THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL IMPACT OF DIVORCE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

A thesis presented
by
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Abstract of Thesis

This qualitative study was designed to examine the academic and social impact of divorce on early childhood students in school. The purpose of this study was based on three areas of past research: How do early childhood teachers, counselors, psychologist, nurses, principals and assistant principals describe their experience of working with children (ages Pre-K to Grade 1) who have experienced parental divorce as compared to children who do not experience divorce?; In what ways does divorce affect early childhood students’ academic achievement and behavior in school?; And what strategies and programs would early childhood teachers, counselors, psychologist, nurses, principals and assistant principals like to see put in place at school to help support these students and their parents? Participants included 20 early childhood teachers and 5 administrators in the Boston, Massachusetts area who completed open ended questionnaires in a focus group atmosphere and interview questions, respectively, in January and February 2012 to determine positive and negative effects of divorce in school for early childhood students.

This research revealed that divorce negatively impacted early childhood students’ behavior and academics performance. However, the degree to which divorce impacted the child was dependent on how the parents and child responded and reacted since every divorce situation is different. This study also revealed strategies teachers have used in the past to help students cope in the classroom. Suggestions for additional interventions for administrators to adopt were also mentioned such as parent education workshops and “Lunch Bunch” groups.

Key Words: Divorce, children, school, effects, early childhood
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Imagine a couple from Anytown, USA walking into a local psychologist office armed with books on divorce. The wife, who wants a divorce, cites a newly released book that says conventional wisdom has overstated divorce's long-term negative consequences. On the other hand, the husband, who wanted to reconcile for the sake of their two school-aged children, stands by a different book that paints a darker picture of divorce's legacy—on school aged children who may appear normal but suffer disadvantages compared to those children whose parents are still together. If this couple’s divorce transpires, what will happen to their children? How will the parents looming divorce change their children’s academic future? How can schools equip their teachers with methods for helping children of divorced parents persist in their academic endeavors?

Each year millions of children are affected by divorce and situations such as the one stated above. Empirical evidence demonstrates that children raised by divorced parents are significantly more likely to have problems in school (Seltzer, 1994). In most cases, people view divorce as not only a traumatic event for the children but also something that contributes to other negative life outcomes. This line of thinking was challenged when Hetherington and Kelly (2002) discovered that 75 percent of the children of divorce do not suffer from having any serious psychological, social, or academic problems. However, that also means that 25 percent of the children from divorce do end up having such problems (Hetherington and Kelly, 2002).

For this doctoral project in PreK-12 Educational Leadership, the topic of divorce was researched and how it related to early childhood students (preschool through first grade). The positive and negative impact of divorce on students in school, focusing on their academic
achievement and behavior, was investigated. This age group was of particular interest since these children are greatly affected by divorce because they are so young and most likely do not understand what is going on.

In my eight years of teaching early childhood students, I have seen many children suffer dramatically when there is a divorce in their family. I have seen mainly negative effects of the divorce take a toll on these children and it is sad that they have to go through this situation at such a young age. I have seen grades drop, homework not turned in, negative attitudes, "acting out" behaviors, poor attendance, etc. I have also seen divorced parents not returning notices, not showing up for parent / teacher conferences, and not returning phone calls, notes or emails to me.

This study reviewed past research and conducted empirical research. Research included what the academic and behavioral impact of divorce was, how it positively and negatively affected early childhood students in school, and how this information can benefit parents and teachers in order to better support these suffering children. Finally, research for this study includes whether or not my experiences with children affected by divorce are similar to other teacher experiences and what kinds of support they would like to have in their classroom.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experience of working with children (in grades PreK – 1) of divorced parents for early childhood teachers, assistants, adjustment counselors, psychologists, nurses, principals, and assistant principals at the Pinkley Elementary School and Tanner Early Education Center in Massachusetts. In this research, the experience of divorce on children will be generally defined as its positive and negative academic and social effects it has on these children in school.
Problem of Practice and Significance

The problem of practice stemmed from how divorce has negatively affected early childhood students' academically and socially in the classroom. Presently, there is a gap in knowledge about how early childhood teachers, support staff, and administrators can best serve the children in their school who experience parental divorce. Understanding the essence of the experience of working with children who experience parental divorce will identify themes that can be addressed both in policy and practice to best support these children and their families academically and socially in the classroom.

This research is significant because schools are committed to meeting the needs of all the children they serve. This includes the subpopulation of children who experience parental divorce. The literature suggests that the needs of these children may be different from children who do not experience parental divorce, so it is important to understand what their experience is from the perspective of the adults in the school to best design policy and practice to support these children.

Theoretical Framework

This research is framed by Symbolic Interaction Theory and Exchange Theory.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic Interaction Theory allows for a better understanding of how all the stakeholders involved (teacher and child) in the educational process create meaning and modify that meaning based on interactions with others. Blumer (1969) highlights three major concepts of symbolic interaction theory. The first, human beings act toward things based on the meaning they have for them. The second, meaning arises out of the social interactions that one has with his fellows.
The third, meaning is handled in, and modified through an interpretative process used by the person dealing with the things they encounter (Blumer, 1969). In essence, children mold themselves to fulfill the expectations of the adults around them. If the child’s parents are divorced, the traumatic experience may have a negative effect on how the child creates meaning. The child may develop maladaptive behaviors in response to the trauma.

The Symbolic Interaction Theory frames this research study because the teacher and the child are trying to work together and make meaning of the situation. The teacher of the child of divorce is learning about the child’s changing family situation. He / she will create meaning of the situation and will do what is best to accommodate that child in the classroom so the he / she can be successful in school. This in turn, will hopefully allow the child to be more open and honest with the teacher and create positive interactions in the classroom for all.

The strategies and techniques teachers and administrators use in the classroom are important for these positive interactions and effects to take place. They can also help students create meaning of their situation and help them cope.

**Exchange Theory**

Exchange Theory puts forward that human beings calculate the amount of pain or pleasure associated with an interaction and makes decisions based on past experience and tolerance (Alix, 1995). If the effects of divorce have permeated the school, the child may develop a low frustration tolerance for school. If the child looks at school as a sanctuary or a place where he / she can escape, he / she may value school and all the things that come along with it.
Exchange Theory informs us on how important the school atmosphere is for a child experiencing a parental divorce. The school and classroom environment need to feel safe and inviting to a child in order for he/she to feel calm and open to conversation and advice regarding their new family situation. The teachers and administration also need to be welcoming in order for the child to feel safe enough to open up and share any positive or negative feelings or thoughts.

These theories will provide an intellectual lens in which to view the problem of practice highlighted in this paper. Symbolic Interaction Theory will help teachers understand how children of divorced parents create and modify meaning. Exchange Theory will help teachers understand how children of divorced parents perceive school—the environment, teacher, and curriculum.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

For purposes of this paper, a review of related literature follows to illustrate patterns in children’s behavior after a parental divorce.

Research and Background Knowledge

In the last three decades, nearly half of marriages have ended in divorce (Powers, 1997; Wallerstein and Lewis, 2004). Half of the one million children whose parents make up the annual divorce rate are six years old or younger at the time of divorce (Wallerstein and Lewis, 2004). Children whose parents get divorced typically suffer disadvantages compared to those children whose parents live together. Evidence shows that children are emotionally distressed by parents’ divorce. Young children, especially, are depressed and anxious. Children’s school behavior and academic achievement also suffer. These disadvantages may have long-term
effects including reducing rates of high school graduation and years of schooling actually completed. Also, children who grow up in single-parent households are more likely to be delinquent than their peers whose parents stay together (Seltzer, 1994).

The incidence of divorce has become quite common in the United States with the number of children affected each year reaching the millions. About one out of five school-age children are living in single-parent homes most around seven years old (Pardeck, 1996). Divorce is emotionally comparable to losing a parent to death for a child. Just knowing that, it is apparent that divorce is a traumatic and painful process for children (Pardeck, 1996). According to Hanson (1999):

The argument that pre-divorce conflict accounts for the apparent negative effects of divorce is based on two assumptions that parents who subsequently divorce exhibit more conflict than parents who stay together and parental conflict reduces child well-being. In a social environment in which the marriage contract is discretionary and the bonds holding marriages together are based on emotional exchange, parents who frequently disagree and engage in hostile interaction are likely to divorce. (p. 1283)

Hanson (1999) also found the following in his phenomenological study on divorce: The divorce transition itself brings about a number of changes that can have deleterious consequences for the well-being of children. For the average child, divorce is associated with income loss, residential mobility, altered friendship networks, reduced contact with the nonresident parent and other kin, and changes in relationships with resident parents all of which may represent losses of economic and social capital. (p.1285)
Some past research has concluded that the experience of divorce during infancy and early childhood has more adverse effects on children than it does during the elementary, middle, and high school years. It has been found that in the first three years of life, children from one-parent families scored lower on cognitive, social, and behavioral assessments than did children in intact families. It has also been found that preschool children were the most distressed when compared with older children in the timeframe following divorce (Nair and Murray, 2005).

**Behavior Changes**

The lives of children of separation and divorce are changed psychologically and socially. They must adjust to new roles and relationships in conjunction with changes in the family. Even though divorce sometimes brings relief from tension at home, for many children the breakup brings more stress, pressure, and conflicting loyalties (Pardeck, 1996). Hanson (1999) stated that “Parental conflict may act as a stressor for children, taking a psychological toll on children’s adjustment. Parental conflict may also influence child behavior through the process of social modeling, whereby children acquire the same behavioral strategies used by their parents during conflict episodes” (p. 1283).

Behavior changes in children are also noticeable after a parental divorce. Seltzer (1994) suggests that young children with divorced parents typically suffer disadvantages such as being emotionally distressed, anxious, and depressed. They also suffer in academic achievement at school which can have long term effects such as increasing high school dropout rates. Social behavior is also affected negatively. Children exposed to divorce are twice as likely to repeat a grade, and five times likelier to be expelled or suspended (Zinsmeister, 1997).
It has been found that in the early months after divorce, young children are often less imaginative. Many become passive. They tend to be more dependent, demanding, unaffectionate, and disobedient than their peers whose parents are still together. They are more afraid of abandonment, loss of love, and physical harm. Some research suggests that a fourth of children say that they blame themselves for their parents' divorce. Preschoolers, specifically, tend to display heightened anxiety and aggression a full year after their parents' divorce. Many are found to be in significantly deteriorated psychological condition. They also show acute regression in toilet training and crave attention from strangers. Older preschoolers become more whiny, irritable, and aggressive, and showed problems with play (Zinsmeister, 1997).

How children respond to divorce is actually age related. Children who are very young at the time of divorce seem to suffer less. But, children from ages 6 through 8 often believe they caused the divorce. Most children, especially boys, whose parents are going through a divorce experience academic problems (Pardeck, 1996).

Divorce is a “stressful experience for children at any age and most children exhibit short-term developmental disruptions, emotional distress, and behavior problems. The age at the time of parental divorce has been found to affect the child's short-term reactions to the separation” (Palosaari & Aro, 1994, p. 681). Since they often turn to teachers for help and comfort, teachers must be sensitive to their needs (Pardeck, 1996).

Attachment insecurity in young children after a parental divorce can be a precursor to behavior and academic problems encountered later on by older children. Research has suggested that young children who have been identified as insecure may be susceptible to negative long-term outcomes. By four to five years of age, children who were classified as insecure when they
were infants were overly dependent and frequently elicited negative attention from teachers. In contrast to this, securely attached children were found to be less emotionally dependent. At the age of ten, these insecure children were less socially competent and more dependent on adults than were children with secure attachment histories. Most explanations of the effects of divorce on children refer to the absence of a parent, adjustment to a new living situation, and conflict and stress among the two parents (Nair and Murray, 2005).

The stress caused by the many changes in household and family relationships which accompany divorce threaten children's emotional security. Divorce is usually accompanied by residential moves, changes in mother's employment, childcare arrangements, and disruption of the household's daily routine. Parenting techniques on the mother’s part, especially with discipline and control, become more erratic in the year or two following divorce and can threaten children's emotional security and attachment (Seltzer, 1994).

Children who experience multiple transitions and changes in their family arrangements as parents divorce and remarry may be disadvantaged in their emotional and social adjustment. Emotional security may be restored once the mothers restabilize their lives and situation. The disruption of parenting techniques and practices may have longer-term effects on socialization though (Seltzer, 1994).

Even though divorce can be detrimental to some children, for others it has no effects. In a study by Pike (2000), the comparison between children in one-parent households and their matched two-parent peers revealed very few statistically significant differences between them across the range of dependent measures. Even where there were statistically significantly different results between the single and two-parent children indicating that the single-parent
children were not performing as well as their two-parent peers, examination of mean scores revealed that overall the single-parent children's scores on the dependent measures were still in the average-to-above-average range.

**Interventions**

Due to the increased behavior changes in children after a divorce, interventions are needed. In this section, intervention strategies to help children cope with divorce will be discussed. According to Miller, Ryan, and Morrison (1999):

> By the time they turn 18, approximately 50 to 60 percent of all children in the United States have been affected by divorce. Virtually every teacher needs to be familiar with the effects divorce may have on children's classroom behavior. Unlike some other stressors, divorce-related problems can be ongoing sources of stress to children, even up to 8 years after the initial separation. As a result, teachers are likely to have students who are dealing with a variety of divorce-related issues at any one time. Effective teaching of these children requires an understanding of the impact of divorce, a supportive environment, safe channels for children to communicate feelings and problems, instruction on building coping and self-regulation skills, and resources to help parents (Miller, Ryan, & Morrison, 1999, p. 285).

Younger children experiencing divorce tend to act out more and draw attention to themselves in the classroom disrupting the environment. They also may become passive and withdrawn. Suggestions for teachers and principals include helping the children understand what is happening and allowing them to express their feelings. Teachers must be good observers and provide both parents with information about grades, homework, projects, conferences, activities,
etc. School counselors and social workers can also be brought in to help work with these children. Parent seminars can be offered and suggested for these parents as well. By working cooperatively, teachers, principals, parents, and students will all be better able to cope with the strain of a parental divorce. Educators must recognize the powerful impact of separation and divorce on children and their ability to learn (Frieman, 1997).

To assist children through these tough times, it is also best to provide them with an outlet of expression. Therapeutic reading helps children relate to characters and therefore cope with the emotions that they are experiencing. Life crisis books, picture books with emotional vocabulary, and journal writing / drawing can offer outlets for children to cope and heal. Children need to learn to express themselves. Initiating conversations with children can help teachers find out what is on their mind. Teachers need to help these children feel safe, secure, and protected as well as enable their academic and emotional progression during this time. Finally, teachers need to guide these children emotionally and provide individual attention to these children along with teaching them problem solving skills (Lowe, 2009).

Until recently, children's books did not address sensitive topics such as death, divorce, and bullying. In the past thirty years or so, due to societal changes, there have been more books published dealing with these personal and difficult issues for children (Lowe, 2009). A Look at Divorce by Margaret Pursell is a resource book appropriate for early childhood students ages five through eight. Through the use of short descriptions and pictures of children in loving situations with one or both parents, this book helps children understand that even though their parents will be getting a divorce, they will still be loved and taken care of (Pardeck, 1996).
Other teacher interventions for the classroom include providing children with recreational support, advice, resources, emotional support, and positive feedback. Teachers need to reinforce to the child that their relationship as teacher and student is secure and intact unlike his / her parents. Allow the child to express their feelings and feel understood. Prepare them for any changes that may occur. Also, allow the child to have some leadership roles in the classroom to let them exercise some control. Be careful of interpreting regressions in academics and behaviors (Miller et al., 1999).

A teacher can help children identify and express what is bothering them through such communication and basic listening skills. Final suggestions include asking the school psychologist / counselor to sponsor workshops or provide resource materials on how to deal with divorce-related issues, create a teacher group to discuss and brainstorm strategies for handling divorce-related problems in your classrooms, create a list of reading resources for children, teachers, and parents, ask the librarian for age-appropriate literature, and search for related websites and distribute to parents. For the parents, prepare a handout on how they can help their children deal with divorce-related stresses (Miller et al., 1999).

Along with therapeutic reading and teacher assistance, parents can also help their children cope with divorce. Parents need to focus on the children’s needs during a divorce and after as well as staying involved and in contact with the teacher. Parents need to be positive role models and minimize their conflicts and hostility. Parenting skills need to be worked on and interventions should be considered (Ahrons, 2007). Powers (1997) states that divorce is most common among adults with low incomes and limited education. There are programs that can
help support families with communication skills, job training, and preparing children for school. This is yet another suggestion for parents to help their children cope with the impact of divorce.

Conclusion

The above research has helped create research questions, a method, and design for this study to continue to investigate divorce and its impact on young children and to find more interventions to help, specifically by school teachers and staff, to support parents and early childhood teachers during this difficult time. This is a common, ongoing issue and conducting research on this topic would be very beneficial to future teaching.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Research Questions

The following research questions informed the design of this study, including its data collection and analysis:

1. How do early childhood teachers, counselors, psychologist, nurses, principals and assistant principals describe their experience of working with children (ages Pre-K to Grade 1) who have experienced parental divorce as compared to children who do not experience divorce.
   a) Is the experience the same for all children?
   b) What are some descriptions of the behaviors?
   c) In what ways do demographic factors (age, gender, etc) impact these experiences?

2. How does divorce affect early childhood students’ academic achievement and behavior in school?
a) What are the effects of divorce? (Positive and negative)

3. What strategies and programs would early childhood teachers, counselors, psychologist, nurses, principals and assistant principals like to see put in place at school to help support these students and their parents?
   a) What strategies have been used already?
   b) Have these strategies been effective?

Methodology

After reviewing existing studies, this study will continue to see what other research says about divorce and its positive and negative impact on early childhood students. Research also included what advice is out there, specifically by school teachers and staff, to support parents and early childhood teachers during this difficult time.

This research study was based on a qualitative approach because it focused on “learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue” (Creswell, 2009, p. 175). In addition, the study took place in a natural setting and the researcher was the key instrument. These are all characteristics of qualitative research design.

Correlational studies, longitudinal studies, and case studies have been popular mixed method approaches in the past as well especially by the famous Judith Wallerstein who is known for her 25 year study on divorce and its effects (Wallerstein and Lewis, 2004). However, these types of research can take quite a long time to complete and participants may drop out of the study. The data may also be outdated by the time the study is complete.

Other researchers in this area of interest include individuals in the education world such as teachers and college professors. As educators, we all have something in common; helping our
students be successful in the classroom. This area of research is becoming very common since parents and educators want the best for the children. Researching how to help them through this difficult time will provide the support and guidance that these children need.

Reviews of literature, interviews, and questionnaires are the data collection method of choice in the past. These methods have proven to be successful in collecting useful data which is why they are all used in this research. The interviews provided specific and detailed information and the open ended questionnaires allowed participants to be open and honest with their answers.

Problems with past research for this topic include that much of it was done in the 1970’s and 1980’s. There is not a significant amount of current research and information on divorce, especially related to young children. Also, much of the research done was not with an ethnically diverse sample and therefore can’t be generalized. Hopefully, this research provided some current information to this topic area, especially in the early childhood area, as well as data that can speak to a more ethnically diverse population while recognizing that the sample size is very small.

The researcher was also interested to see how divorce has affected students in her current school of employment. The researcher teaches at a K-5 elementary school and surveyed teachers to find out how divorce has affected students in the classroom. Along with using questionnaires for early childhood teachers and assistants, the researcher also conducted interviews with the school’s psychologist, adjustment counselor, nurse, principal, and assistant principal to gather specific information on how divorce has affected students positively and negatively in the areas of academic achievement and behavior and what support is currently being used to help support these students.
Reviewing past research on divorce through a literature review and conducting my own provided me with a great deal of information on this topic. Learning more about this topic in order to share the information with parents, other teachers, and administrators is very important as it is becoming more prevalent in our classrooms and there currently doesn’t seem to be much support for students, parents, and teachers. Hopefully, the information found is helpful and beneficial for everyone involved and will help create a support system and / or programs in schools to assist students, parents, and teachers. More guidance counselors in schools or even something simple such as a lending library with divorce related support books would be helpful.

The research design included conducting five individual interviews with the principal, assistant principal, school nurse, adjustment counselor, and school psychologist of the Pinkley Elementary School in Massachusetts.

The researcher also administered 20 open ended questionnaires in a focus group atmosphere in order to be available to answer any questions participants may have during the data collection process. Participants included the kindergarten teachers, first grade teachers, and assistants at the Pinkley Elementary School as well as three preschool teachers representing the Tanner Early Education Center in Massachusetts. This particular school was chosen since it is a former place of employment and is one of the few preschools with a set academic curriculum for preschool students.

**Site and Participants**

The population being studied was early childhood teachers whom have had experience with children of divorce along with the adjustment counselor, psychologist, nurse, principal, and assistant principal. Approximately three preschool teachers, eleven kindergarten teachers and
assistants, and six first grade teachers were asked to participate. The setting for the data collection included two places. The first was the K-5 public elementary school in a city north of Boston, Massachusetts. The Pinkley Elementary School contains five kindergarten classrooms, including the researchers, and five first grade classrooms.

The second school for data collection included teachers representing the Tanner Early Education Center in a city east of Boston, Massachusetts. This early childhood public school has four preschool classrooms and is focused on theme related academics rather than just play. The sample type was convenience because the researcher was utilizing schools that she is connected with. Using this sample is at the expense of the information and credibility of what is found (Creswell, 2007). All participants were recruited by word of mouth and were contacted directly by the researcher since she knows them all personally. They were asked if they would like to participate in the research project and offered a gift certificate for $5 to Dunkin Donuts or Lindt Chocolates for their time. Rapport with the participants was built by debriefing them after school one day. The researcher then continued with the informed consent letter process and explained why she was interested in doing this study and appreciated their possible participation in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The type of data collected consisted of words; therefore the instruments being used were interview questions and open-ended questionnaires in focus groups. The interview questions (approximately 16 questions, Appendix C) and the questionnaire questions (approximately 18 questions, Appendix D and E, respectively) were created by the researcher to correlate with past research to gain knowledge about the participants’ experiences with the academic and social
impact of divorce on early childhood students in school. The researcher recorded the interviews by hand as well as tape recorded them with a tape recorder to ensure accuracy. The participants were interviewed and asked to complete the open ended questionnaires after school, so not to interfere with their teaching and planning time.

This study took approximately five months to conduct research and analyze data. In that time, interviews and open ended questionnaires with the 25 school personnel were completed, interviews and questionnaires were transcribed, and the collected data from the interviews and open ended questionnaires including demographic and student academic information were analyzed.

The following was done with the use of a computer, but no computer program was utilized to tabulate the data.

1. Data management – Transcribed the interviews and questionnaires.
2. Analyze the data - Looked for key phrases and themes and coded the data.
3. Classifying / Interpreting the data - Determined what themes were created.
4. Representing the data - Determined the best way to display the findings such as using thick descriptions and quotes.

The findings of this qualitative research study provided several phrases and themes that were identified by the teachers after describing the various behaviors of children in the classroom experiencing various family transitions in their lives. A pattern of positive and negative effects and attitudes were recognized as indicated from the data collected from the participants’ interviews and questionnaires. The results of the analysis allowed the researcher to better
understand the impact of divorce and successful intervention or classroom strategies teachers are using to manage their classroom and mitigate the impact on the children.

The conclusion is that more needs to be done both in and out of the classroom to help students experiencing a change in his or her family structure. Divorce will impact people in different ways, and each situational response should have the opportunity for individualized attention. Teachers and other school personnel should be trained and prepared to appropriately handle these situations as they arise in their school districts.

Validity and Credibility

Limitations and threats to the internal validity of this study included the participants’ attitude towards divorce as well as the risk of some not wanting to participate in a study based on such a sensitive topic. Researcher biases were hopefully avoided by explaining the purpose of the study and its results to the participants. A representative and reasonable sample of participants was chosen to include three different grade levels of students, from two different schools, in two different cities, as well as administrators. Instruments were checked to make sure that they were adequate measures for this study through IRB approval prior to any data collection.

Data collection and analysis was rigorous and followed a strict schedule to ensure credibility. Interviews questions were recorded by hand and by tape recorder to ensure accuracy and the open ended questionnaires were completed in a group atmosphere so that the participants could ask any questions that they may have had regarding the questionnaire.
Protection of Human Subjects

Ethical challenges that this study faced included the sensitivity of the topic of divorce. The research questions, questionnaires, and interview questions were written with this concern in mind. Teachers and school personnel were being used as participants rather than parents to protect families and their personal challenges. It was anticipated that teachers would be truthful and honest with their responses since the research results would be shared with them in order to help them support students of divorce in their classrooms.

All participants were debriefed prior to their participation in the research as well as being required to read an informed consent form that stated they would not be harmed in any way during this study (Appendix A and B). Informed consent letters also stated that it was important that the participant understood that he / she was under no obligation to complete this study, and that he / she may choose to withdraw at any time. He / she could also leave items blank if the questions made them feel uncomfortable. To ensure that answers were kept completely confidential, participants were not asked to sign their name to the questionnaire or interview questions. After all the results from the questionnaires were tabulated, the packets of data were destroyed. The findings were reported as averages and specific, individual responses were not revealed. Names of the particular schools were also changed to protect the identities of all of the participants. Given this, it was hoped that participants answered honestly and completely as possible and there was no threat to them.
Conclusion

The academic and social impact of divorce on early childhood students in school can be positive and negative. This doctoral study was based on personal experiences in the classroom as an early childhood educator and past research that has been done on the topic. Prior studies that have been done are informative but lack specific details that educators are looking for to help become better, more supportive educators. This research took past studies one step further and focused on helping the affected student rather than just summarizing what happened to them after a parental divorce. Using the literature review as a stepping stone for this study, it hopefully generated some useful information for teachers and parents.

Chapter 4: Report of Research Results

Introduction

Data for this research study was collected in two weeks during the months of January and February 2012. Data was collected in three groups. First, five individual interviews were conducted with members of the administration team at the Pinkley Elementary School. All participants were asked the same 16 questions (Appendix C). Second, 17 open ended questionnaires were given out to the kindergarten teachers, first grade teachers, and their assistants at the Pinkley Elementary School. These participants represent the early childhood team, ten of whom are in kindergarten and seven of whom are in first grade. Participants were solicited by the researcher at school and completed the questionnaires on their own time (Appendix D). Participants were debriefed before completing the surveys and were allowed to ask questions.
The final group of participants included three preschool teachers representing the Tanner Early Education Center. The three preschool teachers completed their questionnaires (Appendix E) after having the chance to ask any questions regarding the questionnaire and study. All names have been changed to protect the identities of all participants as well as the school and its students.

**Description of Data Collection Sites**

The Pinkley Elementary School, a K-5 public elementary school, is located north of Boston, Massachusetts. For the 2011-2012 school year, 520 students are enrolled. Fifty three point five percent are white and 20.0 percent are African American. For 30.6 percent of the students, English is not their first language. Fifty percent of the students come from low income families and 45.8 percent of them qualify for Free Lunch (Department of Education, 2012).

The Pinkley Elementary School was specifically chosen for this study since it is a place of employment for the researcher. The Pinkley Elementary School was also chosen because it includes a diverse array of families of socio-economic status and cultural backgrounds. The Pinkley School is considered to be a well run school, even though it is large, with a positive atmosphere among the students, families, and staff.

The Tanner Early Education Center represents a public early childhood school in a city east of Boston, Massachusetts. One hundred ninety nine students are enrolled in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade for the 2011-2012 school year. Of these 199 students, 75.9 percent are Hispanic, 18.6 percent are white, and 2.5 percent are African American. English is not the first language for 79.4 percent of these students and 51.3 percent come from low income
This particular school was chosen for this study because it is a former place of employment for the researcher. The Tanner Early Education Center is a smaller school and has a well educated staff of teachers and specialists. The Tanner Early Education Center also represents a diverse population along with the Pinkley Elementary School so that the results may be representative of many inner city schools with a diverse student population.

Participants

The 25 participants in this study from both schools were selected purposely due to their school experience with early childhood students. For this study, the criterion was that each participant either taught an early childhood grade (preschool, kindergarten, or first grade) or he/she had administrative contact with early childhood students.

Participants included 24 females and 1 male, ranging in age from mid 20’s to 60. Participants also varied in years of education experience from first year teachers to veterans. All were eager to participate and some even asked if they could participate before the researcher approached them. Some participants were aware of this dissertation topic and were excited to voice their opinion. They were also eager to see the results of the study and read the final product.

Interview Participants

Interviewee 1. Interview #1 was conducted with the principal of the Pinkley Elementary School. At the time of this interview, she had been principal for six years. She holds a Bachelors Degree in Special Education and a Masters Degree in Reading Education. She also
has her CAGS in Educational Leadership. Before becoming a principal, she worked in special education, was a reading specialist, and an evaluation team leader. She is an energetic principal who makes coming to school enjoyable for children and teachers. She sees about 30 students a day in her office for various reasons and is constantly talking to parents throughout the day via in person, by phone, or through email.

**Interviewee 2.** Interview #2 took place one morning with the Assistant Principal of the Pinkley Elementary School. She is there one day a week and this is her second year. The assistant principal is also the ELL (English Language Learner) Coordinator for the schools in the city so she splits her time between that and as Assistant Principal for two of the elementary schools.

**Interviewee 3.** Interview #3 took place in January 2012 with the school psychologist at the Pinkley Elementary School. He held this position for the past three years. The school psychologist is available to teachers and students throughout the day for guidance and support. The school psychologist also meets with certain children on a regular basis. He holds a Masters Degree in Clinical Psychology and ABD (All But Dissertation) in Clinical Psychology. He has a LMFT (Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist), LMHC (Licensed Mental Health Counselor), and School Psychologist licenses. He sees one to ten students a day depending on whether he is testing students, holding counseling sessions, or checking in with students.

**Interviewee 4.** Interview #4 was conducted with the school nurse in her office one morning in January 2012. The nurse was chosen to be a participant in this study because of her constant interactions with students and parents, especially with students and families that need extra attention and support. Elementary school nurses are asked to do so much more than one
would think. She handles and sees more than just runny noses and tummy aches every day. The Pinkley Elementary School nurse has been a nurse for the past twelve years.

She holds her BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing), RN (Registered Nurse), and is CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), CPI (Crisis Prevention Intervention), and DOE (Department of Education) certified. In the month of March, alone, she saw 2099 students in her office, with approximately 70 students a day visiting her. Her office is somewhat like a triage, emergency room. She assesses and evaluates students and sometimes teachers before she can treat them. She also tries to educate students and parents on how to get better and stay healthy.

**Interviewee 5.** The fifth and final interview I conducted was with the Pinkley Elementary School’s Adjustment Counselor. We met one morning in February 2012 in her office. She held this position for four years and works with the students in our school that are in the therapeutic learning program due to their moderate special needs. She has her Masters in Education, a school adjustment license, and is working on her LMHC license. She services 31 children who have Instructional Support Programs (IEPs) and also works with several regular education students so she has about 40-45 students. On average, she sees about 10-20 students per day depending on if she is doing group counseling, individual counseling, or running social skills groups in the classroom.

**Organization of Findings**

The findings of this study are presented in relationship to each research question (Research Questions 1, 2, and 3) followed by summary of the findings across all questions. All sections focus on how the participants perceived early childhood students who come from
divorced families in the school atmosphere and what interventions can be put into place to support all stakeholders.

**Research Question 1:** How do early childhood teachers, counselors, psychologist, nurses, principals and assistant principals describe their experience of working with children (ages Pre-K to Grade 1) who have experienced parental divorce as compared to children who do not experience divorce.

- **a) Is the experience the same for all children?**

- **b) What are some descriptions of the behaviors?**

- **c) In what ways do demographic factors (age, gender, etc) impact these experiences?**

This first research question opened up the dialogue on the topic of divorce with participants. It summarized how they saw and described children who come from divorced parents in the school atmosphere. Themes highlighted in this section focus on descriptions of behaviors, demographic factors noticed in students of divorce, and whether or not these characteristics are consistent with all children of divorce.

**Descriptions of behaviors**

Differences in behavior are seen in children of divorce. Behaviors noticed in students of divorce in the classroom include students acting out more and seeking more attention. More specifically, girls tend to be more emotional and weepy and boys being more angry and aggressive. Other behaviors mentioned included that students had more anxiety as a result of lack of home stability and were more non compliant. Also, boys tended to be more active, physical, withdrawn, and aggressive (Participant 6) and girls tended to be more sensitive, emotional, clingy, and cry more.
Some participants mentioned that behavior, attendance, and social skills suffer especially on Mondays when students spend weekends with one parent and rules and routines are different. They are tardy, discombobulated in the morning, and absent more frequently. “Each child is different but have seen it in most” (Participant 8). One participant also felt that “Many suffer in the initial stages of the divorce process” (Participant 12). They “act out,” want “attention,” and they are “too little to understand” what is going on. It is “hard” for them (Interview 2).

**Demographic factors**

Age and gender can be factors when it comes to effects of divorce on a child. Some participants felt that age was a factor when it came to students being impacted by divorce but some also felt that only older students were affected. “Older students often show negative signs of social and / or emotional behaviors” (Participant 3) and boys tend to “act out” by middle school and negative effects are apparent as the child gets “older.” (Interview 1). Often the “older the children are, the harder it is” since they are “missing a role model” (Interview 5).

On the contrary, when asked about whether or not there was a difference in behavior and social skills, one participant said differences are seen in “kindergarten and first grade” because they are not “used to it” since it most likely “just happened.” They are in the “midst of it” whereas older students are not as affected by it since they have “better coping skills” and it probably happened “a long time ago” (Interview 3).

Gender also was not an issue (Participant 7) when it comes to effects of divorce but some teachers did mention that boys were impacted if their father was not in the picture (Participant 4). However, as the previous section mentioned, gender can affect how a student responds to the
divorce, either by becoming more active or more sensitive. It was also found that this was “not universal and can be reversed” (Interview 3).

**Summary of question 1 findings.**

Table 1 reveals findings regarding students of divorce and their age, gender, and whether or not these characteristics are consistent with all children of divorce as perceived by the administrators and teachers interviewed and surveyed. Results were transcribed by hand by the researcher from the interview and questionnaire recording sheets and were based on “yes,” “no,” and “depends” for answers.

**Table 1**

*Research Question 1 Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age a factor?</th>
<th>Gender a factor?</th>
<th>Divorce effects consistent with all?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 1</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>By middle school, boys act out</td>
<td>Large majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 2</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Not really</td>
<td>For most part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not universal</td>
<td>No, all kinds of divorces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 4</td>
<td>Older kids</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Depends on adult response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 5</td>
<td>Older, harder it is</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No, some make it work, support system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No, some not effected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #3</td>
<td>Yes, older</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Depends on time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, depends on situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #5</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not all, different situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #6</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Boys act out more, girls more emotional</td>
<td>No, depends on family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #7</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Blank Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #8</td>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>See it in most, all different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #9</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Boys miss dad more</td>
<td>Every family is different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #10</td>
<td>Yes, older</td>
<td>Yes, boys if no dad lives there</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #11</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #12</td>
<td>Young children do not understand</td>
<td>Boys keep their feelings inside, act out physically, girls are emotional</td>
<td>To some degree, all suffer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #13</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Most, but not all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #14</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No, depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, Boys show anger, girls show sadness</td>
<td>No, depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #16</td>
<td>Not really</td>
<td>Not really</td>
<td>Most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #17</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreK: #18</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Boys more active, girls more sensitive</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreK: #19</td>
<td>Yes, older means knows what is going on</td>
<td>Boys are a behavioral problem</td>
<td>For most part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreK: #20</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not all, depends on parents and what see and hear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Age**

According to Table 1, age seems to impact how divorce impacts students. A majority of the answers, 48 percent, felt that age was a factor and in fact participants felt that older students were affected the most since they understand more of what is going on with their parents. Out of that 48 percent, four were administrators and six were teachers. It is more difficult for them. Younger children are a little bit more resilient.

**Gender**

As far as gender, 48 percent of participants also felt that gender was not an issue. This included four out of the five administrators and eight teachers. Whether a child is a boy or a girl, it does not affect how the child is impacted by divorce according to results. However, as one participant mentioned, “Boys act out more, girls are more emotional” (Participant 6). This seemed to be a trend in some answers and will be revisited in the conclusion section of this chapter.

**Consistency**

The question regarding consistency in all of the interviews and on all of the questionnaires was a very important one. Whether there are all positive effects of divorce or all negatives effects, the question is are these behavioral and academic effects consistent with every child of divorce. Results showed that 56 percent of participants felt that these effects were not consistent with all children of divorce. Only seven participants felt that it was consistent with all children.

What the researcher liked about this question was that many participants gave reasons why they felt that these negative effects were not consistent with every child. Reasons such as
personality, maturity, and coping skills of the child were some factors. Also, many participants wrote that it depended on the situation. Every divorce is different and is handled in a different way. There are “all kinds of divorces” (Participant 3). Some are very amicable so therefore the children are not impacted. It “depends on the adult response” (Participant 4). “Some make it work” (Participant 5). Effects of a divorce can also depend on the timing of the divorce and how long ago it actually happened. Finally, consistency is based on whether or not the family has a good support system or not to help them through this difficult time. The issue of consistency will be mentioned again in the conclusion section of this chapter.

**Conclusion**

As reported by the five administrators and 20 teachers in this study, students were impacted by divorce in similar ways independent of age and gender. However, boys tend to be more active and girls tend to be more sensitive and emotional following a parental divorce, specifically mentioned by five participants. As Participant 6 stated, “Boys act out more. They are angry and physical, while girls tend to me more emotional and clingy.” Finally, all characteristics of students of divorce are not the same for each child and family. This seems to be a trend among the majority of participants.

**Research Question 2: How does divorce affect early childhood students’ academic achievement and behavior in school?**

**a) What are the effects of divorce?**

Research question 2 involves how divorce positively and negatively affects students focusing on academics and behavior in school.
**Academic Achievement.**

When asked if she saw a difference in academics and grades with the students who come from divorced when compared to students who come from two parent homes, the principal of the Pinkley Elementary School answered, “Absolutely. Almost every case.” (Interview 1). She then continued to say that the academics “decline” but not always starting in kindergarten (Interview 1). My assistant principal added that “especially during that year” (meaning the year that the parents divorced or split) (Interview 2). “Grades go down, they lose focus, can’t function, they are emotional. The kids suffer” (Interview 2).

When asked about whether or not he saw a difference in academics and grades with the students who come from divorced or single parent homes when compared to students who come from two parent homes, the school psychologist answered with “yes” and a “but.” He continued to say that this depended on “age” and that there were “more single parent” families or parents that were “not married” than divorced families (Interview 3). He also stated that were many “factors” that attributed to the differences in these children such as “poverty,” “homelessness,” and “stability” of the family. The “whole situation” can affect the academics (Interview 3).

**Behaviors.**

The kindergarten and first grade teachers described the behaviors of children of divorce as being sad, tired, depressed, angry, stubborn, attention seeking, and aggressive. “Children tend to have abandonment issues and this can make coming to school difficult for them and also can impact the way they interact with the other children” (Participant 4). These adjectives are consistent with what the administration team described as being very emotional and not consistent.
The preschool children were more stubborn, tired and sleepy in school and were in danger of repeating and reenacting parents’ behavior and actions (Participant 20).

Positive effects of divorce

Themes noticed in this section include that many kindergarten and first grade teachers think that there are no positive effects of divorce possible unlike the administration team (Participant 2, Participant 5, Participant 8, and Participant 11). Participant 12 stated, “no matter how amicable a divorce is, all children suffer negative effects.”

In contrast, the principals mentioned positive effects of divorce. They included if “domestic violence” was an issue, then a divorce can benefit a child. Also, sometimes there is “such chaos” in a fighting household that a divorce is best (Interview 1). There is a more “peaceful” environment. There is no more “yelling” for some (Interview 2).

Other participants said that divorce can be “positive” and can lead to the parents being “better than an intact couple.” They also stated that the divorce can create a “no battle zone” and a “calm or calmer” environment for the child (Interview 3). Some parents “cooperate more” and there are “less arguments” in the household. It is “more stable” for the child and sometimes even there is an “extra caretaker” such as a parents new mate who can offer more “support” (Interview 4). The children are in a “safer environment” from a “volatile” situation where parents are “constantly fighting.” They are “not exposed to as much aggression. They are in a “calmer setting” (Interview 5).

Negative effects of divorce

Negative effects of divorce which impact a “large majority of these students,” according to the principal include “attendance, lack of rest, change in economics, mom working more,
more caregivers, fragmented life, parents not following through on things, transitioning households, social confusion, and using the child as a pawn to talk about the other parent” (Interview 1).

More negative effects of divorce, that are consistent “for the most part” with all children who experience divorce, behaviors include knowing “which side to go with, the child doesn’t feel loved, competition between both parents, failing grades, emotional distress” (Interview 2).

Other negative behaviors include a “parent not being around as much since they are now a single, working parent,” “stress,” “no attention,” “in some cases the child knows too much” about what happened, “money”, “sexual,” and “routines are off” due to possible new job hours (Interview 3). These behaviors are not consistent with every child. “Not every kid has them. There are all kinds of divorces” (Interview 3).

Negative effects of divorce according to the school nurse include “fighting parents” who “bad mouth each other” and the child is “in the middle” (Interview 4). When asked if these effects were consistent among all children of divorce, she stated that it “depends on how the adults respond.” If they are “rational and have a clear mind, the child will be fine. If not, it will be a rougher time” (Interview 4).

Finally, negative effects of divorce included that parents have “less time” to do things since they have to work including “school activities.” Also, “paying for things” becomes an issue as well (Interview 4). These negative effects though are not consistent with all families according to the adjustment counselor. “Some single parents make it work because they have a great support system” (Interview 5).
Negative effects of divorce can also include parent involvement in school or lack thereof. As for the three preschool teachers, they felt that divorced parents were not as involved and did not participate as much as the two parent families. As one participant said, “Parents reschedule conferences or do not show up compared to the married couples who showed up together” (Participant 18). Another participant even mentioned that, “Most parents do not bother to ask about their child’s progress or behavior” (Participant 19). This is consistent with the kindergarten and first grade teachers’ responses. These teachers commented on how many divorced parents do not volunteer in the classroom and are not involved in their child’s education. Participant 1 stated, “Some parents are at work and are not available to volunteer in the classroom, they have limited time to work with their child.” Participant 13 stated, “It can be challenging to get both parents to attend meetings together and keep appointments.”

**Summary of question 2 findings.**

Table 2 reveals answers relating to the positive and negative effects of divorce. This table is important because it shows the impact a divorce has on a student, whether it is good or bad. Answers were transcribed by hand and added to the table by the researcher.

**Table 2**

*Research Question 2 Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Positive Effects</th>
<th>Negative Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 1</td>
<td>Domestic violence</td>
<td>Attendance, fragmented life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 2</td>
<td>Violence, more peaceful</td>
<td>Taking sides, competition, grades fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 3</td>
<td>Better than an intact couple, calm</td>
<td>Parents not around as much, stress, money, child knows too much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 4</td>
<td>If there are cooperating parents</td>
<td>Fighting, badmouthing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 5</td>
<td>Violence, safer environment</td>
<td>Less time because of work, less school activities, money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Do not want to come to school, sad, depressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #2</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Less consistency with school, tired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #3</td>
<td>Respectful students</td>
<td>Boy: Crying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girl: Clingy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #4</td>
<td>Learn to share time, make friends at school</td>
<td>Abandonment issues, how to interact with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #5</td>
<td>Blank Response</td>
<td>Angry, stubborn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #6</td>
<td>More independent, help other students going through same thing</td>
<td>Parents buy affection, spoiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #7</td>
<td>Blank Response</td>
<td>Blank Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #8</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>More aggressive and attention seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #9</td>
<td>Less at risk</td>
<td>Miss parent, emotional, act out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #10</td>
<td>Fighting, more calm</td>
<td>Miss parent don’t live with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Emotional effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #11</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Adapt to changing situations more easily, coping skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #12</td>
<td>Adapt to changing situations more easily, coping skills</td>
<td>Loss of trust, unable to handle change, on a mission to get parents back together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #13</td>
<td>Blank Response</td>
<td>Difficulty organizing belongings, especially homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #14</td>
<td>Extra attention</td>
<td>Emotional backlash, lack of consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #15</td>
<td>More independent, able to make transitions</td>
<td>Anger, aggression, sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #16</td>
<td>Excitement to see other parent, more on</td>
<td>Tired, trouble transitioning, sadness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positive Effects.

After reviewing the 25 recording sheets, answers recorded show that five participants felt that there were no positive effects of divorce. Five others revealed that positive effects only were apparent if the child came from a home where violence, hostility, and abuse were an issue. A divorce in this type of situation would bring a more safe, calm and peaceful environment and also alleviate any stress and suffering.

Other positive effects of divorce mentioned by two participants included that the child would learn how to transition from one place to the next easier since he/she would most likely be doing that between two different households. Finally, other positive effects of divorce from three participants included the child learning to be a leader and become more independent.

Negative Effects.

Unfortunately, the impact of divorce on early childhood students seems to have a much bigger negative effect than the positives according to the data in Table 2. The negatives seem to have outweighed the positives. The rich descriptions given on the questionnaires show how divorce really impacts a child behaviorally. Anger, sadness, aggression, tiredness, stubbornness,
confusion, and depression are just some of the adjectives used by 14 participants to describe these children and their behaviors.

**Conclusion.**

Themes that emerged in this section in terms of academics and behavior included that participants did think that grades were impacted by divorce in a negative way. In terms of behavior, it was also affected by divorce. Students become more emotional. Five participants felt that a divorce can have a positive impact on a student if there was domestic violence in the home before. According to seven participants, after a divorce, there may be less chaos and yelling. The home environment may be safer, calmer, and more peaceful. Along with positive effects, participants mentioned negative effects of divorce. Attendance issues, lack of rest, family money problems, fragmented life, less time spent with parents, and stress were all factors contributing to a negative impact. However, these do depend on each family situation and the supports that they receive.

**Research Question 3:** What strategies and programs would early childhood teachers, counselors, psychologists, nurses, principals and assistant principals like to see put in place at school to help support these students and their parents?

_a) What strategies have been used already?_

_b) Have these strategies been effective?_

Research question 3 involved asking participants what strategies have been used in school already to help students cope with divorce in the classroom. Question 3 also discusses what strategies and techniques participants would like to see put into place at their school to better support and help students and their families cope with divorce.
Current Strategies and Effectiveness.

As for the teachers and the strategies that have been used to assist them with these students and parents, “counseling” is offered. Also, teachers are encouraged to be “sensitive” to the family’s situation. It is encouraged that the teachers “meet with the parents” to discuss the family’s new situation (Interview 1). This is consistent with all of the other elementary schools in the city. We “all handle it the same.” There is “no set policy.” It is based on each “individual case” (Interview 1).

Themes that emerged in this section also included how kindergarten teachers, their assistants, and first grade teachers already use many techniques in their classrooms to help students of divorce. Strategies and techniques include using the Second Step program weekly in the classroom (district wide social skills program) (Participant 7), reading aloud and recommending books and DVDs about divorce (Participant 6), listening to students and allowing them to express their feelings, being extra sensitive to these students, allowing some academic and behavior exceptions with these students, keeping communication lines open with both parents, accommodating times for conferences (Participant 1), and in school counseling. As one participant stated, “try to support all children by listening to their thoughts and concerns and helping them express how they feel” (Participant 2).

According to the principal at the Pinkley Elementary School, divorced parents have asked for help. “Counseling is available outside of school for the parent and inside and outside for the child.” The parent counseling focuses on helping the parent “learn how to parent” (Interview 1) and they “readily accept it when offered” (Interview 3).
Other assistance offered includes “money support,” “food,” “pantries,” “gift certificates for food from the principal,” “clothing,” “jackets,” and “basic needs,” connecting parents with “Mass Health for insurance” and “community resources and support services” such as “therapists” and “weekly help with parents at home” (Interview 3). The psychologist mentioned that he does meet with the parents “twice” if needed (Interview 3).

As for strategies that have been used to help teachers with these students in the classroom, the school psychologist mentioned that he tries to “help the teachers understand the development of the kids.” He offers advice on how to “better understand an angry kid versus a depressed kid.” He also suggests “ways to talk to parents,” to learn the “dynamics of the divorce and situation,” but to also “stay out of the triangle” of the family (Interview 3). He concluded this question by talking about how “teachers can’t do it all” and “can’t feel guilty” by these students and their situation (Interview 3).

According to the school nurse, help for these parents, especially the “younger” ones includes “insurance,” “doctors orders for medicine and prescriptions,” and “referrals for mental health issues and stress” (Interview 4). “School related” assistance can include having the child see the “school psychologist to lower anxiety.” The nurse also said that she is trying to “decrease the parents’ stress level” since the “parent affects the kid” and you want to “eliminate” that (Interview 4).

Strategies used to assist teachers by the nurse include “education.” “Educating them and supporting them.” Teaching them how to have “rapport with families” and how to “facilitate” conversation (Interview 4). The nurse also informed me of a condition called encopresis which means to have an “emotionally unstable bowel and urine” (Interview 4). She said that she sees
this with a lot of students who witness and realize things are “going on at home with mom and dad fighting” (Interview 4). She also said that she sees students affected by divorce “anxious” in the classroom and “can’t focus.” Teachers “may mistake this for ADHD” when really it is just anxiety about the child’s parents (Interview 4).

As for the school’s adjustment counselor, assistance available for these parents who have asked for help on her end include “community service agencies, in home services, therapeutic mentors, Big Brother / Big Sister, afterschool programs, extracurricular activities, and support groups” (Interview 5). Strategies that have been put into place at the school include that she “picks up” kids on an “as needed basis” (Interview 5).

At the preschool level at the Tanner Early Education Center, it seems as if counseling is not currently available for students of divorce. “There should be guidance counselors on hand for the children to be able to talk to” (Participant 19).

Teachers are working on their own with these students and families. Providing more affection, one on one time, praise, and positive reinforcement are effective techniques.

**Suggested Strategies.**

Teachers and administrators all use some type of technique or strategy to help support these students and families. These techniques alone can be great suggestions to share with colleagues. However, all participants want more to be done in both schools in order to better help these struggling students and families. Education for all involved seems to be the most important.

Strategies teachers and assistants would like to see include more teacher and assistant trainings on the topic of divorce, parent groups (Participant 1), creating a Lunch Bunch group
with these children and the school psychologist (Participant 3), more afterschool programs 
(Participant 9), and more counseling services available. These suggestions seem to be somewhat 
consistent with the administrations’ requests. A lot is being done in the school but more can be 
done in terms of education on the topic and providing more services to the student.

“Parent education” was one suggestion from the principal as well as finding a ‘way to 
keep both parents involved at school.” Having parents “act like adults” and not letting the child 
“see” the fighting and the arguing were also suggestions (Interview 1).

Suggestions for additional interventions included more “counseling and adjustment 
counselors” in the school to allow the children to “speak to someone” who is a “neutral person” 
(Interview 2).

A “free after school program” that had a “6:00pm late pick up time” since that is a more, 
realistic time because parents work. A “7:30 – 8:30 drop off program” in the morning again for 
parents who may have to work was also suggested along with “more support services for the 
kids” and “other community agencies to help” (Interview 3).

Future professional development on this topic is suggested in order to better educate 
teachers so that they can better support their students in need as well as support groups within the 
school for parents to attend (Participant 18).

A final suggestion made by the school nurse was for “more teacher consultation with the 
nurse” about “illnesses and mental health problems” since teachers sometimes assume bad 
behavior can only mean one thing when really many “factors” come into play with a child’s 
behavior (Interview 4). The nurse would also like to see more “parent support” such as “classes” 
to help parents (Interview 4).
Summary of question 3 findings.

Table 3 results reveal the most pertinent information for this study. This study was written by a teacher for teachers in order to raise awareness about the topic of divorce in the early childhood classrooms. Table 3 shows what strategies teachers and administration have used in the past to help students of divorce cope as well as techniques to help and support families. Table 3 also shows what strategies teachers and administration would like to see put into place in order to better help these families.

Table 3

Research Question 3 Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Strategies Used</th>
<th>Strategies Would Like to See</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 1</td>
<td>Counseling, meeting with the family, sensitivity to child</td>
<td>Parent Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 2</td>
<td>Teacher awareness</td>
<td>Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 3</td>
<td>Better understand child and situation</td>
<td>Free afterschool program, before school drop off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 4</td>
<td>Teacher education, support family, rapport with family</td>
<td>More teacher consultation with school nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 5</td>
<td>Counseling on as needed basis</td>
<td>Outside supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #1</td>
<td>Books, Second Step program</td>
<td>Parent Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #2</td>
<td>Support, listening, let express feelings</td>
<td>Blank Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #3</td>
<td>Sensitive, make exceptions, make laugh</td>
<td>Lunch Bunch group with School Psychologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #4</td>
<td>Mothering Strategies, refer to teacher</td>
<td>Workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #5</td>
<td>Listen to child</td>
<td>Classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #6</td>
<td>Books, DVDs, School Psychologist, family with similar situation</td>
<td>Parent Workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #7</td>
<td>Second Step program</td>
<td>Blank Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #8</td>
<td>Counseling for families</td>
<td>Groups for kids to talk who are going through same thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #9</td>
<td>Second Step, Adjustment Counselor, keep communication open, understand needs</td>
<td>Quality afterschool programs, parent workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher: #10</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #11</td>
<td>Refer to all kinds of families in teaching, build relationships with families, support</td>
<td>Make more time to accommodate single parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #12</td>
<td>Listen</td>
<td>Speaker to come in to talk to parents about kids of divorce, buddy program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #13</td>
<td>Homework folder clearly marked, consistent routines, Second Step</td>
<td>Lunch Bunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #14</td>
<td>Counselor, Psychologist</td>
<td>Workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #15</td>
<td>Emails and conference calls to keep communication open</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #16</td>
<td>School Psychologist</td>
<td>Books, literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: #17</td>
<td>Building a classroom community, social skills lesson with counselor</td>
<td>Lunch Bunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreK: #18</td>
<td>One on one, affection, positive reinforcement, praise</td>
<td>Professional Development, support from school, group for parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreK: #19</td>
<td>Affection, talk</td>
<td>Guidance counselors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreK: #20</td>
<td>Listen, all be aware</td>
<td>Class for teachers on how to listen and talk to kids</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategies used

Strategies transcribed include ideas such as listening to students and allowing them to express their feelings, using the full time adjustment counselor and school psychologist that the school is lucky to have, integrating the Second Step social skills program, using books and DVDs, building relationships with parents, giving the children extra TLC, and finally being aware of what is going on are all taking place. Teachers and administration have noticed that children of divorce sometimes need some extra attention and it is promising to know that we are all already doing so much to help these children cope.

Strategies would like to see.

The strategies listed in Table 3 are important ideas to add to the strategies already being used. They have worked in the past but results show that teachers and administration want more help and assistance. What we come up with on our own has been sufficient and participants feel that so much more can be done. Suggestions made by the participants included starting a “Lunch Bunch” group for students of divorce with the school psychologist and/or adjustment counselor to talk about what is going on in their lives and allow them to express their feelings and concerns.

Another suggestion included workshops, classes, and professional development for teachers and parents on the topic of divorce. This would allow teachers to learn more about the topic and how to help these students cope in school and this would give parents the skills to handle the situation at home as well as learn parenting and disciplining skills.

Expanding our current afterschool program was also another idea to accommodate single, working parents before and after school. Finally, participants would like to see more outside
supports and counseling available. The Pinkley Elementary School is lucky enough to have a full time psychologist and adjustment counselor. However, they can only do so much with 500+ students in a school. Additional counseling would be beneficial for all students, not just ones of divorce.

**Conclusions.**

This data set includes participants’ views on strategies available to students of divorce. Counseling is available for these students as well as for their parents. Supporting and educating parents going through a divorce is key. It was also found that it is important to have the teachers in school be aware of the child’s changing home situation.

Even though there are supports put into place already at school, participants want more to help these families and students. More parent education and counseling were two suggestions as well as possibly expanding on the school’s current afterschool program to make it more practical time wise for working, single parents.

**Final Conclusions**

Interviewing my coworkers and passing out open ended questionnaires provided me with a wealth of data that has helped me better answer my three research questions on the topic of divorce and how it impacts early childhood students in school. The data and research results will be looked at more closely and analyzed in the following section.

**Summary of Research Results**

Data collection took two weeks to complete. After this time, the researcher transcribed and coded the five interviews and open ended questionnaire results based on the answers given
and typed up all the data. How do others perceive early childhood students who come from a divorced or single parent home? How does divorce impact these students in school?

**Conclusion**

According to this group of participants, parental divorce can be a devastating process for everyone involved. There are positive effects of a divorce and negatives effects of divorce. There are also positive and negative effects of single parents who never married. This research was conducted to investigate the specific academic and social impact of divorce on early childhood students in school. Teachers and administration of two separate schools in different Massachusetts cities participated in the study and revealed some very interesting insights regarding children of divorce.

According to kindergarten and first grade teachers, an average of 30 percent of the children in their class come from a broken home. Some felt that it was more. “Most, more than half” (Participant 11). Some felt that this number was increasing. “Seems to be more students each year (about half)” (Participant 15). With this being said, it is crucial as educators that we are aware of who these students are and how we can help them cope with their changing family situation.

Behavior and social skills can be greatly affected by divorce. Out of the 25 participants, 76 percent of them saw a difference in the behavior and social skills of a child of divorce compared to a child from a two parent home. Descriptions of these new behaviors include being bossy, aggression, withdrawal, difficulty accepting limits, acting out, anger towards parents, fear of the unknown, need of extra support for social skills, anger issues, wanting attention, tired, weepy, feeling entitled, bullying, anxiety, depressed, and being non compliant. These behaviors
were especially apparent on Mondays, most likely because a child spent the weekend with one parent and was anxious about transitioning to the other parent.

Divorce can also impact students and their academics and grades. A majority of the participants, 52 percent, said that divorce does impact students academically in the classroom. However, 24 percent said maybe. The timing of the divorce and whether or not there was parent involvement at home with academics and homework were two huge factors mentioned. Attendance was also an issue brought up. Attendance at school was affected according to 36 percent of the participants. However, 35 percent felt that it was not.

The big conclusions according to the data are that participants felt that divorce does affect students in different ways. Some are positively impacted and some are negatively impacted. These results are not consistent with every child which in a way is good since there seems to be a lot of negativity surrounding this subject.

What needs to come out of this research is that teachers are aware of the situation if a child of divorce is in their classroom and apply strategies and techniques such as the ones mentioned in Table 3 to help these children adjust and cope with their new family situation.

Chapter 5: Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Practice

Overview

The goal of this qualitative study was to look at the academic and social impact of divorce on early childhood students in school. The purpose was to uncover how a group of administrators and teachers perceived the behaviors related to children of divorce and to come up with strategies and techniques teachers can use in their classrooms to help these children cope. Through interviews and questionnaires, it was revealed that early childhood teachers and
administration leaders thought that divorce both positively and negatively impacted students in preschool through first grade. However, these effects depended on many factors and how each family responded to the divorce.

The study revealed that a group of administrators and teachers believed that each individual divorce case is different and can impact a child in many ways. For some children, it impacts their school attendance, grades, and behavior. For others, the divorce can be a positive experience if the family living situation before was so violent and hostile. How parents react and handle the situation will make all the difference.

This study also explored what teachers have done in the past to help these children who are suffering. Results indicated that many teachers and administrators, as reported by this group, are doing as much as they possibly can given the time and resources available to support these children and families. However, teachers would like to see more being done such as parent education on the topic of divorce and “Lunch Bunch” groups started with the school psychologist or adjustment counselor to give these children an opportunity to express their feelings.

This chapter includes revisiting the problem of practice and significance, the research design, theoretical framework, and the literature review of this study. This chapter will also discuss the limitations of this study, recommendations and implications for practice, implications for further research, and final thoughts.

**Problem of Practice and Significance**

The problem of practice of this research stems from how divorce has negatively affected early childhood students’ academically and socially in the classroom. Presently, there is a gap in knowledge about how early childhood teachers, support staff, and administrators can best serve
the children in their school who experience parental divorce. Understanding the essence of the experience of working with children who experience parental divorce will identify themes that can be addressed both in policy and practice to best support these children and their families academically and socially in the classroom.

This research is significant because schools are committed to meeting the needs of all the children they serve and this includes the subpopulation of children who experience parental divorce. The needs of these children may be different from children who do not experience parental divorce, so it is important to understand what their experience is from the perspective of the adults in the school to best design supports for these children.

This study has provided a wealth of information regarding students of divorce. This subject is becoming more and more common in our schools today. Hopefully, this research has shown how widespread this issue is and how teachers and administrators can help these students cope.

**Research Design**

The design of this research project was based on past literature and studies. A qualitative approach using interviews and questionnaires was chosen in order to provide focused, thick descriptions and data regarding the topic of parental divorce and its impact on early childhood students in school. Early childhood educators were chosen since this age group of students seems to be impacted the most. They are also very knowledgeable about their students and their behaviors in the classroom. The researcher felt that they would provide the most amount of information on the topic and would also benefit the most from the final data.
Theoretical Framework

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Symbolic Interaction Theory allows for a better understanding of how all the stakeholders involved (teacher and child) in the educational process create meaning and modify that meaning based on interactions with others (Blumer, 1969). Another theoretical framework guiding this study included Exchange Theory which puts forward that human beings calculate the amount of pain or pleasure associated with an interaction and makes decisions based on past experience and tolerance (Alix, 1995).

The Symbolic Interaction Theory frames this research study because both work together to help all involved. In this particular case, it would be the teacher and the child. The teacher of the child of divorced parents is learning about the child’s new family situation. He / she will create meaning of the situation and will do what is best to accommodate that child in the classroom so that he / she can be successful. This in turn, will hopefully allow the child to be more open and honest with the teacher and create positive interactions in the classroom for all.

The strategies and techniques teachers and administrators currently use, such as being more sensitive and accommodating to these students and allowing these students to be open and honest with them, can help teachers in the classroom. They can also help students create meaning of their situation and help them cope. Future strategy suggestions such as more counseling and “Lunch Bunch” groups will allow students to be more verbal with their emotions and allow them to interact with other students experiencing a similar situation.

Exchange Theory describes how students interact based on past experiences. Students who are negatively impacted by a parental divorce may associate that pain with other aspects of their life such as school. This negative association can affect how the student behaves and
performs in school. This can also create negative interactions in the classroom with the teacher and other students. The Exchange Theory is evident in this study since it was found that many participants felt that students were negatively affected by divorce academically and behaviorally at school.

Both theories inform an analysis. Symbolic Interaction Theory and Exchange Theory propose how the child and teacher should work together to be successful in the classroom. Teachers need to be aware of a child’s family situation in order to better support them emotionally, socially, mentally, and academically in the classroom. Strategies suggested that are being used and / or would like to be implemented include the use of books, DVDs, working with the school psychologist and adjustment counselor, “Lunch Bunch groups,” parent education, social skills lessons, and giving the child some extra TLC. These strategies and techniques will hopefully alleviate the pain for the child and make the divorce process not as stressful or painful. These strategies will also hopefully allow the child to enjoy coming to school and trust his / her teacher and to look up to him / her.

**Literature Review**

The findings of this qualitative study are consistent with past research. As stated in Chapter 2, nearly half of marriages end in divorce (Powers, 1997; Wallerstein and Lewis, 2004), and children whose parents get divorced typically suffer disadvantages compared to those children whose parents live together. Evidence shows that children are emotionally distressed by parents’ divorce (Seltzer, 1994). Young children, especially, are depressed and anxious (Seltzer, 1994). Children’s school behavior and academic achievement also suffer and these
disadvantages may have long-term effects (Seltzer, 1994). For some children, however, divorce has no effect on them at all (Pike, 2000).

Divorce can be a stressful experience for children and most children exhibit short-term developmental disruptions, emotional distress, and behavior problems (Palosaari and Aro, 1994). Since they often turn to teachers for help and comfort, teachers must be sensitive to their needs (Pardeck, 1996). Frieman (1997) and Lowe (2009) both suggested strategies and techniques to help support children of divorce cope in the classroom including books on the topic of divorce and being extra sensitive and understanding with these students.

Past research is consistent with the data found in this study. Some students are affected academically and behaviorally by divorce and some are not. The majority of the participants thought that divorce negatively affected students more than it positively did. As educators, we need to be aware of who these students are in our classrooms and be prepared to work with them and their families in order to help them get through this transition. We need to provide them with extra support in and outside of the classroom and use the strategies and interventions that are made available to us.

**Limitations**

There were some limitations to this study. First, it included a small sample. There were only 25 participants in this study. Another limitation of this study included that some participants left some blank responses on the open ended questionnaires. These answers could have provided more information and descriptions. Also, there were some first year teachers with little experience on this topic included as participants. This limited their knowledge on the topic.
Another issue that the researcher encountered during the data collection process was participants asked about the difference between divorced parents and parents that never married. This was a question that came up during the interviews and during the open ended questionnaire focus groups. Participants were encouraged to include these students in their responses as a child of a divorce or split if the child was raised primarily by one parent. This was a more common problem than the researcher anticipated. It was found that there were many single parents in both schools studied. However, some never married and remained separated. Both types of parental splits were included in this study since both led to children being raised primarily by one parent. Future studies can address this issue and can focus on which type of parental split is going to be investigated.

This study provided the researcher with rich data and thick descriptions of how divorce impacts students in school. Participants were very generous and honest with their answers. The open ended questionnaires given in a focus group type atmosphere provided the most detail most likely because they were anonymous. Some of the interviews were helpful but the researcher would probably leave this type of data collection out if she were to repeat this study again in the future. Participants were not anonymous to the researcher during this type of data collection and perhaps felt that they were being put on the spot when asked questions. This seemed to be the case especially with the administrators who participated. It is unknown why these participants did not share as much information as the others did.

**Findings and Recommendations for Practice**

This study was written to help understand the academic and social impact divorce has on children in school. As perceived by a small set of administrators and teachers, some children are
positively impacted by divorce and some are negatively impacted. A child’s response is going to be based on how their parents respond and react to the divorce. It is important for teachers to be aware of a child going through this type of situation.

This paper will hopefully be read by many teachers and administrators. It was written with them in mind and primarily for them. Teachers wear many hats including that of therapist. This study can contribute to the education of how divorce can impact a child in school academically and behaviorally. Participants in this study were all eager to read the final product and see the results.

The researcher also hopes that this study will provide teachers with strategies and techniques that others have used in their classrooms to help these children cope such as keeping communication open with parents, being extra sensitive and accommodating and providing students and families with outside supports such as counseling. This was a very important part of the study and if only one section of this paper is going to be read, it should be that one. Hopefully, teachers will take advantage of this information and integrate it into their classroom and teaching. Sharing techniques is the best way for teachers to learn from one another and support one another at school.

Finally, this study will allow administrators to take into account the many suggestions teachers had to improve our schools and help these suffering children and families. It was interesting to see how many suggestions teachers had such as the “Lunch Bunch” groups with the school psychologist, professional development for teachers and assistants on the topic of supporting children of divorce, parent workshops, and additional before and after school care programs to accommodate working parents. These suggestions also do not seem too out of reach
either for the administrators to adopt. Divorce is a serious issue and is becoming more and more common every day. As educators, we need to be fully prepared to any situation that arises in our classrooms. Hopefully, these suggestions once read by the administration team can be implemented into school improvement plans and possibly be added district wide.

**Implications for Further Research**

This study added solid information to the literature and practical field on supporting children who have experienced divorce. However, more research is needed. Ideas for further research include expanding on this study. Future researchers can investigate students of divorce through case studies. Longitudinal studies can also be done to follow students through the elementary school years to see how divorce continues to impact them in the classroom. Both of these research techniques will provide more specific information on students as well as how they change from year to year.

Another suggestion for future research can include involving more participants in the study such as upper elementary teachers to document their perspectives on how divorce impacts students. Parents can also be included in future research studies to gain more information on what they would like to see as support services in the classrooms. A final suggestion includes case studies. Case studies can also be conducted to compare and contrast children and how divorce impacts them.

**Final Thoughts**

This study investigated how divorce can impact a child in the early childhood grades, academically and behaviorally. Some children are impacted and some are not. It all depends on how parents deal with the situation. This study also investigated what teachers can do in the
classroom to better support these children. This study was written by a teacher, for teachers. It hopefully will provide awareness to teachers and administrators as well as some helpful strategies to implement in the classroom daily.
References


Department of Education [http://www.doe.mass.edu/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/)


Appendix A: Request for Interview Consent

Northeastern University, Doctor of Education Program

Name of Investigators: Diana Galluzzo and Sara Ewell

Title of Project: The Academic and Social Impact of Divorce on Early Childhood Students in School

Dear Participant,

Thank you for interest in this study. I would like you to take part in a research project which is an education course requirement for my Doctorate of Education. The purpose of this study is to investigate the academic and social impact of divorce on early childhood students in school. You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.

This study will take place __________________________________ and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to provide information about yourself and your personal feelings and views about divorce and its effect on students in school through a series of interview questions. Don’t worry, this is not a test! There are no right or wrong answers! There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

It is important that you understand that you are under no obligation to complete this study, and that you may choose to withdraw at any time. You may skip questions if they make you feel uncomfortable. To ensure that your answers are kept completely confidential, you will not be asked to sign your name to the interview questions. After all the results from the interviews have been tabulated, the questions, notes, and tapes will be destroyed. Findings will only be reported as averages and individual responses will not be revealed. Given this, it is hoped that you will answer as honestly and completely as possible.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, your answers may help me to learn more about the impact of divorce on students in school. A Dunkin Donuts gift card and chocolates will also be provided at the end of the interview for your time.

Should you have any questions about this study, please contact me at galluzzo.d@husky.neu.edu or Sara Ewell at ewell.s@husky.neu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.
You may keep this form for yourself. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,
Diana Galluzzo
Appendix B: Request for Questionnaire Consent

Northeastern University, Doctor of Education Program

Name of Investigators: Diana Galluzzo and Sara Ewell

Title of Project: The Academic and Social Impact of Divorce on Early Childhood Students in School

Dear Participant,

Thank you for interest in this study. I would like you to take part in a research project which is an education course requirement for my Doctorate of Education. The purpose of this study is to investigate the academic and social impact of divorce on early childhood students in school. You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.

This study will take place ____________________________ and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to provide information about yourself and your personal feelings and views about divorce and its effect on students in school through a series of questions. Don’t worry, this is not a test! There are no right or wrong answers! There are also no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

It is important that you understand that you are under no obligation to complete this study, and that you may choose to withdraw at any time. You may skip questions if they make you feel uncomfortable. To ensure that your answers are kept completely confidential, you will not be asked to sign your name to the questionnaire. After all the results from the questionnaires have been tabulated, the packets will be destroyed. Findings will only be reported as averages and individual responses will not be revealed. Given this, it is hoped that you will answer as honestly and completely as possible.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, your answers may help me to learn more about the impact of divorce on students in school. A Dunkin Donuts gift card and chocolates will also be provided at the end of the session for your time.

Should you have any questions about this study, please contact me at galluzzo.d@husky.neu.edu or Sara Ewell at ewell.s@husky.neu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.
You may keep this form for yourself. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,
Diana Galluzzo
Appendix C: Interview Recording Sheet

Interviewer: Diana Galluzzo
Interview # _____
Date: ________________

Questions:
1. What is your position at the “Pinkley Elementary School?” _________________________
2. How long have you had this position? _________________
3. About how many students a year come from divorced (or single parent homes) in the early childhood grades (Kindergarten and First Grade)? ______
4. Do you see a difference in academics and grades with the students who come from divorced (or single parent homes) when compared to students who come from two parent homes? Please explain.

5. Do you see a difference in behavior and social skills? Please explain and describe the behaviors.

6. Do you see a difference in attendance? Please explain.

7. Do you see a difference between boys and girls? Please explain.

8. Do you see a difference age wise? Please explain.

9. What positive effects of divorce do you see in early childhood students in school? Please describe the behaviors.
10. What negative effects of divorce do you see in early childhood students in school? Please describe the behaviors.

11. Are these effects consistent with all children who experience divorce? Please explain.

12. Have divorced parents asked for help? What types of assistance is available for them? Please explain.

13. What strategies have been used to assist teachers, parents, and students cope with divorce? Have they been effective?

14. Are these consistent with other elementary schools in the city? Same / Different?

15. What strategies would you like to be put into place? Any other suggestions for additional interventions?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!!!
Appendix D: Pinkley Elementary School Questionnaire

Questionnaire # _____
Date: _______________  “Impact of Divorce” Questionnaire

Questions:
1. What is your position at the “Pinkley Elementary School”? _______________________
2. How long have you had this position? _________________
3. What is your average class size? ___________________
4. About how many students a year come from divorced (or single parent homes) in your class? ______
5. Do you see a difference in academics and grades with these students? Please explain.

6. Do you see a difference in behavior and social skills? Please explain and describe the behaviors.

7. Do you see a difference in attendance? Please explain.

8. Do you see a difference between boys and girls? Please explain.

9. Do you see a difference age wise? Please explain.

10. Do you see a difference in parent involvement? Please explain.
11. What positive effects of divorce do you see in early childhood students in school? Please describe the behaviors.

12. What negative effects of divorce do you see in early childhood students in school? Please describe the behaviors.

13. Are these effects consistent with all children who experience divorce? Please explain.

14. Have divorced parents asked for help? What types of assistance is available for them? Please explain.

15. What strategies are offered to assist teachers, parents, and students cope with divorce? Have they been effective?

16. What specific strategies have you used in the classroom to support these students and parents? Have they been effective?

17. What strategies would you like to be put into place? Any other suggestions for additional interventions?
18. Any other additional comments:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!!!
Appendix E: Tanner Early Education Center Questionnaire

Questionnaire # _____
Date: ______________

“Impact of Divorce” Questionnaire

Questions:
1. What is your position at the “Tanner Early Education Center?” ______________
2. How long have you had this position? _________________
3. What is your average class size? _________________
4. About how many students a year come from divorced (or single parent homes) in your class? ______
5. Do you see a difference in these students academically? Please explain.
6. Do you see a difference in behavior and social skills? Please explain and describe the behaviors.
7. Do you see a difference in attendance? Please explain.
8. Do you see a difference between boys and girls? Please explain.
9. Do you see a difference age wise? Please explain.
10. Do you see a difference in parent involvement? Please explain.
11. What **positive** effects of divorce do you see in preschool students in school? Please describe the behaviors.

12. What **negative** effects of divorce do you see in preschool students in school? Please describe the behaviors.

13. Are these effects consistent with all children who experience divorce? Please explain.

14. Have divorced parents asked for help? What types of assistance is available for them? Please explain.

15. What strategies are offered to assist teachers, parents, and students cope with divorce? Have they been effective?

16. What specific strategies have you used in the classroom to support these students and parents? Have they been effective?

17. What strategies would you like to be put into place? Any other suggestions for additional interventions?
18. Any other additional comments:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!!!