



The influence of preschool on St. Maarten

Comparing achievements of children in group 1 and 2

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Student	Cyriara van Broekhoven (411605)
Supervisors	Dr. R. van 't Rood, Utrecht University Ms. O. Boirard, Division for Educational Innovation St. Maarten
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C.A. van Broekhoven

Abstract

The aim of the present study was to investigate the influence of preschool on children's achievements in group 1 and 2 on St. Maarten. Six schools participated in the research, from which four were private schools and two were public schools. Two classes from each school were involved, from which all the students and teachers participated. Also, the student care coordinators and parents contributed to this study. For many involved in education, preschool is helpful and important and it sets a basic foundation for the rest of child's educational career. But little is known about the specific skills preschool contributes to and how important it is as a factor in a child's development on St. Maarten. The ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner was used as a framework and was able to explain and display the results of this study. Not only preschool was taken into consideration, but also the socioeconomic status of the parents, their language, parental involvement (the Active Parenting Program) and last but not least the educational system on St. Maarten as a whole. This study made use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative methods did not confirm the assumption that preschool has an influence on the achievements of children in group 1 and 2, but it did confirm a relation between achievements and the socioeconomic status from a part of the sample. Perhaps due to a small sample size of children that did not attend preschool or that it was not always clear what kind of care a child has had, could be the reasons for the absence of significant results. The qualitative methods, however did indicate a certain influence of preschool. These methods did not only confirm that preschool has a positive influence on a child's achievements, but also pointed out other important markers which eventually created a complete picture of the educational system on St. Maarten. Finally, various bottlenecks were found within the educational system. These bottlenecks have led to a number of recommendations for DEI and other stakeholders to improve the quality of early childhood education and primary education.

Keywords: St. Maarten, preschool, primary school, socioeconomic status, achievements of students, parental involvement

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With great pleasure I am presenting you this thesis about the influence of preschool on St. Maarten. Since January 2014 till June 2014 I have been fully committed to conducting the research and writing this thesis. I am hoping this thesis will provide a guideline for the Division for Educational Innovation to further development of education.

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1. Research Background

1.1 Sint Maarten

St. Maarten is the Dutch part of an island located in the Caribbean Sea and is a part of the Leeward Islands. Since the 10th of October 2010 St. Maarten gained an autonomous status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. St. Maarten has its own Constitution and its own institutions to determine government policy, however defense and foreign affairs remain a responsibility of the Kingdom.

The island was discovered by Christopher Columbus on behalf of Spain in 1493 and in 1648 the island was divided between the Netherlands and France by the Treaty of Concordia. Although the island is divided, the inhabitants can move freely from one side to the other. There is no real border. The present study will focus on the Dutch side of the island.

The main source of income on the island is tourism. Only about 10 percent of the island is suitable for agriculture, while 90 percent of the food is imported. A lot of inhabitants from the Caribbean move to St. Maarten. In 2011 the total amount of nationalities was 118. Most immigrants came from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica and Guyana. Dutch and English are the official languages on the island. Other languages are Spanish, Creole, Papiamentu and French (UNICEF, 2013).

1.2 Education on Sint Maarten

1.2.1 Education in general

The education system on St. Maarten offers eight years of Elementary School and 4 to 6 years of Secondary Education. Education is compulsory for students from age 4 to age 18. Preschool or Early Childhood Education is not compulsory, but the number of institutions that offers this kind of schooling has increased over the years. The government of St. Maarten provides subsidy to all privately owned Elementary and Secondary Schools that comply with the education laws of the land. The government owns 7 of the 18 primary schools (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, 2011).

1.2.2 Early Childhood Education (ECE)

The ECE includes preschools and daycare centers. In 2008 the implementation of the High/Scope curriculum started. This curriculum provides a program for all ECE Centers. It teaches how to create a supportive setting for young children, built around the principles of active learning (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, 2011). According to SIFMA (2011) about 33 preschools are located on the island, they all differ in size, amount of staff, amount of children enrolled, quality and location. There are two school boards offering a preschool program starting at the age of 3, before entering primary school. Before enrolling into a school, a child's abilities are tested. The difference between the Public School Board and the other school boards is that the public schools have to admit every child and the other schools do not have to (DEI, 2012). A majority of studies find that preschool experience gives children a more favorable start at school and there is evidence of continuous effects during the subsequent school years. In many instances, short-term effects exceed longer-term effects on cognitive development (Burger, 2010). Findings are that children's preschool and childcare experiences are crucial for the development of important school readiness skills, and later school outcomes and that a successful transition to school buffers children's future academic

and behavioral development (Winsler, Tran, Hartman, Madigan, Manfra, & Bleiker, 2008). Early learning opportunities appear to enhance a child's capacity to learn which might improve their later elementary school performance. By providing social and cognitive experiences, preschool programs supplement the home environments of children. They create a familiarity with (pre-) school institutions and procedures which might facilitate formal schooling later on (Burger, 2010).

1.2.3 Elementary Education

The Elementary Education system was reformed in early 2000. Foundation Based Education was introduced in the year 2002-2003, to support the aims of the Ministry of Education of the Netherlands Antilles (DEI, 2013). Before the implementation of FBE the system was divided in kindergarten and grade 1 to 6. Not only were kindergarten schools separated from elementary schools, but they were also managed and run separately and independently from elementary schools. With the introduction of FBE, kindergarten and elementary schools were merged and changed into group 1 to 8. Learning in Elementary school was now set up in cycles. Group 1 to 4 became Cycle 1 and group 5 to 8 became Cycle 2. The main language of instruction on the island is English, but a few schools were permitted to keep Dutch as the language of instruction.

There are 16 government subsidized elementary schools and 1 school for Special Education on St. Maarten. These schools are divided over five School Boards/Foundations (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, 2011). The School Boards exist out of: Public Education, Catholic Education, The Hillside Christian Schools, The Seventh Day Adventist School and The Methodist Agogic Center. Since the start of FBE, all schools should work according to one curriculum. This curriculum is an essential determinant of student behavior and performance and it provides equal opportunities for all students in order to enrich the quality of their lives. The curriculum contains different areas on which a child's abilities can be monitored. The areas are Cultural Artistic Development, Health and Psychical Education, Language and Communication, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Social Studies, Social Emotional Development and lastly, there is Philosophy of Life for the public schools, whereas the private schools focus-on religion. With the renewed focus, the common goal of island development can be reached (DERPI, 2005).

1.3 Labour and economic situation on Sint Maarten

1.3.1 Poverty and Labour on Sint Maarten

According to the Department of Statistics (STAT,2009) no poverty line is known on St. Maarten, but they are currently working on defining one. Every two years a survey is conducted about the employment of inhabitants of St. Maarten. The participants of this survey are only inhabitants that were born on St. Maarten. In 2009 there was an increase of the employed population of just over 3 percent, which only can be attributed to the number of employed women. Also the unemployment rate increased from 10.6 percent in 2007 to 12.2 percent in 2009, whereas the youth unemployment rate stands at 29,4 percent. This unemployment rate can mostly be attributed to men and other groups that were not born on St. Maarten (STAT, 2009). There is a lot of hidden poverty on St. Maarten, mostly (non-registered) immigrants face problems of poverty (UNICEF, 2013).

On St. Maarten there are three forms of social security; (1) financial support, (2) legal

assistance for civil work and (3) health care for uninsured medical attention. Women still make less money than men, while they are mostly the main caregivers for their children. Most parents have to work multiple jobs to provide in the high costs of living. Because of this, children spend a long time in daycare centers, at schools or they stay at home alone, which can have negative consequences (UNICEF, 2013). Studies on the influence of poverty show that this factor seems to influence the achievements of children in school. Poverty is associated with poor medical care, poor nutrition, low self-esteem and low quality of education (Bulut, 2013). Poor families have fewer resources than other families. One of these resources is family income, which is likely to affect a parent's ability to support a child's development. Also, parental education (which influences the activities and interactions a parent has with their child) and the cognitive stimulation provided in the home environment (objects that can stimulate and enrich a child's experience and learning) play an important role in the development of a child (Votruba-Drzal & Coley, 2013; Beceren, 2010). Becker (2011) also adds the differences in parenting, the neighborhood, parental stimulation and the parent-child interactions as important aspects in explaining early disparities. The cognitive interaction and stimulation between a parent and a child are significantly related to the intelligence development. Also, children with socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have an unfavorable development, unlike their more advantaged peers. They are more likely to repeat grades and develop the need for special education and eventually be taken away from normal schooling. Also, there is a higher probability that they will drop out of school (Burger, 2010). They enter with fewer academic skills and lag behind in their cognitive development. These learning difficulties persist during the early school years and will continue to show themselves in different rates of high school graduation and ultimately in later employment (Magnuson & Shager, 2010; Bulut, 2013).

1.3.2 Parental Involvement

In 2008 an Active Parenting program was introduced on St. Maarten with the purpose of increasing the parental involvement rate. Active Parenting can be described as a video-based parental involvement program that aims at creating a positive parenting style. The main goal of AP is teaching parents this strategy, which includes emotional support, high standards, appropriate granting and clear communication between parent and child. At the moment there are several variants of the program: "AP 1,2,3,4 with children 0-4 years" used by SIFMA, "AP now in 3" for parents with children 5-12 years old and "AP for teens". Between 2008 and 2013 at least two parental involvement sessions were held at each school, which resulted in at least more than 3000 parents being trained (Rijkaard, 2013).

It was concluded that parents understood the programs and thought that they were interesting and informative, but were not consistent in applying the methods and skills taught and demonstrated during the workshop. The program requires better implementation, but it is clear that it has a positive effect on parenting styles, which indirectly influences the child's achievements in school (Rijkaard, 2013).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Social Ecological Systems Theory

The Socio-Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner (1977) describes four different levels that clarify how a child and the environment influence each other when the child is growing up and developing skills. These four levels are: the micro system, the meso system, the exo system and the macro system. The micro systems refers to all institutions and groups within the direct area of the child, these include all the direct relationships the child has. These relationships are for example the parents, peers, their daycare or school and neighborhood. The more encouraging and nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the chances are that the child will develop well emotionally, cognitively and socially (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The meso system includes micro systems working together. For example the parent's relationship and communication with the school. If the parent is actively involved in their child's education, the child is positively influenced by this. The exo system influences the child indirectly. An example can be the parent's situation at work. On St. Maarten it often happens that parents have multiple jobs to earn their livings. Because of that, the parent isn't able to provide the child with the attention it needs. Finally, the macro system, refers to the legal system and the culture of the place the child lives in. These aspects determine the structures and habits that are part of the child's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). An example of a macro system for St. Maarten would be to subsidize preschools to provide every child with a fair chance and strong basis in education.

According to Galindo & Sheldon (2012) the two most influential contexts in which young children's learning and development occur are home and school. The authors take over both Bronfenbrenner and Epstein's theory about "overlapping spheres of influence". This theory suggests that the overlap between school and home can have a positive influence on the child's development and academic achievement. If the school maintains a positive relationship with the parents, it will more likely determine a child's academic success. Epstein includes six types of family and community involvement (parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community) that contribute to the academic achievement (Epstein, 2001). Family, school, community, as well as variables related to children themselves, can support positive early academic development in areas such as literacy and mathematics among children in poverty (Hindman, Skibbe, Miller, & Zimmerman, 2010). Findings support the theoretical assumption that communication between contexts (home and school) help explain children's achievements (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012).

2.2 Settings of the research

This study will focus on the academic achievements of children influenced by two settings: the school setting and the home setting. To investigate if there are any bottlenecks, also the communication between parents and teachers, the level of parental involvement and attending the AP program are taken into consideration. These aspects are part of the meso system. When researching the home setting, the exo system is also included because the economic status of the parents is investigated, to review if the economic background influences a child's achievements in group 1 and 2 of primary school. With the different focus

groups planned, the aim is to get different perspectives from different stakeholders, so that recommendations can be made about the macro system.

2.2.1 The home setting

The home setting in this case includes the family background of the child and the parental involvement. Within this study of the family background, the socioeconomic status and some personal information (education, marital status, work) are taken into consideration. A study on the role of early childcare in closing the learning gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children showed that the level of education of the mother was more strongly correlated with the child's development than the education of the father. Children of mothers with low levels of education showed a consistent pattern of lower scores on academic readiness and achievement tests at 6 and 7 years old than those of highly educated mothers, unless they had received a program before starting elementary school. Also, attending preschool seemed to be more significant for lower SES children for obtaining higher scores than for children who stayed with their parents (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2007; Geoffrey et al., 2010). A study that focused on socioeconomic differences in reading trajectories concluded that not only the family context is considered important, but that the qualities of school and community are also associated with differences in reading development to a greater extent than family life is. Consequently, family context can be seen as being strongly associated with the starting point of children's reading competence, while the other settings are more strongly associated with children's reading progress. When considering family context, home literacy environment, number of books owned, parent stress levels, and receipt of center-based care were all significantly related to reading outcomes (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). This strikes with the findings of Ehrhardt, Huntington, Molino and Barbaresi (2013), who found significant outcomes in reading trajectories when comparing the low and the high SES groups.

Also parental involvement is an important predictor of children's achievements in school. Factors that define parental involvement in most studies are communication between parent and teacher, communication between the parent and the child regarding school issues, parental involvement in school activities and the number of hours they volunteer (Englund, Luckner, Whaley & Egeland, 2004). It has been shown that lower socioeconomic status (SES) parents of grade-school children participate less in their children's schools. A study on parental involvement found that single parents were less involved in their children's schools, and is a partial mediator in the relationship between SES and involvement (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff & Ortiz, 2008).

2.2.2 The school setting

The school setting in this study refers to whether a child attended preschool or not and how the child performs in kindergarten. It is said by multiple studies, that preschool sets an important marker for the further development and success of a child's educational cycle. The main interest of the use of preschool is to help disadvantaged children overcome the achievement gap. Although it would appear that children in all types of programs make sizable gains in their pre-kindergarten year, low income children may benefit slightly more in language and cognition development (Winsler et al., 2008). The main problem seems to be the quality of the preschools. A study that focused on the academic achievement of children from

low and high SESes and children from different origins, showed that children from higher SES benefited more from preschool. An explanation could be that parents from low SESes are more likely to enroll their child in a program of a lower quality, which will not influence the learning gap enough to make a difference (Reid & Ready, 2013). Bulut (2013) argues that there are indeed differences in childcare quality, but any intervention seems to be better than no intervention at all. However, most studies view preschool as a favorable intervention that improves achievements, which will be the assumption of this study.

2.3 The research questions

Based on the literature attending preschool has a positive effect on a child's achievements in education. It seems to benefit both children from a low and a high SES. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (1977), the different contexts must be considered during the conduct of this research. This leads to the following sub questions that will be answered throughout this study: (1) Is there a significant difference in the achievements of children from a low SES in comparison with other children, whether they did or did not attend preschool? (2) What is the opinion of student care coordinators, teachers and parents on the attendance of preschool and its effects on achievements in group 1 and 2? (3) How did children who went to preschool experience the transition to primary school compared to those children who started directly in Cycle 1? (4) What is the importance of parental involvement as an influential factor on the achievements of children in group 1 and 2 and how does the Active Parenting program contribute to this?

These sub questions will lead to answering the main question of this study: "How does preschool contribute to the child's achievements in group 1 and 2 compared with the achievements of children in the same groups who did not attend preschool?"

3. Methods

3.1 Design

The objective of this research was to examine the influence of preschool on children's achievements in group 1 and 2 and to identify other contributing factors or bottlenecks, in relation to (attendance or non-attendance) preschool, that define a child's performance in school. To set up the research design, the *Social Ecological Systems Model* by Bronfenbrenner (1977) was used as a guideline. The main focus is on the microsystem: the achievements of children in group 1 and 2 and their attendance of any former education. Both aspects refer to the school setting, whereas the home setting refers to the economic background of the child's family (exo system), level of parental involvement and the attendance of the AP program (meso system). The active contribution of the teachers, student care coordinators and parents provided additional information for all the levels above and recommendations, and identified bottlenecks at the macro level.

A mixed method design was used to answer the research questions. Quantitative methods used were surveys and report cards for group 1 and 2. Qualitative methods were focus group discussions, interviews and questionnaires.

3.2 Instruments

3.2.1 Quantitative Methods

One of the quantitative methods consisted of reviewing the report cards of children in group 1 and 2. It was decided that the report cards would be the most effective and representative manner to compare achievements within classes. With the introduction of FBE one curriculum was designed for all primary schools on St. Maarten. The FBE has eight content areas, which offers a choice of themes that can be investigated. The content areas are: “Social and Emotional Development”, “Language and Communication”, “Mathematics”, “Science and Technology”, “Social Studies”, “Health and Physical Education”, “Cultural and Artistic Development” and “Philosophy of Life”. Every area has a list in the report card of what a child should be able to do at one point in his education and some of the content areas have major subcategories. For example “Reading” and “Writing” are part of “Language and Communication”. An example of skills being rated are for example with “Science and Technology”: “Knows primary colors” and “Is able to name body parts”. The public schools adapted this curriculum completely, whereas the private schools substitute “Philosophy of Life” for “Religion”. The private schools have their own curriculum next to the FBE curriculum, which means that they added other content areas or that they have more detailed subcategories rating the fine and gross motor skills. Also the rating system varies between schools. The standard rating system existed out of four letters: “N(o)P(rogress)”, “W(orking on it)”, “S(teady Progress)” and “Mastery”. Only one private school in this research adapted this system. The other private schools in this research each have their own rating system varying from “No progress” and “Needs improvement” to “Outstanding” and “Excellent”. Because of these different systems, it was difficult to draw an overall conclusion about the difference in achievements of children between schools. Therefore all subcategories within the main categories were matched to get a representative picture which led to excluding a few items. Also the other rating systems were matched with the standard FBE system to draw general conclusions about the results. During the matching process one school was excluded (St. Joseph), because of lack of possibilities to draw a realistic picture by including this school. Therefore it was decided to write a separate descriptive section for the St. Joseph School.

In order to define the economic status of the parent, a survey was distributed to all the parents of the children within the research group. The survey was also available in Spanish or Creole and only one parent or guardian had to fill it in. The surveys were all coded according to the student number lists of the classes, so that the surveys and the outcome of the socioeconomic status could be linked to the achievements of children. The questions consisted out of 3 sections, which were made as user friendly as possible. The participant could complete the survey by ticking off the boxes. The parents were asked basic information (marital status, highest level of education, number of children), information about their child (former education, age, group) and income and parental involvement related questions (employment, health insurance, payments, and the AP). The surveys were sent out twice, trying to reach more parents after the first time. For the surveys that were never returned, the teachers were asked additional questions about the child’s family background.

3.2.2 *Qualitative Methods*

Qualitative methods were focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. The participants were several parties involved in a child's education. The teachers of the involved classes, the student care coordinators and parents were placed in separate groups. With the focus groups open ended questions were used, focusing on the same subjects. The subjects were: preschool, the influence of other factors that contribute to a child's achievements in school, the AP program. To conclude the discussions in the focus group, the participants were asked to give recommendations to improve the educational system on St. Maarten. The open questions about preschool were about the experiences with preschool and the effect of preschool on skills and achievements of children. While the other open questions were about the influence of a low SES and parental involvement. If the parents did not know the program, they were asked how they felt about attending such a course and how they thought it could influence parental involvement. The open ended questions were considered a way to gain valuable information in a relatively short time and to give the participants the opportunity to express their opinions, experiences and ideas without the risk of missing crucial information.

Further, structured interviews were held among children from group 1 and 2. From every class a list of names of children who attended preschool was requested and a list of those children who did not attend preschool. For two schools, the pool of children who did not attend preschool was very small or non-existent, therefore fewer participants were available. As a result only two participants per class were chosen from those schools while 4 participants per class were chosen from the other schools, with 2 children who attended preschool and 2 children who did not. The questions were structured in advance. Children were asked about the preschool they attended, what they learned there, how they felt about the transition from preschool/home to primary school, how they feel about the class they were currently in and if there were any subjects in school that they experienced as difficult. The purpose of this method was to investigate if going to a preschool makes the transition to primary school easier than coming from home. Questions had to be altered or simplified in a few cases because not every child had the same level of understanding, nor was every child proficient in English, so that sometimes Spanish had to be spoken during the interview. Nonetheless, most of the time the structure of the interview was kept.

As additional information for these interviews, a questionnaire about the randomly chosen children was created for the teacher. The questionnaire contained closed questions about the child's attendance of preschool, the child's family background and the level of parental involvement. The open ended questions were about any difficulties a child might be facing in class, the transition from home/preschool to primary school and the child's development compared to its peers. Teachers were asked to fill in the questionnaire as detailed as possible. This method was chosen to get a broader picture of the child's development and because children between the ages of 4 and 6 are not able to answer in depth and complex questions. Both the interviews and the questionnaires were combined per child in a report, all according to a specific structure.

As a final method, an interview with the Acting Head of DEI has been done. A lot of information came from the research, that did not fall within the borders of this research. To finally get a good and realistic picture of the educational system questions about situations that left some answers unclear or some questions that were unanswered, could be asked. The

answers from the interview have been put in the discussion, both implicit and explicit.

3.3 Procedure and Participants

The first focus group was held with student care coordinators. One coordinator from every participating school was invited to a meeting. Out of seventeen FBE schools on St. Maarten 6 were included in the research. Among these six schools, two public schools (M.G. de Weever School and Charles Leopold Bell School), one Methodist School (Mac. Rev. John A. Gumbs Campus), one Hillside Christian School (Asha Stevens School), the Seventh Day Adventist School and one Catholic School (St. Joseph School) participated in this research. From the six coordinators, only four showed up at the meeting. For the focus group with teachers 12 teachers of the participating classes were invited. With a total of 9 participants, all schools, except for M.G. de Weever were represented. The focus groups with parents were held per school, because it seemed almost impossible to get parents from different schools to meet at one place. A total of six meetings were held. Every school was asked to organize one evening for the meeting with a minimum of six and a maximum of ten parents. The following participants showed up: St. Joseph School (3), Charles Leopold Bell School (7), Seventh Day Adventist School (6), Rev. John A. Gumbs Campus (3), Asha Stevens (1) and M.G. de Weever (5). Furthermore two classes per school were chosen to participate in the research. At the St. Joseph School, Charles Leopold Bell School and M.G. de Weever there was only one class available for group 1 and 2. For the other schools the principal of the school decided who was going to participate in the research. A total of 293 students were in the participating classes, from which 142 were in group 1 and 151 were in group 2. A total of 276 report cards were reviewed. There were a number of missing report cards. These report cards had not been returned by the parents. The parents of all the 291 students received a survey, from which 217 were returned. Data known about the parents that returned the survey can be found in the appendix 9.1.

For the interviews a total of 4 children per participating class were chosen. This amount changed once because the pool of children that did not attend preschool was too small for randomization. A total of 20 students from group 1 participated during the interviews, from which 10 students attended preschool and 10 did not attend preschool. From group 2 a total of 22 students participated, from which 11 students attended preschool and 11 students did not attend preschool.

3.4 Data analysis

3.4.1 Quantitative data analysis

All the data from the report cards was processed in SPSS 19 for Windows. SPSS is a statistical computer program that is used to perform statistical tests. Five schools were put together in one database, whereas there was a different section for St. Joseph school. The main content areas and their major subcategories were computed into one variable, from which the average score of the student was calculated. With an independent sample t-test it was reviewed if there was a significant difference between students that attended preschool and students that did not. The same test was done to find differences for economic status, attending the AP program and the kind of preschool the student had attended. And also to

compare the scores between students from a low socioeconomic status. An *independent sample t-test* infers whether there is a difference between the average scores of two independent groups. The *p-value* helps to determine whether the result is significant or not and measures the strength of the evidence for or against the null hypothesis (for this study the null hypothesis would be that there is no difference between the average scores of the groups). The cutoff point is usually set at 0.05 or 0.01. A p-value higher than the cutoff point ($p \leq 0.05$) means that the null hypothesis is most likely true, whereas a smaller value ($p > 0.05$) suggests that the null hypothesis can be rejected and that the alternative hypothesis (there is a difference between the two groups) is assumed to be true.

Pearson's Correlation was used to check if there was a relationship between the content areas and the independent variables (economic status, preschool, AP program. Kind of preschool and Regular Attendance of preschool). It basically measures how well two variables are related and both the strength and direction of this relationship (negative or positive). The nearer the coefficient comes (r) to -1 or 1, the higher the strength of association between the variables. Cohen (1992) indicated that $r = 0.1 - 0.23$ reflected a small effect, $r = 0.24 - 0.36$ an average effect and $r > 0.37$ indicated a big effect. A positive correlation indicates that both variables increase or decrease together, whereas a negative correlation indicates that as one variable increases, so the other decreases, and vice versa. When testing for differences between language groups, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. A one-way ANOVA is in theory the same as an independent sample t-test, but for this type of test you have to compare a minimum of three groups. After that a post hoc test was conducted, which reviews where the differences between the groups are exactly.

For the surveys, an average was calculated for the participants who answered the questions about their income. A score below 2 would indicate a low income, whereas a score above 2 was counted as a high socioeconomic status. For the participants that did not answer those questions, a different method was used. It was decided that the highest level of education, having a health insurance or not, having one or multiple jobs, having a fulltime or a part-time job and the times someone was paid, were good discriminators to define the economic status. Scores were between 1 and 3 and the cut-off point for a low economic status was put at 1,80 after comparison with the data of the participants of whom the economic status was known by income. After that the data from the participants' (income, AP program, language and regular attendance of preschool) were matched with the student numbers.

3.4.2 Qualitative data analysis

The analysis of the teachers' questionnaires and the interviews with the children from group 1 and 2 were documented with the main points that emerged. Then the children's answers and additional information from the teachers were categorized separately in Excel. Table 11 contains the differences between the children who attended preschool and children who did not and table 12 contains the different content areas that children from both groups have problems with, while Table 13 compares the different factors between children who are having difficulties in school and children who are not. The responses have been converted in percentages by dividing the number of responses within a category by the total number of responses to a question and then multiplying the result by 100. For the students, their answers

were classified by category. Responses such as ‘I had to cry a lot/I miss home/preschool/School was difficult’, were classified as having difficulties. Responses as “Going to primary school was not difficult because I have already been to school/I felt happy, because my friends were also coming to the same school”, were classified as school readiness and an easy transition. Students were also asked about their favorite subjects and if there were subjects they thought were difficult. These subjects were categorized by ‘Language’, ‘Socializing’ and ‘Mathematics’. Not every child was able to answer the questions about subjects that they thought were hard, but a notable amount of students (mostly those who had attended preschool) mentioned homework to be easy, and at times ‘boring’, because it was too easy. Table 9 shows the percentage of students who experienced a good transition, a good experience in class and their reports of basic knowledge before entering primary school. The difficulties are shown in Table 10. It was decided to put the information from Group 1 and 2 together, since both students and teachers were asked about their experiences/observations in Group 1 and if the students were still facing the same difficulties in Group 2. In all cases the answer was ‘yes’, although some students were improving in Group 2. The difficulties still existed nonetheless.

The focus groups with the different stakeholders were also documented with the main points that emerged in the conversation. The six focus groups with the parents were put together, after documenting them separately. The different rounds were categorized per subject and the recommendations made by the groups were considered to be a contribution to the discussion and recommendations.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Results

4.1.1 St. Joseph School Group 1

There were 26 students in group 1, from which 16 attended preschool (10 regularly, 2 irregularly, and 4 unknown) and 10 did not attend preschool. 14 students were classified as low SES, whereas 12 were classified as high(er) SES. 14 students spoke English at home, 9 spoke Spanish, 2 spoke Dutch and 1 spoke French. A total of 18 parents indicated to have followed the AP program, whereas 3 did not. For 5 students this was unknown.

An independent-samples T-Test for difference between groups (preschool and no preschool) showed that no significant results were found any of the main content areas. The outcome of an alpha value (p) above .05 indicates that differences are not significant. This is displayed in Table 1 (appendix 9.2.1) However, there was one significant result for Reading (Language Attainment) when comparing for Economic status, $t(24) = -2.154, p < 0.05$. This suggests that the economic status of a student influences reading scores. The results for the other content areas were not significant. This is displayed in Table 2 (appendix 9.2.1)

When calculating for correlations between independent variables (Economic Status, Preschool, the AP program, regular attendance of preschool) and dependent variables (achievements for all the content areas), a positive correlation was found between Economic Status and Reading scores, $r = .40, p < 0.05$. This would suggest that the higher the economic status of the students, the higher the scores for reading will be. Also a negative relation was found between Preschool and Economic Status, $r = -.42, p < 0.05$. Which would suggest that if

a student did not attend preschool, the more likely it is that a student is from a low SES. Also a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the scores on all content areas between language groups, but no significant differences were found.

4.1.2 *St. Joseph School Group 2*

There were 24 students in group 2, of which 18 attended preschool and 6 did not attend preschool. From the students that attended preschool 14 attended preschool regularly, 1 irregularly, and the other 3 were unknown. 11 students classified as low SES, whereas 13 were classified as high(er) SES. 17 students spoke English at home, 6 spoke Spanish and 1 spoke French. When it comes to the student's parent(s) 15 have followed the AP program, 4 did not and for 5 students this was unknown.

From all the main subjects the only significant difference in achievements between preschool and no preschool groups was Social Studies $t(22)=3.134, p<0.05$, displayed in Table 3 (appendix 9.2.2). This result suggests that attending preschool has an influence on the achievements in Social Studies. No significant differences were found for the other content areas. This suggests the attendance or non-attendance of preschool does not influence the achievements in group 2 of St. Joseph. Also, no significant differences in achievements were found for economic status. This is shown in Table 4 (appendix 9.2.2)

When calculating correlations between independent variables (Economic Status, Preschool, the AP program, regular attendance of preschool) and dependent variables (achievements for all the content areas), a negative correlation was found between Preschool and Social Studies, $r = -.56, p<0.01$. This would suggest that if a student did not attend preschool, the lower the score for Social Studies will be. The one-way between subjects ANOVA that was conducted to compare the scores on all content areas between language groups did not display any significant results.

4.1.3 *Results five schools combined Group 1*

A total of 110 report cards of students from the five other schools in Group 1 were reviewed and entered together in one database. 54 of the students were male and 56 were female. The average age of the students was $M=4.3$ years. 96 students attended some kind of preschool, whereas 14 did not. 87 students spoke English at home, 14 students spoke Spanish and 9 students spoke Creole. A total of 40 parents followed the AP program, whereas 28 did not. For the other 42 parents this is unknown, because either the survey was not returned or the parent did not fill in the section about the program.

An independent samples T-Test did not show any significant differences in scores between students who attended preschool and students who did not. This suggests that the attendance of preschool does not influence the achievements of the students in group 1. The results are displayed in Table 5 (appendix 9.2.3). The same was done with select cases, to review if there was a difference between low socioeconomic students that attended preschool and students that did not. But no significant differences were displayed. However, doing the same test for economic status showed a few significant results. There was a significant results for Language Attainment (listening and speaking), $t(108)=-2.192, p<0.05$; Mathematics (measurement and geometry), $t(108)=-2.415, p<0.05$; Social Studies, $t(108)=-2.327, p<0.05$ and Work Habit, $t(108)=-2.383, p<0.05$. This suggests that the economic status has some

influence on scores of the students in the different content areas. The results are displayed below in Table 6 (appendix 9.2.3). Also the difference between groups was measured with the attendance of the AP program, which showed a significant result for achievements on Cultural and Artistic Development, $t(66)=2,056, p<0.05$. For the other content areas, results were not significant. Since two schools are offering an early stimulation program, the difference between students who attended preschool and students who attended early stimulation was measured. This was significant for the following content areas: Listening and Speaking (language attainment), $t(92)= -2.977, p<0.01$; Reading (language attainment), $t(88)= -1,986, p<0.05$; Measurement and Geometry (mathematics), $t(92)= -3,029, p<0.01$; Problem Solving (mathematics), $t(48)=-2,460, p<0.05$; Social Studies, $t(92)=-2.962, p<0.01$; Social and Emotional Development, $t(92)= -2,194, p<0.05$ and Work Habit, $t(92)=-2,342, p<0.05$. This would suggest that the scores on the content areas mentioned above, depend on the kind of early education a student followed. However, for the other content areas results were not significant.

When calculating for correlations the following positive correlations were found when relating to Economic Status: Listening and Speaking, $r = .25, p<0.01$; Measurement and Geometry, $r = .23, p<0.05$; Social Studies, $r = .22, p<0.05$ and Work Habit, $r= .22, p<0.05$. These results show small to moderate effects and suggest that the higher the economic status, the higher the achievements of the student will be. Also positive correlations were found when relating to the type of preschool: Listening and Speaking, $r= .25, p<0.01$; Reading, $r = .20, p<0.05$; Measurement and Geometry, $r= .33, p<0.01$; Social Studies, $r= .19, p<0.05$; Science and Technology, $r=.21, p<0.05$ and Work Habit, $r=.20, p<0.05$. This suggests that going to an Early Stimulation Center will provide higher scores for the mentioned content areas.

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the scores on all content areas between language groups. There was a significant result for Social Studies, $[F(2,107)=7,415, p= 0.001]$; Listening and Speaking $[F(2,107) = 3,586, p = 0.031]$ and Problem Solving $[F(2,59) = 3,635, p = 0.032]$. Post hoc comparisons using the Fisher LSD test indicated that the scores between English and Spanish speaking students and also between English and Creole speaking students was significantly different for Social Studies. For both Listening and Speaking and Problem Solving the scores between Creole and English speaking students was significantly different. This suggests that the language that is spoken at home has some influence on achievement of children in Group 1 and that in all the significant cases, the English students get on average higher scores than the students that speak another language at home.

4.1.4 Results five schools combined Group 2

A total of 124 report cards of students from the five other schools in Group 2 were reviewed. 60 of the students were male and 64 were female. The average age of the students was $M=5.4$ years. 102 students attended some kind of preschool, whereas 22 did not. A total of 101 students spoke English at home, 13 students spoke Spanish, 8 students spoke Creole and 2 spoke French. A total of 68 parents followed the AP program, whereas 35 did not. For the other 21 parents this is unknown, because of missing data or surveys that were not returned.

An independent sample T-Test did not show any significant differences in scores between students who attended preschool and students who did not. This suggests that the attendance of preschool does not influence the achievements of the students in group 1. The results are displayed in Table 7 (appendix 9.2.4). Nor did selecting and comparing the low socioeconomic status cases display any significant results. Also the third t-test, when comparing for the attendance of the AP program, there were no significant results. The fourth t-test that compared the groups by socioeconomic status, did not show any significant results. These results are displayed in Table 8 (9.2.4). The final t-test was done to compare means between students who attended early stimulation and students who attended a private preschool. Significant results were found for: Dutch, $t(73)=2.331, p<0.05$; Cultural and Artistic Development, $t(101)=2.388, p<0.05$; Health and Physical Education, $t(101)=2.986, p<0.05$ and Philosophy of Life, $t(100)=2.296, p<0.05$. Remarkably, all the scores were in favor of a private preschool, whereas the scores in group 1 were in favor the early stimulation center.

Besides the t-test some significant correlations have been found. The kind of preschool that a students attended was positively correlated with regular attendance, $r=.40, p<0.01$. This would suggest that a regular attendance is more likely to happen when a student attended early stimulation. The economic status and the AP program were negatively correlated, $r=-.21, p<0.05$. This suggests that the lower the economic status, the more likely it is that the parent did not attend the program. Finally, the scores on Problem Solving were negatively correlated with the kind of preschool that a student attended, $r=.34, p<0.05$. This could suggest that the scores on problem solving are lower when a student attended a normal preschool.

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the scores on all content areas between language groups. There was a significant result for Math and Geometry, $[F(3,119)=3,311, p= 0.022]$; Science and Technology $[F(3,120) = 3,131, p = 0.028]$; Cultural and Artistic Development, $[F(3,120)=2,784, p = 0.044]$; Health and Physical Education, $[F(3,120)= 4,309, p = 0.006]$ and Philosophy of Life $[F(3,119) = 3,747, p = 0.013]$. Post hoc comparisons using the Fisher LSD test indicated that the scores between English and Spanish speaking students were significantly different for Math and Geometry. For Cultural and Artistic Development there were differences found in scores for Spanish and English speaking students compared to French speaking students. For both Health and Physical Education and Science and Technology the scores for English and Spanish speaking students were significantly different compared to the scores of Creole and French speaking students. Finally, for Philosophy of Life the differences between English and Creole speaking students were significant. Also for this sample, the English speaking students get on average higher scores than the other students. This suggests that the language that is spoken at home has some influence on achievement of children in Group 2.

4.2 Qualitative Results

4.2.1 School setting: preschool

4.2.1.1 Focus groups with student care coordinators

In terms of quality there are a lot of different preschools on St. Maarten. The schools need to meet some requirements, but the costs will rise once a preschool is offering additional

activities or a special type of program. The statements referred to the fact that “ a child whose parents does not have the money will most likely end up in a low quality preschool”. A high quality and a good preschool was described as: “secure, clean, has a good infrastructure and is located in a good environment.” The program that was offered was less important as a condition. The student care coordinators viewed preschool overall as an advantage for children. They mentioned that “ a child learns the structure of the day, which is not always provided at home”. Also “a child learns social skills in preschool and will be able to communicate better with his peers in primary school. This is definitely an advantage for children who speak another language than English at home, so they can overcome the language barrier”. The student care coordinators stated that most of the time you will be able to tell which child went to preschool and which did not. “Children who did not go to preschool have to learn everything from the beginning, which can be frustrating for the teachers”. In terms of education the student care coordinators did not mention a lot of disadvantages, except for the fact that a child who went to preschools already knows what he has to learn in group 1, which can work demotivating. Other disadvantages were: “Children can pick up bad habits from preschool.” “They get sick more often.” “You are not able to spend as much as time with your child as when he is staying home.” About the necessity of preschool the following was mentioned: “It depends on the cognitive ability of a child if preschool is necessary, but at least 1 or 2 years of attendance is needed for most children.” “It does not have to be an obligation, leave the choice to the parents.” “To support parents who do not have to money, it would be wise to subsidize preschools to prevent them from enrolling their children in a low quality preschool.” When mentioning differences in achievements because of preschool, the cognitive ability of a child was mentioned again. “In general children who went to preschool will perform better, because they have already obtained some knowledge that the other children will obtain in group 1.” “You will already know who is going to be a repeat, because some children who did not go to preschool struggle from the beginning.” “Children who did not attend preschool have more problems with settling in in group 1. They have more problems with sitting still, structure and following instructions.”

4.2.1.2 Focus group with teachers

Opinions about preschool were divided. The teachers agreed on the following problem on St. Maarten: “The terms “daycare” and “preschool” are mixed up, there is no guidelines. Daycares are offering education that belongs in preschools, and preschools sometimes do not have enough equipment and are basically daycares.” “In the past there were a lot of low quality preschools, which are more likely to be chosen by parents who are poor.” Advantages of preschool were described as the following: “Preschool does help with socializing and learning to focus.” “Comprehension skills for children are at a higher level.” “The early stimulation that is connected to the primary school is better, because the levels can add up.” More negative aspects were mentioned: “Preschools tend to overburden children with too much information, which demotivates a child in primary school and will cause the child to know a lot that is supposed to be taught in group 1.” “The prices for a good quality school are high.” “Children who attended preschool know a lot, but did not practice their fine motor skills enough, because the focus is too much on the cognitive development.” “Once a

child learns a routine in preschool (way of writing) it is hard for him to learn another routine.” The teachers all agreed that preschool is necessary and also the subsidizing thereof, because it is too expensive in general. The following statements emerged: “A lot of children are facing language barriers, especially for those children preschool is needed.” “Especially public schools have to deal with children from immigrants, so for these schools it should be an obligation.” “It depends on the parent if a child needs preschool, some parents think that all the educating will be done at school, which is a bad cause.” The teachers do notice a difference between children who attended preschool and children who did not. This all has its pros and cons. For children who did not attend preschool the following was stated: “The social behavior is different, it is harder for them to share.” “Solving issues and adjusting to new situations (the transition) is harder for those children.” “They have more confidence problems.” “The repeaters in the class usually did not have preschool, but there should be a good reason to hold a child back.” For children who attended a preschool it all depends on the situation and the parents. “Not all schools learn the child a routine.” “Some parents expect too much, because they want their child to develop quickly in certain skills. This is not always reasonable.”

4.2.1.3 Focus groups with parents

The opinion about preschool varies from school to school. A lot of participants were pleased with preschool or the Early Stimulation Center that is connected to the school. Overall it was agreed that St. Maarten has a lot of preschools that differ in quality. “Schools vary in size, program, staff, care and location. It depends on what is important to you as a parent.” “Preschools do not have a uniform curriculum, so children go to primary school with different knowledge.” The MAC and the Hillside Christian Schools have Early Stimulation Centers. According to parents of children who attended these schools, this offers a great advantage for your child. “These schools know what a child is supposed to know by the time he reaches primary school, so the child is better prepared.” “There should be more Early Stimulation Centers because this offers more advantages than private preschools.” “In Early Stimulation the child does not have to be cared for in a way that a daycare or a preschool provides care. They already need to have some kind of independence (Seventh Day Adventist).” Many advantages were named during the focus groups. The most important statements were: “A child learns to socialize and make friends.” “Preschool offers a good foundation and a basic knowledge which children can build on for the rest of their school careers.” “Children are taught moral and ethics at an early age.” “Preschool contributes to a child’s language development. They start to speak and communicate earlier and for children who speak another language at home, it is a good measure to overcome the language barrier.” “Children learn a routine and adjust to new situation easier. The transition to primary school is harder for those who stayed at home.”

The disadvantages that came up the most were the following: “The children pick up bad habits from preschool.” Examples of bad habits were: using bad words, being more outgoing and showing bad behavior at home (not listening). “The children do not have a lot of space and have to sit on a hard chair all day. That cannot be expected from a child at that age.” “The children get ‘homework’, but usually the parent ends up doing it.” “The costs of preschool are very high and not everyone can afford it.” “Children come home with dirty

clothes and they get sick often.” “If a child is a slow learner and he does not get enough attention in preschool, it still will not help.” The participants of the Rev. John A. Gumbs Campus came up with the least disadvantages, because of their good experiences.

Most participants agreed that at least some sort of schooling should be done before a child attends primary school. “It depends on the child if he needs preschool, but some schooling in advance is necessary.” “Early learning provides a child with a strong foundation.” There were participants who were more in favor of home schooling, if the parent has the time (M.G. de Weever, Seventh Day Adventist, St. Joseph). Almost all participants agreed that home schooling would be just as good as preschool, although it was thought by some that preschool should be mandatory for at least a year to learn the basics (St. Joseph, Charles L. Bell, M.G. de Weever, Asha Stevens). The participants reacted differently to the question if today’s society is not putting too much pressure on children. At the Seventh Day Adventist, M.G. de Weever and Charles L. Bell it was mentioned that: “You can control the pressure. As a parent you need to balance the time for learning and playing.” At the other schools it became clear that the participants thought of their children as high achievers. “The sky is the limit, children need to learn.” “Children are like sponges, they need to take in as much information as possible and they are able to handle it.” “It is best if a child learns as much as possible at an early age, because the brains can pick up, for example: languages, faster.”

All participants agreed that preschool does influence the achievement in group 1 and 2. Some children are more advanced, get higher grades or they get extra work or work from a higher grade. For children that are slow learners it helps to close the learning gap. There was one downside that was mentioned more than once: “My child is becoming lazy and demotivated, because she already knows a lot that is taught in group 1.” “A child that already knows too much for group 1, will get bored and start seeking other challenges instead.” “My child needs additional works and the school tends to hold the child back, when he wants to move forward.”

4.2.2 Home setting: influence of low SES and other important factors

4.2.2.1 Focus group with student care coordinators

The student care coordinators considered low SES as a small factor, because schools provide a lot for children these days. “If a parent still has to buy books, the impact might be bigger.” Also it was thought that parents from a low SES will value a child’s education more and do their best to support a child to achieve. The influence of SES was not completely denied: “Parents from a higher SES can provide more for their children, whereas children from a low SES will have more disadvantages, which puts them at risk for failure.” Other influential factors were: “The child’s ability to learn and the level of parental involvement.” “Some parents teach their children certain things in advance and there are enough technological supporting methods to help a parent teach their child.”

4.2.2.2 Focus group with teachers

The teachers were more outspoken about the influence of a low SES. “Children from a low SES get poorer achievements, even if they have been to preschool. This is because they are facing a lot of disadvantages.” “The main problem is that these children do not get any

breakfast, which influences their performances.” “The educational background of the parent is also important, a parent without education is usually ashamed to seek help.” Other influential factors according to the teachers were: parental involvement, the reinforcement at home and the teaching methods that are used. “Teaching in context is important and adds to the understanding the child has of a subject.”

4.2.2.3 Focus groups with parents

Most parents stated the following: “Giving low SES as a reason to not be involved in your child’s education is an excuse. These days we have sufficient technologies and methods to help even low educated parents to support their child.” “There is always time to spend with your child, parents just need to put it as a priority.” “Parent from a low SES that are not involved, should pay more attention to the educational system or ask for help.”

When it came to preschool all participants agreed that costs of preschool are high. “Not everybody has the economic possibilities to provide a child with preschool.” “The costs are very high, so it would be understandable to not enroll your child.” “Minimum wages are very low, costs of living are going up and it is getting harder to pay for preschool.” At the Seventh Day Adventist, St. Joseph, M.G. de Weever School there were more negative experiences when it came to costs. “Preschools are all about the money and less care.” “It is a waste of time to spend money for a preschool, because at the end of the day my child learned nothing there.” Another emerging opinion was that the price should not matter once it comes to the education of your child (Rev. John A. Gumbs, Seventh Day Adventist.) “For a good quality preschool you pay more money.” All participants agreed that some sort of subsidy or agreement should be there for parents who have a low income, which would prevent them from enrolling their children in low quality preschools.

4.2.3 Home setting: The Active Parenting Program and parental involvement

4.2.3.1 Focus group with student care coordinators

All the student care coordinators were aware of the program. The first comment that emerged was: “The program is American and does not fit the culture of St. Maarten. Parents that try it, do not feel like it is working.” As additional statement it was mentioned that “not every parent is trying”. The overall opinion was not in favor of the program. “It will make a small difference if the parent is interested.” “The program needs more follow ups to keep the parents motivated. Now there are only three nights of attendance.” “Making the program mandatory is possible and will help for the involved parents. It will not cause many changes if a parent is not interested and only attending because it is mandatory.” The idea to design a program that fits the Caribbean culture was supported by all the participants.

4.2.3.2 Focus group with teachers

All the teachers were aware of the program. At some schools it is an requirement to attend the program before you can enroll your child. The opinions about the program were overall negative. “The program is not for Caribbean children.” “A lot of children are used to parents shouting at them. ‘Soft’ parenting does not work.” “The fact that it is an obligation at some schools makes it even worse, because parents are not motivated.” “The only way it would work is by being consistent and adjust the program to the culture.” They agreed that parental involvement is an important factor, but it needs to be stimulated in another way.

4.2.3.3 Focus groups with parents

From every school at least one parent attended the AP program. The opinion about the program did not vary a lot between schools. Opinions in general were: “It is a good program. You always learn something.” “You learn to speak different to your child. Some parents just scream at their children. The program learns you to offer your child choices.” In a few cases the program offered help with behavioral issues of a child (M.G. de Weever, St. Joseph). Most participants did not agree with making the program mandatory (if it already was not). The following reasons emerged: “They should leave the choice to the parents. If a parent is not interested, it will not help.” “It schools would offer the possibility it would not be a problem to do the program. If it offers something positive, it is always good.” The main concern and downside of the program was the fact that the program is considered to be too American. “The program does not match the Caribbean culture.” “The Caribbean culture is different. We expect our children to show more respect to their parents and their teachers.” On the other side it was mentioned that “You have to adapt the learning materials to your own situation, then it can be useful.” (Asha Stevens, M.G. de Weever).

Across all schools, the participants agreed on parental involvement being the main influential factor and the key to succeeding in life. It was considered to be a greater influence than the attendance of preschool. “Some parents think a child will learn everything in school, while the basics lie at home.” “It is important to find time for your child. It will get your child better achievements.” “Some parents do not even ask their child how his day was. But being involved: questioning your child, helping with homework, asking the teacher for advice or even helping with school activities can support and motivate your child to do better in school.” Consequences of not being involved were considered to be that: “the child is at risk for failure and that a child will have more behavioral problems.” “My child did not do his homework when I was working two jobs. Now he is doing better and our relationship is still improving.” A few participants concluded that: “Everybody is part of the community. If everybody played his part, we would have a stronger system.” (Rev. John Gumbs, St. Joseph School, Seventh Day Adventist).

4.2.4 Results from structured child interviews

Table 9

Children’s self-reported experiences

Category	Preschool (N=21)	No Preschool (N=21)
Good experience transition	90,5%	47,6%
Good experience group 1/2	100%	81%
Reporting basic knowledge before primary school	100%	23,8%

*Basic knowledge refers to the knowledge is usually obtained in group 1.

Table 10

Children's self-reported difficulties

Category	Preschool (N=21)	No Preschool (N=21)
Difficulties with language	14,3%	33,3%
Difficulties with socializing	9,5%	19%
Difficulties with mathematics	-	9,5%
Difficulties with behavior	4,8%	9,5%

4.2.5 Results from teacher questionnaires about the children interviewed

Table 11

Children with difficulties during transition, after transition and the rate of parental involvement and parent-teacher contact

Category	Preschool (N=21)	No Preschool(N=21)
Transition Difficulties	14.3%	42.9%
Difficulties in School	19%	76,2%
Difficulties during and after transition	14,3%	42,9%
Parental Involvement	66,7%	38,1%
Parent-Teacher Contact	61,9%	47,6%

*The percentages show the percentage-of parents that are involved and the percentage of parents and teachers that have contact regularly

Table 12

Content areas that children are having difficulties with

Category	Socializing	Behavior	Language	Emotional Development	Achievements
Preschool (N=4)	1	2	0	1	2
No Preschool (N=16)	8	4	8	6	2
Total	9	6	8	7	4

*Some children have more than one difficulty

Table 13

All of the factors that possibly play a role when it comes to having difficulties in school

Category	Having difficulties (N=20)	Not having difficulties (N=22)
Preschool attendance	20%	77,3%
Parental Involvement	50%	77,3%
Language other than English at home	35%	18,2%
Parent-Teacher contact	50%	91%
Supporting Family	30%	68,2%

*Other types of families were poor families or families that supported the child solely in the basic needs

5. Conclusion

5.1 Is there a significant difference in the achievements of children from a low SES in comparison with other children, whether they did or did not attend preschool?

The results of the independent sample t-test show that there is a significant difference in scores for some school subjects between children from a low SES and from a high SES, when doing the test for Group 1 from St. Joseph School and Group 1 from the other 5 schools. For St. Joseph School there was a significant difference in reading scores, whereas for the other schools there were significant differences in Social Studies, Work Habit, Listening and Speaking and Measurement and Geometry. Also, these positive correlations were found which indicates that the higher the economic status, the higher the scores on the above named subjects. For both samples, there was no significant difference to be found in Group 2. This is remarkable, since differences are both significant in group 1 and not in group 2. However, there were no significant results for any group when children from a low SES were tested for their (non-)attendance of preschool. This could suggest that the differences between these groups are too small, whereas the differences between the SES groups are more visible. On the other hand, information from the focus groups suggests otherwise. The student care coordinators did not consider low SES to be a huge impacting factor, however it is seen as a disadvantage for the child, since the parents can provide less. Also because these children are more likely to end up in a low quality preschool. The teachers named the lack of breakfast for these children as one of the problem factors and also it was stated that these children get poorer achievements, even if they have been to preschool. Interestingly, both the parents and teachers seem to automatically connect low SES with less parental involvement and the shame to look for help with their child's education. Literature supports the findings that parents that are less educated are less involved, especially the mother's education seems to influence this (Dearing et al., 2007). But no information supported the idea that these parents would be ashamed to seek support. A matter of pride would be more plausible, since this became very clear during the survey when questions about income were asked. According to the literature, children from a low SES would slightly benefit more from preschool for language and cognitive development (Winsler et al., 2008). This is not shown in the results, since the children from a high SES have (significantly) higher scores in language. Another

study confirms the findings, where it is stated that high SES children would benefit more and get higher scores on their achievements, because children from a low SES are more likely to be enrolled in a low quality preschool (Reid & Ready, 2013).

In conclusion with regard to this question, it can be said that the socioeconomic status affects the outcomes of children in group 1. The fact that no difference was found within the group of children with a low socio-economic background, may be explained by those who have had early childhood education, but might have been enrolled in a low quality preschool. Therefore the difference is not very large when compared with the children who remained at home. For group 2, no statistical difference was found, which could indicate that the effect of one year of education overcomes the learning gap or that the effect of preschool diminishes it.

5.2 What is the opinion of student care coordinators, teachers and parents on the attendance of preschool and its effects on achievements in group 1 and 2?

All participants recognized the advantages of preschool. Preschool provides basic knowledge and a strong foundation that the child will benefit from during his educational years. Besides the basic foundation, the opportunity for a child to socialize with peers at an early age was an important advantage. They learn to focus, their comprehension skills are better and they have less problems with the transition to primary school. Many parents would say that their child is advanced because of the attendance of preschool and that this still shows in their skills and grades in group 2. Teachers and student care coordinators also agreed that you definitely see if a child attended preschool or not, because it shows in how fast they learn or in how much more advanced they are than children who did not. Since St. Maarten has a lot of inhabitants from other, mostly Spanish speaking islands/countries, it is also an advantage for children to overcome the language barrier. The disadvantages referred to the educational system, pointing out that high quality preschools are expensive and there is no standard curriculum for preschools. As a result children have different levels of knowledge in advance before they start primary school. Disadvantages in relation to the type of care and space were mostly mentioned by the parents and the student care coordinators, whereas the teachers were more referring to the pressure that is put on the children. According to them the preschools overburden a child with too much information. Without naming it ‘overburdening’ a child, some parents mentioned that because their child was advanced, the child now (in group 2) is getting demotivated. According to them, the concentration is less and their children pay more attention to what their peers are doing. As a last main point, the Early Stimulation Centers are considered to be better than private schools. In this setting the school is aware of what a child has to know by the time he goes to group 1. The opinions varied about private preschools when speaking to parents from different schools. Some parents had good experiences and they recognized that their child learned a lot, but some parents had negative experiences when it came to the care of their child, the way their child was treated or the learning materials, which were not age appropriate.

Although the student care coordinators and the teachers had generally the same opinion, this varied for the parents. During the focus groups it was noticed that it does matter which school their children visited, or which religion or nationality the parent had. Parents who sent their children to a private school, usually are more affluent and have more money to spend on their children than parents who sent their child to a public school. This influences their decisions about the kind of preschool they send their children to, the kind of knowledge they have, their level of involvement and the amount of money they are willing to pay for their child’s education. Moreover, the parents expect that when you invest a lot of money in

your child's education, they expect the intervention to work. When it comes to religion, this varies within the parent's belief about raising a child. Parents from one school would say that they rather homeschool their child, because it is important that a child stays with the mother in the early years, whereas other parents said that it is important that a child learns outside the home, but that moral and ethics should be learned at home.

5.3 How did children who went to preschool experience the transition to primary school compared to those children who started directly in Cycle 1?

The results of the questions from the interviews conducted show that the children who went to preschool, experience the transition better than children who had not been to preschool. Also, every child in the preschool group said that he/she was enjoying the current class, whereas this is true for 81% of the other group. Also, all the children from the preschool group were reporting basic knowledge before entering primary school, which would make sense. Most preschools teach counting, the alphabet, figures, colors and other sorts of basic knowledge before a child enters primary school. Only 23,8 % of the other group reported basic knowledge before entering school. In this case, mostly the parent did do some home schooling with the child. When reviewing the sort of difficulties the children were having, difficulties with language and socializing emerged the most, whereas there was a lower percentage for mathematics and behavioral problems. In the case of the preschool group there were no difficulties with mathematics.

Furthermore, children who did not go to preschool had more difficulties with the transition, had more difficulties during and after the transition and also a higher percentage were still encountering difficulties. Parental involvement and parent-teacher contact was remarkably lower for this group too. Reviewing the data from another point of view, the groups were divided in children who were having difficulties (N=20) and children who did not have difficulties (N=22). Not just preschool, but also parent-teacher contact, parental involvement and the family background were taken into consideration. When comparing these factors for both groups, it emerged that the group that was having difficulties had the most disadvantages to deal with. In this group preschool attendance, parental involvement and parent-teacher contact is remarkably lower. Also this group is less likely to have a supporting family and the percentage that spoke another language at home than English, is higher than for the other group. Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Systems Theory (1977) points us in multiple directions. Both the home and the school setting matter and all the above mentioned factors can be placed within the ecological system. The educational background of the child (microsystem), parental involvement and parent teacher contact (meso system) and the family background (exo system) are all factors that influence the outcome of how well a child is doing in school.

Furthermore the results from the children were consistent with the problems that the teachers pointed out; namely the children had the most problems with socializing and language. In third place (which was not mentioned for the children) is the social emotional development. When reviewing the results it is clear that there is a remarkable difference between children who attended preschool and children who did not. Children who did not go to preschool, were having more transition difficulties and had a higher probability of still facing these difficulties at school. This can be explained by the fact that children who have been to preschool have experience with schooling and learn some skills earlier. They learn the structure of the day, being in school, making friends, which prepares them in a better way for the transition than if they would be coming directly from home. Above all, it is important to

realize that preschool is not the only factor that contributes to problems in primary school. The more disadvantages a child faces, the more likely the child is to fail. But preschool can be helpful in the process nonetheless.

5.4 What is the importance of parental involvement as an influential factor on the achievements of children in group 1 and 2 and how does the Active Parenting program contribute to this?

Across all the focus groups parental involvement was considered to be the biggest factor that decides if a child will succeed during his educational years and later in life. All parents agreed that as a parent you have to be there for your children, to support them and spend time with them. Otherwise the child is at risk for failure. According to findings within literature, parental involvement is indeed an important predictor of children's achievements in school (Englund, Luckner, Whaley & Egeland, 2004). This is also reflected in the results of the interviews and questionnaires with children and teachers. The rate of parental involvement and parent-teacher contact was lower for children who were facing difficulties in school and also for the children who had not been to preschool. As mentioned earlier, causes of these problems can not solely be described to one factor but it is the system around the child that finally defines if it will succeed in life.

The AP program was mainly negatively reviewed, because the program did not fit the Caribbean culture and ~~that~~ it did not match with how children are raised in the Caribbean. The participants seemed to prefer authoritarian parenting above authoritative parenting. Authoritarian parenting is characterized by the strict rules and harsh punishments, whereas authoritative parenting is demanding, responsive and child centered. At some schools attending the program is obligatory, before you are able to enroll your child. Some parents took their own initiative in this by following the program voluntarily and in a few cases some parents did think it was useful and their situation with their child (mostly behavioral problems) changed.

An unpaired sample t-test was done to see if there was a difference between children whose parents followed the AP program and whose parents did not. In group 1 for all 5 schools, there was a significant result for Cultural and Artistic Development. In group 2, there was a significant negative correlation between the AP program and the economic status. This suggests that the lower the economic status, the less likely it is that a child's parent had attended the program. This matches with the findings of Arnold et al. (2008), that parents from a low SES are less involved in activities at their child's school. With the AP program parents have a possibility to get more involved with their child's education and to learn another way of raising a child, but it is a challenge to get parents involved in the first place. Unfortunately, within this sample the AP program is received a negative review and does not seem to have an indirect impact on children's achievements in school.

5.5 Main question: How does preschool contribute to the child's achievements in group 1 and 2 compared with the achievements of children in the same groups who did not attend preschool?

The statistical analysis between groups did not provide evidence for the importance of preschool, apart from one significant results for the subject "Social Studies" at St. Joseph School in group 2. Interestingly, when groups were compared between children who attended a private preschool and children who attended an Early Stimulation Center, significant

differences were found in both group 1 and 2. The remarkable difference is that the children who attended an Early Stimulation Center got higher scores for their achievements in group 1, whereas children who attended a private preschool got higher scores in group 2. As indicated during the focus groups, there is no standard curriculum for preschools. However there is one for primary schools, but this is not properly used by every school. This was viewed as a problematic, because children transit from different preschool with different basic knowledge and they will develop differently on different levels because schools are not matching up to each other.

Even though no statistical evidence was found for the assumption that preschool has influence on children's achievements in school, the focus groups that were researched pointed in a different direction. By all participants preschool or some kind of schooling in advance (homeschooling) is seen as crucial and important and a good foundation for the child's ability to learn. The difference in socializing, adjusting to a new situation (transition), fine motor skills, achievements and language abilities were all mentioned in relation to the attendance of preschool. According to the teachers it is easy to see which child attended preschool and which did not. These differences also continue to exist in group 2. Especially for children who speak another language at home, preschool would be beneficial. The opinions of the parents from the 6 different school varied the most. This was mostly because some parents had negative experiences with sending their child to a preschool, because, according to them, the care that was provided was not good enough. Other parents agreed that preschool has its benefits, certainly when a parent is working and does not have the time to homeschool a child. The claim was not that every child needed to go to a preschool, but that attending preschool would help a child to be more advanced in school. But at the same time children who did attend preschool are more demotivated, according to parental reports.

Information from the interviews also indicate that children who did not attend preschool have more problems during and after the transition compared to the other group. The data indicated that this cannot solely be ascribed to preschool. Reviewing the children who have problems in group 1 and 2, show that parental involvement, teacher-parent contact, the attendance of preschool are all lower for these students and the percentage that speaks another language at home is higher. This indicates that the outcome is not only defined solely by the attendance of preschool, but that it is a combination of multiple factors, from which parental involvement is viewed as very influential.

Even though the statistics did not point it out, preschool can be considered as an influential factors in achievement. Quantitative data show that attending preschool teaches a child to socialize, to develop language, to adjust to new situations and it supports basic knowledge. A child who did not attend preschool will also learn this, but later than a child who did attend a preschool.

6. Discussion and limitations

6.1 Discussion

Preschool has some influence on the achievements of children in group 1 and 2. But the outcome of how a child will perform in primary school can be attributed to other additional factors. As described by Bronfenbrenner (1977), all factors within the different systems provide a combination that ultimately determine how a child develops. These factors

interact with each other and can result in a positive or a negative outcome. Within the micro system of the child, there is the preschool which can be of a low or a high quality and determines whether a child gets a good basic foundation when entering primary school. Secondly, the primary school itself. In theory it should not matter which school a child attends, because every school on St. Maarten has the same end test for every child in group 8. Every school is supposed to meet this level. According to the Acting Head of DEI, it does matter whether a child goes to a private or a public school. Public schools have more specific guidelines and they face a lot more bureaucracy when wanting to implement educational changes, because they are funded by the government. On the other hand, a private school can decide its own curriculum and guidelines of admittance, which can turn it into a school with mostly high achievers. This causes an imbalance between private and public schools. Also the parent and the teacher are within the micro system. As a teacher, it matters how a teacher lectures the children or how the teacher gives extra help to the children who need it. As a parent, parental involvement is one of the most influential factors, which means that a parent should support and help a child with homework or that the parent should spend enough time with the child. But not only the involvement, also the type of parenting style has an impact on the child's development. As seen in the results, many participants preferred an authoritarian style above an authoritative style. The strict rules, the harsh punishment and at times the violence will only have a negative effect on a child, which could explain the social emotional and behavioral problems that some children in school are experiencing. The AP program suggests a more authoritative parenting style, but the program and the parenting style were highly condemned. A child needs to show respect and is not allowed to choose what he wants and after all the program does not fit the Caribbean culture. But this idea could be characteristics for small islands, where the own culture is considered to be different from the rest. But unfortunately this mindset will not allow any changes. Maybe the AP program is American, but as a few parents suggested: you have to make it your own.

As for the meso system, it contains the micro systems interacting with each other. Parental involvement also belongs to this area, meaning that the parent interacts with preschool or primary school in terms of speaking to the teacher about the child or attending parent evenings or report card evenings where the progress of the child is discussed. These processes are bidirectional, because the teacher also has to make an effort to inform the parent about the child and to keep the parent updated about the child's progress. Reviewing the conclusion, the children who were facing difficulties in group 1 and 2 had parents who were less involved and there was less contact between the parent and the teacher.

The exo system represents the indirect influences in the environment of the child. One clearly influential factor is the socioeconomic status of the parent. As seen in the statistics of the parents from the conducted surveys, a majority of the parents is single. And many people have a minimum income or even less and seeing that the prices for basic necessities are very high, it is hard to imagine how these people are able to manage. Also a lot of parents on the island have to work multiple jobs which influences their parental involvement, but also what they can offer their child. This can result in a child who is enrolled in a low quality preschool or a child who does not get any type of preschooling at all.

Finally, the macro system contains the culture that a child is living in and the laws designed by the government. A majority of the participants from the focus groups thinks that

both the government and the school boards are not doing enough to provide children with a better educational system. According to the Acting Head of DEI this is not true, since government spends at least a third of its annual budget on education. But there are definitely some flaws within the system. DEI was set up to implement innovations within education and in 2001 the Foundation Based Education was implemented as a standard guideline and curriculum for primary schools. Because of the law, private schools are not obligated to use this curriculum, which finally results in schools using only some parts of the curriculum. The problem is that the competition and the achievements of children between schools is very unequal, resulting in the fact that some children will not meet the requirement for the end test by the time they start in group 8. Every school has their own vision, but also this results in inequality. This causes one school to have to take in every child, while the other schools only take the advanced children which results in higher scores for the school that does exclude children when they do not have good scores on the entry test at the age of 4. For preschools, however, there is no standard curriculum provided and there is no inspector for these preschools who would pay attention to the quality of the education that is offered, which would be beneficial with regards to the negative experiences that some of the parents from the focus group had.

Besides the influence of the government, the culture also makes a difference. On St. Maarten there are a lot of different nationalities. A majority of the immigrants are from a Spanish speaking culture. These people remain with their own beliefs and their own language, while English is one of the main languages on the island. This results in language barriers, not only for the child at school but also it makes the interaction between parent and teacher, or being up to date about what the government is offering more difficult. This eventually cause 'cracks' within the ecological system and puts a child at a greater disadvantage. Not only the language but also the culture as a whole influences the way that a parent raises a child or what a parent, a teacher or a school board thinks is important for a child to learn. Very remarkable is the tendency that parents have on the island to expect their child is to be a high achiever and that a child becomes advanced for his age. In theory this is not a negative aspect and it is true that times change and so do children and the way that they are educated. But sometimes children are being pushed too far which results in not allowing them to play. Parents tend to forget that children also learn through play, since some parents said that preschool "was a waste of time and their child did nothing there, but playing". But play is actually a very natural way for a child to learn and it is a good sign of development. It cannot be expected from a child to sit still all day in a chair and make homework and get started on the fine development at the age of 2, because this does not belong at the developmental stage a child is currently in. This seems to be forgotten, not only by parents but also by the teachers who are not pleased when a child is not able to write from the start in group 1. And the child being in school already at a very young age could be a reason why parents are reporting that their child is demotivated by the time he is in group 2. An Early Stimulation Center is connected to the primary school, so a child will know what to expect. And maybe that is the part where the child does not get any new challenging situations, whereas the children who come from a private preschool have a new environment to adjust to. A child should be regularly exposed to new stimulations in his environment. This will keep a child interested and eager to learn.

To conclude this discussion, as described by Bronfenbrenner's theory (1977), all

factors within the systems interact with each other. And the more disadvantages a child faces, the more likely the child is to fail. The main problem is that none of the systems are working properly together or that they do not provide enough opportunities to create chances. After all, it takes a community to raise a child.

6.2 Limitations

During the research it was not at all simple to find out which student had attended preschool and which one had not. The majority of the schools had a list. For the other schools it took some extra time to go through the files and help was offered, but one school did not want to help because of confidentiality issues. Secondly, some teachers mentioned that not all the parents were honest about their child attending preschool. According to them you can clearly see this in their behavior or knowledge. In case of any doubts, there was the survey as a backup. To review what the parent answered about the preschool questions.

The third limitation is that the terms preschool and daycare seem to be mixed up on St. Maarten. Sometimes daycares offer also some sort of schooling, whereas a preschool can also vary in different ways from low quality to high quality and in the kind of educational programs they are offering. Because most students went to different preschools, there is no clear view on what kind of knowledge they entered preschool with. This may be the reason why only one statistically significant result has been found between students who attended preschool and students who did not. Also, the relative small group of stay at home students could have been the reason for this outcome. In fact the majority of students did attend some sort of schooling before entering primary school.

Another limitation is that this study was not randomized. The participating schools were chosen by the school boards. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized. The same applies to the participating groups. For three schools, there was only one group 1 and one group 2. But for the other three schools the principal made the decision regarding the classes in which the research would be conducted. However, the children who were interviewed were chosen randomly.

The surveys for the parents contained questions about income. As expected, not all parents answered this question. Based on other discriminating factors (level of education, health insurance, benefits) the socioeconomic status could still be defined. This is of course, less accurate than the exact information about the income. But when comparing the known incomes and their discriminating factors, the definition seemed accurate.

Another limitation of the survey is that not all parents completed it. This was usually the last part where questions were asked about the AP program and parental involvement. It is possible that the parents considered the survey to be too long or that the questions about parental involvement were too personal. Even though the questionnaires were anonymous.

The last limitations concerns the size of the focus groups. The focus group with the student care coordinators was relatively small and also not randomly chosen. The focus group with the teachers had more participants, but only the teachers from the chosen classes could attend. In the case of the focus groups with the parents, the schools had to organize the parent meeting. The approach varied per school. There were schools that invited everyone, whereas other school only invited the parents who they were certain would attend a meeting. Because

of limited time and the scope of this research, no new invitations were sent out if the attendance was low and the information that was gathered from all the focus groups was used.

7. Recommendations

During the research problems and deficits within and outside of the educational system emerged. Based on recommendations and complaints from the focus groups and obstacles during the research, a few recommendations for education on St. Maarten and future researches can be made.

Since there are no clear guidelines for a preschool or a daycare when it comes to educational facilities, a clear definition of both terms needs to be made. A standard curriculum needs to be designed for private preschools, so that it is known in general what basic guidelines a preschool needs to live up to. In this way children who attend preschool can get an equal basic foundation and the quality of education can be protected. But the quality also has to be inspected by an inspector who not only checks if the school offers a healthy and safe environment, but also checks if the right quality of early childhood education is given.

Early Stimulation Centers were very positively rated by the focus groups. These centers require a child to be more independent (potty trained, etc.) before entering the Center. It would be beneficial if more schools could offer this program, because it is known what is expected from a child in primary school. However, more attention needs to be paid to play and not only to learning all day. The pressure that is put on a child should be more divided and the educational materials more differentiated, which would prevent a child from getting demotivated by the time he is in group 2.

The Foundation Based Education is the standard curriculum for the primary schools. Since most private schools are not consistently using this curriculum it is recommended that one curriculum be used across the board and by all school boards. At this moment, there is too much variation within the education and quality of the school boards. One school will only take the advanced children, whereas others would take in everyone. This draws an unrealistic picture, while every child should have equal opportunity. This would require a change within the law, since the law allows private schools to have their own curriculum.

Many children have behavioral or emotional problems, which also would explain why some children are not performing well. This is a main concern at school and these problems could possibly be attributed to the authoritarian and sometimes, violent parenting style that some parents use. Both the Student Support Services Division and the student care coordinator are supposed to support these children with varied problems. Nonetheless, the placement of a school psychologist or a behavioral therapist at the school is recommended to support these children and to have a more effective support system. But going back to the source of the alarming problem, authoritative parenting courses can be recommended. The AP program does exist, but an alternative should be offered or the existing program should be better implemented by offering more follow ups or by making it obligatory.

Two aspects need to be stimulated in the bidirectional relationship between parent and teacher. First, the school could plan in parent and teacher meetings if there are any problems or have an obligatory update meeting for both the parent and the teacher to discuss the situation at school or at home, and how the child is progressing. The second aspect is stimulating parental involvement, which is a challenging goal for several reasons. Some

parents are simply not interested, while others have multiple jobs to attend and do not have the time. Offering opportunities for parents to meet one another would be a good way to stimulate parental involvement. During the focus groups most parents expressed that they liked being able to talk to each other about educating and raising a child. Creating meeting opportunities will always start with the persons that are the most involved and interested, but could possibly encourage other parents to join.

Reviewing the results and the differences between students coming from a different socioeconomic status, it would be wise to subsidize preschool or partly support the parents of preschoolers who have a low income. As informed by the Acting Head of DEI, the possibility of parental support was there. But many people are too proud to request support and therefore it is hard to get a subsidy program started.

The final recommendation would be to keep stimulating play. Many parents seem to have high expectations for their children and want them to be advanced, without paying sufficient attention to play. Play is one of the most important ways a child learns and it comes natural to a child. This does not only require informing parents, but also preschools and primary schools.

For future research it would be interesting to look at achievements of children in a preschool or get into the different curricula that are offered at the private preschools and Early Stimulation Centers, to research the differences in educational facilities and quality. Also, a study with a focus on parental involvement and the reasons why some parents are less involved, would be beneficial.

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9. Appendixes

9.1 Data Parent Surveys

Figure 1. Birth place of parents that returned the survey

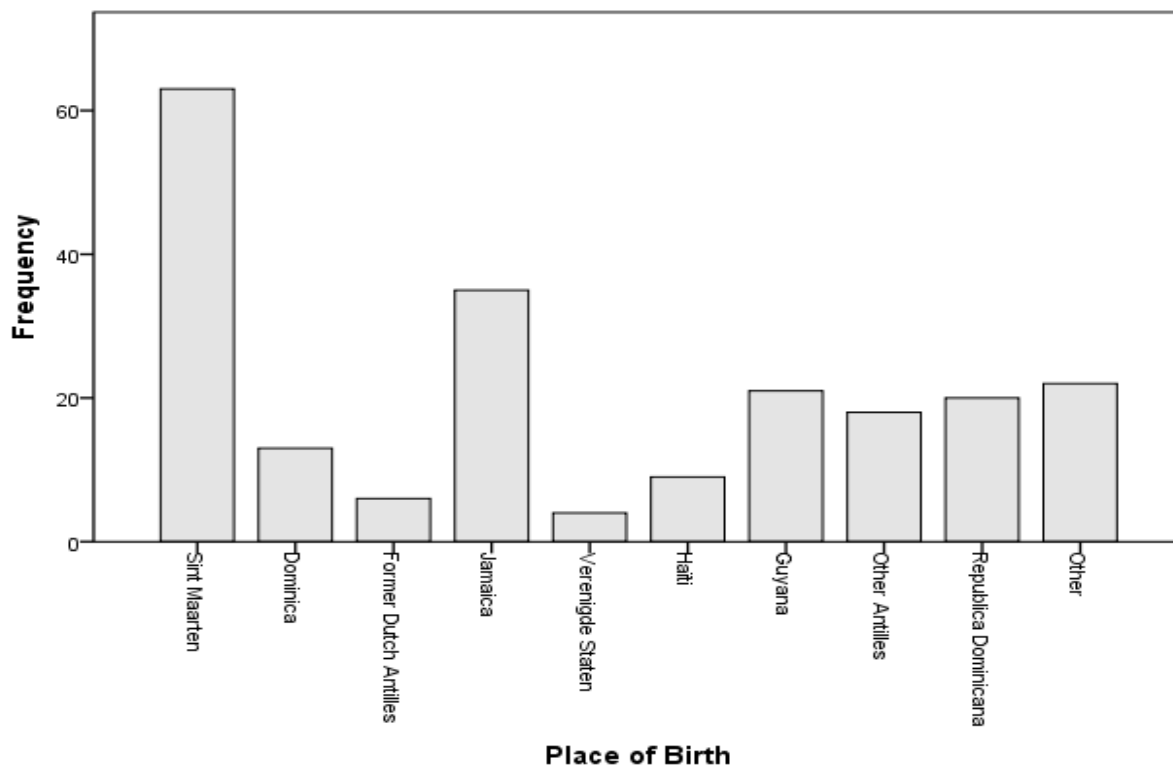


Figure 1. Of all the parents who returned the surveys, most came from Sint Maarten and Jamaica. This bar charts is a good representation of the many nationalities the island has.

Figure 2. Highest level of education of the parents

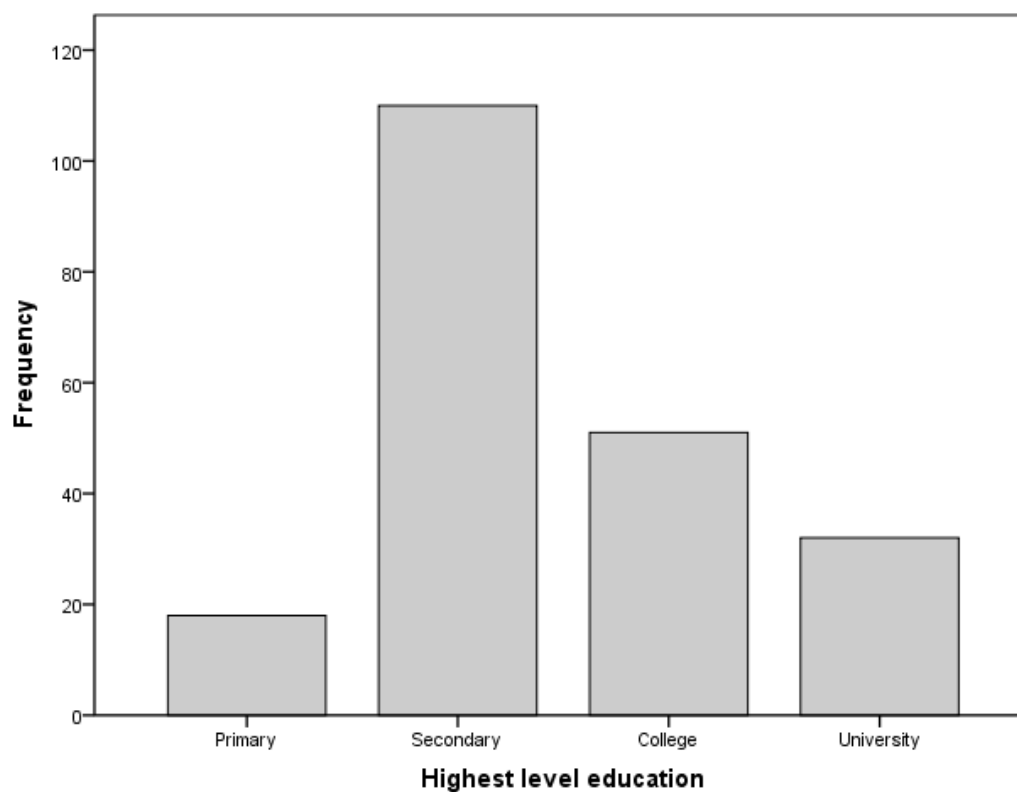


Figure 2. This chart represents the highest level of education of the parents who returned the survey. Most parents have had secondary education as their highest level.

Figure 3. Marital status of the parents.

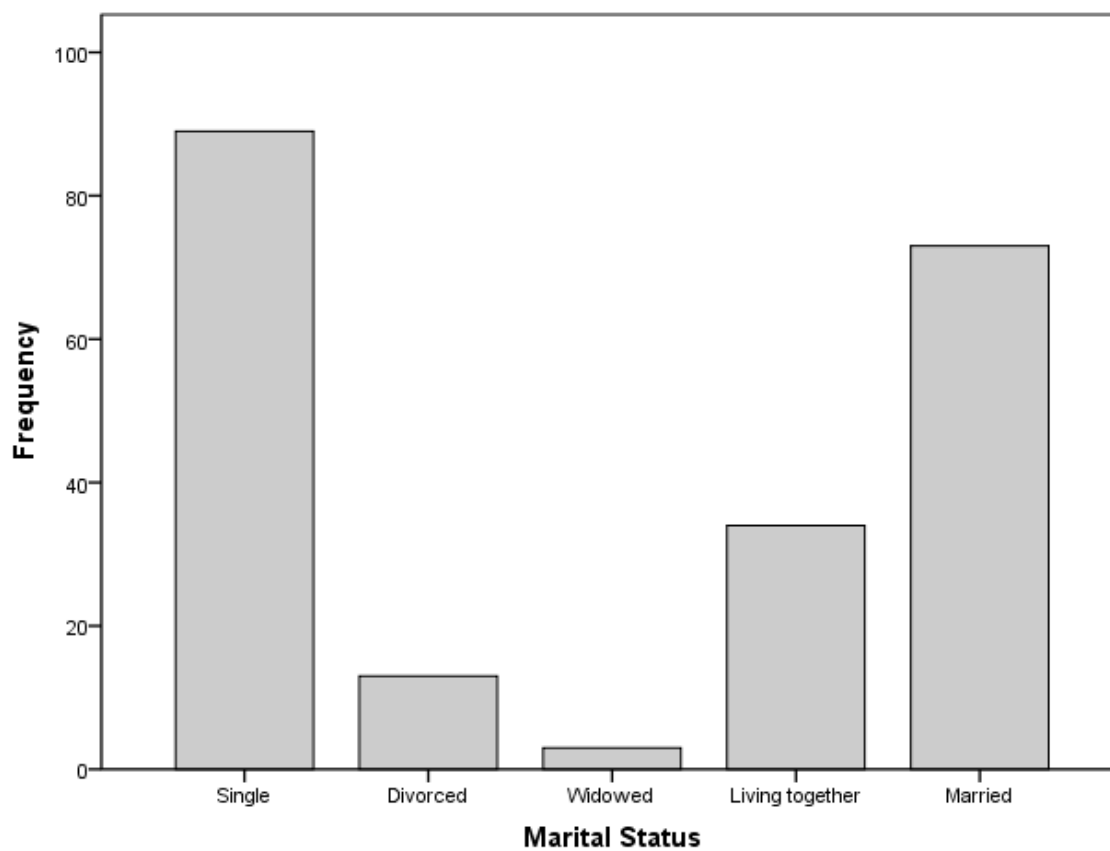


Figure 3. The marital status of the parents. Most parents are single, which is also assumed to be an indirect cause of problems on the island.

9.2 Tables

9.2.1 St. Joseph School Group 1

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for 8 content areas (and major subjects), divided by attendance of preschool

	Preschool		No Preschool		<i>t</i>
	<i>N (16)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>N (10)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	
Phil. Of Life		1,63 (.39)		1,55 (.40)	.472
SEDSocial		2,24 (.42)		2,24 (.52)	-.007
SEDWork		1,95 (.53)		1,80 (.62)	.639
SEDPractical		2,13 (.39)		1,85 (.34)	-1.877
LAListen		2,04 (.50)		1,91 (.48)	.654
LARead		1,92 (.52)		1,74 (.58)	.848
LAWrite		1,96 (.37)		1,74 (.48)	1.335
S&T		1,94 (.48)		1,75 (.68)	.829
S&S		2,66 (2.53)		1,80 (.63)	1.043
HPE		2,11 (.36)		2,18 (.54)	-.371
CAD		2,10 (.46)		1,90 (.62)	.965
FMS		1,94 (.25)		1,75 (.35)	1.599
Mathnumbers		2,10 (.52)		2,04 (.56)	.300
Mathgeometry		1,88 (.39)		1,80 (.48)	.437

*The results in this table suggest that there is no significant difference in achievements between students who attended preschool and students that did not.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for 8 content areas and, divided by economic status

	High(er) Economic Status		Low Economic Status		<i>t</i>
	<i>N</i> (12)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>N</i> (14)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	
Phil. of Life		1,69 (.38)		1,52 (.39)	-1.118
SEDS		2,22 (.45)		2,26 (.47)	.219
SEDW		1,99 (.59)		1,80 (.54)	-.844
SEDP		2,15 (.42)		1,91 (.34)	-1.645
LAListening		2,14 (.48)		1,87 (.47)	-1.465
LARead		2,08 (.55)		1,66 (.46)	-2.154*
LAWrite		1,93 (.41)		1,82 (.44)	-.627
S&T		2,04 (.58)		1,71 (.51)	-1.531
S&S		2,96 (2.89)		1,79 (.47)	-1.498
HPE		2,17 (.40)		2,10 (.47)	-.344
CAD		2,15 (.50)		1,92 (.53)	-1.152
FMS		1,93 (.26)		1,81 (.33)	-.970
Mathnumbers		2,21 (.57)		1,97 (.47)	-1.202
Mathgeometry		1,83 (.44)		1,86 (.41)	.142

* $p < .0$

5 The scores in the table show that the economic status seems to influence the student scores for Reading (Language Attainment). The average score for students who are from a high SES is 2.08, whereas the average score for students who are from a low SES is 1.66. The other scores suggest that there is no difference between groups for the other content areas.

9.2.2 St. Joseph Group 2

Table 3

Descriptive statistics for 8 content areas, divided by attendance of preschool

	Preschool		No Preschool		<i>t</i>
	<i>N</i> (18)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>N</i> (6)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	
Phil. of Life		2,17 (.47)		2,30 (.53)	-.540
S&T		2,20 (.84)		1,95 (.49)	.758
S&S		2,64 (.38)		2,08 (.38)	3.134*
CAD		2.78 (.17)		2.92 (.13)	-1.831
HPE		2.33 (.27)		2.45 (.25)	-.998
FMS		2,67(.44)		2,90 (.22)	-1.190
SEDWork		2,18 (.56)		2,23 (.44)	-.193
SEDSocial		2,59 (.97)		2,59 (.23)	-.015
SEDPractical		2,56 (.29)		2,27 (.30)	2.041
LAListening		2,54 (.51)		2,58 (.49)	-.194
LAResading		2,83 (.45)		2,33 (.88)	1.853
LAWriting		2,50 (.44)		2,19 (.56)	1.372
Mathnumbers		2,26 (.55)		1,91 (.26)	1.447
Mathgeometry		2,69 (.52)		2,40 (.82)	.990

* $p < .05$ *Analysis: The scores in the table show that the attendance of preschool seems to influence the student scores for Social Studies. The average score for students who attended preschool is 2.64, whereas the average score for students who did not attend preschool is 2.08. The other scores suggest that there is no difference between groups for the other content areas.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics for 8 content areas and, divided by economic status

	High(er) Economic Status		Low Economic Status		<i>t</i>
	<i>N</i> (13)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>N</i> (11)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	
Phil. of Life		2.37 (.35)		2,03 (.58)	-1.747
S&T		2.27 (.67)		1,95 (.93)	-.963
S&S		2.54 (.38)		2,50 (.53)	-.204
CAD		2.81 (.18)		2,80 (.16)	-.106
HPE		2.35 (.32)		2,38 (.21)	.249
FMS		2.76 (.38)		2,68 (.45)	-.485
SEDWork		2.27 (.49)		2,10 (.59)	-.744
SEDSocial		2.53 (.42)		2,68 (1,24)	.401
SEDPractical		2.49 (.33)		2,45 (.31)	-.296
LAListening		2.62 (.51)		2,48 (.51)	-.614
LARreading		2.75 (.58)		2,63 (.68)	-.477
LAWriting		2.45 (.56)		2,40 (.41)	-.230
Mathnumbers		2.29 (.48)		2,04 (.57)	-1.155
Mathgeometry		2.63 (.57)		2,60 (.66)	-.096

*The scores in the table indicate that there is no difference between children from a low SES and a high(er) SES in achievements in all the content areas. This means the achievements between these two groups can be assumed to be equal. The only remarkable thing is that the standard deviation for SEDSocial is very high (1.24), compared to the other standard deviations. This would suggest that there is a great variance within the low SES group.

9.2.3 Results five schools combined Group 1

Table 5

Descriptive statistics for 8 content areas, divided by attendance of preschool

	Preschool		No Preschool		<i>t</i>
	<i>N</i> (96)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>N</i> (14)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	
Phil. Of Life		2,97 (.61)		2,96(.60)	-.38
SED		2,79 (.69)		2,76 (.52)	.202
LAListen		2,92 (.75)		2,75 (.61)	.855
LARead		2,49 (.74)		2,26 (.64)	1.099
LAWrite		2,38 (.80)		2,15 (.86)	.965
S&T		3,12 (.72)		2,93 (.80)	.887
S&S		2,80 (.80)		2,78 (.68)	.098
HPE		2,86 (.71)		2,84 (.55)	.081
CAD		2,78 (.65)		2,72 (.48)	.965
Mathnumbers		2,76 (.93)		2,64(.94)	.310
Mathgeometry		3,14 (.91)		2,67 (.81)	1.838
Mathproblemsolve		2.57 (.87)		2,27 (.52)	1.074
Dutch		2.34 (.68)		2,22 (.42)	.525
Work Habit		2.75 (.71)		2.65 (.56)	.487

*The results in this table suggest that there is no significant difference in achievements between students who attended preschool and students who did not.

Table 6

Descriptive statistics for 8 content areas and, divided by economic status

	High(er) Economic Status		Low Economic Status		<i>t</i>
	<i>N</i> (70)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>N</i> (40)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	
Phil. of Life		3,04 (.55)		2,81 (.71)	-1.643
S&T		3,14 (.66)		3,02 (.85)	-.848
S&S		2.93 (.77)		2,57 (.78)	-2.327*
CAD		2.80 (.59)		2,73 (.71)	-.494
HPE		2.83 (.71)		2,89 (.67)	.425
SED		2.86 (.71)		2,67 (.56)	-1.424
LAListening		3.01 (.74)		2,70 (.67)	-2.192*
LARreading		2.52 (.74)		2,34 (.71)	-1.232
LAWriting		2.44 (.71)		2,19 (.93)	-1.558
Mathnumbers		2.76 (.99)		2,71 (.90)	-.237
Mathgeometry		3.24 (.96)		2,81 (.85)	-2.415*
Mathproblemsolve		2.63 (.88)		2,31 (.72)	-1.404
Dutch		2.40 (.70)		2,19 (.50)	-1,050
Work Habit		2.85 (.72)		2.54 (.59)	-2.383*

* $p < 0.05$ The scores in the table indicate that there is significant difference in scores for Listening and Speaking, Measurement and Geometry, Social Studies en Work Habit. This suggests that the economic status of a student has some influence on the achievements in these areas.

9.2.4 Results five schools combined Group 2

Table 7

Descriptive statistics for 8 content areas, divided by attendance of preschool

	Preschool		No Preschool		<i>t</i>
	<i>N</i> (102)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>N</i> (22)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	
Phil. Of Life		2,74 (.67)		2,80 (.51)	-.422
SED		2,94 (.58)		2,96 (.42)	-.112
LAListen		3,01 (.66)		2,96 (.52)	.326
LARead		2,85(.68)		2,76 (.69)	.585
LAWrite		2,96 (.79)		2,68 (.83)	1.464
S&T		3,04 (.73)		3,05 (.51)	-.054
S&S		2,89 (.68)		2,81 (.40)	.538
HPE		3,25 (.48)		3,15 (.51)	.893
CAD		3,07 (.52)		2,96 (.57)	.842
Mathnumbers		3,03 (.76)		2,86 (.78)	.952
Mathgeometry		3,08 (.61)		2,90 (.51)	1.276
Mathproblemsolve		2.26 (1.55)		2.56 (.95)	-.797
Dutch		2.65 (.85)		2,44 (.73)	.972
Work Habit		2.99 (.53)		2.89 (.55)	.819

*The results in this table suggest that there is no significant difference in achievements between students who attended preschool and students who did not.

Table 8

Descriptive statistics for 8 content areas and, divided by economic status

	High(er) Economic Status		Low Economic Status		<i>t</i>
	<i>N</i> (82)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>N</i> (42)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	
Phil. of Life		2,69 (.68)		2,88 (.55)	1.586
S&T		3,14 (.74)		3,02 (.58)	-.436
S&S		3,06 (.69)		3,00 (.52)	.469
CAD		3,08 (.54)		2,99 (.51)	-.829
HPE		3.26 (.52)		3,18 (.41)	-.871
SED		2.89 (.60)		3,05 (.42)	1.520
LAListening		3.02 (.67)		2,97 (.56)	-.440
LARReading		2.87 (.68)		2,77 (.68)	-.806
LAWriting		2.95 (.79)		2,83 (.82)	-1.558
Mathnumbers		3.05 (.77)		2,89 (.73)	-1.113
Mathgeometry		3.09 (.61)		2,95 (.59)	-1.200
Mathproblemsolve		2.31 (1.31)		2,36 (1.52)	.168
Dutch		2.70 (.86)		2,44 (.75)	-1,428
Work Habit		2.99 (.55)		2.95 (.50)	-.437

*Table 8 shows that there were no significant results, which suggests that the economic status does not have an influence on the achievements of children in group 2.

9.3 Parental survey

Parents questionnaire

It is very important for the subsidizing of projects in education in St. Maarten and for your child that you fill in this questionnaire!

Dear parent/guardian,

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Cyriara van Broekhoven and I am a student at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands and I am researching certain aspects of the education sector on Sint Maarten for my Master research. Through this research, I am trying to get insight in the influence of preschool on the achievements of children in group 1 and 2 (Cycle 1). To get a full report, the cooperation of parents, teachers and Student Care Coordinators are required and the final recommendation will be written to the Division for Educational Innovation (DEI).

This survey will include questions about your family structure and your child's former education. These questions are included because it is important to know which aspects are contributing to your child's achievements in general and also if preschool does offer advantages for children during the first years of primary school. I will also ask your opinion about the activities offered by your child's school.

After you have filled in the questions you can put them back in the envelope. This survey is anonymous. Neither the teacher, nor anyone else of the school staff will read your information or will be informed in any other way.

Please give the questionnaire back the next day or as soon as possible.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Kindest regards,

Cyriara van Broekhoven

- 2.3 Former education of your child before attending primary school
- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Daycare | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Preschool | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Early Stimulation Center | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No former education | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 2.4 How many years did your child attend preschool?
- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 2.5 Did your child attend preschool regularly (every schoolday) during that time?
- | | |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 2.6 Do you think the former education influences your child's achievements in school?
- | | |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Section 3: Questionnaire

Answer each question in the following sections by selecting Yes or No

3.1 Employment

	Yes	No
Have you ever been employed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you worked within the past year?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have more than 1 job?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a fulltime job?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you the breadwinner in your household?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3.2 Income

How often do you get paid?

Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bi-weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>

Currency paid

USD	<input type="checkbox"/>
EUR	<input type="checkbox"/>
ANG	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please indicate which income bracket best represents your family structure

< 10,000 ANG per year	<input type="checkbox"/>
10,000 - 20,000 ANG	<input type="checkbox"/>

20,000- 25,000 ANG
 25,000 and ABOVE

Average income per month in ANG/FLS 0 - 1.364
 1.365-2.000
 2.001 or more

If unemployed, please go directly to section 3.3

Do you have health insurance? Yes
 No

Do you receive any of the following benefits? Child Support
 Welfare
 Alimony
 Private Pay Insurance
 FZOG
 SZV 60+
 SZV employee benefits
 SZV PPK benefits

3.3 Parental Involvement

Did you attend any Active Parenting Program between 2008 and 2013?

If yes, was it useful?

Are you actively involved in your child's education?

Does your child's school offer activities to promote parental involvement in your child's/children's education?

Do you think that the school has enough methods to support a child that is having difficulties with subjects?

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thank you for your cooperation!

9.4 Teachers Questionnaire

Questionnaire Teachers

Questions about 4 children in your class

Dear teacher,

For a good research it is important that the „participants“ are chosen randomly. This means that I cannot let you choose a student to take as the subject of the questionnaire because you can be influenced by your perspective as a teacher. Therefore I will ask for a list of the students who attended preschool and did not attend preschool or that are from a low socioeconomic status. I will roll the dice to decide for which students I will ask you to fill in the questionnaire. Also these students will be asked simple and age appropriate questions, to document their experience of the transition.

This questionnaire is completely confidential. This means that I will not use your name or the name of the child in question in the documentation of this research, also the information that will be obtained from this questionnaire is confidential and anonymous.

Regards,

Cyniara van Broekhoven

Intern at the Division for Educational Innovation

Date

Name of the School

1. Name of child/ number on list

--

2. Age of the Child

--

3. Did the child attend preschool?

4. If yes, for how many years?

5. What is according to you the background of the child?

Difficult: Poor and traumatic life events

A bit difficult: Poor, but supporting family

Average: The child is supported in its basic needs

All right: The child has possibilites to develop his or her talents

Good: The child is very well supported by the family

6. The child is raised by:

7. What language does the child speak at home?
8. Do you have regular contact with the parent(s)/guardian?
9. Is the parent/guardian actively involved in the child's education?
10. Does the parent/guardian regularly assist with school activities?
11. Did the child have difficulties with the transition from home/preschool to primary school?
12. If yes, what kind of difficulties?
13. Do you notice any differences in: communication, behavior, dealing with emotions, socialization or achievements in comparison with other children?
14. If yes, please describe in what area:

Question 15 is only valid for children in Group 2

15. If the child is in Group 2, do you still notice these differences?
16. Other differences notices that are not mentioned in the questionnaire:

Thank you for your assistance!

9.5 Format interview children group 1 and 2

Notification: These questions are the standard questions that were asked, but were further explained or simplified depending on the child's language abilities.

- 1) Did you go to preschool? ("baby school")
- 2) Do you remember what you had to do there?
- 3) What did you like/not like about preschool?
- 4) Do you miss preschool/home?
- 5) Was it hard for you to go from home/preschool to primary school?
- 6) If it was hard, did you cry or were you angry or did you miss mummy or daddy?
- 7) Do you like it in Group 1 / 2?
- 8) Are the things you do in Group 1 harder than in preschool?
- 9) Do you think some tasks you do are difficult in Group 1 / 2?
- 10) Which ones are difficult? And which one do you like?
- 11) Who helps you at home with homework?