The special education process can be an overwhelming experience for parents (Hammond, Ingalls, & Trussell, 2008). The reaction of parents going through the initial evaluation process at the preschool level is an overlooked area. Due to the requirements of the special education evaluation process, parents may not fully understand the purpose, results, or implications of the evaluation, or may not feel as though they were an involved member in the evaluation and decision-making process (Hanson et al., 2000; Villeneuve et al., 2013).

A phenomenological study was completed in order to gain an understanding of the parental experience of an initial preschool special education evaluation. Interviews were completed with five parents. Analyses resulted in six core themes. First, parents were not surprised by a referral for evaluation for their child. Secondly, the purpose of the individual paperwork forms, while necessary, was not recalled by parents. Next, parents reported feeling as though they provided valuable information and were a part of the evaluation process. Additionally, the results meetings were viewed as a culmination of the evaluation process. Next, parents indicated feelings of happiness regarding the special education services their children would receive, but also feelings of sadness as a result of their children needing those same services. Finally, parents made suggestions to
improve the special education evaluation process in the future. These findings have significant implications for future initial preschool evaluations, as well as the role of the school psychologist in working with parents of preschool children. Future research suggestions are provided.