Leadership knowledge, skills, and behaviors of Administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool Program and Head Start) in the Inland Empire Area

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Abstract

High quality early childhood education programs characterized by engaging administrative leadership can result in long term benefits. Despite the fact that the importance of leadership has been established in the field of education in general, research on leadership in early childhood settings has been lacking (Murray 2013; Stamopoulos, 2012; Wise & Wright, 2012). According to Murray (2013), “The quest to develop models of leadership which suit Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and engage greater practitioner participation is a concern not only for England but also for Australia, Finland and many other countries”(p.289). Benefits of children attending high quality preschool programs according to Barnett (2008), improvements in school success, higher achievement in test scores, lower rates of grade repetition and special education, and higher educational attainment. According to Pipa (1997) the need for high quality early childhood education programs are on the rise due to economic reality of American families. The purpose of this research study is to identify and describe if any leadership knowledge, skills and behaviors are found among Administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool Program (CSPP) and Head Start (HS)) in the Inland Empire Area and to determine in what ways if any of these leadership knowledge, skills and behaviors of these administrators are similar or different from those identified in the research literature. This study will use descriptive research methodology which is in the quantitative paradigm. By utilizing the survey research design, data will be gathered to learn about leadership knowledge, skills and behaviors of 10 administrators by interviews and 50 teachers by completing questionnaires about their administrators in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties situated in the Inland Empire.

*Keywords*: Early Childhood Education, Leadership, Preschool, Head Start, State Preschool Program

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**Chapter I - Introduction**

**Statement of the research problem**

The researcher hopes to learn about “Leadership knowledge, skills and behaviors of Administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool Program and Head Start) in the Inland Empire Area.” through this study. This study is a replicate study which was carried out by Pipa (1997) to learn about the impact of early childhood education leadership in the Inland Empire. Currently there are two major issues faced in the field of early childhood education: (1) Increase in demand for preschool education for children between 3-5 years

(2) Limited research about leadership in early childhood education. It is important to study about the leadership practices of early childhood education leaders because there is a direct impact on the quality of the early childhood programs (Bloom, 1992). It is relevant to study about early childhood education leadership as there is a scarcity of research on this topic. Benefits of early childhood education is proven in many studies. There are three chapters in this research proposal. The researcher will discuss the purpose of the study, type of research, research questions, significance of the study, assumptions, delimitations and definition of key terms in the first chapter of this research proposal. In the second chapter, the literature will be reviewed and the methodology will be discussed in the third chapter of this research proposal.

High quality early childhood education programs characterized by engaging administrative leadership can result in long term benefits. Research on early childhood education leadership is limited worldwide (Murray 2013; Stamopoulos, 2012). According to Murray (2013), “The quest to develop models of leadership which suit Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and engage greater practitioner participation is a concern not only for England but also for Australia, Finland and many other countries”(p.289). Benefits of children attending high quality preschool programs according to Barnett (2008) improvements in school success, higher achievement in test scores, lower rates of grade repetition and special education, and higher educational attainment. According to Izbicki (2004) high quality early childhood education programs impacts children from low-income and as well as children with identified special needs. Economists have found that high-quality early childhood education offers one of the highest returns of any public investment -- more than $7 for every dollar spent. (Reynold, 2002).

According to Pipa (1997) the need for high quality early childhood education programs are on the rise due to economic reality of American families. Families have to depend on income of both parents and single parents are compelled to work long hours to make ends meet. Some children spend as long as 10-12 hours in child care programs. According to the 2011 Child Care Data Report of California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, Children on waitlists to receive child care subsidy have increased in both Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.

**Purpose of Study**

The first purpose of this study is to identify and describe what if any, leadership knowledge, skills, and behaviors are found among Administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool Program and Head Start) in the Inland Empire area as determined by state and federal reviews and based on the perceptions of administrators and their teachers.

The second purpose of this study is to determine in what ways if any of these leadership knowledge, skills, and behaviors of these administrators are similar or different from those identified in the research literature.

**Type of Research**

Research method for this study will be descriptive research design which is in the quantitative paradigm.

“Descriptive design help provide answers to the questions of who, what, when, where and how associated with a particular research problem; a descriptive study cannot conclusively ascertain answers to why. Descriptive research is used to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena and describe “what exists” with respect to variables or conditions in a situation” (Schnorr, Santamaria, & Piller, 2011, p. 38).

Since my quest is to describe the leadership knowledge, skills and behaviors of administrators and not to establish relationships, make predictions, or test hypothesis about these attributes descriptive research design fits my need. The research design which I will utilize is survey research to acquire information for my study. According to (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013) survey research involves to gather information about one or more groups of people and about their characteristics by asking questions and tabulating the answers. The goal is to learn about a large population of early childhood education Administrators by sampling a few Administrators.

**Research Questions**

1. What, if any leadership knowledge do administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool and Head Start) in the Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino counties) demonstrate based on the perceptions of the administrators and their teachers?

2. What, if any leadership skills do administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool and Head Start) in the Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino counties) demonstrate based on the perceptions of the administrators and their teachers?

3. What, if any leadership behaviors do administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool and Head Start) in the Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino counties) demonstrate based on the perceptions of the administrators and their teachers?

4. In what ways, if any, are the leadership knowledge, skills, and behaviors of the administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool and Head Start) in the Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino counties) as identified by the state (Monitoring Instrument Item Report by Child Development Division of California Department of Education) and federal (Monitoring Protocol by the Office of Head Start (OHS) ), similar or different from those identified in the current research literature in the areas of (a) staff development; (b) setting the direction for the program; (c)instructional leadership; (d) internal organizational politics; (e) external organizational politics?

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it has the potential to transform the practice of early childhood educational leadership in the Inland Empire for the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) and the Head Start (HS) preschool programs. As a results of the researcher sharing the findings with leaders of the Child Development Division of California Department of Education and the Office of Head Start, specific information can be used by these agencies in providing in-service trainings to early childhood administrators. Currently there are two major issues faced in the field of early childhood education: (1) The increase in demand for preschool education for children between 3-5 years (2) Limited research about leadership in early childhood education. According to Pipa (1997) the need for high quality early childhood education programs are on the rise due to economic reality of American families. Families have to depend on income of both parents and single parents are compelled to work long hours to make ends meet. Some children spend as long as 10-12 hours in child care programs. According to the 2011 Child Care Data Report of California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, children on waitlists to receive child care subsidy have increased in both Riverside and San Bernardino counties. There has been many studies that noted the strong and positive effect of educational leadership on student achievement, school culture, and other aspects of the educational environment. Current research also points unequivocally toward leadership as an important factor in the achievement of quality in most educational institutions. Leadership has been cited as second only to classroom instruction in its contribution to achievement. Despite the fact that the importance of leadership has been established in the field of education in general, research on leadership in early childhood settings has been lacking. Further, the research in this area is dominated by only a few researchers, with most of the studies being conducted as dissertations (Wise & Wright, 2012). There has been an ongoing debate for decades over what constitutes effective leadership preparation. The current high-stakes accountability environment has increased the attention given to institutions that prepare individuals to become PK-12 school leaders. One of the primary concerns of critics is the failure of university-based preparation programs to effectively bridge the leadership theory taught in courses with the reality of the lived experiences of practitioners (Myran, Sanzo, & Clayton, 2011).

**Assumptions**

1. There is a direct correlation between the leadership knowledge, leadership skills and leadership behaviors of early childhood education Administrators and the quality of the early childhood education program.
2. There is a direct correlation between student success and the quality early childhood education program.
3. Self-reported interviews will reflect the accurate information about the leadership knowledge, skills, and behaviors of the ECE Administrators.
4. Surveys completed by the teachers will reflect the accurate information about their administrator’s knowledge, skills and behaviors.

**Delimitations**

1. This study will delimit to the population of Administrators and teachers of California State Preschool Program (CSPP) and Head Start (HS) programs located in public school districts in the Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino counties). This study will not identify leadership knowledge, skills, and behaviors of Principals of elementary schools, Coordinators of the early childhood programs, Site Supervisors or Para professionals of the early childhood education programs. The rationale behind this is the focus of the study is leadership of early childhood education Administrators.

2. This study will delimit to high quality California State Preschool Programs and Head Start Preschool programs as identified by the program monitoring tools by the California Department of Education (CDE) and Office of Head Start (OHS). The rationale behind this is that these monitoring tools are the determents of measuring the overall quality and the program standards of the early childhood education programs.

3. The sample size – This study will choose 5 early childhood education programs that serves more than 100 preschoolers from each county (total of 10), 5 Administrators from each county (total of 10) and 25 teachers from each county (total of 50)

**Definition of Key Terms**

1. Administrator - The Administrator is an individual responsible for the overall day-to-day operation and the management of one or more full-day (six and a half hours) or part day (three and a half hours) early childhood education programs for preschoolers in school districts. This individual may be identified as the “Principal,” “Coordinator,” “Program Director,” or “Director.”

2. Preschooler – A child between the ages of 3-5 years.

3. Early Childhood Education (ECE) & Early Care and Education (ECE) is the field of study that provides education and care for young children between 3-5 years of age.

4. Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program/Center – A term that includes to provide full-day (six hours) or part day (three hours) early childhood education programs for preschoolers in school districts. This may include Child Development Program, Child Care Center, Preschool, California State Preschool Program and Head Start.

5. Monitoring Instrument Item Report – A comprehensive monitoring tool used by the Child Development Division of California Department of Education to measure the overall quality of the California State Preschool Program.

6. Monitoring Protocol - A comprehensive monitoring tool used by the Office of Head Start (OHS) to measure the overall quality of the Head Start preschool program.

7. High Quality Programs – Preschool programs that offer school readiness skills for preschool children which comprised of research based student assessments, curriculum, learning environment and parent participation. (a) Curriculum: Early childhood education programs that offer developmentally appropriate education and play activities with a research based curriculum that meets the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical and self-help skills of preschoolers.

(b) Environment: Early childhood education programs that offer a safe and stimulating learning environment assessed by the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS).

(c) Assessments: Early childhood education programs that assess children throughout the year time using research based methodologies with supporting documentation. i.e. DRDP (Desired Results Development Profiles). (d) Parent Involvement - Early childhood education programs that has built a strong relationship with parents and involve parents of preschoolers in decision making, advisory board, leadership board and volunteering in the classrooms.

8. Student success/achievement – School readiness skills children demonstrate in student assessments as measured by the pre and post DRDP assessments conducted during the beginning of the school year and end of the year.

**Chapter II – Literature Review**

The purpose of chapter II is to review the current literature and examine the importance of early childhood education programs, describe Head Start (HS) and California State Preschool Program (CSPP), describe the Inland Empire, review current literature about the leadership in early childhood education, discuss the importance of the leadership of early childhood education programs and conclusions will be made about the connectedness between the literature and the research topic.

**Theme 1 - Historical Context of the Problem - Importance of Early Childhood Education**

According to Pipa (1997) the need for high quality early childhood education programs are on the rise due to economic reality of American families. Families have to depend on income of both parents and single parents are compelled to work long hours to make ends meet. Some children spend as long as 10-12 hours in child care programs. In today’s competitive global society, with ever increasing technology and literacy demands, it is crucial that children develop powerful academic and social skills to be successful in attaining high levels of academic achievement. According to Cannon, (2007, p.1) “The concept of using the early childhood years to boost school readiness and ideally set students on a positive trajectory is not new.” School readiness is a critically important factor in a child’s ability to move fluidly through the PK-12 educational system and beyond. The myriad of school readiness activities that a child-centered preschool program provide can impact overall educational achievement, adult earnings, and income potential throughout an individual’s lifetime. Child-centered preschool programs which focus on developmental and academically focused curriculum can have a positive generational effect to move families out of poverty. Economists have found that high-quality early childhood education offers one of the highest returns of any public investment -- more than $7 for every dollar spent (Reynold, 2002).

Today, the Obama administration has focused on the “Race to the Top” (RTT) initiative. Preschool education is a part of this initiative. California receives federal funds through this initiative under the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) which is used to implement a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) in preschool programs (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires 2012).

**Theme 2 – History of Head Start and California State Preschool Program**

Currently, there are two (2) predominant Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs which receive significant federal and state funding. They are the Head Start and State Preschool Programs (Cannon, 2007). Head Start is a federally funded comprehensive early ECE program which was introduced and implemented in May 1965. California State Preschool Program (CSPP) also began in California in 1965. Early Childhood Education programs which are operated in school districts in the Inland Empire receives federal and state funds.

Since the 1950’s significant educational initiatives, reforms, mandates, and federally funded educational programs have played an important role in improving education in America. Many of these programs and initiatives have been developed and implemented to provide more equitable access to educational resources and to close the achievement gap for millions of children across the nation who live in poverty. Sometimes referred to as the “backbone” of educational reform, the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which was signed into legislation in 1954 was a prime impetus in promoting, sustaining, and guiding the improvement of education. Since then, many strides have been made in the effort to close achievement gaps across ethnic, socioeconomic, and social demographics throughout the nation.

The Johnson administration was responsible for the passage of Title I federal funding which enabled the Head Start Program to begin. Head Start program was intended to assist children to overcome setbacks or obstacles caused by poverty. Head start initially was formed as an eight week summer program staffed with many volunteers. The Head Start curriculum is a child-centered program which focuses on the whole child: cognitive, social emotional, motor skills, along with Mental and Physical health. The curriculum emphasizes the importance of the participation by the family in order to enrich the child’s educational experience while supporting the family. The Head Start program also requires that 10% of its population be filled with students with special needs (Puma, 2010). According to Izbicki (2004) high quality early childhood education programs impacts children from low-income and as well as children with identified special needs.

According to Cannon, California’s State Preschool program began in 1965, the same year that Head Start began. Similar to Head Start, the focus of the State Preschool program is to serve children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. “This strategy is being adopted across the country as states allocate resources to expand access to publicly funded preschool programs, in some cases available to all four-year-olds.” (Cannon, 2007, P.1)

The irony is that some families don’t get the opportunity to send their children to California State Preschool (CSPP) or Head Start (HS) as they have to be income eligible according to state and federal income guidelines. This leaves families at a loss in finding quality preschool programs for their children. “Out of the total population in CA, 18% of 4 year old children attend California State Preschool and 12% of 4 year old children attend Head Start program in CA. Cost per child to attend California State Preschool is $5,069 and $8,832 to attend Head Start (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires 2012, p. 40).

**Theme 3 – Inland Empire**

Inland Empire consists of Riverside and San Bernardino counties. According to the 2011 Child Care Data Report of California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, children on waitlists to receive child care subsidy have increased in both Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. According to the report titled Benefits of Head Start and Early Head Start by the National Head Start Association, Head Start is a wise investment for society. In a longitudinal study of more than 600 Head Start graduates in San Bernardino County, California, showed that society receives nearly $9 in benefits for every $1 invested in these Head Start children. These benefits include increased earnings, employment, and family stability, and decreased welfare dependency, crime costs, grade repetition, and special education.

**Theme 4 – Research in Early Childhood Education Leadership**

Research in early childhood education leadership is limited worldwide (Murray 2013; Stamopoulos, 2012). According to Murray (2013), “The quest to develop models of leadership which suit Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and engage greater practitioner participation is a concern not only for England but also for Australia, Finland and many other countries”(p.289). Stamopoulos (2012) conducted 2 longitudinal research studies 1992 to 1995 and 1996-2001 and investigated principals, early childhood teachers and teacher’s aides on educational changes in work contexts. According to Stamopoulos (2012) “Leadership is reframed as a shared responsibility for all early childhood professionals who must tackle educational change. This leadership model challenges those involved in change to build on their pedagogical and professional knowledge and maintain their professional identity” (p.42). Murray (2013) conducted a qualitative longitudinal research study to investigate the motivation of aspiring, current and experienced practitioners in leading practice and to discover how they were interpreting and applying their professional purpose as an EYP (Early Years Practitioners). Data revealed consistency and correlation between all three groups about their motivation and model of leadership they were pursing. Participants viewed leadership as collaborative and community oriented. Some participants in group a viewed leadership as non-authoritative.

Both (Murray 2013; Stamopoulos, 2012) concluded that research on early childhood education leadership is limited.

**Theme 5 – Administrator’s Impact on the Quality of the Early Childhood Education Program**

According to Bloom (1992) there is a direct correlation between the leader and the quality of the early childhood education program. Bloom (1992) carried out a quantitative and qualitative study and concluded that quality staff training is a determinant of the overall quality of the program. The researcher conducted the study on 22 participants in the study group and 22 in the control group. Deakins (2007) carried out action research to learn about Effectiveness of Learning Organization and Adaptive Enterprise Theories for promoting organization-wide learning and creating a more effective early childhood education organization. In a research conducted in a state funded preschool program in West Virginia to learn about the preschool environment and the knowledge of the directors about the quality of the learning environment, it was found that using the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) as a training tool to improve the quality of preschool classrooms and the director’s knowledge about the quality of the preschool. (Warash, Markstrom, & Lucci, 2005).

**Theme 6 – Significance to Study - Leadership of Early Childhood Education**

It is significant to study about the leadership in early childhood education because of the importance of early childhood education, the studies on Head Start and California State Preschool. Also as noted in the literature review, research on leadership in early childhood education is very limited. Therefore as stated on themes 1-5 it is imperative to study the leadership of early childhood education.

**Purpose of Study**

The first purpose of this study is to identify and describe what if any, leadership knowledge, skills, and behaviors are found among Administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool Program and Head Start) in the Inland Empire area as determined by state and federal reviews and based on the perceptions of administrators and their teachers.

The second purpose of this study is to determine in what ways if any of these leadership knowledge, skills, and behaviors of these administrators are similar or different from those identified in the research literature.

**Research Questions**

1. What, if any leadership knowledge do administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool and Head Start) in the Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino counties) demonstrate based on the perceptions of the administrators and their teachers?

2. What, if any leadership skills do administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool and Head Start) in the Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino counties) demonstrate based on the perceptions of the administrators and their teachers?

3. What, if any leadership behaviors do administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool and Head Start) in the Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino counties) demonstrate based on the perceptions of the administrators and their teachers?

4. In what ways, if any, are the leadership knowledge, skills, and behaviors of the administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool and Head Start) in the Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino counties) as identified by the state (Monitoring Instrument Item Report by Child Development Division of California Department of Education) and federal (Monitoring Protocol by the Office of Head Start (OHS) ), similar or different from those identified in the current research literature in the areas of (a) staff development; (b) setting the direction for the program; (c)instructional leadership; (d) internal organizational politics; (e) external organizational politics?

**CHAPTER III – Methodology**

The purpose of Chapter III is to discuss the research methodology, research tools, data collection, data analysis and the dissemination of data. In addition, summation of the research proposal will be provided.

**Research Method** – This study will use descriptive research method which is in the quantitative paradigm.

“Descriptive design help provide answers to the questions of who, what, when, where and how associated with a particular research problem; a descriptive study cannot conclusively ascertain answers to why. Descriptive research is used to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena and describe “what exists” with respect to variables or conditions in a situation” (Schnorr, Santamaria, & Piller, 2011, p. 38).

Since my quest is to describe the leadership knowledge, skills and behaviors of administrators and not to establish relationships, make predictions, or test hypothesis about these attributes descriptive research design fits my need. The research design which I will utilize is survey research to acquire information for my study. According to (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013) survey research involves to gather information about one or more groups of people and about their characteristics by asking questions and tabulating the answers. The goal is to learn about a large population of early childhood education Administrators by sampling a few Administrators.

**Research Tools**

Research tools that I will utilize are interviews and questionnaires which were developed by Pipa (1997). I will contact the researcher to obtain permission prior to using these tools. I will be conducting interviews with the ECE Administrators and mail questionnaires with self-addressed envelopes and pre-paid postage to ECE teachers. According to (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013) questionnaires have a low return rate. In addition (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013) also stresses the importance of planning and constructing questionnaires thoughtfully.

**Data Collection**

Data will be collected from the following sample size for the research:

5 early childhood education programs that serve more than 100 preschoolers from each county (total of 10),

5 Administrators from each county (total of 10)

25 teachers from each county (total of 50)

**Data Analysis**

Quantitative data will be gathered from the interview of the Administrators and surveys that the teachers will complete. I will be using the Statistical package (SPSS) to analyze data.

**Dissemination**

Data will be kept secured and under lock and key in order to protect the privacy of the research participants. Data will be destroyed according to the expectations of the school of doctoral studies of the College of Education of California State University San Bernardino.

**Summary**

This research proposal reviewed leadership knowledge, skills and behaviors of Administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool Program and Head Start) in the Inland Empire Area. The is a replicate study of the original study which was completed by Pipa (1997).

The researcher examined the two major issues faced in the field of early childhood education: (1) Increase in demand for preschool education for children between 3-5 years (2) Limited research about leadership in early childhood education. . Despite the fact that the importance of leadership has been established in the field of education in general, research on leadership in early childhood settings has been lacking (Murray 2013; Stamopoulos, 2012; Wise & Wright, 2012). According to Pipa (1997) the need for high quality early childhood education programs are on the rise due to economic reality of American families. The purpose of this research study is to identify and describe if any leadership knowledge, skills and behaviors are found among Administrators of early childhood education programs (California State Preschool Program (CSPP) and Head Start (HS)) in the Inland Empire Area and to determine in what ways if any of these leadership knowledge, skills and behaviors of these administrators are similar or different from those identified in the research literature.

This study will use descriptive research methodology which is in the quantitative paradigm. This study is significant because it has the potential to transform the practice of early childhood educational leadership in the Inland Empire for the California State Preschool Program (CSPP) and the Head Start (HS) preschool programs.

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