and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families; NAEYC professional preparation standard 4, Teaching and Learning; NAEYC professional preparation standard 5, Becoming a Professional. Additionally, the study investigated possible differences in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standards based on the

following demographics: ethnic background, place of employment, position, the children respondents work with, and the quality of respondents' place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status. The study also explored what students/graduates perceived to be the most beneficial aspects of their program and in what aspects of their program students/graduates perceived themselves to require better preparation.

Discussion of the Findings

The following section provides a discussion of the findings of the study according to the research questions.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 addressed students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 1, Promoting Child Development and Learning. This standard involves using one's understanding of young children's characteristics and needs, and of multiple interacting influences on children's development and learning, to create environments that are healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging for all children. The findings suggest that the students in/graduates of the early childhood associate degree program under study perceived themselves to be "well prepared" to meet this standard.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 addressed students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 2, Building Family and Community Relationships. This standard involves understanding and valuing the importance and complex characteristics of children's families and communities, and

using this understanding to create respectful relationships that empower families, as well as involving families in their children's development and learning. The findings suggest that the students in/graduates of the early childhood associate degree program under study perceived themselves to be "well prepared" to meet this standard.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 addressed students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 3, Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families. This standard involves understanding of the goals, benefits and uses of assessment, as well as the responsible use of effective assessment in partnership with families and other professionals, to positively influence children's development. The findings suggest that the students in/graduates of the early childhood associate degree program under study perceived themselves to be "well prepared" to meet this standard.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 addressed students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 4, Teaching and Learning. This standard involves integrating one's understanding of and relationship with children and families; one's understanding of developmentally effective approaches to teaching and learning; and one's knowledge of academic disciplines to design, implement and evaluate experiences that promote positive development and learning for all young children. The findings suggest that the students in/graduates of the early childhood associate degree program under study perceived themselves to be "well prepared" to meet this standard.

Research Question 5

Research question 5 addressed students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC professional preparation standard 5, Becoming a Professional. This standard involves identifying and conducting oneself as a member of the early childhood profession; knowing and using ethical guidelines and other professional standards related to early childhood practice; being a continuous, collaborative learner who demonstrates knowledgeable, reflective and critical perspectives on his/her work; making informed decisions that integrate knowledge from a variety of sources; and being an advocate for sound educational practices and policies. The findings suggest that the students in/graduates of the early childhood associate degree program under study perceived themselves to be "well prepared" to meet this standard.

The findings pertaining to Research Questions 1 through 5 are consistent with studies which suggest the importance of higher education and specialized training in early childhood education (Ruopp, Travers, Glantz, & Coelen, 1979; Travers & Goodson, 1980; Berk, 1985; Honig & Hirallal, 1998; Whitebrook, 1990; Norris, 2000). Students/graduates of the early childhood program under study perceived themselves to be "well prepared" by the early childhood education associate degree program under study to promote child development and learning; build family and community relationships; observe, document, and assess to support young children and families; integrate their understanding of and relationship with children and families, their understanding of developmentally effective approaches to teaching and

learning, and their knowledge of academic disciplines to design, implement and evaluate experiences that promote positive development and learning for all young children; and identify and conduct themselves as members of the early childhood profession. By incorporating the NAEYC professional preparations standards, this study has contributed to the clarification of "specialized training in early childhood education" and the circumstances under which it advances teacher behavior, tasks identified as critical for the field (Arnett, 1989).

Research Question 6

Research question 6 addressed potential differences in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet NAEYC standards based on the demographic variables, ethnic background, place of employment, current position, children respondents worked with or quality of respondents' place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status.

There was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet standards 2, 3 and 5 based on any of the demographic variables under study: ethnic background, place of employment, current position, children respondents worked with or quality of respondents' place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status.

There was no difference in graduates'/students' perceptions of their preparation to meet standard 1 based on the demographic variables, ethnic background, place of employment, current position or children respondents worked with. However, there was a difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet this standard based on the demographic variable quality of place

of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status.

There was no difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet standard 4 based on the demographic variables ethnic background, place of employment or children respondents worked with. However, there was a difference in students'/graduates' perceptions of their preparation to meet this standard based on the demographic variables current position and quality of their place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status.

Research Questions 7 and 8

Graduates of/students in the early childhood program under study were also asked to consider the aspects of their program which they perceived to be the most beneficial as well as the aspects of their program in which they perceived themselves to require additional or better preparation. Responses to these open-ended items suggested that graduates/students perceived child guidance coursework, interaction with classmates, hands-on experiences and child development coursework to be the most beneficial aspects of the program. They perceived a need for greater preparation in the areas of child guidance, curriculum planning and/or implementation, and working with families and communities.

With respect to the areas believed to require greater preparation, the findings of the present study were consistent with the findings of the 2009 University of North Carolina Charlotte College of Education study which examined COED graduates' perceptions of their level of preparation as defined by the North Carolina Professional

Teacher Standards. In both studies respondents perceived a need for greater or additional preparation in child guidance/classroom management and communicating with families. This finding is particularly interesting and is consistent with Early's (2007) finding that a sole focus on increasing teacher education is insufficient to improve classroom quality. Like the associate degree students and graduates in the present study, graduates of the undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs in the University of North Carolina Charlotte study perceived a need for additional preparation to develop critical skills.

Another interesting finding of the study is that participants perceived a need for greater preparation in the areas of curriculum planning and implementation, and working with families and communities. These areas correspond to NAEYC Standards 4 and 2, respectively. These are two of the three standards that the peer review team, and subsequently the NAEYC Commission, concluded in 2002 that the program under study had failed to demonstrate that its students met. The graduates'/students' perceptions corresponded with the peer review team's conclusions in this case.

Limitations of the Study

A link to the survey and several pre-notification emails were emailed to all 938 prospective participants via their respective college email addresses. Thirty-five emails were returned to the researcher. Of the 903 selected, 127 completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of only 14%. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the study's findings.

The survey was disseminated in June of 2010, during the institution's summer break. While the institution offers summer courses, including early childhood education course, its summer offerings are relatively limited. It is likely that many members of the target population were not taking classes during the dissemination period and were therefore not checking their college email. It is likely that many of the program graduates targeted for participation in the study never received the emails. Once graduated from the program, students would have no reason to check their college email, and the college does not have a system for routinely updating graduates' email addresses.

It could be speculated that the low response rate reflects the difficulties that some students may have with access to computers. Program faculty members reported that many early childhood students do not own computers or have internet access but instead use computers in one of the college's technology labs to complete course work.

The increase in surveying in the United States may also account for the low response rates, along with the increase in unsolicited e-mail to Internet users and the ill will that this may generate among potential respondents. This information overload causes individuals to develop ways for dealing with e-mail, including the use of filtering software or the development of heuristics such as deleting all unsolicited e-mail without opening it. Additionally, the threat of viruses delivered from unsolicited e-mail may discourage Internet users from reading unsolicited e-mail.

The sampled population, in particular program graduates, may not have associated much importance to the study.

This study relied on self-reported data collected by survey. The validity of self-reported data is questionable. According to Cook and Campbell (1979), respondents (a) tend to report what they believe the researcher expects to see, or (b) tend to report what reflects positively on their own abilities, knowledge, beliefs or opinions (as cited by Yu, 2011).

An additional concern about self-reported data concerns the accuracy with which respondents are able to recall past behaviors. Schacter (1999) warned that the human memory is fallible and, therefore, the reliability of self-reported data is questionable (as cited by Yu, 2010). Although some researchers reject the use of self-reported data due to its alleged poor quality, Chan (2009) argued that the so-called poor quality of self-reported data is nothing more than an urban legend. While respondents might provide researchers with inaccurate data on some occasions, it does not happen all the time (as cited by Yu, 2010).

Recommendations for Future Research

Several recommendations for additional research could be made as a result of this study. First, more needs to be known and understood about the relationship between students'/graduates' perceptions of early childhood program quality and students'/graduates' position in the field (lead teacher, teacher assistant, administrator, other), and the relationship between students'/graduates' perceptions of early childhood program quality and the quality of students'/graduates' place of employment as measured by licensing status, star rating and NAEYC accreditation status.

The current study investigated students' and graduates' perceptions of associate degree program quality related to NAEYC standards approved by the NAEYC Governing Board in July 2003. New NAEYC standards were affirmed by the NAEYC Commission on Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation in June of 2010. The new standards and related guidance materials were published on the organization's website in January 2011. The current instrument should be revised to include the 2010 standards.

The researcher recommends modifying the current instrument to include NAEYC's supportive skills as well as its standards. NAEYC asserts that "In order to support the effective use of the knowledge, skills and dispositions described in Standards 1–5, well-prepared graduates of associate degree programs also need a set of skills that cut across these five domains." These skills are: Skills in Self-Assessment and Self-Advocacy; Skills in Mastering and Applying Foundational Concepts from General Education; Written and Verbal Communication Skills; Skills in Making Connections between Prior Knowledge/Experience and New Learning; Skills in Identifying and Using Professional Resources (NAEYC, 2007).

The study provided insight into students'/graduates' perceptions of early childhood program quality related to NAEYC standards at one community college in the United States. The associate degree program under study was NAEYC accredited. It would be valuable to know how graduates of/students in other NAEYC accredited associate degree programs perceive their preparation to meet NAEYC standards and whether the perceptions of graduates'/students' from NAEYC-accredited associate degree programs differ from the perceptions of graduates

of/students in non-NAEYC accredited associate degree programs. Additionally, for NAEYC accredited early childhood associate degree programs, it would be interesting to learn whether there is a difference between students'/graduates' perceptions of the quality of their preparation pre-NAEYC accreditation and post-NAEYC accreditation. If students enrolled in the program post-NAEYC accreditation perceive themselves to be better prepared than do students who graduated from the program prior to NAEYC accreditation, their respective institutions would be better able to justify the allocation of scarce resources for r-accreditation.

It would be helpful to include focus group discussions to enable participants to elaborate on their responses, particularly for the open-ended items. A majority of the students in the program under study required remedial English and Reading coursework. These students may feel more comfortable elaborating on their responses verbally as opposed to in writing. More detailed responses to the open-ended items would provide greater insight into the program's perceived strengths and weaknesses.

To ensure an accurate assessment of educational programs, resources should be dedicated to the development and maintenance of a data base to record current contact information for current and former students. This would provide a readily accessible and accurate estimate of the number of potential respondents for surveys.

Finally, financial support for the use of a mixed mode survey could also improve the response rate, given the number of inactive email addresses in the current database. A mixed mode survey includes the use of mail surveys when the email and/or web surveys do not reach all of the potential respondents. Considerations for a

mixed mode survey include the cost of copying and mailing surveys to non-responders of the web-based survey.

Recommendations for the Program under Study Based on the Findings

The researcher makes the following recommendations for administrators of and faculty members in the early childhood program under study, based on the findings of the study.

Graduates of/students in the early childhood program under study perceived a need for greater preparation in the areas of child guidance. Interestingly, they also perceived course work in child guidance to be a beneficial aspect of the program. Based on the early childhood professionals' perceptions of the value of child guidance course work and their perceived need for additional preparation in this area, program faculty should consider providing additional opportunities to study child guidance. Such opportunities may include the addition of a child guidance lab and the incorporation of child guidance content and activities into other courses.

Graduates of/students in the early childhood program under study also perceived face-to-face contact with classmates to be a beneficial aspect of the program. This suggests a need for face-to-face course sections and other opportunities for students to meet, such as professional association meetings. Opportunities for student gatherings should be coordinated by the program and students should be encouraged to attend.

Graduates of/students in the early childhood program under study also perceived hands-on experiences, such as those afforded by field experiences, Service Learning assignments and child observations, to be a beneficial aspect of the

program. Program faculty should seek opportunities to provide additional hands-on experiences for students. Additional opportunities to observe, assess and interact with children, in centers/classrooms and other settings, would be beneficial. The program under study is considering expanding the courses in which it offers Service Learning assignments, and this should be done. The program currently offers two Practicum (field experience) courses but has in recent years considered eliminating one of the courses. Based on the participants' responses, this would be ill-advised.

Graduates of/students in the early childhood program under study also perceived a need for greater preparation in curriculum planning and implementation. The program under study offers one core course in curriculum planning but students are advised to take it at end of the program. Faculty should consider incorporating curriculum planning and implementation experiences in other courses, with a particular focus on activities courses and labs.

Graduates of/students in the early childhood program under study also perceived a need for greater preparation in working with families and communities. The program faculty should review the content and delivery of its core course related to working with families and communities. Course assignments should be reviewed to determine whether or not they are aligned with NAEYC Standard 2; if they are not, adjustments to those assignments should be made. Additionally, the program faculty should consider placing more emphasis on community involvement, in addition to family involvement, as several respondents indicated that they felt well-prepared to communicate with families but ill-prepared to work with the community for the benefit of children.

Several respondents perceived a need for better preparation in general education coursework. The program under study currently receives funding to provide developmental Math, English and Reading course work for qualified program majors. These developmental courses teach Math, English and Reading within the early childhood context. The program faculty should continue to seek funding for these courses, and tutoring in Math, as study participants perceive a need for better or additional preparation in general education course work.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY

Early Childhood Education Survey

Consent Form

This study examines students' perceptions of the quality of the Early Childhood Education program at Central Piedmont Community College. The study is being conducted by Farhad Javidi, a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina Charlotte, and has been approved by the University Institutional Review Board. No deception is involved, and the study involves no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., the level of risk encountered in daily life).

Participation in the study typically takes 10 minutes and is strictly anonymous. All responses are treated as confidential, and in no case will responses from individual participants be identified. Rather, all data will be pooled and published in aggregate form only. The study is being run from a secure https server.

Participation is voluntary, refusal to take part in the study involves no penalty or loss of benefits to which participants are otherwise entitled, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled.

If you have further questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of North Carolina Charlotte at 704 687 3309 704 687 3309 or Dr. John Gretes, Professor of Education at UNCC, at 704 687 8810 704 687 8810 .

If you are 18 years of age or older, understand the statements above, and freely consent to participate in the study, click on the "I Agree" button to begin the experiment.

- ○ I AGREE
- ○ I do NOT AGREE

1. What is your current status in CPCC's Early Childhood Education program? (Please mark all that apply)

- ☐ I am a graduate of the associate degree program
- ☐ I am currently a student in the associate degree program
- ☐ I have received a certificate(s)
- ☐ I am currently a student in a certificate program
- ☐ I am taking classes in the Early Childhood program but am not pursuing a degree or certificate at this time

2. If your answer to Question 1 was "I am a graduate of the associate degree program" please indicate what year you graduated from your program.

- ○ Before 2000
- ○ 2000
- ○ 2001
- ○ 2002
- ○ 2003

- ○ 2004
- ○ 2005
- ○ 2006
- ○ 2007
- ○ 2008
- ○ 2009
- ○ 2010

PART I

2b. If your answer to Question 1 was "I have received a certificate(s)", please indicate below what year you received your certificate(s).

- ☐ Before 2000
- ☐ 2000
- ☐ 2001
- ☐ 2002
- ☐ 2003
- ☐ 2004
- ☐ 2005
- ☐ 2006
- ☐ 2007
- ☐ 2008
- ☐ 2009
- ☐ 2010

3.What is your primary reason for being in the Early Childhood Education program? (Mark only one answer)

- ○ To complete selected courses; don't intend to obtain a certificate or degree
- ○ To earn a certificate
- ○ To earn a 2-year associate degree in Early Childhood Education
- ○ To earn a 2-year associate degree in Early Childhood & transfer to a 4-year college
- ○ To transfer to another community college
- ○ To transfer selected courses to a 4-year college or university
- ○ Other (please specify)

4. Are you currently working in the Early Childhood Education field?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

b. If your answer was "No" to Question 4 above (I am NOT currently working in the early childhood field), please mark one or more of the following reasons for not working in the early childhood field.

- ☐ I could not find a suitable position in early childhood education
- ☐ I am dissatisfied with the field of early childhood education
- ☐ Personal or family reasons
- ☐ I am pursuing an associate degree in a field other than early childhood education
- ☐ I am pursuing a bachelor's degree in early childhood education
- ☐ I obtained a job in another field

c. If your answer above to Question 4b was "I obtained a job in another field," please mark one or more of the following reasons for pursuing a position in another field.

- ☐ Less stress
- ☐ Higher income
- ☐ Better working conditions
- ☐ Better benefits
- ☐ Other (please specify)

PART II

4a. If you are currently a student in the Early Childhood Education program, how many credit hours have you completed?

- ○ Fewer than 50 credits
- ○ 50 credits or more

DIRECTIONS: Below are the 19 indicators of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Professional Preparation Standards for Associate Degree Students. Please select the rating that best describes how well CPCC's Early Childhood Education program has prepared you to meet the standards.

Standard 1: Promoting Child Development and Learning

Please mark the appropriate response to indicate your level of preparation with the following standards:

1. Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs

○ Unprepared ○ Minimally prepared ○ Prepared ○ Well prepared ○ Very well prepared

2. Knowing and understanding the various influences on children's development and learning

○ Unprepared ○ Minimally prepared ○ Prepared ○ Well prepared ○ Very well prepared

3.Using knowledge of child development to create healthy, respectful, supportive and challenging learning environments for young children

○ Unprepared ○ Minimally prepared ○ Prepared ○ Well prepared ○ Very well prepared

4.Knowing about and understanding family and community characteristics

○ Unprepared ○ Minimally prepared ○ Prepared ○ Well prepared ○ Very well prepared

Standard 2: Building Family and Community Relationships

Please mark the appropriate response to indicate your level of preparation with the following standards:

5.Supporting and empowering families and communities through respectful, reciprocal relationships

○ Unprepared ○ Minimally prepared ○ Prepared ○ Well prepared ○ Very well prepared

6. Involving families and communities in their children's development and learning

○ Unprepared ○ Minimally prepared ○ Prepared ○ Well prepared ○ Very well prepared

Standard 3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families

Please mark the appropriate response to indicate your level of preparation with the following standards:

7. Understanding the goals, benefits and uses of assessment

○ Unprepared ○ Minimally prepared ○ Prepared ○ Well prepared ○ Very well prepared

8. Knowing about and using observation, documentation and other appropriate assessment tools and approaches

○ Unprepared ○ Minimally prepared ○ Prepared ○ Well prepared ○ Very well prepared

9. Understanding and practicing responsible assessment

○ Unprepared ○ Minimally prepared ○ Prepared ○ Well prepared ○ Very well prepared

Standard 4: Teaching and Learning

10. Knowing about assessment partnerships with families and other professionals.

○ Unprepared ○ Minimally prepared ○ Prepared ○ Well prepared ○ Very well prepared

Please mark the appropriate response to indicate your level of preparation with the following standards:

11. Knowing, understanding, and using positive relationships and supportive interactions

☐ Unprepared ☐ Minimally prepared ☐ Prepared ☐ Well prepared ☐ Very well prepared

☐ Unprepared ☐ Minimally prepared ☐ Prepared ☐ Well prepared ☐ Very well prepared

12. Knowing, understanding and using effective approaches, strategies, and tools for early education

☐ Unprepared ☐ Minimally prepared ☐ Prepared ☐ Well prepared ☐ Very well prepared

13. Knowing and understanding the importance, central concepts, inquiry tools, and structures of content areas or academic disciplines

☐ Unprepared ☐ Minimally prepared ☐ Prepared ☐ Well prepared ☐ Very well prepared

14. Using your knowledge and other resources to design, implement and evaluate meaningful, challenging curriculum to promote positive outcomes for young children

Standard 5: Becoming a Professional

Please mark the appropriate response to indicate your level of preparation with the following standards:

☐ Unprepared ☐ Minimally prepared ☐ Prepared ☐ Well prepared ☐ Very well prepared

15. Identifying and involving yourself with the early childhood field

☐ Unprepared ☐ Minimally prepared ☐ Prepared ☐ Well prepared ☐ Very well prepared

16. Knowing about and upholding ethical standards and other professional guidelines

☐ Unprepared ☐ Minimally prepared ☐ Prepared ☐ Well prepared ☐ Very well prepared

17. Engaging in continuous, collaborative learning to inform practice

☐ Unprepared ☐ Minimally prepared ☐ Prepared ☐ Well prepared ☐ Very well prepared

18. Integrating knowledgeable, reflective and critical perspectives on early education

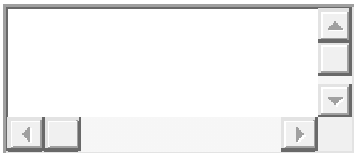
☐ Unprepared ☐ Minimally prepared ☐ Prepared ☐ Well prepared ☐ Very well prepared

19. Engaging in informed advocacy for children and the early childhood profession

These questions are very important. Your responses will help improve CPCC's Early Childhood Education program. Please take your time answering these questions.

When you think about your entire Early Childhood Education program experience at CPCC :

1. What aspects of the program were most beneficial for you?



2. What areas, concepts or skills do/did you feel you need/needed better preparation?

For explanation of this standard, please click on this link:
http://surveys.cpcc.edu/52577/52577.asp

Please tell us about yourself

1. Which of the following best describes your ethnic background?

- ○ White, Non-Hispanic
- ○ Black or African American, Non-Hispanic
- ○ Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander
- ○ Hispanic, Latino, Spanish
- ○ Native American or American Indian
- ○ Other (Please specify)

2. Which of the following best describes your current place of employment?

- ○ Child development center
- ○ Family child care home
- ○ Head Start program
- ○ Program affiliated with a church or other religious institution
- ○ Public elementary school
- ○ Private elementary school
- ○ Not-for-profit agency serving children, youth or families
- ○ Not employed at this time

3. Which of the following best describes your position?

- ○ Lead teacher
- ○ Teacher assistant

- ○ Administrator
- ○ Substitute teacher
- ○ Floater
- ○ Not employed
- ○ Other (Please specify)

4. Which of the following best describes the children you work with? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Infants (birth-12 months old)
- ☐ Toddlers (13-35 months)
- ☐ Preschoolers (3 years-5 years old, not in kindergarten)
- ☐ Kindergartners
- ☐ Children in grades 1-3
- ☐ Children of various ages
- ☐ Children with exceptionality
- ☐ NA

5. Which of the following best describes your current place of employment? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Not licensed by the State of North Carolina
- ☐ Licensed by the State of North Carolina, 1 star rating
- ☐ Licensed by the State of North Carolina, 2 star rating
- ☐ Licensed by the State of North Carolina, 3 star rating
- ☐ Licensed by the State of North Carolina, 4 star rating
- ☐ Licensed by the State of North Carolina, 5 star rating
- ☐ Accredited by NAEYC
- ☐ NA

Thank you for your input

PART III

Submit Reset

APPENDIX B: EMAILS TO PRESPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Email 1 to students/graduates, to notify them of survey

Dear _____,

As an early childhood professional and graduate of (student in) CPCC's Early Childhood Education program, your opinion matters!

You are invited to complete a short, online survey designed to assess the preparation you have received at CPCC to meet NAEYC's professional development standards. Your responses will be used to improve the quality of the Early Childhood Education program at CPCC.

On June 10, you will receive a link to the online survey. The survey can be completed in about 10 minutes.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you will not be penalized if you decide not to participate. All responses will remain confidential and will be stored in a secure location.

I am conducting this survey to partially fulfill the requirements for the doctoral dissertation in Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina Charlotte.

Only I and my major professor, Dr. John Gretes, will have access to your responses. You will not be identified in the results of the study.

Now is your opportunity to provide feedback that will impact the training of tomorrow's early childhood educators.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this very important evaluation process.

Sincerely,

Farhad Javidi

Instructor, CPCC's Simulation and Game Development Program

Student, Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at UNC Charlotte

Follow-up email 1, to be sent June 1

Dear _____,

As an early childhood professional and graduate of (student in) CPCC's Early Childhood Education program, your opinion matters!

You are invited to complete a short, online survey designed to assess the preparation you have received at CPCC to meet NAEYC's professional development standards. Your responses will be used to improve the quality of the Early Childhood Education program at CPCC. Simply click on _____ to take the survey now.

Now is your opportunity to provide feedback that will impact the training of tomorrow's early childhood educators.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this very important evaluation process.

Sincerely,

Farhad Javidi

Instructor, CPCC's Simulation and Game Development Program

Student, Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at UNC Charlotte

Follow-up email 2, to be sent one week prior to closing survey

Dear _____,

The results of CPCC's Early Childhood Education survey are starting to come in! If you have already responded, thank you! If you have not yet taken the survey, please take the time to respond today by accessing the survey at _____. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Please be aware that the survey will close this week, on June 30.

Your response is vital for the improvement of CPCC's Early Childhood Education program. Thank you again for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Farhad Javidi

Instructor, CPCC's Simulation and Game Development Program

Student, Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at UNC Charlotte

APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL

From: Runden, Cat [mailto:CatRunden@uncc.edu]
Sent: Thursday, May 27, 2010 1:51 PM
To: Farhad Javidi
Cc: Gretes, John
Subject: IRB Protocol #10-05-07: Approval

Farhad,

Your protocol #10-05-07, "Students' Perceptions of Early Childhood Program Quality According to NAEYC Standards" is approved. The approval document is attached.

When contacting the Compliance Office regarding this protocol, please refer to the protocol #10-05-07. The attached Investigator Responsibilities document is for your reference. Please review this document and be familiar with your responsibilities. Be aware that any changes to the approved study procedures or approved study materials (consent, assent, surveys, questionnaires, etc.) must be submitted for amendment review and approval before the changes are implemented.

If you complete your research before the annual renewal date or if you graduate before the renewal date, please submit the necessary protocol closure form. You can find this form on the Compliance Office website at http://www.research.uncc.edu/comp/renewclose.cfm.

Thank you.
Cat

Cat Runden | Office of Research Compliance
Research & Federal Relations | Cameron 321F
9201 University City Blvd. | Charlotte, NC 28223
Phone: 704-687-3309 | Fax: 704-687-2292
crunden@uncc.edu | http://research.uncc.edu/comp/human.cfm

APPENDIX D: RESPONSES TO OPEN ENDED ITEMS

Table D1

What Aspects of the Program Were Most Beneficial

	Frequency	Percent	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	30	23.6	23.6	23.6
Acctive listening is most benficial for me,because now I listen first instead of reacting first.	1	.8	.8	24.4
Advisor Roles in helping students and internet and CHRIS access	1	.8	.8	25.2
all childhood oriented courses were beneficial; however, the ones most beneficial were Early Childhood I and II.	1	.8	.8	26.0
All hands on experiences benefited me.	1	.8	.8	26.8
All of the early childhood classes	1	.8	.8	27.6
all so far	1	.8	.8	28.3
Attending classes and getting an understanding of what is being taught in class and being able to take it about to incorporated into your field of work.	1	.8	.8	29.1
being in a class with other teachers who could relate and give ideas to help out in situations that occur in the class	1	.8	.8	29.9
Child Development 1 AND 2 CLASSES	1	.8	.8	30.7

Child development and child guidance were the most beneficial aspects of the program for me.	1	.8	.8	31.5
Child development classes, Children with Exceptionalities	1	.8	.8	32.3
Child Developmet 1 & 11 Infant Toddlers & Twos Guidance Health Safety & Nutrition	1	.8	.8	33.1
Child guidance and creative activities.	1	.8	.8	33.9
Courses such as Child Guidance, Child, Family and Community and Children with Special Needs were very beneficial to my every day work experience.	1	.8	.8	34.6
creating different resource files to use in the class room meeting others in the field and sharing strategies	1	.8	.8	35.4
creative wasthe best to help me learn about the children	1	.8	.8	36.2
Edu 119	1	.8	.8	37.0
Every class that I have taken has increased my knowledge of impacting the lives of young children.	1	.8	.8	37.8
everything, I am coming from an accounting background, this is all so new to me, have 1 full year of classes so far	1	.8	.8	38.6
Flexibilty	1	.8	.8	39.4
Going back to School to get more knowledge in the childcare field.	1	.8	.8	40.2
Guidance for Young Children	1	.8	.8	40.9

Hands on experience. Thinking outside the box.	1	.8	.8	41.7
Having a teacher that really understands the program and the guidelines is a big help to me. I have had teachers that assume things and they some how believe you should know the answer to the questions. Meaning if you are in need of information about a	1	.8	.8	42.5
Having an academic advisor who is on hand to give you feed back and help you outline your courses for completion. Also having professors that are wiling to be a guide for you and be hands on in the classroom and through blackboard.	1	.8	.8	43.3
having the hands on experience, the discussions, and gathering information	1	.8	.8	44.1
Having thehelp of the labs and the teachrs to help me better understand what I was lerning.	1	.8	.8	44.9
Hearing and learning from the other students in my classes about the their teaching position inthe clasroom.	1	.8	.8	45.7
how teacher give you the information to better yourself in classrooms.	1	.8	.8	46.5
I am currently a student of CPCC and have taken fewer courses in Early Childhood Education Program. Based on that I think the interactions with children and observing young children were most beneficial for me.	1	.8	.8	47.2

I beleive that every aspect of the program was beneficial however, the most beneficial was the observation project.	1	.8	.8	48.0
I enjoy the Service Learning aspect	1	.8	.8	48.8
I feel the guidance aspects has been beneficial to me. I also feel the child development courses are also well taught by Janna. So far the best professor has been Kristen Monteith, Janna Sonyarbrough,Lisa Goodwin. These instructors has made this experien	1	.8	.8	49.6
I found my child guidance class to be most beneficial to me.	1	.8	.8	50.4
I learned alot things that I did not know about which put me in a better perspective n seeing things differently.	1	.8	.8	51.2
I really enjoyed the co-op/practicum courses. Although it was a pain to visit other centers, it was benifical to see another center in action. It was also very benifical to spend time in my classroom working on the various skills and having an instruct	1	.8	.8	52.0
I think I got alot out of health, safety, and nutrition.	1	.8	.8	52.8
I think i will enjoy it all because i love kids.	1	.8	.8	53.5
I think the classes in child development helped me prepare for practicum.	1	.8	.8	54.3

I think this is a wonderful program that will benifit you in the long run. I have in my case a good deal of knowledge of children but after being in this program I realixe that my knowledge was not as broad as I thought. I have learned may things and I a	1	.8	.8	55.1
im just really starting to take early childhood classes so i cant answer this question in depth	1	.8	.8	55.9
It was all beneficial and necessary, especially learning how children develop	1	.8	.8	56.7
Just getting started, all of my classes have been beneficial thus far.	1	.8	.8	57.5
just wanting to understand children better	1	.8	.8	58.3
knowing much more now about children than before	1	.8	.8	59.1
Knowing that I have some one who cares about our children of the world and professional who realy care about their students and community.	1	.8	.8	59.8
Learning about different types of early education. Like Reggi Emilia, high scope, Montessori.	1	.8	.8	60.6
learning about family and the community we live in, also interacting with children on there level.	1	.8	.8	61.4
Learning about the "becoming a professional" aspect of the program.	1	.8	.8	62.2
Love the Harris Campuss!	1	.8	.8	63.0

Meeting the needs of children, Parents, and Families Programs and services for children and Families.	1	.8	.8	63.8
Meeting with other early childhood educators to discuss ideas and strategy	1	.8	.8	64.6
Morning and Evening Classes, Class Times, Child Development 1&2, and Child Guidence	1	.8	.8	65.4
Most of the teachers are very helpful and are early childhood teachers themselves. This is helpful because you can ask them questions that don't necessarily have to be related to the class, but to actual experience.	1	.8	.8	66.1
My co-op work within a school setting and being able to learn and be involved in the curriculum of a classroom setting. Watching, observing not oly the students but the staff.	1	.8	.8	66.9
My enteractions with the instructors and gaining their expertise and knowledge of the feild of working with children	1	.8	.8	67.7
My instructor. All of my classes so far I have taken under one professor and I like her love and knowledge of children and her respect of their families. If I am spending my time to learn all I can about the development of children and who and what effe	1	.8	.8	68.5
N/A	1	.8	.8	69.3

night classes	1	.8	.8	70.1
Nutrition and safety, child development one and two, English, Exploration for young children, adult child relations, strategies, Multiculture and many more.	1	.8	.8	70.9
Online courses	1	.8	.8	71.7
Practicum classes.	1	.8	.8	72.4
Practicum coursese were very helpful	1	.8	.8	73.2
So far I have only been in the EDU 119 & 144 classes. However, they have both been very educational for me; I have learned a lot from them.	1	.8	.8	74.0
Some of the classes help me understand my children and their parents	1	.8	.8	74.8
Some of the classes that are required i feel that they should not be in the curriculum	1	.8	.8	75.6
Some of the classes were during the day. They all was beneficial	1	.8	.8	76.4
Teachers know their field, very helpful relating textbook to the real world.	1	.8	.8	77.2
The ability to obtain the ethical code of teh profession as well as the developmental stages of the children that we serve	1	.8	.8	78.0
The activity that we did in the class as a group.	1	.8	.8	78.7
The aspect that has been very beneficial to me has been being able to interact and act out situation with in the class room	1	.8	.8	79.5

The Child Guidance class taught me more than most of the other classes.	1	.8	.8	80.3
The courses that taught how to implement these practices above. I did not receive any benefit in doing the creative activities because I have been in the field for a long time and it was boring to me.The lab was boring but the book info was good however,	1	.8	.8	81.1
the different projects that helped better understand certain lessons	1	.8	.8	81.9
The discussion board external documents; the professor filled that aspect very well!	1	.8	.8	82.7
The edu 119	1	.8	.8	83.5
The Edu 119, class learinng about the different backgrounds and the different ways to help build your classroom around these areas, without making any child feel leftout.	1	.8	.8	84.3
the hands on classes	1	.8	.8	85.0
The hands on labs in several areas were helpful such as creative activities, exploration activities.	1	.8	.8	85.8
The hands on student teaching (co-op) were very beneficial. Also having smaller classrooms where we could talk, interact, and work together helped greatly.	1	.8	.8	86.6
The instructors consistant need to educate the students.	1	.8	.8	87.4

The labs associated with the courses was very beneficial for me to gain understanding and hands on experiences.	1	.8	.8	88.2
The learning of development in children.	1	.8	.8	89.0
The most beneficial aspects of the program were the Internet links to resources in the Early Childhood Education field, PowerPoint notes from the instructor, and on-line collaboration and discussion with my classmates through the on-line course.	1	.8	.8	89.8
The ones that deal directly with the profession	1	.8	.8	90.6
The Online classes were the most beneficial.	1	.8	.8	91.3
The practical application related to course work and field experiences were the most beneficial.	1	.8	.8	92.1
The presentation of theParent participation and Parent involvement were very beneficial to me and my program as a licensed home day care provider.	1	.8	.8	92.9
The program as a whole is very beneficial to me. The more that I learn about the growth of a child in all aspects will make me more aware as a person as well as a better educator.	1	.8	.8	93.7

The program is great. I just feel that some teacher dont take the time to show student the way they would like for the work to be done. Then some classes give you so much work that you cant take the time to really learn you doing work. I feel that if the	1	.8	.8	94.5
The Safety,Nutrition,and Health in Early Education.	1	.8	.8	95.3
The teaching staff were to me, the best part of the program. They love what they do, and they care about children. It is obvious in the classroom.	1	.8	.8	96.1
To be able to get my credential's.	1	.8	.8	96.9
To get my degree in this field.	1	.8	.8	97.6
what I learned in child guidance have been especially helpful to me.	1	.8	.8	98.4
When we go to class and can listen, give feedback, and taking in what other classmates have to say. You never know what help someone else in a class can give includingour teachers.	1	.8	.8	99.2
yes	1	.8	.8	100.0
Total	127	100.0	100.0	

Table D2

What Areas, Concepts or Skills Feel Need/Needed Better Preparation

	Frequency	Percent	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	40	31.5	31.5	31.5
Added preparation in behavior management.	1	.8	.8	32.3
art and schedules for the pre K	1	.8	.8	33.1
Because I didn't have much experience in the field of a childs education or development until I started taking classes, I realize that I need all all the education that I can receive. It has helped me tremendously. I will continue to learn and grow as a	1	.8	.8	33.9
children in problem solving skills.	1	.8	.8	34.6
Class Scheduling at more than one location	1	.8	.8	35.4
communacations	1	.8	.8	36.2
Computer Skills/ Knowledge	1	.8	.8	37.0
Converting theory into practice	1	.8	.8	37.8
Disciples	1	.8	.8	38.6
fREE Art- Letting the children do more free art.	1	.8	.8	39.4
GETTING PARENTS INVOLVED IN THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION	1	.8	.8	40.2
Guidance and displine.	1	.8	.8	40.9
Guidance/Counseling	1	.8	.8	41.7

Health , Safety, and Nutrition class was taught by someone who I thought had no idea what they were doing. What I read from the book is what I learned. not from the instructor.	1	.8	.8	42.5
health/nutrition	1	.8	.8	43.3
i believe the best experience is by doing.of coure i do not know everything, but as time progress all situations will be thrown to me and at each time my skills,and prepartation will be getting better each and everytime	1	.8	.8	44.1
I can always learn more about the "teaching and learning" aspects.	1	.8	.8	44.9
I don't know	1	.8	.8	45.7
I don't know.	1	.8	.8	46.5
I feel like it prepare me better to work with children with with behavior problems.	1	.8	.8	47.2
I feel that all fields were well covered	1	.8	.8	48.0
I feel that i need more preparation in the field of learning CPR for the first aid training of the courses.	1	.8	.8	48.8
I feel that maybe there could be more classes avaiable in the summer.	1	.8	.8	49.6
I feel that the instructor have equiped me with the knowledge to move forward and to achieve the necessary goals that challenge the field of early childhood.	1	.8	.8	50.4

I found that I gain a wealth of new knowledge of how children developed, and I know that I am much more knowledgeable.	1	.8	.8	51.2
I have not yet completed all of the EDU coarses. However, the coarses that I've already had, had a great presentation and were well prepared.	1	.8	.8	52.0
i need beter perparation on guidance, learning to negiotiate with children.	1	.8	.8	52.8
I need better preparation in curriculum planning, but I am taking this course next semester.	1	.8	.8	53.5
I need to have a better communication with the parents and other members of the childs family.	1	.8	.8	54.3
I needed a better understanding of how to prepare educational lesson plans for various age groups.	1	.8	.8	55.1
I needed more preparation in using assessments to check prekindergartener's progress in Bright Beginning Programs.	1	.8	.8	55.9
I needed to know that each child has a different way of learning materials in th classroom.	1	.8	.8	56.7

I really would have prefered more activity type courses geared towards infants and toddlers. As a toddler teacher, some of the activities classes and such were very difficult to relate the information into my classroom. I enjoyed the infant/toddlers/tw	1	.8	.8	57.5
I think I need better preparation on curriculum.	1	.8	.8	58.3
I think I need more preperation on how to develop and maintain an effective curriculum. I would like to know more about how much impact I will actually have on it, as opposed to the school itself.	1	.8	.8	59.1
I think I was less prepared in areas concerning the families and the communities.	1	.8	.8	59.8
i think the curriculum has been great, i have only completed some of the classes and still have a lot more to take.	1	.8	.8	60.6
I think the ways of understanding children's need and the ways to respond to their needs or answer their questions are the two most important things which I need better preparation.	1	.8	.8	61.4
I would like more information about how to get the community involved with educating young children. I feel more confident in forming partnerships with families and colleagues, but not as confident with the surrounding community.	1	.8	.8	62.2

I would say I needed more help in being a parents advocacy.	1	.8	.8	63.0
In how to get alone with the children better.	1	.8	.8	63.8
Interacting with parents, getting to know the child before they come to class	1	.8	.8	64.6
Intorduction to Early Childhood and Child Development. I did not understand the classess at all so I got out of both of them knowing I really needed them to go on with my plans.	1	.8	.8	65.4
Just going back to school after many years and not knowing a lot of the math and english courses that are available now.	1	.8	.8	66.1
Knowing how to do the curriculum, the postives and negatives about your relationship withe the child and the childs parents.	1	.8	.8	66.9
learning what to say to children using the right words as to were they would understand and using the i message.	1	.8	.8	67.7
Math	1	.8	.8	68.5
Math :)	1	.8	.8	69.3
More Early Childhood Math classes with Ms. Adams, she encouraged me in Math 050, currently in Math 060 I am struggling, at the age of 52 I have great trouble memorizing formulas. As long as I have my notes I do fine. Math is the only thing that stands be	1	.8	.8	70.1

My one concern is that I feel I should have been prepared or made aware of the Praxis tsets that are needed to teach within certain states especially North Carolina. I am now finding after being a student at UNCC this has made it impossible to move forwa	1	.8	.8	70.9
n/a	5	3.9	3.9	74.8
N/A	3	2.4	2.4	77.2
none	2	1.6	1.6	78.7
None	2	1.6	1.6	80.3
None at this time.	1	.8	.8	81.1
none so far	1	.8	.8	81.9
None.	1	.8	.8	82.7
none. The teaching received along with working in the fild has helped me grow as a teacher.	1	.8	.8	83.5
not sure	1	.8	.8	84.3
nothing	1	.8	.8	85.0
Putting together my paper after I have gathered all the information.	1	.8	.8	85.8
registation	1	.8	.8	86.6
room arrangements	1	.8	.8	87.4
Safety, Nutrition, and Health.	1	.8	.8	88.2
same as above	1	.8	.8	89.0
talking with parents, curriculum planning	1	.8	.8	89.8

The areas of concepts and skills are just fine. It just that when you have the same homework for three classes its like whats the point. Then the teachers say that you cant give them the same work why not I had to do the same work for my last two edu cl	1	.8	.8	90.6
The areas, concepts or skills I feel I needed better preperation in is making the connection fron the classroom to my employment.	1	.8	.8	91.3
The concept of knowing what is approiate learning materials for children of all ages.	1	.8	.8	92.1
The Early Childhood Development 1 did not get good feed back with the Teacher. The quizzes to me wasn't nothing like you read in the chapter.	1	.8	.8	92.9
The ones that don't deal with the profession like art and music appercation.	1	.8	.8	93.7
The only area I have a problem with is the fact that you have to do a lot of observations and anadotel records. I mean the work is not bad but the improvement that I would say that needs to be done is better preparation. Meaning for those of us which are	1	.8	.8	94.5
The paperwork, and patience.	1	.8	.8	95.3
the prep math o6,07.08 is it another way to get threw the math	1	.8	.8	96.1

There needs to be more time discussing children with special needs.	1	.8	.8	96.9
To learn more about Engaging informed advocacy for children and the childhood profession.	1	.8	.8	97.6
Understanding the star rated programs and NAEYC. To expand on how to get families involved and to expand on marketing, I have worked in a GS110 church facility and some things are the same however, to expand on star rated center practices would have been	1	.8	.8	98.4
with knowing what to look for, but I also believe it is with experience as well.	1	.8	.8	99.2
Working with families, getting them involved. Guess that will come over time and working with more families.	1	.8	.8	100.0
Total	127	100.0	100.0	

Table D3

Themes Related to Open-Ended Question 1

Hands-on Experience	Development	Guidance	Classmates
I am currently a student of CPCC and have taken fewer courses in Early Childhood Education Program. Based on that I think the interactions with children and observing young children were most beneficial for me.	The learning of development in children.	what I learned in child guidance have been especially helpful to me.	When we go to class and can listen, give feedback, and taking in what other classmates have to say. You never know what help someone else in a class can give including our teachers.

The hands on labs in several areas were helpful such as creative activities, exploration activities.	The ability to obtain the ethical code of teh profession as well as the developmental stages of the children that we serve	The Child Guidance class taught me more than most of the other classes.	The most beneficial aspects of the program were the Internet links to resources in the Early Childhood Education field, PowerPoint notes from the instructor, and on-line collaboration and discussion with my classmates through the on-line course.
The hands on student teaching (co-op) were very beneficial. Also having smaller classrooms where we could talk, interact, and work together helped greatly.	So far I have only been in the EDU 119 & 144 classes. However, they have both been very educational for me; I have learned a lot from them.	I found my child guidance class to be most beneficial to me.	The hands on student teaching (co-op) were very beneficial. Also having smaller classrooms where we could talk, interact, and work together helped greatly.
Edu 119	Nutrition and safety, child development one and two, English,	I feel the guidance aspects has been beneficial to me. I also feel the child development courses are also well taught by Janna. So far the best professor has been Kristen Monteith, Janna Sonyarbrough,Lisa Goodwin. These instructors has made this experien	Meeting with other early childhood educators to discuss ideas and strategy

	It was all beneficial and necessary, especially learning how children develop	Guidance for Young Children	meeting others in the field and sharing strategies
I beleive that every aspect of the program was beneficial however, the most beneficial was the observation project.			
The labs associated with the courses was very beneficial for me to gain understanding and hands on experiences.	I think the classes in child development helped me prepare for practicum.	Guidance	Hearing and learning from the other students in my classes about the their teaching position inthe clasroom.
The practical application related to course work and field experiences were the most beneficial.	Child Developmet 1 & 11	Exploration for young children, adult child relations, strategies, Multiculture and many more.	having the hands on experience, the discussions, and gathering information
I enjoy the Service Learning aspect	Child development classes, Children with Exceptionalities	Courses such as Child Guidance, Child, Family and Community and Children with Special Needs were very beneficial to my every day work experience.	being in a class with other teachers who could relate and give ideas to help out in situations that occur in the class
I am currently a student of CPCC and have taken fewer courses in Early Childhood Education Program. Based on that I think the interactions with children and observing young children were most beneficial for me.	Child development and child guidance were the most beneficial aspects of the program for me.	Child guidance and creative activities.	Attending classes and getting an understanding of what is being taught in class and being able to take it about to incorporated into your field of work.
The edu 119	Child Development 1&2, and Child Guidence	Child development and child guidance were the most beneficial aspects of the program for me.	
creating different resource files to use in the class room	Child Development 1 AND 2 CLASSES	Child Development 1&2, and Child Guidence	

Practicum coursese were very helpful		Acctive listening is most benficial for me,because now I listen first instead of reacting first.
Having thehelp of the labs and the teachrs to help me better understand what I was lerning.		
Practicum classes.		
creative wasthe best to help me learn about the children		
My co-op work within a school setting and being able to learn and be involved in the curriculum of a classroom setting.		
Watching, observing not oly the students but the staff.		
I really enjoyed the co-op/practicum courses.		
Although it was a pain to visit other centers, it was benifical to see another center in action. It was also very benifical to spend time in my classroom working on the various skills and having an instruct		
Child guidance and creative activities.		

Table D4

Themes Related to Open-Ended Question 2

Working With Families and Communities	Curriculum Planning and/or Implementation	Child Guidance
Working with families, getting them involved. Guess that will come over time and working with more families.	The concept of knowing what is approiate learning materials for children of all ages.	learning what to say to children using the right words as to were they would understand and using the i message.
Understanding the star rated programs and NAEYC. To expand on how to get families involved and to expand on marketing, I have worked in a GS110 church facility and some things are the same however, to expand	talking with parents, curriculum planning	i need beter perparation on guidance, learning to negiotiate with children.

on star rated center practices would have been		
	Knowing how to do the curriculum, the postives and negatives about your relationship withe the child and the childs parents.	Guidance/Counseling
talking with parents, curriculum planning		
Interacting with parents, getting to know the child before they come to class	I think I need more preperation on how to develop and maintain an effective curriculum. I would like to know more about how much impact I will actually have on it, as opposed to the school itself.	Guidance and displine.
I would say I needed more help in being a parents advocacy.	I think I need better preparation on curriculum.	children in problem solving skills.
I would like more information about how to get the community involved with educating young children. I feel more confident in forming partnerships with families and colleagues, but not as confident with the surrounding community.	I really would have prefered more activity type courses geared towards infants and toddlers. As a toddler teacher, some of the activities classes and such were very difficult to relate the information into my classroom. I enjoyed the infant/toddlers/tw	Added preparation in behavior management.
I think I was less prepared in areas concerning the families and the communities.	I needed a better understanding of how to prepare educational lesson plans for various age groups.	
I need to have a better communication with the parents and other members of the childs family.	I need better preparation in curriculum planning, but I am taking this course next semester.	
GETTING PARENTS INVOLVED IN THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION	I can always learn more about the "teaching and learning" aspects.	