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Early intervention: An examination of Børnehave and pre-kindergarten benefits and challenges for families and teachers in Denmark and West Virginia, USA

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This presentation will address the brief history and impact of voluntary, universal pre-kindergarten education for four year olds and three year olds with special needs, with an emphasis on language/literacy of children in West Virginia. Comparisons will be made to Børnehave in Denmark, where 95% of the parents of children ages three to five send their children. An examination of early childhood education in Denmark (dating from the 1820s) reveals a much longer and more complex history, but both West Virginia and Denmark typically focus on play-based language/literacy experiences today. The West Virginia "Early Learning Standards" provide a guide for instruction and are child centered, whereas, the play-based curriculum in Danish Børnehave is less restricted by oversight from a standards board. Interviews with parents of children from both systems regarding services provided demonstrate how both systems work closely with families. Finally, insights from university instructors and a "skoleinspektør" show how coursework for university students studying to be teachers, based in early learning centers and placements in school settings, reflects an emphasis on families and children engaging in play and literacy activities together.