

Preschool beneficial, but should offer more, study finds

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A study led by Michigan State University's Lori Skibbe suggests that multiple years of preschool are beneficial, but that more specific skills should be taught. Credit: Michigan State University

As more states consider universal preschool programs, a new study led by a Michigan State University scholar suggests that two years of pre-K is beneficial – although more time should be spent on teaching certain skills.

In the current issue of the *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Lori Skibbe and colleagues argue that pre-K programs generally do a good job of teaching literacy and that two years of preschool is better than one.

However, the researchers also recommend that preschool teachers focus

more on vocabulary instruction and exercises that build self-control as part of a broader curriculum.

"In terms of kindergarten preparation, I believe preschool does a very good job in certain areas in promoting children's skill sets," said Skibbe, MSU assistant professor of child development. "But it might do a better job if there was also explicit attention directed at building children's self-regulation and vocabulary skills."

The researchers assessed the skills of a cohort of Michigan children attending the first and second years of preschool (generally, 3- and 4-year-olds). The study was one of the first to directly assess self-regulation in this age group.

The findings come amidst a brewing controversy over preschool. Many states are debating whether to offer preschool to all families and how many years children should attend – an important policy question in a time of tight budgets.

Some researchers argue that pre-K programs such as Head Start, a federally funded program for low-income families, offer no long-term benefits for children.

Skibbe disagrees. The study found that attending preschool was associated with gains in literacy skills – specifically, learning the letters of the alphabet and comprehending how they go together to form words.

Skibbe said she supports a preschool curriculum that combines a focused, "holistic approach" to all three elements – literacy, vocabulary and self-control.

"Children should be spending more time in preschool, not less, because the results appear to be cumulative," she said. "Children who spent two

years in preschool, for example, did better in [literacy](#)."

Provided by Michigan State University

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