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# An Analysis of the Readiness Perceptions of Head Start Parents, Teachers, and Center Leaders in Early Childhood Education

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE READINESS PERCEPTIONS OF HEAD START PARENTS,  
TEACHERS, AND CENTER LEADERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Educational Leadership

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by  
Julie K. Desmangles  
December 2017

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Accepted by:  
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## ABSTRACT

The perceptions that parents, teachers, and early childhood education leaders have about school readiness, and how these individuals promote readiness in children, influences how prepared children are to enter the school setting. In this study, I drew upon an ecological systems model to examine how parents, teachers, and early childhood school leaders perceive and promote school readiness. In this study, I also examined the strategies that early childhood education leaders' used to build relationships with families and community members, and to foster parent involvement.

I used semi-structured interviews to collect data from 11 participants in three Head Start Centers in a southeastern state. I analyzed, coded, and grouped the data into themes. Eight themes emerged from the data that was analyzed. The results of this study revealed that parents', teachers', and school leaders' beliefs about readiness were imbedded in the context of their surrounding environments, and influenced their actions and behaviors in working together to prepare children for school.

The outcome of the study revealed that parents believed readiness was a level of cognitive ability – specifically demonstrated by reading, writing, and mathematical skills. Parents also believed that family support and routines promoted readiness. Additionally, parents noted that readiness was a result of communication between the school and the family, and family support at home. Teachers believed that readiness was being able to sit, listen, and follow directions, as well as a level of cognitive ability. School leaders described their beliefs of readiness being a multidimensional concept, encompassing many different parts. School leaders also discussed strategies used to encourage family

involvement in preparing children for school. Lastly, school leaders indicated that children's readiness was affected by parents' understanding of readiness.

The implications and recommendations included suggestions for future research that would include the recognition of parents' cultural values and beliefs about readiness. Furthermore, more research is needed that specifically focuses on the perceptions and actions of parents, teachers, and school leaders concerning school readiness.

## DEDICATION

I would like to first and foremost thank God for guiding me through this long journey. With God all things are possible. This study is dedicated to my husband Stanley, who has been my never ending supporter and cheerleader, and who believes that I can do anything I put my mind to. Stanley, words cannot express how much I love you and what your continued support means to me. To all four of my wonderful children, Christina, Jacqueline, Knighton and Tamia, thank you for believing in me, and having the patience to deal with me during my research and progress through this journey. I love you very much. You give my life meaning and joy. I would also like to give special thanks to my sisters and cousins for all their encouragement, love and support while I worked. Thank you for everything.

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I am also thankful for the Southern Regional Education Board's Doctoral Scholars Program, and for Clemson University's Graduate Diversity Fellowship Program, which offered mentorship and support throughout the years.

Lastly, I would like to thank the administrators, teachers, and families who agreed to participate in this study.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

School readiness is a key factor in determining children's future academic success, and overall success later in life. The lack of readiness and the disparity in readiness levels between children from low-income families and children from wealthier families is a major cause for concern today. Research has shown that the disparity in readiness levels not only continues to increase over time, but begins well in advance of students entering into the kindergarten classroom (Burchinal et al., 2011; Halle et al., 2009).

Parents, teachers, and school leaders are major influencers in children's lives and have a significant impact on their readiness levels for school. The beliefs that parents, teachers, and school leaders have about readiness are important in this regard, as beliefs are strongly related to behavior (Stipek, Milburn, Clements, & Daniels, 1992). The strategies and actions taken by parents, teachers, and school leaders are guided by their beliefs and can help strengthen and build readiness skills in children prior to entering kindergarten, and can help decrease the readiness gap between low-income and wealthier children.

Decisions made by parents, teachers, and school leaders about school readiness are crucial, and may affect a child's entire educational career. Though parents, teachers, and school leaders contribute to school readiness in many ways, we do not know how they perceive and promote school readiness. It is therefore important to understand the

perceptions that teachers, parents, and school leaders have about school readiness, and how these individuals promote school readiness in children and the community.

Effectively understanding the perceptions and actions of teachers, parents and school leaders is not possible without first examining the influences of their environment and community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Litkowski & Kruger (2017), suggested that “supporting children’s language and school readiness necessitates understanding their ecological influences by learning about an individual community’s beliefs and practices” (p. 212). I, therefore, used an ecological perspective to answer the research question, *How do parents, teachers, and school leaders perceive and promote school readiness?* Additionally, to help answer the research question and keep the study focused, I concentrated on answering the following questions:

1. How do parents perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
2. What strategies do parents use to promote readiness for children entering kindergarten?
3. How do early childhood teachers perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
4. How do early childhood teachers promote readiness for the children in their classroom?
5. How do early childhood school leaders perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
6. How do early childhood leaders promote readiness for children entering kindergarten, through collaboration with parents and community members?

In this chapter, I will discuss: the importance of school readiness, the increase in early childhood center program enrollment, Head Start, and the benefits of attending a high-quality early education program. Additionally, I will present the conceptual framework that guided the study, the research problem, a summary of the research study, and the significance of the study along with the limitations of the study.

### **The Importance of School Readiness**

Many research studies note the importance of school readiness and its effect on children's current and future social and academic development. Researchers agree that higher school readiness skills lead to more successful academic careers, and a more successful life in general (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002; Duncan, Dowsett & Claessens, 2007; Rim-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). Additionally, Duncan et al. (2007) posited that school readiness was actually an important *predictor* of children's academic success. It is therefore critical for young children to be as prepared as possible in the early years, as "children who meet the relevant school readiness goals demonstrate a greater likelihood of later success in school, both socially and academically" (Litkowski & Kruger, 2017, p. 213)

### **The Increase in Early Childhood Center Enrollment**

Many parents have begun enrolling their children in early childhood education programs that can help prepare their children for academic success. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) indicates that the percentage of three to five year-old children in the United States enrolled in early childhood education programs has increased dramatically over time (NCES, 2016). In fact, Barnett et al. (2016) noted that

the number of children enrolled in an early childhood education program has virtually doubled since the early 1990's. Factors such as the growth of maternal employment (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007), a higher family income (Fuller et al., 2006), changes in family structure – which include changes in marital status, income, and type and quality of early child care (Crosnoe, Prickett, Smith & Cavanaugh, 2014), and public policy changes that make early childhood centers more available (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007) have contributed to the dramatic increase in the number of children enrolled in early childhood programs.

Another factor behind the surge in early childhood program enrollment is the notion that more and more parents have become aware of the value of an early childhood education as a means to foster school readiness among young children (Phillips & Adams, 2001). Magnuson et al. (2004) noted that the primary purpose of an early childhood program is to provide educational experiences to children (usually 3-4-year-olds) prior to their enrollment in a kindergarten program. Early educational experiences in early childhood programs can positively contribute to children's academic and socio-emotional functioning when they enter kindergarten. These experiences become important factors that can help prepare children for the rigors of a formal classroom in addition to a successful academic career overall (Davis, 2009; Love, Schochet, & Meckstroth, 1996). Furthermore, researchers agree that early educational programs are known to provide children with the foundation for increasing readiness for kindergarten.

Despite the large numbers of children attending early childhood programs, there are overwhelming inequalities in children's readiness levels as they enter kindergarten (Razza, Martin & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). These inequalities in readiness levels are

especially true in cases of children who are from low-income families. Research has indicated that by the time many impoverished and disadvantaged children enter kindergarten, they already trail behind their peers in academic and social skills (Brooks-Gunn, Britto & Brady 1999; Lee & Burkham, 2002).

To address the inequalities in readiness levels, the Goals 2000 initiative determined that setting national goals would provide a common direction for educational improvement in all states. The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) set the goal that by the year 2000, “all children will start school ready to learn” (Department of Education, 1995). State and federal governments have since invested in programs geared towards early childhood learning with the goal of improving school readiness for children in low-income families. One such program designed to help break the cycle of poverty, address inequalities in school readiness levels, and prepare children for kindergarten and beyond is Head Start (US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Head Start, June 2015).

### **Head Start**

According to the Office of Head Start, the purpose of the Head Start Program is to promote the school readiness of low-income children. The Head Start Program’s purpose is important, as research has shown that readiness gaps are evident between the achievement of moderate-income children and low-income children upon school entry, and continue to increase over time (Halle et al., 2009; Burchinal et al., 2011). The Head Start Program was designed to promote the readiness of low-income children by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development (1) in a learning



environment that supports children's growth in language, literacy, mathematics, science, social and emotional functioning, creative arts, physical skills, and approaches to learning; and (2) through the provision of health, educational, nutritional, social, and other services that are determined, based on family needs assessments, to low-income children and their families, as necessary. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

The Head Start approach to school readiness incorporates multiple frameworks for promoting school readiness for parents and children. One specific framework focuses on goal-directed relationships between parents, families, and community members. This framework, known as the Parent, Family & Community Engagement Framework (PFCE) is intended to help promote collaboration between school leaders, parents, families and the community to achieve "outcomes that lead to positive and enduring change for children and families." (p. 2). The PFCE framework, along with Head Start's goal of improving educational and developmental outcomes for children from economically disadvantaged families (U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, 2010) is what drew me to the Head Start Program for this research study.

### **High Quality Early Childhood Education**

The consensus among researchers is that for children to benefit from an early childhood program, the program must be of high quality (Espinosa, 2002). Studies by Campbell & Ramey (1994), and Peisner-Feinberg et al. (1999), revealed that high-quality early childhood experiences were related to children's current and future social and

academic development. In other words, not only has high-quality early childhood education been identified as an important factor contributing to school readiness, but school readiness (in and of itself) has been shown to be a strong predictor of children's academic success (Duncan et al., 2007) and later socio-economic achievements (Duncan et al. 1998). Moreover, studies revealed that children who participated in high-quality early childhood programs had better health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes – including higher high school graduation rates, a lower probability of being held back, and a lesser likelihood of engaging in criminal activity than those who do not participate (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002; Duncan, Dowsett & Claessens, 2007).

The benefits of attending a high-quality early childhood education program has been demonstrated repeatedly through research (Berrueta-Clement, 1984; Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999), but not all pre-school programs are created equal. High-quality programs do more than just provide basic education for students; high-quality programs promote children's development and learning by providing “high quality programming for children, equitable compensation for staff, and affordable services for families or other consumers” (NAEYC, 1995, p. 1).

Research from Pianta (2003) suggested that high-quality early childhood education programs reflect specific components within the program that produce successful outcomes for students. NAEYC (1995) suggests that high quality early childhood centers are defined as safe and nurturing school environments that promote

students' physical, social-emotional and cognitive development, while being receptive to the needs of the family.

Elements of high-quality programs include classrooms where students are involved in more complex, leveled activities with peers and material resources (Burchinal, Lee, & Ramey, 1998). Additionally, higher-quality early education programs have more staff per child than lower-quality settings, and can offer more individualized attention to students than centers where there are fewer teachers and more students (Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002). Moreover, Saluja, Early, & Clifford (2002) identified higher quality programs as those that employ teachers and staff members with higher levels of educational attainment and more specialized training than teachers and staff members in lower quality programs. Adequate funding and financial stability are also aspects of higher-quality programs that may affect the quality of the education that children receive. Furthermore, NICHD (2002) reported that the more structural features of early childhood education centers (such as the qualifications of the teachers and staff members as required by state licensing, the adult-student ratio, and the size of the class) that are sometimes regulated by public agencies or by states, are indirect indicators of the quality of the child's experiences in early childhood centers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In 1991, the Education Goals Panel produced a report which established the goal "By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (National Education Goals Panel [NEGP], 1990, pg. 1). One problem with this goal is there is little

agreement among experts about what qualifies children as ready for kindergarten.

Linder, Ramey & Zamback (2013) noted that researchers have not yet defined what the specific characteristics of readiness are that are encompassed within the cognitive, social, emotional, and language development areas. As a result, readiness expectations vary from region to region (Graue, 1992) and even from school to school (Hatcher, Nuner & Paulsel, 2012).

In addition to the lack of an accepted definition of readiness, the limited number of research studies on parents' views of readiness have suggested parents and teachers differed in their conceptualizations of readiness. Parents' views of readiness are essential for us to understand, as parents are known to be their child's first teachers (Barbarin et al., 2008), and to have a tremendous effect on children's preparedness for school and future academic careers. Stipek et al. (1992) suggested that parents' beliefs about readiness were strongly related to their actions and behaviors with their children at home. Understanding these beliefs may help teachers, parents, and school leaders work together to increase student readiness in all children.

Teachers' perceptions of readiness are equally as important to understand. Teachers' beliefs and perceptions have a direct effect on what they do and how they teach in the classroom (Kagan, 1992). Studies have indicated that parents and teachers have differing beliefs on school readiness. Thompson & Raikes (2007), and Barbarin et al. (2008) noted that parents considered the essential skills necessary for entry into formal school to be academic skills such as counting, recognizing letters, and knowing colors. Conversely, teachers emphasized readiness skills in the social and emotional domain,

such as sharing, taking turns, and regulating behavior (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003; Heaviside & Farris, 1993). These research studies were in line with the findings of an unpublished pilot study conducted in the fall of 2016 (Desmangles, 2016).

The pilot study (Desmangles, 2016) was conducted to examine the perceptions of parents with children enrolled in a Head Start center, Head Start teachers and elementary school teachers regarding their views of quality in an early childhood setting, and readiness for school. The research questions guiding the pilot study (Desmangles, 2016) were:

1. Do Head Start teachers' perceptions of school readiness and preschool center quality differ from those of elementary school teachers?
2. Do Head Start parents' perceptions of school readiness and preschool center quality differ from elementary and Head Start teachers?
3. What are the similarities and differences between parent and teacher perceptions of the concepts of school readiness and preschool quality?

The pilot study (Desmangles, 2016) was conducted using data collected and compared from survey questionnaires that investigated the similarities and differences in perceptions between teachers' and parents' beliefs about school readiness, and quality in a preschool setting. Results of the study indicated that parents and teachers did not have the same understandings of what it meant to be ready for school. As a result of the pilot study (Desmangles, 2016), I gained beneficial insight into parents' views of readiness, an area lacking empirical research.

The present study built upon the pilot study by adding another dimension – the perceptions of school leaders’ surrounding readiness, and how school leaders promote readiness. School leaders’ perceptions about readiness, and the way school leaders promote readiness are also areas lacking in research.

The majority of the research on readiness has been focused on the views of teachers and administrators in the field (Graue, 1993a). These studies noted that teachers emphasized readiness skills based on children’s socio-emotional levels, such as self-regulation, general well-being (including physical health), being able to share and take turns, being sensitive to other children’s needs, and approaches to learning (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003; Heaviside & Farris, 1993). Shonkoff & Phillips (2000) have also suggested that teachers believed that the academic skills kindergarten children need could be developed during their first formal year of school and therefore were not as crucial to readiness as other skills.

Due to this incongruity in defining readiness, and the limited research that examines the beliefs of parents in this area (Barbarin et al., 2008; Graue, 1993a), it is not clear how parents are making vital decisions about their children’s school readiness, or how parents, early childhood teachers, and school leaders are working together to ensure that children are prepared for kindergarten. It is important that we learn more about what parents’ beliefs are, as these beliefs impact educational decision making, parental involvement, and subsequently children’s academic futures. Likewise, teachers’ and center leaders’ views of readiness affect their behaviors and strategies in the classroom and in the general school setting, and are also important to understand.

Parents', teachers', and school leaders' views on school readiness are influenced by a variety of factors, but are shaped by the interactions and relationships they have with the different environments that surround them (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). In support of the literature on how views of school readiness are shaped, research by Litkowski & Kruger (2017) indicated that "views and practices of specific communities influence how language and school readiness are fostered and what elements and skills are preferenced" (p. 212). Hatcher, Nuner & Paulsel (2012) also emphasized that the environments and local communities that are closest to parents and families (such as the local schools, home, and neighborhood play areas) have the most influence on parents' beliefs and perceptions about school readiness. These environments and communities, noted in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), include a variety of systems within the environment that play an important role in human development. Understanding parents' beliefs and perceptions about readiness, and their actions and behaviors, would include examining the influences of the environmental levels that surround them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Research on the formation of a persons' views indicates that the environment plays a major role in shaping readiness beliefs. Hatcher, Nuner, & Paulsel, (2012) suggested that an individual's beliefs about school readiness are shaped by the combination of their local schools, communities, surroundings, and environments. These beliefs influence the choices parents make about when and where to send children to school, early childhood programs in general, and their participation in their child's early childhood education. Parents' beliefs also influence choices they make and activities

they engage in with their children (Graue, 1992). Barbarin et al. (2008) noted that parents' readiness beliefs

are likely to influence parents' socialization goals and the choices they make regarding the activities and materials provided to the child within and outside of the home. Parents are likely to cultivate skills and impart the knowledge they consider essential and to be less intentional about competencies they deem unimportant. Beliefs about readiness not only influence the nature of parental practices but also dictate parents' level of engagement with children for the purpose of skill development (p.672).

It is also important for early childhood teachers and school leaders to understand parents' perceptions of what readiness means. As noted above, parents' perceptions inform the choices they make and influence their levels of engagement (Barbarin et al., 2008). Parental engagement is an important part of the relationship between school leaders and families and is linked to children's success in kindergarten and beyond (Graue, Clements, Reynolds, & Niles, 2004). Studies have shown that parental engagement is related to higher levels of student success (Epstein, 1991), particularly for students in low-income homes. Teachers and school leaders can be beneficial in influencing the partnership with parents and working toward the common goal of student readiness.

Without an understanding of parents' views, early childhood teachers and school leaders are tasked with making decisions and managing early childhood centers without being able to fully focus on the needs of the child and the family. This can certainly have



an impact on how early childhood leaders support parents as valued educational partners in the educational process (Bloom, 2000). Additionally, cooperation and mutual understanding between all stakeholders who play a role in raising and educating the child is of major importance (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) if we are to make a difference in the outcomes of students entering the school setting. Regrettably, Stamopoulos (2012) found that there is very little research on leadership in early childhood education, and after much searching on my own, I have found that this is still an area of research that is understudied.

In a review of the limited extant research on leadership in early childhood, Mujis, Aubrey, Harris & Briggs (2008) noted that not only is the research in this area limited, it is “dominated by a relatively small number of researchers” (p. 158). Additionally, Mujis et al. (2008) suggested that research in early childhood education leadership “is not well informed by theory and research in the broader field of leadership studies” and also “does not connect with [literature] on school leadership (p. 159).

### **Conceptual Framework**

In this study, parents’, teachers’, and school leaders’ perspectives of readiness, and how they promoted readiness, were examined through an ecological lens. This ecological perspective not only informed the study, it allowed for a focus on the perspectives of parents, teachers, and school leaders, and the larger and broader contextual influences that shaped their beliefs and influenced their actions.

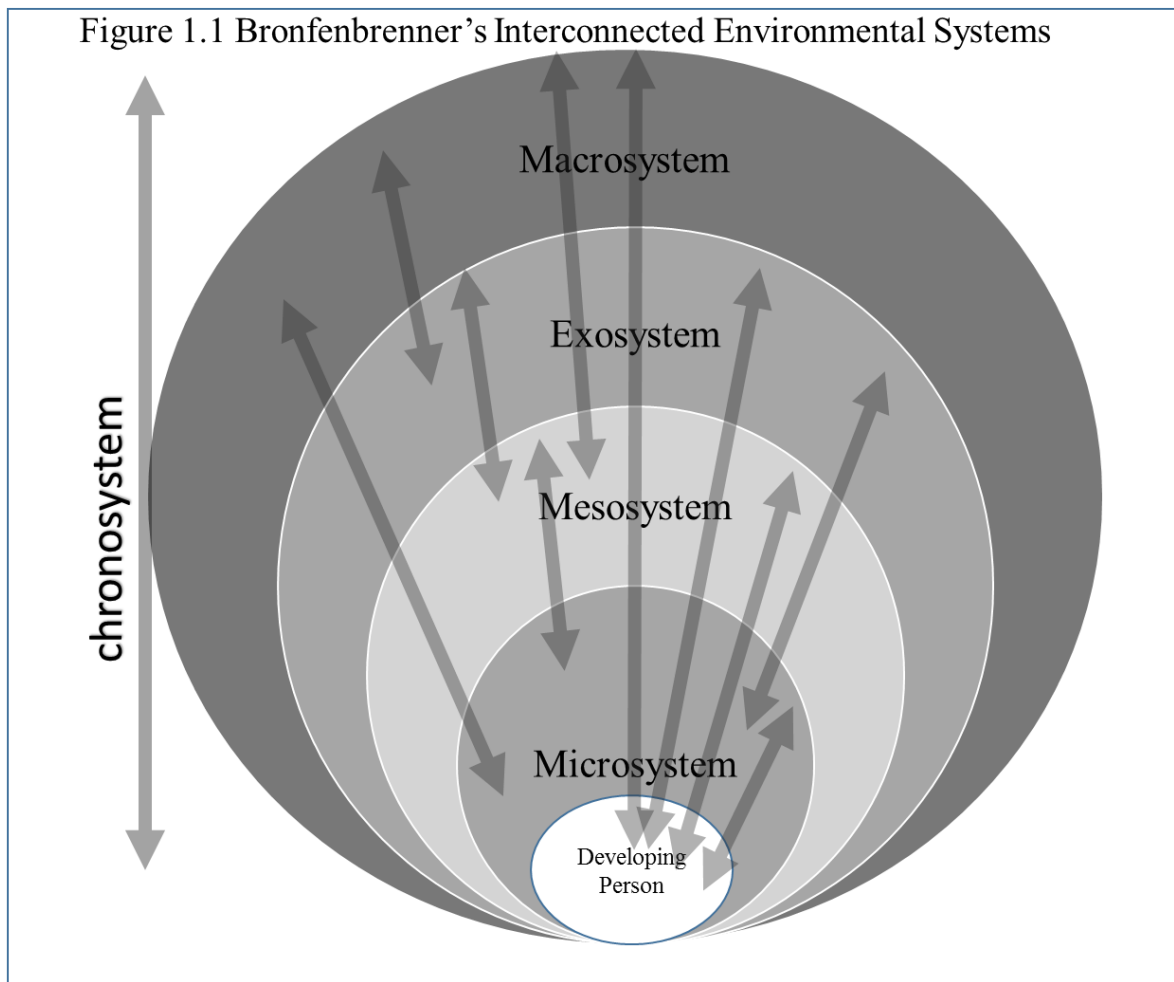
Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and a qualitative multicase study design were used to formulate the conceptual framework for this study.

Bronfenbrenner's theory asserted that human development occurs within a system of interconnected environmental systems. The child, or the developing person, is at the center of these environmental systems. Each of these environmental systems interacts with and influences each other. Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) focused on the relationships between the developing person, and their different environmental systems.

According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), there are five levels of environment that influence a developing person. These levels of environment are known as the 1) microsystem, 2) mesosystem, 3) exosystem, 4) macrosystem, and the 5) chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained that the microsystem is the immediate environment that is closest to the developing person, and where the developing person has direct interactions with others. The immediate environment includes settings such as the home and family, the school and classroom, and the neighborhood. The mesosystem includes the interrelationships and interactions of the different microsystems, such as the relationship between the home and the school, or the home and the neighborhood. The exosystem illustrates the broader environments and social systems that may not directly involve the developing child, but indirectly affects his or her development. Such environments may include the media, state and government agencies, school boards, and corporations. The macrosystem represents the "overarching patterns of ideology and organization of social institutions" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 8) such as the cultural values and laws, customs, and legal, political, and economic systems. The macrosystem indirectly affects the developing child. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained that the chronosystem is the dimension of time

that influences human development through changes that occur during the developing person's lifetime. All of the environmental systems interact to influence human development.

The multicase study design in conjunction with Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) was used to investigate the readiness beliefs and actions of parents, teachers, and school leaders involved in a Head Start center. The social and environmental influences that affected the beliefs of these individuals was explored in an effort to answer the research question. Figure 1.1 depicts Bronfenbrenner's interconnected environmental systems. The bi-directional arrows represent the interactions and the influences between and within the different environments.



### Research Summary

Parents' beliefs and perceptions about school readiness are important for teachers, school leaders, and policy makers to understand. Parents' beliefs affect the skills and abilities they instill in their children and the activities they engage in with their children (Graue, 1992). Parents' beliefs also influence the choices and actions they take in preparing their children for school (Barbarin et al., 2008), including when and where to send children to school, and their level of engagement in school (Barbarin et al., 2008).

Furthermore, choices made by parents affect children's preparedness for school and success in school (Graue, Clements, Reynolds, & Niles, 2004; Epstein, 1991). Likewise, beliefs that teachers have about readiness influence what they do and how they teach in the classroom (Kagan, 1992; Pohan & Aguilar, 2001).

Acquiring an understanding of parents' experiences and perceptions about readiness may help in developing a common language among parents, school leaders, teachers, and policy makers involved in early childhood education. Similarly, the readiness views of teachers and early childhood school leaders both directly and indirectly affect their relationships with parents and with students, and impact student readiness. While past research has indicated many factors associated with children's readiness for kindergarten, the focus of the present study was to illuminate the perceptions parents, teachers, and school leaders have about readiness, and to examine the strategies and actions used at home with their children in preparation for school. In addition, the study will investigate early childhood leaders' strategies and activities used to build relationships with families and community members, and foster parent involvement.

Epstein (2001) emphasized the importance of school and community members (such as teachers and peers) in advancing children's learning. As family support and educational programming are key components of effective leadership in an early childhood program (Bloom, 2000), early childhood leaders need to understand the views of parents to better support families and children as partners in the educational process.

This study drew upon Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) which emphasized the importance of the environment in shaping the growth and development of a person. Bronfenbrenner's theory was used as a basis for understanding how the environment influences parents', teachers', and school leaders' views about readiness, the relationship between parents' views and school leadership, and how these relationships affect student readiness. A multicase study design was used to gather information on the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of parents and early childhood leaders. The following research question guided this study: How do Head Start Parents, Teachers and School Leaders perceive and promote school readiness? To properly answer this research question, the following focus questions were employed to help guide the research:

1. How do parents perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
2. What strategies do parents use to promote readiness for children entering kindergarten?
3. How do early childhood teachers perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
4. How do early childhood teachers promote readiness for the children in their classroom?
5. How do early childhood school leaders perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
6. How do early childhood leaders promote readiness for children entering kindergarten, through collaboration with parents and community members?

The study involved using semi-structured interviews to conference with one early childhood school leader, one early childhood teacher, and one or two parents nested within three Head Start centers in two counties in a southeastern state. These semi-structured interviews will give me insight into the perceptions, lived experiences, ecological influences, and conceptualizations that parents have about readiness, and the experiences of school leaders as they work alongside parents, families and community members to promote readiness in students.

### **Significance of the study**

The inconsistency in defining what readiness means, the lack of research on parents' views of readiness, and the limited research on leadership in early childhood education has implications for policy and practice. Parents' perceptions of school readiness in early childhood education are critical for making positive changes within the early childhood educational arena. These perceptions inform involvement and are necessary to minimize the achievement gap between children from different subgroups. Given that parents are the first teachers of their children (Barbarin et al., 2008), and that the family is the primary entity responsible for preparing children for school, it is important to understand the views that parents have on school readiness. Connected to this is the complexity of the role of early childhood teachers and school leaders in communicating with and supporting families, being responsive to their needs, and encouraging parental involvement within the school and at home. Parents, teachers, and school leaders need to be aligned in how they are preparing children for school, as readiness is an important factor in predicting a child's success in school.

The results of this study may provide early childhood education leaders with the ability to offer enhanced and relevant guidance and support to families and students where necessary, and to improve the quality of the early childhood setting. Moreover, an understanding of parents' views of readiness may help to clearly define readiness in ways that can benefit all stakeholders and help prepare children for success in the school setting.

### **Limitations**

This study has a number of limitations that should be noted. Lunenburg & Irby (2008) noted that limitations are “factors that may have an effect on the interpretation of the findings or on the generalizability of the results” (p. 133). First, the small number of parent, teacher, and school leader participants involved in the study limited the ability to generalize the findings to an entire population. Additionally, only parents, teachers, and school leaders in three selected Head Start centers were contacted to participate in the current study. Parents, teachers and school leaders not involved in a Head Start center were not invited to participate, and may have had different perceptions. Time was another limitation of the current study. Interviews were conducted during one month in the spring of 2017, and the data was collected during this short period of time. Perhaps if the data was collected over a period of months – for example, throughout the fall and spring semesters, the data might have been different.

### **Organization of the study**

The study is divided into five chapters. In Chapter one, a brief introduction to the study, including background information about the problem, the importance of school



readiness, and an explanation of why the views of parents, teachers, and school leaders are important to consider was presented. Chapter one also included a statement of the problem, the conceptual framework, a research summary, the research questions, the significance of the study and the limitations.

Chapter two includes a review of the literature on school readiness, the differing views of school readiness, and the conceptual framework of the study. Chapter three presents a description of the research design and method, the setting, the population and sample, instrumentation, and recruitment procedure. Additionally, the data collection and analysis procedures are described, along with steps taken to ensure transferability, validity, and credibility. Researcher relevance and positionality, reflexivity, limitations and delimitations are also included in Chapter three.

In Chapter four, the research findings, including an examination of the research questions and themes that emerged from parent, teacher and school leader data are presented. Lastly, in Chapter five, the study summary, discussion of the findings, and implications for future practice are included.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

In this chapter, I provide a review of the literature on the types of early childhood education programs, the importance of attending a high-quality early childhood education program, the importance of school readiness, definitions and views of school readiness, and perceptions and influences on school readiness (parents, school leaders, and environments). In conclusion, I present the conceptual framework that guided this study, and a summary of the chapter.

#### **Types of Early Childhood Education Programs**

There are four main types of early childhood education programs that make up the majority of programs attended by three and four-year-old children in the United States. One type of early education program is private care. Privately funded child care centers and nursery schools are defined as centers that provide child care and supervision to very young children and preschool age children. According to Magnuson & Waldfogel, (2005), many children in early childhood or center care attend private programs, which are fee-based. Privately owned early care centers are generally independently owned and operated, and rely on parent fees to cover most of their daily operating expenses. These types of privately funded programs are usually housed in private buildings and sometimes church facilities. Most states require licensing for each age group a center provides care for. Parents and families categorized as low-income working families may apply to receive child care subsidies to help pay for the cost of private care programs. Other

families (with working parents) may apply for tax rebates and credits to help subsidize the cost of these programs.

The second type of early childhood education program is known as state-funded prekindergarten. State-funded prekindergarten programs are a type of publicly funded education program that is usually based in the public school building to provide early education services to three and four-year-old students. State-funded prekindergarten programs are a newer type of early education program that mainly receive funding through state governments. According to a report from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), state-funded preschool program enrollment reached an all-time high, serving nearly 1.5 million children, or 32 percent of four-year-olds and five percent of three-year-olds (NIEER, 2016).

State-funded prekindergarten programs are part of the public school system and are housed in public school buildings. Enrollment in these state-funded programs has been on the rise over the past decade. Barnett (2013) suggested that the United States has not only increased its 4-year-old student enrollment in state-funded prekindergarten programs, but has also expanded or even created new programs to meet the growing needs of participants.

The third type of childhood education program is family or home-based child care. These child care providers offer child care and supervision to infants, toddlers, early childhood -age or school-age children and can usually be found within a home, or a public/private building, including a church facility. The required state licensing for this type of childcare includes state facility inspections, state and federal background checks,

and other inspections as required by law. Though there are early learning standards established in every state, there is little accountability for these standards. Research in this area validates the belief that quality standards are important not only for instruction and classroom practices, but also for the center environment and teacher credentials as well.

The fourth type of early childhood education program is Head Start. Head Start is a federally funded early childhood program designed to promote the school readiness of students coming from low-income and impoverished backgrounds (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). The Head Start early childhood education program was created in 1964, as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. Head Start programs offer early childhood development and health services to all vulnerable and low-income children in the general education population, as well as to students with special needs and developmental delays.

There are four programs within the Head Start Program that specifically target low-income children by age, ethnic background, or parental work status (Geronimo, Romano, & Acevedo-Garcia, 2014). These programs are 1) The Head Start Programs (children 3-4 years old), 2) The Early Head Start Programs for pregnant woman and children from birth to two, 3) The American Indian and Alaskan Native Head Start and Early Head Start (AI/IN) Programs, which primarily serve Native American or Alaskan Native children and pregnant women, and 4) the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) Programs which target pregnant woman and children from birth to school age

who are from migrant and seasonal farmworker families (Geronimo, Romano, & Acevedo-Garcia, 2014).

The goal of the Head Start Program, as of the last reauthorization in 2007 (known as The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007), is to:

promote the school readiness of low-income children by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development (1) in a learning environment that supports children's growth in language, literacy, mathematics, science, social and emotional functioning, creative arts, physical skills, and approaches to learning; and (2) through the provision to low-income children and their families of health, educational, nutritional, social, and other services that are determined, based on family needs assessments, to be necessary. (Public Law 110-134 110<sup>th</sup> Congress An Act, 121 STAT 1363)

The Head Start program thus works to improve equity among children, by improving access to early childhood educational opportunities for the most vulnerable groups – low-income children – by eliminating the cost barriers (Geronimo, Romano, & Acevedo-Garcia, 2014).

The NIEER State of Head Start Report (2016) indicated that Head Start programs currently serve less than 40 percent of three and four-year-olds in poverty and less than five percent of the number in poverty under age three. Head Start programs must meet federal performance guidelines to receive federal funding. According to the Office of the Administration for Children and Families (OACF), Head Start has served more than 30 million children since its establishment in 1965. Head Start programs cumulatively

served 1,100,000 children ages birth to five and pregnant women throughout the 2015-16 program year (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Head Start).

### **The Importance of Attending a Quality Early Childhood Program**

There is a great deal of research documenting the advantages of attending a high-quality early childhood program. The consensus among researchers is that high-quality early childhood programs make a significant difference in increasing student readiness skills for the school setting, especially for children living in poverty (Espinosa, 2002). Increased student readiness leads to considerable positive long-term benefits for children. These benefits include better health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes, including higher high school graduation rates, a lower probability of being held back, and a reduced likelihood of engaging in criminal activity than those who do not participate in high-quality early childhood education programs (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002).

For example, studies such as the Perry Early Preschool Project (1962), the Carolina Abecedarian Project (1972), and the Chicago Child-Parent Center Study (1983) revealed the importance of a high-quality early education program in positively impacting the future of children who were living in poverty. These studies demonstrated the difference that school readiness could make in the lives of disadvantaged students and illuminated the need for high-quality programs that prepare students for the classroom and beyond. Even more so, the Chicago Child-Parent study (1983) posited that the benefits of a high-quality early education could be continued if educational services were also provided to the parent.

Some aspects of high-quality early childhood programs include programs with more complex activities, experiences and interactions that help children develop more advanced language and math skills (Espinosa, 2002). Additionally, research has indicated that high-quality early childhood education centers are linked to higher teacher quality and competence. Espinosa (2002) also determined that high-quality early childhood programs had lower child-teacher ratios, higher salaries for teachers, and more highly qualified teachers.

Unfortunately, though the advantages of attending a high-quality early childhood education program are clear, not every child attends a high-quality early childhood education program. In fact, recent research suggested that lowest income families are *the least likely* to attend an early childhood education program (Barnett, 2011; Lopez, 1999), and those that do attend “are found *more likely* to attend lower-quality programs” (Espinosa, 2002 p. 3). Research has also demonstrated that only about half of the children living in poverty receive the necessary early childhood services (Frede, & Barnett, 2011).

Many underprivileged families lack access to high-quality early childhood programs due to factors such as geography, race, and income. This lack of accessibility to high-quality early education programs leads to an abundance of children who enter kindergarten a year or more behind their classmates in readiness skills, including academic and social-emotional skills. The Head Start program was specifically designed to offer educational services to disenfranchised and low-income families who are affected by the lack of access to an early childhood program. Furthermore, the goal of the Head Start Program is to provide children of low-income families with a “comprehensive

program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

The Head Start program was selected for this study based on its objective of offering families living in poverty access to a high-quality early childhood programs to help better prepare children for school. As previously stated, the importance of being ready for school has significant effects that carry through to adulthood. The voices of low-income parents in defining what readiness means to them may help bring to light relevant issues pertaining to school readiness and school leadership that may not have been addressed in prior research.

### **The Importance of School Readiness**

School readiness has become an important issue facing children today because readiness has been found to be a predictor of children’s overall success in school (Duncan et al.,2007). While there are many factors that affect a child’s overall success in school and life, school readiness has been linked to children’s later socio-economic achievements (Duncan et al. 1998). Furthermore, Duncan et al. (2007, 2010), noted that children entering formal schooling with higher school readiness skills at age five were more academically successful in grade school, had lower high school drop-out rates, and earned more money as adults than those with lower school readiness skills. In summary, the skills that children possess upon entry to kindergarten have important implications for their overall futures.



## **Definitions and Views of School Readiness**

Though school readiness is important for children and families, there is inconsistency in defining what school readiness means. Differing views, definitions, and perceptions of readiness may cause confusion for parents and school leaders. What readiness means to parents, teachers, school leaders, policymakers, and other stakeholders is important as it may affect the strategies parents employ at home, the expectations, and the demands placed on children, and the leadership practices in early childhood centers. These views of readiness may have long-term implications for young children entering kindergarten.

Extant literature has indicated that multiple concepts of school readiness exist. Researchers noted that although there is no standard definition for school readiness, it is generally expressed in terms of children's skills or characteristics (LaParo & Pianta, 2000). Duncan et al. (2007) indicated that school readiness had been referred to as the social, behavioral, intellectual, and attentional skills that are necessary upon entry to a formal school setting. The concepts of readiness can be divided into distinct categories. These categories are: (1) the traditional view, (2) the maturational view, (3) age, and (4) the five dimensions of readiness from The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP). Each of these views will be discussed further in this chapter.

**The traditional view of readiness.** The traditional and oldest view of readiness, according to Kagan, Moore & Bredekamp (1995), is that a certain level of cognitive skills and abilities are necessary for children to be considered ready for school. The NAEYC declared in a 1995 position statement that “traditionally, the construct of school readiness

has been based on the assumption that there is a predetermined set of capabilities that all children need before entering school” (p. 1). These “specific brain-based cognitive functions” are what have been used to assess readiness (Nobel, Tottenham & Casey, 2005, p. 71). This traditional view of readiness has been challenged by the NAEYC and the NEGP as placing the burden of proof solely on the child. The NAEYC suggested that all children enter school ready to learn, and it is the responsibility of the school to meet the needs of each child.

Past research on school readiness has been focused on academic and cognitive readiness. The focus on academic and cognitive readiness is mainly due to researchers who rank cognitive readiness (language, math, and reasoning abilities), higher than non-cognitive readiness (Blair, 2002), and believe that these cognitive skills are the most critical skills necessary for learning. Knudsen et al. (2006) identified cognitive skills as those related to memory, processing, intelligence, motor skills, problem-solving ability, and language proficiency. Although some cognitive skill development is genetic, most cognitive skills are learned.

Evidence from researchers support the idea that the cognitive skills, such as literacy and numeracy, that are developed in kindergarten are strong predictors of later reading and math achievement (Duncan et al., 2007). In addition, Claessens et al. (2009) noted the importance of cognitive skills and paying attention in kindergarten, which were found to be significant predictors of achievement in the fifth grade. Also, early math skills in kindergarten were found to be strong predictors of achievement through the eighth grade (Claessens & Engel, 2013).

**The maturational view of readiness.** Another view of readiness asserts that it is a maturational and a social-emotional level that children require to be ready for school (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2006). This conceptualization suggests that readiness resides within the child, and is developed over time. This was the view of well-known researcher Arnold Gesell and his colleagues, who discussed primary indicators of readiness, such as being able to sit and focus. (Gesell, Ilg & Ames, 1974). Other researchers, such as Scott-Little et al., (2006) noted that the maturational view is simply the ability of the child to succeed in an academic setting such as a classroom.

**Readiness as an age.** The third view of readiness, adopted by most schools today, is that readiness is based upon age (Hatcher et al., 2012). This means that a student must be a certain age (usually five years old) before a specified date (e.g., before Sept 1 of the year in question) to be allowed to enter a kindergarten classroom. Hatcher et al. (2012) noted that schools rely on age as a determining factor of when children are ready for school.

**The five dimensions of readiness.** Lastly, the more recent conceptualization of readiness, and the most commonly accepted view, was suggested by the NEGP (1995) and included a very broad definition based on child development and research in early childhood education. This definition centered on five dimensions of readiness: physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches toward learning; language development; and cognition and general knowledge. This conceptualization of readiness takes a broad view that emphasizes the interconnections between each of the domains, and children's development. Although these five areas are

separate, skill acquisition is reinforced within and between each domain for the most efficient method of skill development. Following are descriptions of each of the five dimensions of readiness as discussed by the NEGP (1995).

***Physical well-being and motor development.*** According to the NEGP (1995), this particular dimension focuses on the general health and growth of each child, gross and fine motor skills, and the absence of unattended physical conditions or exposure to toxic substances. Kagan, Moore & Bredekamp (1995) noted that children's health and health history are important in understanding the conditions in which children come to school. Additionally, a child's physical health and well-being and motor development may be factors that hinder growth and development in the classroom setting.

***Social and emotional development.*** Social and emotional learning and development is quickly becoming an important topic within early childhood education because of its significance in influencing school readiness and adjustment to school (Denham, 2006). According to Kagan, Moore & Bredekamp (1995), "this dimension serves as the foundation for relationships that give meaning to school experience" (p. 3).

The NEGP (1995) defined social and emotional development as the ability to: interact socially, take turns, and cooperate; a positive self-esteem and ability; and the ability to interpret and express feelings. Social and emotional development can also be described as the ability of children to control their emotions and to make meaningful friendships with others. Past research in the area of children's emotional, social, and behavioral adjustment has shown that social-emotional development is as important for academic success as cognitive and academic preparedness (Raver & Zigler, 1997).

Researchers such as Birch, Ladd, and Blecher-Sass (1997) and Ladd, Birch, and Buhs (1999) found that children with more social emotional competence in kindergarten developed more positive attitudes about school and were more successful at adjusting to school. Additionally, research by Ladd, Kochenderfer, and Coleman (1997) suggested that children who struggle with skills such as paying attention, following directions, working with others, and regulating their emotions, struggle more in school. Therefore, it is important to note that the social-emotional and behavioral development of children have been shown to be important factors in predicting overall school success.

***Approaches to learning.*** Approaches to learning, otherwise known as learning behaviors, is a term used to express how children react to different learning situations. Kagan, Moore, and Bredekamp (1995) described approaches to learning as adaptive learning behaviors that included a child's initiative and motivation, frustration tolerance, persistence, and outlook toward learning. The NEGP has a similar description that included enthusiasm, curiosity, and persistence in completing tasks.

Current research indicates that children who enter school with a positive approach to learning have higher school readiness and achievement outcomes than children with poor approaches to learning (Fantuzzo, Perry, & McDermott, 2004). Studies conducted by the NCES (2002) supported the notion that children who possess positive approaches to learning performed better in kindergarten reading and mathematics than those who do not. Additionally, the NCES (2002) reported that “children who frequently exhibit a positive approach to learning are more than twice as likely as other children to score in

the top 25 percent in reading and mathematics at the spring of kindergarten and first grade” (p. 22).

***Language development.*** Children’s early language and literacy development opportunities are rooted throughout the social and cultural environments in which they live. For example, recurrent interactions and communications between children and adults, and frequent exposure to words and phrases can promote language development (McGregor, Sheng, & Ball, 2007). Early language experiences and environmental factors play a role in children’s language comprehension and development. Based on research that indicated that third-grade reading comprehension test scores could predict much of a child's success in school, the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act put in place high accountability standards for students to be reading at grade level by third grade. Included in the language development paradigm created by the NEGP were the categories Verbal Language and Emerging Literacy. These categories outlined specific definitions of verbal language and literacy language including listening, speaking, vocabulary, questioning, print awareness (assigning sounds to letter combinations); story sense (recognizing story elements); and writing process (representing ideas through drawing, letter-like shapes, or letters).

***Cognition and general knowledge.*** According to the NEGP, the cognition and general knowledge dimension consists of the understanding of shapes and spatial relationships; knowledge of social customs such as holidays; and knowledge gained from looking at objects, events, or people for similarities, differences, and associations. Kagan, Moore & Bredekamp (1995) suggested that this particular domain is important as

children's experiences in "rich learning settings with skilled and appropriate adult intervention" help them to construct knowledge and solve problems that occur in life. (p.4).

**Additional readiness factors from NEGP.** In addition to the dimensions of readiness discussed above, the NEGP (1998) proposed that a definition of readiness include factors outside the child, such as the readiness of the families, the readiness of schools, and community supports in place for children and families. In support of this approach, a 1995 revised position statement by NAEYC argued that "it is the responsibility of schools to meet the needs of children as they enter school and to provide whatever services are needed in the least restrictive environment to help each child reach his or her fullest potential" (p.1).

**Readiness of families and communities.** The NEGP (1998) noted that family and community readiness includes supports and services that focus on readiness goals for children. Studies indicated that while children from all socioeconomic levels can benefit from high-quality early childhood programs, children from lower socioeconomic families benefit more than children that come from more privileged backgrounds (McCartney, Dearing, Taylor, & Bulb, 2007). High-quality early childhood programs can offer developmental support for all young children but can be especially beneficial for children with risk factors or developmental delays that may stunt educational or social/emotional growth.

**Readiness of schools.** According to the NEGP, the readiness of schools encompasses the premise that schools are ready for the children and families who are

counting on them and are consistently raising student achievement to sufficient levels of readiness. Schools should implement action plans geared toward improving children's learning, regardless of their developmental level. The NEGP Ready School Report (1998) discussed ten essential attributes of ready schools:

1. Ready schools smooth the transition between home and school.
  2. Ready schools strive for continuity between early care and education programs and elementary schools.
  3. Ready schools help children learn and make sense of their complex and exciting world.
  4. Ready schools are committed to the success of every child.
  5. Ready schools are committed to the success of every teacher and every adult who interacts with children during the school day.
  6. Ready schools introduce or expand approaches that have been shown to raise achievement.
  7. Ready schools are learning organizations that alter practices and programs if they do not benefit children.
  8. Ready schools serve children in communities.
  9. Ready schools take responsibility for results.
  10. Ready schools have strong leadership
- (p. 5).

Head Start defines school readiness as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life (Center for Family Services, Office of Head Start). Additionally, Head Start indicates that school readiness “means that children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children’s learning, and schools are ready for children” (Center for Family Services, para. 1). The Head Start definition of school readiness, and the one used in this study align with the readiness factors proposed by the NEGP (1998).



## **Parents' Perceptions as Influences on School Readiness**

According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), the definition of *perception* is “the way you think about or understand someone or something; the ability to understand or notice something easily; the way that you notice or understand something using one of your senses”. *Parent perception* is defined in this study as the thoughts, understandings, or experiences of parents regarding school readiness.

As stated by Bronfenbrenner (1986), parents' beliefs and perceptions are formed by the interactions they have within the different interconnected social contexts that surround them. This may include areas such as home, family, school, and neighborhoods. Hatcher, Nuner & Paulsel (2012) indicated that beliefs and perceptions of readiness form within these diverse social contexts. The beliefs parents have affect what skills and abilities they instill in their children (Barbarin et al., 2008). Stipek et al., (1992) noted that these beliefs are strongly related to actions and behaviors parents take with their children at home. Furthermore, recent research suggested that parents' readiness beliefs influence student achievement and outcomes (Barbarin et al, 2008).

Understanding parents' perceptions of readiness are important because parents are known to be the first teachers of their children (Barbarin et al., 2008). Examining parents' views of readiness may help us understand what parents deem to be important skills, in addition to helping identify how parents work with school leaders to prepare children for school. Although researchers have suggested that there is little research on what factors influence parent involvement in early childhood programs (Arnold, Zeljo,

Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008), studies have shown that parent involvement is related to higher levels of student success, particularly for students in low income homes.

### **Parents' Roles in Promoting Readiness**

There are a variety of factors that affect how parents promote readiness in their children. As previously stated, the ecological and social contexts surrounding parents influence how they think and act (Bronfenbrenner, 1985), just as the expectations that parents have influence school readiness (NAEYC, 1995). However, there are ways parents can help promote readiness in students. Some examples of ways parents can promote school readiness are suggested in the following paragraphs.

Promoting school readiness at home can include techniques such as providing children with educational toys, or materials that increase literacy. A study conducted by Kington, Huang, Calzada, Dawson-McClure & Brotman (2013) emphasized the importance of parent behaviors such as “reading to children and maintaining frequent contact with teachers” (p. 266) as a way to help reduce disparities in school readiness experienced by low-income children. Reducing disparities in school readiness leads to more children being prepared for school and having more successful academic careers. Preparation in areas such as math and reading are essential for young children’s growth and development. Duncan et al (2007) noted that early math and reading skills are important indicators of higher levels of academic performance in later grades.

Parents can also increase school readiness in children by participating in activities connected to math. Duncan et al. (2007) indicated that early mathematical skills are a better predictor of future academic success than reading skills. Increasing school

readiness in math includes adding math into the day with various activities that encourage children to see the numbers all around them (NAEYC, 2013). Encouraging activities such as *number talk* can also help increase school readiness skills in math. Number talk activities, as defined by Gunderson & Levine (2011) are parent-child number interactions that are most helpful to children as they learn the cardinal meanings of the number words. Number talk interactions may include activities such as counting visible objects (e.g., you have three crayons), and labeling cardinal values of sets of visible objects (e.g., the dog has four legs) (Gunderson & Levine, 2011).

Social and emotional skills, such as self-control, and the ability to pay attention are important to school readiness, as these skills affect readiness for learning (Conti & Heckman, 2012). Parents can provide opportunities for children to interact with other children outside of the home or school. During these interactions, parents can work on skills such as sharing or taking turns, a skill that is emphasized in the social and emotional domains of readiness presented by of NEGP (1995). Parents can also help children build social skills by helping children talk about and describe their own feelings. Encouraging conversation, helping young children use words to describe their feelings, and enabling children to share their thoughts and feelings are all good ways of increasing social skills and school readiness.

Parent involvement in schools is another way to promote readiness skills in young children. Research by Epstein (1991) suggested that parent involvement is related to higher levels of student success, particularly for students in low-income homes. Similarly, Mendez (2010) noted that parent involvement in school activities positively

influenced school readiness in young children. Moreover, Jung (2016) noted that when parents participated in activities at home that encouraged language interactions, these activities increased language development, which is important for school readiness.

### **Teachers' Perceptions as Influences on School Readiness**

Much of the research on teachers' perceptions of school readiness has indicated that teachers perceived readiness to be strongly associated with social and emotional aspects of learning such as following directions, taking turns, and regulating behavior (Heaviside & Farris, 1993; Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003). Teachers' perceptions about readiness are influenced by many factors, including their surrounding environmental and social contexts, and life experiences as teachers and learners (Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003). The perceptions that teachers have about school readiness influences their instructional practices in the classroom (Kagan, 1992), as well as helping to establish a supportive classroom environment that promotes readiness and development in children (Willer & Bredekamp, 1990).

Teachers' perceptions about readiness also impact the expectations they have regarding a child's school readiness. The expectations that teachers have of children's abilities can influence academic achievement (Jacobs & Harvey, 2010). Furthermore, the relationship that teachers have with children can influence school readiness (Palermo, Hanish, Martin, Fabes, & Reiser, 2007). The study by Palermo et al. (2007) emphasized the importance of the quality of the teacher-child relationship and its influences on children's readiness for and adjustment to kindergarten. Palermo et al. (2007) also indicated that close teacher-child relationships were predictors of increased school

readiness, and “dependent or conflictive relationships” were predictors of lower levels of school readiness, and “increased rates of school adjustment problems” (p. 408).

It is easy to see that the way teachers perceive readiness impacts how they interact with children, and ultimately impacts children’s readiness. Consequently, the actions that teachers take to prepare children for school can positively or negatively impact children’s school readiness. It is therefore important to understand teachers’ perceptions about readiness.

### **Teachers’ Roles in Promoting Readiness**

Research has indicated that teachers can promote school readiness in children in many ways. First, creating a nurturing and inviting classroom environment, and fostering nurturing relationships with children is beneficial in helping children gain social and emotional skills (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Gaining social and emotional skills increases school readiness. Communicating with families and inviting parents to be involved in their children’s education is one way teachers can help increase readiness among students (Epstein, 1988).

Connecting with families on a regular basis to discuss children’s learning goals can help encourage parents to participate in learning activities with children that could increase readiness. Setting daily routines in the classroom is another way to help children practice skills and prepare for learning. Direct instruction in reading and math incorporated into daily classroom routines are noted practices suggested by Burger (2015) to foster school readiness in young children.

When teachers and school leaders understand parents' beliefs of readiness, it may help increase parent involvement in educational decision-making. This may help to “improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work” (Epstein, 1995 p. 701). The effects of parent involvement and partnership with early childhood center teachers and leaders has implications that reach far beyond increasing student readiness.

### **The Role of Early Childhood Center School Leaders**

The collaboration between early childhood leaders and parents is an essential part of any high-quality school learning environment. Bronfenbrenner (2004) posited that the family is the primary entity that prepares children for school and life, and that children benefit most when all of the adults who care about them work together. A parents' role in preparing children for school and life indicates the importance of the interactions between parents and early childhood leaders as influencers of children's school readiness.

The role of a school leader is important in determining student outcomes. Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins (2006) noted that school leadership is an important factor that affects student learning, and in a school setting, school leadership is second only to teaching. Leaders in early childhood education play a key role in student learning and school success (Cranston, 2013), and there is a need for high-quality education in all early childhood centers that would prepare students for success in the kindergarten classroom. Parent and family engagement plays a large part in student growth and development and is key to student success. What parents do and how they

interact with their children at home and at school is an important indicator of how successful children will be in school (Epstein 1998). Parent engagement also affects how early childhood leaders support parents as valued educational partners in the educational process (Bloom, 2000).

Communication strategies to actively engage parents and increase parent involvement in schools, are not new. In fact, Epstein (1995) created a framework of six types of parental involvement that “ helps educators develop more comprehensive programs of school and family partnerships and also helps researchers locate their questions and results in ways that inform and improve practices” (p. 705). Epstein noted that “the six types of involvement can guide the development of a balanced, comprehensive program of partnerships, including opportunities for family involvement at school and at home, with potentially important results for students, parents, and teachers (p. 707). The types of involvement are broad, but each contributes to student learning and success. Epstein believes that schools and families need to partner together to help children be successful in school. The 6 types of parental involvement as defined by Epstein (1995) are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

Though the responsibilities of a school leader are important, there is a paucity of research in the area of leadership in early childhood education (Mujis, Aubrey, Harris & Briggs, 2004). Understanding the role of an early childhood school leader can affect the quality and amount of interactions between parents and school leaders, and may influence school readiness. Epstein (1998; 2013) noted the need for parents and schools to work

together to help children be successful in school. The responsibility of family engagement lies with both parents and schools. Parents must be willing to work with school leaders to volunteer or to be available to help children reinforce skills they have learned in school. Schools must make an extra effort to reach out to parents and enable them to be contributing members of their child's educational experience and school readiness.

### **Early Childhood Center School Leaders and School Readiness**

Research in the area of early childhood school leadership is minimal, but a handful of studies conducted abroad have indicated a relationship between effective early childhood school leadership and high-quality early childhood centers (Mujis et al., 2004; Siraj-Blatchford, & Manni, 2008). Siraj-Blatchford & Manni (2008) revealed that effective early childhood school leaders had a significant impact on children's overall achievement and academic success. According to Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, the most effective early childhood school leaders have strong leadership skills, motivate others, and share the vision of the center's pedagogical and curricular practices. Unfortunately, models of effective early childhood leadership strategies that promote school readiness are currently lacking, especially in the United States. As explained by Ang (2012), "there is undoubtedly scope for more empirical research on leading and managing in the early years, not least with regards to how the notion of effective leadership can be defined, and its impact on the outcomes for children" (p.302). Other factors that contribute to children's school readiness are explored in the following paragraphs.



## **Other Factors Influencing School Readiness**

Researchers have examined many factors that are associated with children's school readiness. LaParo & Pianta (2000) indicated that the child's social-emotional competence is a factor associated with readiness, while other researchers noted factors such as parenting and socioeconomic status are key to readiness (Baker, Grissmer, Cameron, & Rimm-Kaufman 2012). In addition, a study by Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes (2002) specified the relationship between family background and family characteristics as factors associated with school readiness. Other research in this area revealed that the quality of parenting (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002), and racial and ethnic factors (Nord, Lennon, Liu, & Chandler, 1999) were also strongly linked to children's readiness for school.

## **The Environment as an Influence on Parents', Teachers' and School Leaders' Perceptions**

A key part of this study relies on the understanding that parents' views of readiness are important in shaping school readiness for children. Bronfenbrenner (1986), suggested that parents' perceptions are formed by the interactions they have within the different interconnected social contexts that surround them. The term social contexts denotes surrounding areas such as homes, families, schools, and neighborhoods. Parents' views of readiness are influenced by the interactions with their surrounding environments and their personal experiences. Environmental interactions, such as the relationship between the parents and schools, affects a child's capacity to learn (Bronfenbrenner,

1986). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) we cannot expect to fully understand the actions and behaviors of people until we examine the influences of the environments around them. Based on this idea that interactions between and within changing environments affect human development, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) is used as a basis for understanding how parents', teachers', and school leaders' views of readiness are formed, and the ecological systems that helped shape their views on school readiness.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1979) described five key layers of systems that affect a developing child. Bronfenbrenner's model begins with the child, who is at the center of the five layers of systems. The developing child brings his or her unique characteristics, personality, and influences that impact and are impacted by each layer. These layers of systems are known as the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner later revised his original theory, changing the name to the Bioecological Model (1995). Ashiabi & O'Neal (2015) noted that the newer, more refined bioecological model emphasized "differentiating between the concepts of environment, the person, proximal process, and the concept of time as they relate to human development" (p. 2). Both models are used in this paper to emphasize beliefs and the interactions between the various systems and how they affect one another over time.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that the immediate environment and the broader social contexts affect children where the environments exist. The microsystem is the innermost layer closest to the child, and where the child has the most direct contact. The

immediate environments included in this layer are ones such as school, the playground, the neighborhood, and family. Examples of interactions in this layer of environments include direct communications between the child and the family, the child and the school, and the family and the school. Berger (2000) noted that within the microsystem, the family has the most influence on a child's development. At this level, parents are recognized as the strongest influence on a child's school readiness, and the relationship between the parents and the school affects the child's ability to learn within the school (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Bronfenbrenner proposed that interactions on this level are reciprocal, or bi-directional, meaning that the child influences each of these different environments, and is also influenced by them. Other examples of interactions in this layer include teacher-child relationships, parent-child relationships, and relationships with friends. Bronfenbrenner also noted that every interaction the child has in each of the different environments affects the child's growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

According to Bronfenbrenner's model (1979), the next layer of systems is the mesosystem. Bronfenbrenner defined the mesosystem as a *system of microsystems* that includes interrelations among the different structures where the developing child actively participates. Interactions within this layer have direct and indirect impacts on the child. Examples of relationships and interactions within the mesosystem are those between the child's teacher and the child's parents, the relationship between the child's friends, and other types of relationships and interactions between two settings that surround the child. For this particular study, the mesosystem layer represents the relationships between

parents and school leaders (parent involvement in and out of school), school leaders and communities, and their corresponding effects on the readiness of the child.

The third layer of Bronfenbrenner's model is the exosystem. In the exosystem, Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified structures such as parents' work places, mass media, government agencies, and other institutions that are an extension of the mesosystem which impact the child. The child is not an active participant or a functioning part of the exosystemic layer but is indirectly influenced by it. An example of this indirect influence may be the effects of factors related to the child's extended family or the impact of a family member's workplace.

The macrosystem is the fourth layer in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). This layer encompasses the larger and broader context of cultural influences, ideologies, beliefs and values that impact relationships and interactions in all of the other layers. This layer of systems is the furthest from the child but incorporates the largest structures or organizations that have an enormous, if indirect, impact on the child. In this layer, parents are affected by forces such as the economy and socioeconomic conditions, outside material resources, and other opportunities that affect the quality of life for their families. Bronfenbrenner noted that the experiences of children in any subgroup within the macrosystem were likely to be very similar, whether positive or negative.

Lastly, Bronfenbrenner's latter model (1995) discussed the chronosystem, which is the dimension of time that incorporates changes and transitions that occur during the child's life. Bronfenbrenner (1986) describes this as "the cumulative effects of an entire

sequence of developmental transition over an extended period of the person's life" (p. 724). This may include changes in family structure (for example, marriage, divorce, separation, incarceration, births and deaths), economic status, or other factors that affect parents and subsequently affect children. In conclusion, Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests that children are affected by interactions with their parents, the schools they attend, and the interactions in each system of environments. All of these interactions shape the child's growth and development, and readiness for school.

In this dissertation, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was utilized as a basis for understanding the systems and environments that helped shape parents', teachers', and school leaders' views on school readiness. Views on school readiness are important to understand, as they not only affect the child's capacity to learn, but are strongly related to the decisions and activities parents engage in with their children, and can influence student achievement and outcomes (Barbarin et al, 2008). Bronfenbrenner's theory will also be used to evaluate the social contexts and individual experiences that influenced parents', teachers', and school leaders' views of school readiness, and to provide insight into the experiences, beliefs, decision-making processes, and relationships between parents, teachers, and school leaders in the early childhood educational arena.

### **Conceptual Framework**

To help guide and frame the present research, and to help provide an outline for the study, a multicasestudy design and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory (1979) was used to understand the how parents', teachers', and school leaders' perceptions of readiness are formed. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's work, the

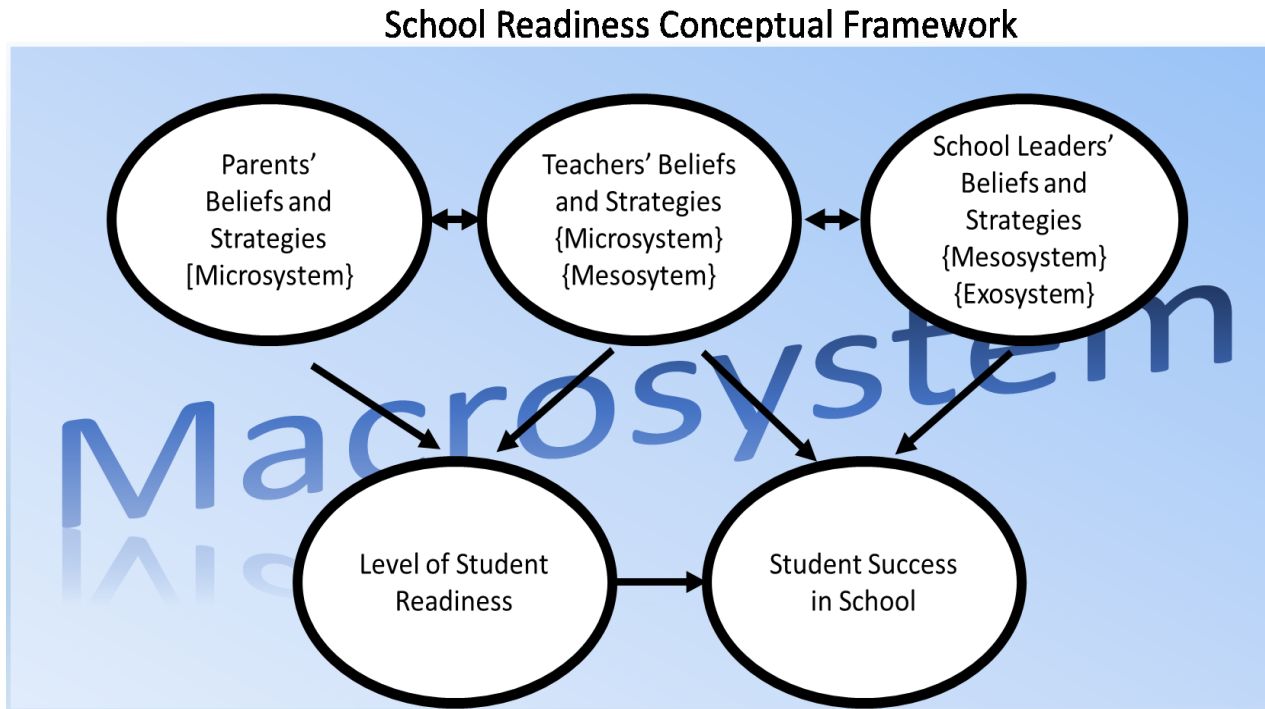
relationship between the environment, parents', teachers', and school leaders' views, and their influence on student readiness and success in school were emphasized in the study. All of these intersecting parts work together to influence student readiness skills and success in school.

The conceptual framework guiding this research study is outlined in Figure 2.1. As demonstrated in this review of the literature, school readiness is an important topic that affects millions of children in the United States today. School readiness has implications for children that can affect their entire academic career, and can set the stage for success later in life. Parents' beliefs contribute to school readiness and are influenced by the interactions they have within their local environments and social contexts. According to Bronfenbrenner's theory (1986), these interactions affect parents' decisions about school, and their involvement with and engagement in schools. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's theory (1986) underscores the relationship between the family and the school, and its effects on the child's capacity to learn.

Parents' beliefs may also influence where parents decide to socialize with their children, or even whether or not they participate in any educational programs in the community at all. Teachers and school leaders need to know and understand how parents conceptualize school readiness in order to provide appropriate support to students and families, and to increase the children's levels of student readiness. The bi-directionality of the arrows reflects the influence that parents, teachers, and school leaders have on each other. School leaders play an important role in shaping student success in school, but

need to work with parents and community members to have the most beneficial impact on students.

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework



### Chapter Summary

School readiness is a topic that has long been researched in the field of early childhood education. While this subject is gaining much more attention, there remains a lack of clarity on what school readiness is and how it can be measured. Many children enter school possessing a variety of skills, while others lag behind and remain behind for most of their academic careers. While there is no nationally accepted definition of the term school readiness within the United States, school readiness has been expressed as

the social, behavioral, intellectual, and attentional skills that are necessary upon entry to a formal school setting (Duncan, 2007). Definitions vary from specific skills to very broad categories as noted by the NEGP (1995), and the holistic view of learning as suggested by the NAEYC (1995).

Much of the literature points to the influence of a child's participation in an educational center prior to kindergarten on academic achievement and success in later life. Other factors such as family dynamics, socioeconomic status, and parenting also play a role in children's academic success, but the consensus is that children who enter school with a higher degree of readiness tend to do better than their peers academically, and are more likely to have success later on in life than children who do not have these basic skills upon entry to school. Studies have shown that early intervention and school readiness programs that support the individual success of children and provide educational services for young children and their families are essential to improving the learning outcomes of children.

The quality of school readiness programs in early care centers is important and can result in favorable outcomes, including higher academic achievement throughout a child's academic career. Longitudinal studies have shown that students who attended a high-quality early childhood program did better than those who did not attend a high-quality early childhood program in a significant number of areas, including high school graduation rates, future employment, finances, health, and general quality of life. Bronfenbrenner (1982) asserted that high-quality early childhood centers which provide resources such as food and healthcare and include parental involvement in their programs



have long-term positive effects on developing children. Research has also indicated that early childhood centers that provide parents with training and support, and include parent-involvement have both short and long-term benefits for developing children (Bronfenbrenner, 1982) and are related to higher levels of student success.

Parents' beliefs and perceptions about school readiness are also very important to school readiness. Bronfenbrenner (1986) noted that the environment and social contexts influence parents' beliefs. Parents' beliefs about readiness guide their expectations and influence their actions, choices, and strategies with children at home (Stipek et al., 1992). Additionally, Barbarin et al., (2008) and Lally, (2010), revealed that parents' readiness beliefs influenced student achievement and outcomes. Furthermore, parents' beliefs affect their engagement and involvement with children and school leaders. As Epstein (1985) pointed out, "parental participation in schools and classrooms positively influence achievement" (p. 19). In other words, parents collaborating with schools and school leaders is related to positive changes in student's achievement.

Early childhood leaders are charged with working with parents and community members to help prepare children for school. This responsibility is complex as it involves understanding the cultural factors that influence parents' beliefs, and working with families and community members who may have different views about readiness. Furthermore, early childhood leaders not only make decisions on readiness based on observations and other assessment methods, they offer guidance and support to parents and families. It is important to understand how these partnerships are formed and how decisions are made on this level to help students make academic and the social gains

necessary to be ready for school. It is equally important for early childhood leaders to understand parents' views on readiness in an effort to work together with parents, students, and community members to increase school readiness.

In Chapter two, an in-depth analysis of the literature on school readiness, readiness views, and the impact of school readiness on children's academic and social outcomes was presented. Additionally, the conceptual framework guiding the study was included. In Chapter three the research design and method, and the data collection and analysis procedures of the study will be presented.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

As noted in both Chapters one and two, there is limited research that addresses parents', teachers' and school leaders' perceptions of school readiness, or how these individuals promote school readiness in children. Readiness perspectives are important to understand as parents, teachers and school leaders play a major role in preparing children for school. I therefore aimed to investigate the beliefs of parents, teachers and school leaders in a Head Start program concerning the meaning of 'readiness' to enter formal school, and to understand the subsequent strategies they take to promote readiness. Additionally, in this study I examined how early childhood leaders interacted with parents and community members to promote readiness in children.

In this chapter, I provide a review of the ecological lens through which I conducted the present research study and a discussion of the pilot study I conducted in the fall of 2016 and how the pilot study informed the current study. Additionally, I include a description of the research design, method, setting and population, instrumentation, recruitment procedures, data collection and analysis, transferability, validity, credibility and trustworthiness. I also include my relevance and positionality statement, reflexivity statement, and the delimitations and limitations of the study.

#### **Researching Through an Ecological Lens**

As a researcher, I am seeking to generate practical and real-world solutions that would benefit parents, community members, and leaders in the field of education. To do this, it was important to understand how the environment impacted parents', teachers'

and school leaders' views of readiness. I used Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) as a vehicle to help me gain insight into the different relationships formed within each layer of the environment and how these relationships impacted the beliefs and strategies of parents, teachers, and school leaders.

As the developing child is at the center of Bronfenbrenner's five layers of environment, the relationships formed between the parent and school becomes an important factor shaping the child's ability to learn (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Additionally, to gain an understanding of parents' and teachers' conceptions about readiness, and early childhood leaders' views and experiences working with families and community members, a qualitative approach, using a semi-structured interview process, was the most suitable way to collect data. As stated by Creswell (2007), "Qualitative inquiry represents a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration, without apology or comparisons to quantitative research" (p. 11).

Using the knowledge I gained from conducting a pilot study (Desmangles, 2016), I was able to strengthen the present study by using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), and a qualitative approach to inform the study and guide my research. These perspectives allowed me to examine the subjective experiences of the participants and to explore the concept of school readiness through individual interviews. My aim was to focus on the descriptions, perceptions, and explanations of school readiness as a phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2008) and the position of early childhood leaders in regards to family and community engagement, involvement, and support.

## **Pilot Study**

In the fall of 2016, I conducted a pilot study that served as the first phase of the present research study (Desmangles, 2016). This unpublished study was carried out to examine the perceptions of parents with children enrolled in a Head Start Center (HS Parents), Head Start Teachers (HS Teachers) and Elementary School Teachers (ES Teachers) regarding their conceptualizations of quality in an early childhood setting, and school readiness.

Participants of the pilot study included 15 early childhood teachers in five Share Head Start Centers (HS Teachers), 170 parents of children enrolled in the same Head Start Centers (HS Parents), and 51 elementary public school teachers (ES Teachers) in two counties. These participants voluntarily completed survey questionnaires comprised of open-ended questions and five point Likert rating scale questions that explored parents' and teachers' perceptions. The questionnaires focused on beliefs concerning the meanings of kindergarten readiness, and quality in an early childhood setting. Participant beliefs about readiness served as the dependent variables in a Kruskal-Wallis H Non-parametric test, with the groups the participants belonged to (parents, Head Start teachers, kindergarten teachers) serving as the independent variables.

I had three main goals for this pilot study: (1) to determine if there was a difference in the way the three groups internalized school readiness and quality, (2) to understand what the differences in perceptions were, and (3) to establish where the differences, if any, existed.

I analyzed the data for group mean differences between HS Parents, HS Teachers and ES Teachers regarding their conceptualization of quality in an early childhood setting, and readiness for school. The surveys were also analyzed and compared for similarities and differences within and across participants' responses. Due to the large differences in group size, the Kruskal-Wallis H Non-parametric test was used to analyze, summarize and describe the quantitative information in the most meaningful way. The Kruskal-Wallis is a rank-based non-parametric test that does not assume that the data are normally distributed, and can be used to determine if there are statistically significant differences between two or more groups of an independent variable.

The results of the study indicated the following: Not surprisingly, HS Parents had different perceptions of readiness than both HS Teachers and ES Teachers. Differences in these perceptions supported current research that parents viewed readiness in terms of academic skills, while teachers viewed readiness more in terms of social and emotional competence. This was the same for beliefs between parents and teachers on factors that affected school readiness. On perceptions of quality in early childhood programs, no statistically significant differences were found between these groups.

The findings of the pilot study influenced the design of the present study. Yin (2009) described the usefulness of a pilot study in helping the researcher define the methodology for a research study. The pilot study was beneficial in providing a foundation for the participant selection and the research method and allowed for the “opportunity to make adjustments and revisions in the main study” (Kim, 2010, p.191). The participants in the present study were drawn from the same type of participants in the

pilot study (Glesne, 2011). In addition, the pilot study enabled me to have a better understanding of the phenomenon and develop semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate way of understanding the thoughts of each participant. The results informed the design of the current study, including the preparation of the research questions and interview questions, and the recruitment for the next phase of the study, which included the views and perceptions of school leaders.

### **Research Design: Multicase Study**

I selected a multicase study design for this study, to examine the perceptions of parents, teachers, and school leaders in regards to school readiness. Yin (2006) described the case study design as a way for the researcher to analyze different cases within a particular context. Merriam (2009) suggested that a case study design is a detailed analysis of a bounded system that provides a description of a case or multiple cases. Creswell (2005) explained that a bounded system refers to a time, location, or a physical boundary that is important for a research study. In this study, the three groups of participants, or cases, (parents, teachers, and school leaders), and their location (Head Start Centers) bounded the study. The experiences, perceptions, and practices of the participants were the focus of the study. Using a multicase study design enabled me to conduct an in-depth examination of the complexity of three particular cases within a specific context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2006) to answer the “how” and “why” questions pertaining to my research study (Yin, 2003).

The multicase study design was the most appropriate way to examine the readiness perceptions and practices of three groups of participants -parents, teachers, and

school leaders - nested within the context of three Head Start Centers. One key benefit of using this type of design included concentrating on gathering data from participants in their natural setting in order to interpret their experiences and provide descriptive findings (Creswell, 2007). While I did not compare findings across the different cases, the multicase study design can allow for a small amount of comparative data, which may be helpful during the analyzation process (Yin, 2006).

I chose to conduct a multicase study in the real life context of the Head Start centers to focus on the experiences, perceptions, and practices of parents, teachers, and school leaders about school readiness. Using multiple cases enabled me to increase the number of participants for the study, which was beneficial in improving the generalizability of the findings (Merriam, 1998). In addition, using multiple cases to study readiness perceptions and practices helped to provide consistency in the findings.

### **Research Method: Semi-Structured Interviews**

I conducted semi-structured interviews in this study. Adams (2015), remarked that semi-structured interviews are interviews that “employ a blend of closed and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions” (p. 493). Additionally, Glesne (2011) described semi-structured interviews as a “more structured and orderly process” than unstructured or conversational interviews (p. 103). Semi-structured interviews are well suited for interviews where the researcher interviews one person at a time in a conversational format. Semi-structured interviews are also appropriate for situations in which the researcher desires to use probing questions to understand the thoughts of each participant. Additionally, Adams (2015) suggested that



the semi-structured interview format is suitable for times when responders may not be truthful when sitting together in a group design.

### **Research Question**

The perceptions that parents', teachers' and early childhood school leaders have about readiness affects the how they promote school readiness in children. To understand the how parents', teachers', and school leaders understand readiness and promote readiness in students, the following research question guided this study:

How do Head Start parents, teachers and school leaders perceive and promote school readiness? To answer this research question, I focused on answering these questions:

1. How do parents perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
2. What strategies do parents use to promote readiness for children entering kindergarten?
3. How do early childhood teachers perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
4. How do early childhood teachers promote readiness for the children in their classroom?
5. How do early childhood school leaders perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
6. How do early childhood leaders promote readiness for children entering kindergarten, through collaboration with parents and community members?

## **Research Setting**

The Head Start Program is a free program that promotes school readiness in children from low-income families. Head Start is also accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The NAEYC accreditation is important as early childhood centers that achieve NAEYC accreditation have “met NAEYC’s 10 standards for high-quality early childhood education”, and “have demonstrated that they provide a safe and healthy environment for children, have teachers who are well-trained, have access to excellent teaching materials, and work with a curriculum that is appropriately challenging and developmentally sound” (NAEYC.org/accreditation).

The Head Start centers were essential to the goals of this study as I was determined to understand the readiness perceptions and strategies of low-income families. Permission from the regional office of the Head Start Program was granted to contact center employees and parents for research purposes, and interviews were conducted at the Head Start Center. The Head Start centers were located in two counties in the northwest part of a southeastern state in the United States. Information about the counties and a description of the Head Start Centers are detailed below.

County A (Pitt County) was approximately 512 square miles and as of the 2010 census, the county’s population was 119,224. The unemployment rate for Pitt County was 3.4 % as of April 2017. There were two universities located in this county along with 14 elementary schools, five middle schools, four high schools, and a career and

technology center at the time of the study. Additionally, a total of two Head Start Centers were located in Pitt County at the time of the study.

County B (Oxford County) was approximately 674 square miles, with a population of 74,273, as of the 2010 census. The unemployment rate in Oxford County was approximately 3.5%, as of April 2017. There were ten elementary schools, three middle schools, three high schools, one career center, and one academy located in Oxford County at the time of the study. In addition, there were a total of three Head Start Centers located in Oxford County at the time the study took place.

A description of the three Head Start centers participating in the study is provided below.

- Bloomfield Head Start Center employed ten full-time certified teachers with an enrollment of 70 full-time students.
- Harrison Head Start Center employed four full-time certified teachers with an enrollment of 74 full-time students.
- Edison Head Start Center employed nine full-time certified teachers, with an enrollment of 94 full-time students.

### **Population and Sample**

This qualitative study was designed to gather the voices of the individuals involved. Given my research questions and the goals of my study, a purposeful sampling technique was the best sampling strategy for the study. Creswell (2005) indicated that a purposeful sampling is “a qualitative sampling procedure in which researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon”

(p. 596). Moreover, Merriam (1998) noted that purposeful sampling is the recommended strategy for case studies, as purposive sampling allows the researcher to select a sample from the population which he or she can learn the most from. The research sample included a subset of the population of Head Start parents, teachers, and school leaders in two counties in a southeastern state.

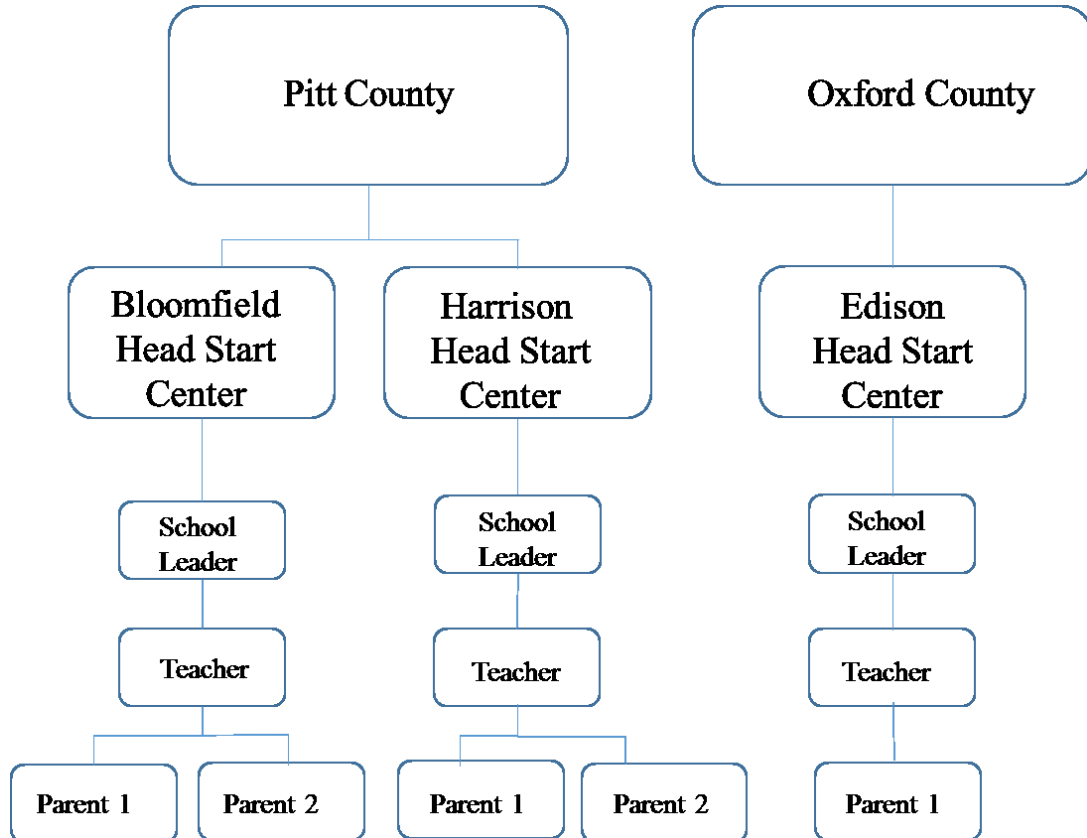
The three Head Start centers selected for the study were purposefully chosen based on their size and location, and because these same centers were used in the pilot study I conducted in the fall of 2016. The total number of participants included in the study was determined based on my availability for interviewing participants, and for analyzing and coding the data. The types of participants in the current study (Head Start parents, teachers, and school leaders) resembled the types of participants that were included in the pilot study (Head Start parents and teachers) (Desmangles, 2016). Study participants were selected based on recommendations from teachers and school leaders, and their willingness to be interviewed.

The pilot study conducted in the fall (Desmangles, 2016) illuminated the need to add the perceptions and beliefs of early childhood center school leaders into the current study, as the perceptions and beliefs of school leaders is an area lacking in empirical research. Participants were given information explaining the purpose of the study and their part in it. Names and identifying characteristics of parents, teachers, school leaders, and county locations were kept confidential and pseudonyms were used to protect their privacy.

The three Head Start centers selected for the study were located in two counties in a southeastern State. The Bloomfield Head Start Center and Harrison Head Start Center were located in Pitt County. The Edison Head Start Center was located in Oxford County. I was given permission from the Office of Head Start to speak with parents, teachers, and school leaders about what readiness means to them and how they promoted readiness in children. The interviews with parents, teachers, and school leaders were conducted at the respective Head Start centers in the two counties. Five Head Start parents, three Head Start teachers, and three Head Start center school leaders participated in the study. All participants were volunteers, and pseudonyms were used to provide anonymity (Glesne, 2011). A diagram of the participants of the study can be seen in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1.

*Diagram of Participants in the Multicase Study*



At the time of the study, Head Start parents were either the mother or father of a child enrolled in one of the selected Head Start centers who would be eligible to enroll in a kindergarten program during the upcoming 2017-2018 school year. The parents described themselves as the primary caregivers of the children and reported that the children resided with them in their homes. Four female parents (three White, one African American) and one male parent (African American) participated in the study. The three

teacher participants were full-time instructors in one of the selected Head Start center classrooms.

Teachers in the study were all white females ranging in age from 22 to 35 years old. Two teachers had Bachelor’s degrees, one teacher had an Associate’s degree. There were two white and one African American female Head Start center school leaders. The ages of the school leaders fell between 40 years and 59 years old. Two school leaders had Bachelor’s degrees; one held an Associate’s degree. Demographic information about the participants’ locations, ages and levels of educational attainment can be seen in table 3.2.

Table 3.2

*Participants’ Locations, Age Ranges, and Education Levels*

Center Locations and Participants			
Group	<u>Pitt County</u>		<u>Oxford County</u>
	Bloomfield Head Start Center	Harrison Head Start Center	Edison Head Start Center
Parents	2	1	2
Teachers	1	1	1
School Leaders	1	1	1

n=11

Age Range

Group	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59
Parents	5	0	0	0
Teachers	1	2	0	0

School Leaders	0	0	2	1
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#### Highest Degree Attained

Group	Some College	Associate's	Bachelor's	Master's
Parents	5	0	0	0
Teachers	0	1	2	0
School Leaders	0	1	2	0

### **Instrumentation**

In this study I used semi-structured face-to-face interviews to examine parents', teachers', and school leaders' perceptions of school readiness, and the strategies they used to promote school readiness in children. The use of the semi-structured interviews for this study was the best choice for helping me to focus on how parents, teachers, and school leaders personally understood and promoted readiness, and how early childhood leaders personally experienced working with families and communities. The interview protocol was designed by mapping the interview questions to the research questions, and by the results of the pilot study that explored the perceptions of parents and teachers surrounding the concept of school readiness. Additionally, the interview protocol, which can be found in Appendix B, included questions geared toward examining the environmental and social influences on how parents', teachers', and school leaders' perceived and promoted readiness.

Interview questions were designed to address the research questions, and to encourage participants to fully explain their viewpoints. According to Glesne (2001),



“questions may emerge in the course of interviewing and may add to or replace pre-established ones” (p. 102). I remained open to rephrasing and adding questions throughout the research process, as recommended by Denzen (1970), who noted the importance of being flexible during the interview process because participants may discuss issues that are not noted on the interview protocol, or may even answer many questions at once. Interview questions for the parent participants included questions pertaining to their views on readiness, experiences with school, and strategies used at home. Teacher interview questions included questions about strategies used with parents to increase school readiness. Interview questions for school leaders included questions about their experiences working with parents and the community. Interviews lasted up to 45 minutes. The planning matrix used for the research and interview questions are located in Appendix A. The complete set of interview questions can be viewed in Appendix B.

Glesne (2011) noted that the attributes of a good interviewer include being anticipatory, setting aside assumptions, being analytical, probing patiently, and being nonthreatening, among other qualities. Keeping these attributes in mind during interviews can help researchers ensure the interviews flow smoothly, uninhibited, and focused. The semi-structured interview format allowed for revising interview questions during the interview for flexibility and a natural flow during the interview process.

### **Recruitment Procedure**

I recruited participant volunteers through the Head Start programs in the two counties. Similar to the pilot study, I contacted the Head Start center managers (school

leaders) via email explaining the study and what I hoped to gain from the study. I invited center managers to participate in an interview that would last no more than one hour.

Each school leader was asked to identify a 4k teacher they felt would be the most qualified to speak about school readiness. I then approached the identified teacher to invite her to participate in the study. I discussed the study and arranged a date and time for an interview. During this initial contact and research study discussion, I asked the teacher to begin thinking of the children in her classroom, and to pinpoint one that is exceeding expectations of readiness, and one that is not meeting expectations of readiness. After meeting with and interviewing the classroom teacher, I approached the parents of the two children identified either during drop off or pick times and invited them to take part in the study. A mutually convenient time was arranged for parent interviews. All the interviews took place at the Head Start center where the teacher and the school leader were employed.

### **Data Collection**

For this multicase study, I used face-to-face semi-structured interviews. This type of data collection is effective for highlighting the experiences and perceptions of the people involved from their own perspective. I audio recorded the interviews for dependability and availability to transcribe and code properly. I also used a professional transcription service to convert the audio data into text.

Data collection for this study also included artifacts compiled from participants, and researcher notes. Merriam (2009) noted the importance of tangible artifacts as part

of the data collection process. The artifacts I collected included examples and copies of the following items:

- Teacher Lesson Plans (Appendix C)
- Preschool Activity Calendars (Appendix D)
- Parent Meeting Invitations and Agendas (Appendix E)
- Parent Conference Form (Appendix F)
- Home Visit Form (Appendix G)
- Parent-Child Activities Handout (Appendix H)
- DIAL-4 Teacher Questionnaire (Developmental Indicator for the Assessment of Learning) Form (Appendix I)
- DIAL-4 Parent Questionnaire (Appendix J)
- Weekly Parent Newsletter (Appendix K)
- Family Project Assignment (Appendix L)
- Reading Drop In Information Sheet (Appendix M)
- Reading Ideas to do at Home Information Sheet (Appendix N)

In addition to collecting the above mentioned artifacts, I took hand-written field notes during the interviews to use in conjunction with the audio recordings during the data analysis process. A copy of the collected documents can be viewed in the Appendix (C – N).

### **Data Analysis**

Data for this study included 11 participant interviews, artifacts, and researcher notes. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were held with each participant to

examine the research question. Merriam (1998) noted that interviews are a beneficial way for researchers to gather information on a particular subject matter that cannot be gleaned from direct observations or from paper documents. The interviews were held at the respective Head Start Centers and were recorded and transcribed. The participants shared their thoughts and experiences on school readiness, and how they promoted school readiness in children.

The data analysis process for this study involved several steps that allowed me to focus on the experiences, perceptions and strategies of the participants. The primary source of analysis for this study was the audio recordings and the transcripts from interviews held with participants. The interviews were transcribed using the transcription service Rev.com. Rev.com is an online transcription service that allowed me to upload and send audio files for transcription. Once the data were transcribed, the transcripts were uploaded into the NVivo software program. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis program that is suitable for organizing data and creating nodes or themes.

Using NVivo, I began analyzing the transcripts and notes that I took, along with the artifacts I collected at each site. I read through all of the material to note the different codes, categories, subcategories and themes as they emerged. The purpose of reading through the data was to reflect on the information and identify the experiences described by the participants. This is the process called coding, and a researcher may read through transcripts multiple times during the coding process to categorize the data into emergent themes. Lester (1999) noted that the analysis of data can be complicated, as data does not always fall into neat categories.

I read through the interview transcripts several times to refresh my memory of the interviews, and to make preliminary notes and identify general recurring concepts.

During the next few readings of the transcripts, I began to identify the more prominent themes (Creswell, 1998). I used an open coding (Saldana, 2009) method that allowed me to systematically begin classifying the data without having any predetermined categories or themes.

The first round of coding included descriptive codes, which were used to summarize the main idea of the passage of data (Saldana, 2016). The second and third rounds of re-coding enabled me to review the data more deeply to focus on refining the initial categories, and subcategories. This part of the coding process was fluid; allowing me to apply and re-apply codes, and to prioritize the data in different ways. Saldana (2016) noted that this process is called codifying. I then began to look for repeated codes in the data that indicated repetitive patterns, routines or relationships that were important to the study.

After a continual process of sorting and re-sorting the codes and refining the categories, I compared the categories to each other to consolidate the codes where possible. This process led me to the creation of larger themes, or concepts that were represented by these categories. To determine shared themes among the data, I carefully analyzed the data to establish commonalities within and across the different interviews (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). I began with 15 themes that I ultimately reduced into eight final themes. I then established connections between the different themes. I used Saldana's coding process (2016) to drive the analysis of the data.

### **Transferability, Validity and Credibility**

I established transferability, or evidence that this study's findings could be reproduced or applied to other contexts, or situations, by using several procedures. First, I employed a well-defined study design and qualitative methodology. Also, I used actual quotes from participants, which enabled me to provide rich, thick descriptions to support and illuminate the themes that emerged from the study (Creswell, 1998). In addition to these procedures to ensure transferability, the participants of the study were volunteers from different external school sites unrelated to me (Creswell, 1998) that I established a relationship with to complete the study.

In order to ensure validity and credibility, I used strategies such as triangulation, and member checking. Creswell & Miller (2000) asserted that "triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (p. 126). I examined data from multiple sources for consistency. The sources that I used for triangulation were the interviews, artifacts, and field notes I collected for the study. Triangulation via these different sources of data allowed me to validate the data I collected and organize it into themes. Once the themes were identified and organized, I was able to make sense of the data and summarize the findings (Lester 1999).

Member checking allowed me to contact the study participants to review the information they provided. Creswell & Miller (2000) identified member checking as a way for participants to "confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account (p. 127)." Creswell & Miller (2000) also indicated that "qualitative researchers routinely

employ member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews, and external audits” (p.124). Lincoln & Guba (1985) noted that member checking was a “crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p.314). Contacting participants of the study to review the data to confirm its accuracy helped me to confirm the credibility of the data.

Contacting participants of the study involved phone calls, emails and meetings with parents, teachers, and school leaders, to discuss and review the details of the data they provided. The transcribed data was sent to the participant via email or given to the participant during a face-to-face meeting. Participants were given an opportunity to review their interview data to check for accuracy. Responses from participants indicated that the findings accurately reflected the data they provided during the interviews.

In an effort to establish trustworthiness and to build trust with the participants, (and also the reader) I employed the peer debriefing technique as another means of validity checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000). According to Lincoln & Guba, (1985), peer debriefing “is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). The peer debriefer, described by Lincoln & Guba (1985) as a “non-involved professional peer” (p. 283), was a retired New York City school administrator with experience in early childhood education. The peer debriefer met with me several times during the research study and offered valuable feedback about the analysis of the data, the findings, and implications for future research. In addition, the peer debriefer was familiar with issues pertaining to kindergarten readiness. The peer debriefer provided me with a different viewpoint and a

means of having relevant conversations about the study and the research process. After meeting with the peer debriefer, a summary of the findings - including my interpretations - was drafted.

### **Relevance and Positionality**

My experiences during my upbringing have led me to strongly value education. As a daughter of Caribbean immigrants who left their homeland in search of better opportunities, my philosophical beliefs about education were shaped by the values my parents held dear. They fostered an environment where I was always encouraged to prioritize my studies above all else. At a young age, I realized that my parents created opportunities for me which they never enjoyed themselves. They sacrificed what little they had to send my siblings and me to the best schools they could find. Because of this, I resolved to persevere through school, even while others around me did not. I understood my parents' motivation; I observed how their life experiences and their surrounding environment influenced the decisions they made and how those decisions have impacted my life. But what about other parents? Did they make different choices? If so, why? Believing that the environment and social contexts played a role in the beliefs and choices parents made, I desired to understand the environmental factors that impact parents' belief systems regarding how they perceive and promote readiness.

I began my teaching career in an underprivileged school in the inner city of New York. I have also taught in several school districts in the South. Over the course of my teaching experience, I have come to a critical understanding: children's earliest experiences at home and in school influence who they become as future scholars and



members of society. Parents are the most important people in a young child's life; therefore, their perceptions about school readiness are vitally important as they influence the actions and decisions that affect a child's entire academic career. These perceptions are formed through a combination of the parents' experiences, their immediate environment, cultural norms, and the larger political climate (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Additionally, the relationships parents form in these environments – particularly with school leaders – influences how well children are able to learn in the school setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Knowing how parents internalize school readiness and make meaning of it is crucial if we are to understand their decision-making process and the readiness strategies they apply with their children.

As an educator, seeing the large discrepancy in skill level between students as they enter the kindergarten classroom was shocking. Students' educational experiences before kindergarten are a good indicator of a child's later success in his or her academic life. Studies such as The Perry Preschool Project (1962), The Carolina Abecedarian Project (1972), and The Chicago Child-Parent Center Study (1983) have supported this theory. Evidence demonstrating that the social and economic benefits of high-quality early education for children are both substantial and lasting is overwhelming. I believe that every child should be given the opportunity to attend a high-quality early childhood center, yet many do not. For these reasons, I have chosen to conduct research in the area of early childhood education, with a focus on parents', teachers', and school leaders' perceptions and promotion of readiness. I strongly believe that this research is important

and may help to identify areas for improvement in how children are prepared for entrance into formal school.

In this study, I aimed to extend the body of research on early childhood education by examining the views of parents, teachers, and school leaders in regards to what school readiness means, and the strategies they employ to prepare children for kindergarten. This research was necessary to offer insight into the intricacy of the meaning of school readiness for parents and school leaders of children attending a Head Start program, an area which is currently under-researched. Furthermore, this study may lead to influencing future changes to public policies that may affect curriculum, instructional methods, and other school standards. Additionally, the results of this study may help bridge gaps in perceptions of school readiness between parents, early childhood teachers, and early childhood school leaders, and may affect decisions that parents, teachers, administrators, and policy makers make about early childhood programs.

### **Reflexivity**

An essential aspect of qualitative research is recognizing my own bias. As the researcher, I understand that I am the primary instrument for collecting data from participants (Merriam, 1998). Understanding my own bias and subjectivities are essential in this regard, as my subjectivities influenced how I chose to analyze and interpret the data I collected. Sikes (2004) noted the importance of researchers being aware of positionality and assumptions, as it may influence the research. Guba & Lincoln (2008) suggested that "Reflexivity forces us to come to terms not only with our choice of

research problem and with those with whom we engage in the research process, but with ourselves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting" (p. 278).

Though my biases cannot be totally removed, approaching the research study with an open mind helped me to minimize some of the biases I had (Creswell, 2005). My life experiences, relationships, and choices make me who I am and shape the way I view the world. These experiences have also taught me to be a constructivist – in search of understanding why things are the way they are. I feel a responsibility to share my work with the early childhood population. I believe it is imperative that we have an understanding of how we think about school readiness. We need to align our definitions for the benefit of the students who are in our homes and in our classrooms.

### **Delimitations**

As previously stated, though there are many factors that contribute to the readiness of a child, I focused only on the perceptions and strategies of parents, teachers, and school leaders in regards to school readiness in this study. This was intentional, as I wanted to use the voices of underprivileged and low-income families as the primary source of data on parents', teachers', and school leaders' views of readiness.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of this study was the small number of participants included in the study. A larger sample size could offer better representation of the overall population. Unfortunately, as I was working alone, and did not have the benefit of a team to help analyze and code data, I was not able to use a larger participant group for this

study. This has limited the ability to generalize the findings. Merriam (2009) noted that limited generalizability is a known issue that may arise from case study research.

Additionally, only parents, teachers, and school leaders currently involved or employed in the Head Start program were contacted to participate in the study. Families who qualify for Head Start are typically living below the poverty level, or even homeless, and may be receiving public assistance. Parents, teachers, and school leaders not involved or employed in an early childhood Head Start Program were not contacted as they were beyond the scope of this study, but may have provided different perspectives on school readiness. The data examined are the opinions and perceptions of the volunteer participants, and are not subject to outside verification, nor are these opinions compared to any type of assessment. Another limitation of the study is that the data on parent perceptions will be collected at one point in time and perceptions may change over time.

To address some of the limitations of the study, I used member checking to ensure accuracy of the data, and also peer review feedback to ensure both validity and credibility of the data. Additionally, artifacts were collected from each Head Start center to provide validation of the data through triangulation.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative multicase study was to explore the perceptions and strategies of parents', teachers', and school leaders' in regards to their understanding of school readiness, and the strategies they used to promote readiness. The research question guiding this study was, How do Head Start parents, teachers, and school leaders perceive and promote school readiness? To answer this research question, I drew on

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) to help inform the study, and I used a semi-structured interview process to gather data on the experiences and beliefs of 11 participants from three Head Start centers.

In this chapter, I included a description of the research setting, population and sample, instrumentation, recruitment procedure, data collection and analysis. The data analysis process included analyzing the transcripts and coding the data into themes. To ensure the data was transferable, valid, credible and trustworthy, I employed strategies such as triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. In Chapter four, I present the results of the study and the analysis of the data.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

School readiness is a topic that has been studied for many years. A variety of factors contribute to a child's school readiness, including parents' perceptions, early childhood attendance, and school leadership, to name a few. Though there is literature that investigates the perceptions of teachers regarding school readiness, literature that examines the experiences and perceptions parents have about school readiness, and literature that examines school leadership in early childhood, is limited.

As noted in Chapters one, two, and three, parents' perceptions are strongly related to their actions and the activities they engage in with their children at home.

Furthermore, parents' readiness beliefs are known to influence student achievement and outcomes (Barbarin et al, 2008). Teachers' perceptions about readiness influence what they do in the classroom and how they teach (Kagan, 1992) and inform involvement. School leaders' perceptions about readiness are equally as important to understand as school leader's work directly with parents, teachers, and community members to increase and promote school readiness in young children.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions that parents, teachers, and school leaders have about readiness for school. Additionally, in this study I investigated how these groups of participants promoted school readiness in their homes, schools, and communities. I primarily used semi-structured interviews to collect data from parents, teachers, and school leaders in three Head Start centers to accomplish this.

In Chapter four, I present an analysis of the interview data and the findings in order to answer the following research question: How do parents, teachers, and school leaders perceive and promote school readiness? Answering this research question depended on focusing on the following questions:

1. How do parents perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
2. What strategies do parents use to promote readiness for children entering kindergarten?
3. How do early childhood teachers perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
4. How do early childhood teachers promote readiness for the children in their classroom?
5. How do early childhood school leaders perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
6. How do early childhood leaders promote readiness for children entering kindergarten, through collaboration with parents and community members?

### **Summary of the study**

Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, I conducted this multicase study to examine parents', teachers', and school leaders' perceptions about readiness, and their strategies used to promote readiness in their children. Additionally, I examined early childhood leaders' strategies used to build relationships with families and community members, and to foster parent involvement. Potentially, this study can help stimulate changes that affect early childhood policies and standards, and can influence decisions

made by parents and school leaders about early childhood programs. In this chapter I present a description of the themes and findings of the study, in an attempt to answer the research question: How do Head Start parents, teachers, and school leaders perceive and promote school readiness?

To answer the question, I conducted semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers, and school leaders at the three Head Start centers. Each Head Start center provided full time early childhood education that served low-income children with an emphasis on health, nutrition, and parents' involvement. Additionally, the Head Start centers were accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and were located in two counties in one state in the southeastern United States.

### **Findings**

During the coding process, patterns began to emerge, and 15 initial themes were identified. Some of the categories that emerged during the first rounds of coding are displayed in Table 4.1.



Table 4.1

*Initial Themes from Parent, Teacher and School Leader Data*

Focus Question	Parent themes	Teacher Themes	School Leader Themes
How do parents perceive readiness for children entering into kindergarten?	Reading, Writing & Math skills	Parent Responsiveness	Parent Commitment
What strategies do parents use to promote readiness for children entering kindergarten?	Helping with student Homework & activities Routines at home	Inviting/Engaging Parents	Empowering parents
How do early childhood teachers perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?	Social Skills Regulation of Behavior Cognitive Skills	Inconsistent parent involvement	Open 2-way Communication
How do early childhood teachers promote readiness for children entering kindergarten	Communication	Open 2-way Communication	Open 2-way communication
How do early childhood school leaders perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?	Parent beliefs about readiness Parent attitudes	Family support	Multidimensional concept of readiness
How do early childhood school leaders promote readiness for children entering kindergarten, through collaboration with parents and community members?	Parent involvement	Collaboration between school and home	Parent involvement strategies & activities Collaboration with parents & community

As coding continued, the data was organized and re-organized, and the 15 themes were collapsed. Eight major themes emerged from the interview transcripts during the data analysis process that informed the research questions. A description of the themes from the different participant groups that came to light can be seen in table 4.2.

Table 4.2

*Themes from Participant Groups*

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A. Themes from Parent Interviews
Theme P1: Readiness is a cognitive ability (reading, writing, mathematics)
Theme P2: Readiness is promoted by home support and routines
B. Themes from Teacher Interviews
Theme T1: Readiness is being able to sit, listen, and follow directions
Theme T2: Readiness is a cognitive ability/skill
Theme T3: Readiness is promoted by school-family communication and family support
C. Themes from School Leader Interviews
Theme L1: Readiness is multidimensional
Theme L2: Readiness is promoted through parent and family involvement strategies
Theme L3: Readiness is affected by parents' understandings of readiness

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The interview questions for the study were derived from the over-arching research question and the sub-questions (see Appendix A titled “Planning Matrix for Research Questions and Interview Questions”). Many of the themes that emerged from the data were applicable to more than one research question. For example, some teachers and school leaders had very similar responses about readiness, and about strategies to promote readiness. A comparison of the different themes to the research question can be seen in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

*Relationship between Emerged Themes and Research Questions*

How do Head Start parents, teachers and school leaders perceive and promote school readiness?		
Research Focus	Emerged Themes	Participant Group
1. Parents perception of readiness for children entering kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readiness is a cognitive ability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents, Teachers</li> </ul>
2. Strategies parents use to promote readiness for children entering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readiness is promoted by family support and routines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents, School Leaders</li> </ul>
3. Early childhood teacher’s perception of readiness for children entering kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readiness is being able to sit, listen, follow directions</li> <li>• Readiness is a cognitive ability/skill</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers, School Leaders</li> </ul>
4. Strategies early childhood teachers use to promote readiness for the children in their classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readiness is the result of school and family communication, and family support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers, School Leaders</li> </ul>
5. Early childhood school leaders perception of readiness for children entering kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readiness is multidimensional</li> <li>• Readiness is influenced by parents’ understandings of what readiness is</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Leaders</li> <li>• Parents, Teachers, School Leaders</li> </ul>
6. Strategies early childhood school leaders use to promote readiness for children entering kindergarten through collaboration with parents and community members?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Readiness is promoted through parent and family involvement strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers, School Leaders</li> </ul>

**Themes from Parents**

**Theme P1: Cognitive Skills: Reading, Writing, Math.** Parent interviews revealed that many parents had similar ideas about readiness. Parents were asked

specifically what *being ready for kindergarten* meant to them, and *what children needed to know and be able to do before entering kindergarten*. Parents were also asked about their child's readiness for kindergarten. A theme that emerged concerning skills and abilities in reading, writing, and math. Some parents responded by providing specific examples of cognitive abilities that represented readiness to them. Other parents used generalities to describe readiness that were consistent with describing readiness in terms of cognitive skills and competencies. All of the parents agreed that readiness could be perceived as having the necessary level of academic skill and cognitive ability. This was consistent with National Education Goals Panel's (NEGP, 1995) definition of the skills in the cognitive domain. Differences were not apparent between responses from parents across the three Head Start centers.

For example, Parent 1 (Ashley) in the Pitt County, Bloomfield Head Start Center emphasized what she believed were the basic skills necessary for kindergarten entry:

Readiness is knowing the basics. Writing their name, colors, counting, reading simple words, sight words I think is probably good. That's about it. A lot of the kids that are in K4 now are going to kindergarten soon and they're learning those things. So they have to stay amongst their peers and be ready for kindergarten in the fall.

In the Edison Head Start Center in Oxford County, Parent 2 (Malcolm) observed that readiness included many of the same concepts noted by Ashley in Pitt County. Malcolm indicated that readiness included knowing the basic skills that children needed. Malcolm

further explained what these basic skills were, and the following about readiness when discussing his daughter:

I feel like she should at least know 1 through 10, simple colors, simple shapes, the ABCs and recognizing her name. Especially going into kindergarten. Also, she should know basic colors. How to spell their name, count to a certain number, and the recognition of shapes. Just simple things. It's kindergarten.

Similarly, Parent 1 (Gwendolyn) in the Edison Head Start Center in Oxford County explained that part of readiness was transitioning to “big girl school” and knowing her ABC’s, counting through 10, some colors and shapes, and recognizing her name.

Gwendolyn’s response differed only slightly from the other parent responses, as she noted the transition to kindergarten as a step in the readiness process. Gwendolyn’s response was as follows:

I myself feel as if they should at least know ABCs, at least one through maybe 10, 15, and their name. Some may be able to spell theirs, some not. However I practice with my daughter for her to know her name and to recognize her name going into kindergarten. I don't know. I feel like this is the basics. The basic step to get her ready for kindergarten, for, "big girl school," as my daughter says. She's coming from Head Start, small school transitioning to the big school- I feel like she should at least know one through 10, simple colors, simple shapes, ABCs and recognizing her name.

Gwendolyn’s response highlighted her understanding of readiness, which included the transition from the smaller Head Start center to a big kindergarten

environment. The understanding of the importance of the transition period from an early childhood education center to a kindergarten classroom was not noted in any other parents' comments. As noted by Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta (2000), "kindergarten is a different environment than preschool or home. Goals, demands, and the nature of the classroom environment are different, as is the ecology surrounding this new environment (p. 493). Understanding this difference is important for parents, as this may help parents to work differently with children, teachers, and school leaders to increase school readiness.

To summarize the parents' responses about their perceptions of readiness, all of the parents' comments generally supported the notion that parents perceive readiness for kindergarten to be mastery of the academic and cognitive skills necessary to function in the kindergarten classroom. Most of the parents noted that readiness was within the child, and not something outside of the child, like the readiness of the school or the community. The concept of readiness being within the child is consistent with the traditional view of readiness, which is a level of academic or cognitive skill (Kagan, Moore & Bredekamp, 1995), and places the burden of proof solely on the child's ability to meet the demands of kindergarten.

**Theme P2: Home Support and Routines.** A second theme emerged from the data when parents were asked about strategies they used at home to prepare their children for kindergarten. Several parents noted that preparing children for school included setting up routines at home, and being supportive in terms of helping with homework and activities sent home by the school. The word *routine* was specifically stated several

times in parent interviews. Parents relied on their own experiences and subjective understandings of readiness to create their own strategies to work with their children. The strategies parents used at home could be described as behaviors to help children develop good habits for school.

Parents felt that routines practiced at home could help children begin to understand structure and develop healthy habits that would increase school readiness. Examples of the homework described by parents are the preschool activity calendars (Appendix D), and the Parent-Child Activities handout (Appendix H). These artifacts support parents' discussions about work sent home with students.

When asked about strategies used at home to promote readiness, Malcolm in the Edison Head Start Center in Oxford County noted the following about strategies he used at home:

Head Start sends my daughter her homework, right? In my mind I was thinking this is pre-kindergarten stuff, you know what I'm saying? So, when she goes to kindergarten, she already knows how to do all this stuff, and kindergarten will be like a refresher course. And, so for me, I make sure she is in the routine, so she knows I got this to do when I come home today, and things like that. We do homework first, and then play after. I make sure she understands that school stuff comes first, because that is more important. We do that everyday.

Similarly, Parent 2 (Katelynn) in the Harrison Head Start Center in Pitt County noted that her routines at home included doing homework together and going to bed early.

Katelynn noted the importance of these actions so that her daughter would be prepared for school in the morning. She reported:

We do some stuff at home. She has homework every single night. So they bring home a worksheet, maybe one or two a night, but it's like, just counting. They've done a few math problems, so I think that is good for them to get in the routine of doing the worksheet every single night. We talk about it a lot, and I try to get her in a routine of just going to bed early, so she's not waking up in the morning, not ready, and fully awake for school. I feel like that's important too. She goes to school, she's got to be awake and ready to listen. That's kind of how I was brought up. Just having a routine, and having a bedtime, and having stuff to do at the house as far as my parents asking me and telling me stuff to do.

Ashley in the Bloomfield Head Start Center noted most of the same strategies as the other parents, but felt that reading with her daughter was one of her more important strategies for school readiness. Ashley asserted that her routines included not only reading, and doing homework, but writing practice and little tests. Ashley articulated the following:

We actually have a routine that we do everyday. We do a little bit of home study, home schooling. We have workbooks. We read every night, actually several times a day. We practice writing our name the right way not just all caps, you know big letters. Writing them how he needs to write them. We do like little tests here and there. We have ABC Mouse as well.

Ashley also noted that in addition to the routines she set in place, she participated in different community activities that helped her prepare her daughter for school. Ashley



discussed being a part of a “mom” group that included friends in the neighborhood, parents and grandparents. Ashley shared some of the activities she participated in with her daughter and the “mom” group that helped her prepare her daughter for school.

Sometimes we go with the kids to JC Park or we go to Greenville. We meet up with them and let them socialize. So they're always around kids their age and stuff like that. And like the little ones too. I have a younger son. So it's for them and for the little ones and for us. I mean we have the Children's Museum. We go to the Children's Museum which there, I would say, there is some pretty cool stuff.

Ashley’s description of the “mom” group she participated in emphasized her interconnectedness with others in her community, and the relationships she formed in the group that helped influence her level of involvement with her daughter.

In summary, Theme P2: Home Support and Routines, highlighted parents’ beliefs that having a routine at home was an important strategy that helped prepare children for the rigors of kindergarten and formal school. Routines at home included activities such as reading with children, doing homework, and having a set bedtime. The routines described by parents also spoke to their level of engagement with their child, and the importance that parents placed on school. Parents’ beliefs about readiness influenced what routines were practiced in their homes, and where they took their children to socialize.

The experiences that children have within their homes, schools and communities emphasized the many interactions in different environments that may have influenced their learning. Similarly, parents’ perceptions of readiness influenced and were

influenced by the interactions and relationships in different environments that informed their views and strategies used to promote readiness. The environmental influences surrounding parents' readiness perceptions were embedded in the context of family, school, and the community.

### **Themes from Teachers**

**Theme T1: Sitting, Listening, Following Directions.** When teachers were asked about readiness, and being *ready for kindergarten*, three different themes emerged from the data. Participants viewed skills such as sitting, listening, and following directions as a foundation for learning and school readiness. One example came from Ms. Sandy, the teacher at the Pitt County, Bloomfield Head Start Center, who, when asked about readiness said:

I feel being ready for kindergarten means you are ready to sit in a classroom setting for the time needed to, for the teacher to do what she needs to do. Being able to listen, and sit, and control yourself during those times. Hopefully, it means learning some letters and numbers and colors and shapes, of course, but it's mostly being able to sit and learn. Some kids are to the level where they are ready to learn. Some kids are just not interested. They're not ready to sit and listen. They still don't know how to hold a pencil even though you show them 12 times every day, they're just not quite there yet. They're just not mature enough. I just feel being ready to learn, [means] being ready to sit and listen to someone and not being as interested in everything else going on.

Ms. Sandy also noted that her readiness beliefs affected her classroom instruction. Based on her understanding of readiness, Ms. Sandy discussed working in small groups and targeting students she felt needed more time and instruction in certain skill areas, in order to increase their readiness. For example, Ms. Sandy indicated the following about how her beliefs influenced her teaching practices:

I do a lot of small group lessons, and in the small groups we are doing different things. The children are on different levels, so sometimes it's tracing your name, you know and that's holding the pencil. Some are ready and some can't write their names without a paper with their name already on it. We do counting and activities where you roll the dice and you count how many dots and you have to get that many blocks and activities like that. I try to provide my best and perceive the kids that need me to spend extra time with them. I basically give them more activities to try to help that primary skill or something that's lacking. I chose to do those activities based on the level I think the kids are on and what I think they will need going forward.

Another teacher noted the importance of student behavior and being able to sit for instruction. The Edison Head Start Center teacher in Oxford County, Ms. Betty, noted that not only was behavior an important part of readiness, following multi-step directions was important as well. Ms. Betty said:

When I think about what kindergarten is like, I think the kids need to be able to sit still, pay attention, and socialize with others. Behavior wise, they should be able to listen and follow two-to three-step directions. They need to be able to

understand redirection, to manage their behavior, follow the rules, listen, pay attention, stuff like that so that they are be able to learn what they need to know.

Ms. Charlotte, the teacher in the Harrison Head Start Center in Pitt County, also asserted that her beliefs of readiness included being ready to sit, pay attention, and follow directions. Contrary to the comments of the other teachers, Ms. Charlotte noted that the curriculum used at the Head Start center did not offer enough structure for children, which was not beneficial to students who were lacking in readiness skills. Ms. Charlotte's comments were as follows:

As far as curriculum goes, we use High Scope, Growing Readers, Number Plus, and Second Steps to hit all the different domains. High Scope is the main one. It lets children learn by play. It's part of the curriculum to let the child lead. We don't stop the kids if they don't want to do something because when they're ready, they'll come over. So if they want to go to the book center and read a book and not do our activity, that's fine. I like it sometimes, but a lot of times I think children need to be told, "It's time to this. It's time to do that." Most of these children are still learning to follow directions, and I think they need that type of structure. There is no structure with High Scope, and there is nothing I can do about that.

To summarize theme T1, teachers seemed to agree that sitting, listening, and following directions were key factors in determining readiness for children entering into a kindergarten setting. These three skills were viewed by teachers as the basis for being

ready to learn. The teachers also described following multi-step directions, and demonstrating self-control as important readiness skills.

**Theme T2: Readiness is a Cognitive Ability.** The second theme that emerged from teacher data indicated that teachers perceived readiness as a mix of abilities in reading and mathematics. Similar to what parents suggested, teachers associated higher levels of reading and mathematical skills with being prepared for kindergarten. Teachers seemed to give less importance to the cognitive skills than the social and emotional skills they perceived children needed to be prepared for school. Skills that teachers noted were associated with readiness ranged from gross and fine motor skills, to language and mathematical skills.

Ms. Betty from the Edison Head Start Center in Oxford County believed that social skills and academic skills were important for school readiness. Ms. Betty noted that children needed not only physical development skills, but literacy and math skills as well to be ready for the demands and activities in the kindergarten classroom. Ms. Betty remarked:

Well, the kids should be able to know how to sit in a circle, know how to learn, their fine motor, gross motor skills, literacy, domains, math, counting to 20, writing their name, recognizing letters. That's also a part of being ready for school. It's not as important as being socially ready, but it is important. Kids that have most or all of those type of skills are ready for kindergarten.

In the Bloomfield Head Start Center in Pitt County, Ms. Sandy made similar observations about readiness but noted the importance of reading skills to promote school

readiness. Ms. Sandy's response exposed her beliefs that language and mathematical skills could be learned from reading:

I think reading and being read to gets kids ready for school. Sitting quietly so the teacher can read, and listening is big. They learn lot of language skills, and counting while reading stories, counting of this counting of that, and what happened next and things such as that. Those skills are important too. Now, you can really learn those skills in kindergarten, but you have to be able to sit to do that. A child that can do those things would be ready for school.

Ms. Sandy's comments indicated her beliefs that reading skills were of primary importance, and that other skills, like language and mathematics, could be learned through reading. Ms. Sandy's beliefs about the importance of reading skills in promoting school readiness most likely influenced her instructional strategies and the number of reading activities she conducted in her classroom.

In the Harrison Head Start Center in Pitt County, Ms. Charlotte asserted that her beliefs about readiness included a mix of cognitive and intellectual skills. Ms. Charlotte, unlike Ms. Sandy, did not indicate her beliefs about any particular developmental area. Ms. Charlotte's comments pointed to her beliefs in the connection between social and emotional readiness, mastery of academic skills, and school success. Ms. Charlotte explained:

Being ready for kindergarten means preparing the children socially and emotionally, but also academically, cognitively, intellectually in all the different

areas to get them ready. The academic part is necessary if the kids are going to do well when they get to kindergarten.

In sum, theme T2: Readiness is a Cognitive Ability, emphasized teachers' beliefs that children with higher levels of reading and mathematical abilities are considered ready for kindergarten. Teachers placed less importance on these skills, but indicated these cognitive skills were necessary for school readiness. As noted earlier, cognitive skills, language skills, and social and emotional skills are all portions the NEGP's (1995) five domains of readiness.

**Theme T3. School-Family Communication and Family Support.** A third theme materialized from the data when teachers were asked about strategies used to promote readiness in students. Teachers noted that readiness appeared to be fostered among students when 1) teachers communicated with parents, and 2) when parents worked at home with students. School and family communications were emphasized as a factor that teachers felt aided in promoting school readiness, in conjunction with parents' support at home. These two concepts were stated emphatically in teacher responses to the question about strategies they used to promote readiness in students. Teachers noted the connection between parents working with children at home, and children's work in school.

The artifacts collected at the Head Start centers corroborated the statements teachers made concerning strategies they used to work with parents. Teachers' comments referenced forms used to invite and involve parents to be engaged in their child's learning and school readiness. Examples of these forms are the Parent

Conference Form (Appendix F), the Home Visit Form (Appendix G), the Weekly Parent Newsletter (Appendix K), and the DIAL-4 Parent Questionnaire (Appendix J).

Additionally, teachers provided artifacts of assignments or reading projects to complete with children. An example of the Family Project Assignment and the Reading Ideas to do at Home sheets can be found in Appendix L and N respectively. All of the artifacts described represent examples of tools teachers used to help engage parents in promoting readiness in children. For example, Ms. Sandy in the Bloomfield Head Start Center in Pitt County discussed communication with parents as a crucial need for preparing children for school, but that parents had to actually work with their children at home.

Ms. Sandy stated the following:

My best strategy is communication. You have to have open communication with your parents for you to be successful with the child's learning. But, it depends on the family. You have to talk to the parents, and you can tell the ones that do things at home and the ones who don't. The children also come tell me. The children would say, "I did this at home," or they'll say, "My mom wouldn't do this with me." I can see it in their learning, too and what the children do in the classroom. We send home lots of things for the parents to do with their children, and to keep them informed about what we are doing in the classroom. But, the parents have to read the information, like in the newsletters or the homework activity sheets we send home. Sometimes, it's really hard.

Ms. Charlotte, the teacher in Pitt County, Harrison Head Start Center, revealed similar ideas when asked about strategies used to promote school readiness. Ms.



Charlotte implied that children who had parents that worked with them at home did better and were better prepared for school. Ms. Charlotte noted the following:

We sit down every day, we read stories. We try to get on so that the kids are not just sitting there. We are just trying everyday to get that learning in and sometimes it has to be really quick! When we get to talk to the parents about what the kids are doing, it really helps. We communicate with interested parents as they're picking up or dropping off and we tell them what's going on. We stuff their backpacks with great information about what we are doing at school, newsletters, and things they could attend and be a part of. The parents that care work with the kids at home. It shows when the kids come back to school. You can tell the parents were working with them at home. I think teachers talking to parents is one of the biggest factors that gets them to help their kids be ready for school.

Ms. Betty in the Edison Head Start Center in Oxford County divulged that communication with parents was the most important strategy she used to promote school readiness in her students. Ms. Betty implied that communication without follow-through from parents was not effective in promoting student readiness. Ms. Betty said this about strategies she used to promote school readiness:

Communication. Talking with the parent. Explaining things like saying “well, you could do this at home to help them to build up this certain skill”. The parents are very open. I have a very open communication with all my parents. I speak with the parents every time they come in. We do home visits. We have parent

staff conferences that we have to do. We have parent meetings and in the beginning of the year, we have the parent questionnaire (DIAL-4). We also do the Class Dojo where we can communicate with the parents that way. But no matter how much we communicate with the parents, if they don't work with their kids, it won't do much.

In summary, theme T3: School-Family Communication and Family Support, described teachers' feelings that communication with parents about children's progress seemed to be the strategy that worked best in helping to prepare children for kindergarten. Some of the strategies teachers used to communicate with parents included sending paperwork home with children, but also face-to-face communication with parents as they pick up or drop children off to the school building. One teacher specified her use of technology to communicate with parents through the Class Dojo application. All the teachers indicated the importance of direct communication with parents, but also suggested that other forms of communications could be used, but are only effective if parents are interested and willing to work with children at home to help promote readiness.

While the many strategies employed by teachers to communicate with parents were similar, (such as communication through various newsletters, and information sent home about school events and activities) differences in teacher communication included the use of technology and the emphasis on very open communication and a strong relationship between the family and the school. The differences noted in teacher

communication practices may be an important factor in increasing the readiness levels of children in the early childhood education setting.

### **Themes from School Leaders**

**Theme L1: Readiness is Multidimensional.** School leaders were asked to share their views and experiences about readiness. One of the themes that emerged revealed that school leaders believed that readiness was a multidimensional concept. Leaders discussed readiness being comprised of many parts, including social and emotional readiness, motor skills, a desire to learn, and academic skills. These descriptions of readiness from school leaders were directly in line with the different domains of readiness presented by the NEGP (1995).

As previously noted, the social and emotional domain (in general) refers to the child's ability to exhibit self-control, to relate to others, and to form and sustain friendships. The motor skills development domain, as described by the NEGP (1995) includes gross motor skills, such as walking, and running, fine motor skills such as buttoning and using scissors, sensorimotor skills for vision, hearing, and touching, and oral motor skills such as movements to produce speech. Approaches to learning, which includes children's curiosity, creativity, independence, cooperativeness, and persistence are important for early learning and development (NEGP, 1995). The cognitive domain refers to the child's physical knowledge, logic-mathematical skills, social-conventional knowledge, and cognitive competencies.

School leaders provided specific comments about their experiences regarding readiness. Jade, the school leader in the Bloomfield Head Start Center in Pitt County

described readiness as having many parts that enable children to advance into the next stage of their academic careers. She said readiness means:

being ready to take on that next level in life, making sure that you have the basic fundamentals, ready to advance into, you know, Kindergarten. It means knowing how to sit and listen, it means having those basic skills like math and reading. It means wanting to learn. So, when we try to accomplish that here, you know, make sure you have, like, your fine and your gross motor skills, you know, your social and emotional development, and you're ready.

Ms. Raquel at the Oxford County Head Start center revealed her beliefs that readiness encompassed the whole child. This view of readiness corresponded with the Head Start philosophy of readiness, and with the depictions of readiness noted by other center leaders. Ms. Raquel observed the following about readiness:

Oh gosh. Being ready for kindergarten, just the whole child, you have to be ready emotionally, physically, mentally, academically. There's so many things that you have to do to be ready to go to school because school's a big place. There's a lot of different faces there, a lot of kids there, a lot of rules, a lot of changes as you get older. Here, I think we spoon-feed them a little bit to get them ready. I'm so excited that when they leave here. They're excited about going to public school.

Ms. Heather, the school leader located at the Harrison Head Start Center in Pitt County described similar beliefs about readiness. Ms. Heather noted that readiness incorporated a multitude of skills and abilities that children needed to be prepared for the kindergarten

classroom, including social skills, language skills, motor skills and academic skills. Ms. Heather explained this about what readiness meant to her:

Being able to sit. Being able to function with other children. Being able to function as part of the classroom. Being able to communicate their needs. Being able to keep up with the academic rigor of a kindergarten classroom. Being able to cut and paste and other activities that are necessary. There are so many things that go into being ready for kindergarten. – it's not just one thing, it's a host of things.

To summarize, Theme L1: Readiness is Multidimensional, school leaders' perceptions and definitions of readiness incorporated aspects of readiness from the five dimensions of readiness suggested by the National Education Goals Panel. All of these descriptions contained a mix of skills and attributes consistent with a multidimensional view of readiness.

An ecological perspective on children's school readiness indicates that children are influenced by the interactions and relationships they have in the environments that surround them. Based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), children's development does not occur in isolation. Instead, development occurs through the many interactions and relationships children form in different environments that influence their development. School leaders' views that readiness is multidimensional incorporated the understanding that children's experiences at home, school, and in the community contributed to their growth, development, and school readiness.

**Theme L2: Strategies to Engage and Involve Parents.** The second theme that emerged from the data indicated that school leaders used a variety of strategies when working with parents, to get parents more engaged and involved. In response to questions about strategies that school leaders used to actively engage parents, families, and community members in preparing children for school, school leaders described a mix of communication strategies and activities used.

The strategies discussed by school leaders can be classified into Epstein’s (1995) six types of parent involvement framework. Table 4.4 illustrates Epstein’s parent involvement framework and the strategies discussed by school leaders to increase parent involvement.

Table 4.4

*Comparison of Epstein’s Parent Involvement Framework and School Leader’s Parent Involvement Strategies*

Parent Involvement Framework	Definition	Examples from School Leaders
1. Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent training and school readiness workshops offered at the Head Start center</li> </ul>
2. Communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent conferences, newsletters, calendars, informational notices</li> </ul>
3. Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent help and support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents helping at school by reading to students; arts &amp; crafts activities; spending time and sharing with students</li> </ul>
4. Learning at Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework and other special assignments and materials sent home for parents to complete with</li> </ul>

	other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.	child
5. Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home visits, parent conferences</li> </ul>
6. Collaborating with the Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community speakers, Local librarian reading to children; Donuts, muffins, French toast, grits</li> </ul>

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The interactions between the school leaders, families, and community members were evident and exemplified the relationships and interactions noted in the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem environments in Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979). Similar strategies in each category were used at each center, but school leaders noted that even with a number of activities and engagement strategies, parent involvement at home and at the Head Start center was low or lacking.

Examples of activities that school leaders noted during interviews corresponded with the artifacts collected from teachers and school leaders at the Head Start centers. School leaders provided examples of parent meeting invitations and agendas (Appendix E), and described inviting parents to school events such as parent conferences (Appendix F), and going on home visits (Appendix G) to connect with family members.

Raquel, at the Edison Head Start Center in Oxford County, gave the following example of strategies used at her center, and the level of parents’ and community involvement:

With parents, like I said, we do the home visits, the conferences, the programs and whatnot here at school, but we have teachers that do *Make it Take it Days*, where the parents come and they do arts and crafts with the kids. We even have where parents come and read with the kids. Even just that little five minutes in the morning to let them be a part of their child's education. Those children, they're really proud when their parent is the one that comes and reads to the class. We do that kind of thing. We try to do muffins for mom. French toast for fathers, grits for grandparents. Just those kinds of things to get people to come in and be involved and take a part.

Ms. Raquel continued to discuss some positive and negative factors she observed about parent involvement:

We have a lot that come every time and we have some that work and can't come. Then we have some that just don't come at all. You can't make them come. It's difficult sometimes, but we reach out as much as we can to have the parents get involved. I really wish the parents would be more involved. Even read the calendars and information we send home with the kids. But it's hard and we can't force them to come in or be interested.

Like some of the other school leaders, Heather, in the Harrison Head Start Center in Pitt County, discussed strategies she used to engage parents and promote readiness in children. Heather's strategies included inviting families and community members to the school for special events and refreshments.



We do a lot in the school to get parents in and involved. We have days where parents come in and read, or special days where we invite families and community members in for donuts or other foods. But now it seems like we get more grandparents playing the role of parents. So, it just fluctuates. It's just different.

Noted in Ms. Heather's discussion was the reference to younger parents, or grandparents taking on the role of the parent:

Overall experience with the parents is good, but they could be more involved. But, you know, sometimes, it's kind of half-hearted. Like, you can get them to show up certain times. But, to get them to be consistent, sometimes, that's hard. Some of the parents are willing to come in or get involved because they may have another child that's already in school, so they know what is expected. But then, when you get those that, this is their first kid, they don't do as much. It's really not what we want here and we know the kids would do better if the parents would just get involved!

Ms. Jade, from the Pitt County, Bloomfield Head Start center, supported what was noted by the other school leaders about the numerous activities and events at the Head Start center, but indicated there was minimal participation from parents. This seemed to be a consistent concern voiced by school leaders. Ms. Jade's account of strategies used to engage and involve parents included strategies found in many of Epstein's (1995) parent involvement framework. Ms. Jade indicated that the purpose of using various strategies to engage and involve parents in school events was to foster relationships with families

and to increase readiness in students. Involving parents in school activities has also been shown to increase parent understanding of the needs of the students (Epstein et al., 2009). The relationships between the school leaders, families, and community members have direct and indirect effects on student's readiness for kindergarten. Ms. Jade remarked:

Head Start provides different activities for the parents. At this center we do a School Readiness Workshop with the parents. And they're able to go to that School Readiness Workshop and it'll help them to know what their child should know. They're all invited to all these different events. We even have a workshop in our curriculum that the parents are invited to, but you know, there is very low attendance.

We also use the library. The library comes out, the library lady comes out once a month and she reads to the children. She goes from classroom to classroom and reads to all the children. We do the parent meetings. In the parent meetings that we have once a month, they invite community people to come in and speak to the parents on different subjects like breast cancer awareness, child abuse prevention, domestic violence. We have different community people come in and speak to our parents about those topics.

Sometimes what works is whenever their child is gonna be doing some artwork or something that they can come in and see. We have some parents that will get involved then. They'll send their child's homework in and we'll display it in the classroom. You may have two out of eighteen or twenty children to bring their stuff back.

We also have a family advocate here and she is great. This year she tried to do an Egg Hunt and we had a snowflake gallery. She had the kid's artwork all out here and, "Come see your kids artwork." In December we had the kids perform. So the parents really came to that one because their kids were gonna sing. She tried to do some stuff like that which did help some of our numbers, but you can only do so much. She tried to help get them in here. We try really hard to get the parents involved, but we could only do so much. It's really sad.

In summary, Theme L2: Strategies to Engage and Involve Parents, emphasized the strategies that school leaders used in their particular Head Start center to get parents, families, and community members involved in preparing children for school. Strategies involved different parenting workshops, student centered events, and events that were led by community members (such as the local librarian), and were consistent with Epstein's (1995) six types of parent involvement. While there were some positive comments, school leaders discussed the need for more involvement on the part of parents and families to be a part of their child's learning. The importance of parent involvement in promoting school readiness and increasing student achievement has been widely researched (Epstein, 2005a; Epstein et al., 2009).

In addition to the parent involvement strategies described by school leaders, the interactions and relationships evident between school leaders, parents, and community members were emphasized in this theme. The interactions and relationships between school leaders, parents, and community members have direct and indirect effects on

children's readiness, and are an important part of understanding the ecology that influences the beliefs and behaviors of these groups.

**Theme L3: Parent's Understanding of Readiness Impacts their Behaviors.**

The third theme that emerged from discussions with school leaders indicated that they believed parents' understandings about readiness affected what activities parents chose to partake in, and ultimately children's preparedness for school. This theme is supported by research from Stipek et al., (1992), which emphasized the notion that parents' beliefs influence their actions, and the activities they participate in with their children.

School leaders reflected on the value parents placed on the education provided at the Head Start center, and on parents' lack of understanding of readiness. School leaders correlated parents' beliefs of the importance of school readiness to their engagement and involvement in their child's education. School leaders indicated that communication with parents was an important way to keep parents informed and involved, but only if parents were willing to engage with their children.

Ms. Jade, in the Bloomfield Head Start Center, surmised that parents' understandings of readiness are influenced by their own experiences and by the people they talk to. School leaders' beliefs about how parents' views of readiness are formed corresponded with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) which stated that the relationships individuals have within the different layers of environments work together to influence how they think and grow. Ms. Jade noted that parents acted according to their beliefs when it came to preparing children for school. Ms. Jade discussed:

Parents don't seem to know what readiness is, so they go by their own experience, and whoever they talk to. I think in general some parents want to make sure their children are ready. And that might mean to them that they have to make sure that their children can write their name and count. And then other parents, they just, they're not engaged with their children at all because it's of no value to them. You can tell. You can always tell the ones that work with their children and the ones that do not. The sad part is that if the parents, they don't understand what readiness is, they don't do anything to prepare their child.

Ms. Jade's comments emphasized her concern about parents with a lack of understanding of readiness, and how these parents are promoting readiness at home. Ms. Jade's concerns are shared by other school leaders who voice similar observations. In the Pitt County, Harrison Head Start Center, Ms. Heather disclosed that she believed parents did not truly understand what readiness was, and therefore did not take school readiness seriously. Additionally, Ms. Heather's comments indicated that parents believed the Head Start center was a day care center, not an early childhood education center. Ms. Heather associated parents' lack of understanding of readiness and the Head Start center program with their low involvement at home and in school. Ms. Heather noted the following:

I feel like some parents, like they don't understand- they don't really get the meaning of what school readiness is- until they actually get into Kindergarten, because then that's when they start taking their learning seriously. But by then, the kids are already behind. They don't do anything at home with the kids, and they don't take them anywhere. Like, right now, they think – she's little, and so

they don't take it seriously. They just take it like, you know, all they do here is, they come and eat and play outside. So we are always asking - you know, to come in and, you know, at least come in and sit with the kids to read to them. But, sometimes, it's hard to get parents to understand. Because, that plays a major part in a kid's learning.

Ms. Heather went on to discuss her beliefs that parents' personal educational experiences influenced their beliefs about readiness and the Head Start center. Additionally, Ms. Heather noted her efforts to help parents understand readiness and how readiness is promoted at the Head Start center. Ms. Heather stated:

I mean, because, not only are you building life skills, you're building those social connections, you know, and they don't understand the importance of that. We have a lot of parents here that just think of this right here as a day care. That's probably what *their* experience was – they were in daycare... and so they don't see the value in doing educational things with their kids at this age. So, and we have to tell them, like, you know, we're not a day care. Our job is really to make sure that your child is ready day one for Kindergarten.

Ms. Raquel at the Oxford County Head Start center had similar experiences about parents' understandings of school readiness. Ms. Raquel noted that parents did not have a clear understanding of what readiness was, and like other school leaders, Ms. Raquel indicated that parents did not comprehend the purpose of the Head Start center in preparing their children for school. Ms. Raquel remarked this:

A lot of times, when parents come here and whatnot, they don't understand what we are doing here. I tell people we are an educational program. We care for your child while they're here, but we want to teach them and want them to learn. I've been here doing this a long time, and there is one thing I know – parents make the difference. Whatever the parents do affects the child. If the parents believe they need to do certain things to prepare their child, then they will, and that child will be way ahead of the others. Sometimes it's just reading to them, or taking them places. Sometimes its asking about their day and going over what they learned in school. It all depends on what the parents think about readiness and how they act with their children.

To summarize, Theme L3: Parent's Understanding of Readiness Impacts Their Behaviors, school leaders discussed their beliefs about parents' understandings of readiness and the role of the Head Start center in preparing children for school. School leaders observed that parents' understandings about readiness affected the activities they chose to participate in with their children and the educational decisions they made. School leaders also remarked that parents' personal school experiences played a role in their beliefs and understandings of readiness and the role of the Head Start center. In addition to this, school leaders remarked that the activities parents participated in at home with their children affected the child's readiness for the kindergarten classroom.

From an ecological perspective, parents' beliefs and understanding of readiness were embedded in their environments and in the relationships they formed with their children, teachers, and school leaders. The influences of families and schools on each

other, and children's readiness levels, are exemplified in this theme as school leaders discussed their experiences working with parents to increase readiness.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I presented thick, rich descriptions of the interviews conducted with 11 participants who either had children in a Head Start Center, or, were teachers or school leaders of a Head Start center. The study was guided by the overarching research question: *How do Head Start parents, teachers, and school leaders perceive and promote school readiness?* The research question was addressed by conducting semi-structured interviews at the Head Start centers involved in the study.

Parents' beliefs about readiness were explored, as well as the beliefs of teachers and school leaders in the Head Start centers. Eight major themes emerged from the study that were related to the research question. Parents, teachers, and school leaders had different perceptions and experiences about readiness, and provided details to support their beliefs. Two themes became apparent from the data gathered from parent participants. The first theme included the beliefs of parents that readiness was a cognitive ability. The abilities noted included reading, writing, and mathematics. Another theme that surfaced from the parents' data included readiness being promoted by home support and routines in place for children.

Three major themes were revealed from teacher data. Theme T1 indicated that teachers largely perceived readiness as the ability to sit, listen, and follow directions. Teachers specified that children needed to be able to sit quietly, follow multi-step directions (among other skills) and also to manage their own behaviors in order to listen



to instruction. This theme from teachers supported the findings of the pilot study I conducted in the fall of 2016 (Desmangles, 2016) that teachers viewed readiness in terms of self control and the ability to follow directions. Theme T2 reflected teachers' perceptions that readiness was evident in children with higher levels of cognitive skills and abilities. Theme T3 suggested that teachers viewed communication between school and family, and family support as one of the strategies that works best in preparing children for school. Teachers discussed the importance of regular communication with parents to discuss how children are progressing.

Three major themes became apparent from discussions with school leaders. Firstly, Theme L1 revealed that school leaders described readiness as being a multidimensional concept. School leaders stated many different dimensions that they described as readiness, such as: social and emotional readiness, cognitive skills and motor development. These dimensions were tied to the five domains of readiness as suggested by the NEGP (1995). Theme L2 focused on strategies that school leaders used to engage parents, families and community members. School leaders used a variety of strategies at each center, but implied that more engagement was necessary from parents. Theme L3 exposed school leaders' perceptions that children's readiness is affected by parents' views of what readiness is. Additionally, school leaders observed that the activities parents participated in with their children had an impact on the child's readiness for kindergarten.

All the emerged themes presented in Chapter four revealed parents', teachers', and school leaders' perceptions of readiness, and how these groups of participants

promoted readiness. The environmental and social contexts embedded in parents', teachers', and school leaders' beliefs about readiness were illuminated through interview questions that were intended to expose these underlying influences. I will use Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory (1979) to discuss these findings further in Chapter five. Additionally, in Chapter five, I will present my interpretations of these findings and also my recommendations for future practice and research surrounding the topic of school readiness.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Introduction

School readiness is an important issue that has gained national prominence with the adoption of the national goal that all children will start school ready to learn (NAEYC, 2004). It is well known that school readiness is a predictor of children's success in school (Duncan et al., 2007) and that children who enter kindergarten with higher levels of school readiness have more successful academic and social outcomes than those who are less prepared (Duncan et al., 2007, 2010). Understanding the readiness views of parents, teachers, and school leaders can be helpful in promoting readiness among students in early childhood centers. While perspectives on readiness are important, current research on readiness views often only reflect the perceptions of teachers in early childhood centers (Graue, 1993a). Literature that investigates the beliefs and perspectives of parents and early childhood school leaders is extremely limited (Mujis et al., 2008; Stamopoulos, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to use an ecological perspective to examine the beliefs of parents, teachers, and school leaders surrounding the concept of school readiness, and the strategies these individuals use to promote readiness. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) emphasized the significance of the interactions with changing environments in shaping human development. In this study, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate these views and

beliefs. This chapter includes a brief summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, and an explanation of how these findings are related to literature. Additionally, a discussion about the implications for future research and practice, and my recommendations and conclusions are contained within this chapter.

### **Summary of the Study**

In this study, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979, 1995) was used as a means of understanding how parents', teachers', and school leaders' beliefs about readiness were influenced by the relationships and interactions within their surrounding environments, and personal experiences. These interactions, which include relationships such as those between parents and children, teachers and parents, and school leaders, parents, and community members, affect a child's capacity to learn (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

The importance of understanding parents', teachers', and school leaders' views of readiness stems from the notion that beliefs inform behavior. Parents' beliefs inform the choices they make and the activities they engage in with their children (Barbarin et al. 2008; Graue, 1992). These beliefs also impact the relationships they have with teachers and school leaders, and influence parents' levels of engagement (Barbarin et al., 2008). Bronfenbrenner (1986) noted the importance of parents' beliefs and their influences on children's learning.

Teachers' beliefs impact their teaching and classroom practices (Kagan, 1992). Moreover, teachers' beliefs about readiness impact their relationships with parents. The interactions and relationships between parents, teachers, and school leaders both directly

and indirectly impact school readiness. Therefore, the beliefs of teachers and school leaders are equally as important as those of parents, as teachers, and school leaders communicate with and support families in preparing children for school.

Bronfenbrenner, (1979) emphasized the significance of the cooperation and mutual understanding between all stakeholders who play a role in raising and educating a child.

This multicase study was conducted in order to answer the following research question and focus questions: How do Head Start parents, teachers and school leaders perceive and promote school readiness? Six focus questions helped to answer this research question. The focus questions were as follows:

1. How do parents perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
2. What strategies do parents use to promote readiness for children entering kindergarten?
3. How do early childhood teachers perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
4. How do early childhood teachers promote readiness for the children in their classroom?
5. How do early childhood school leaders perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
6. How do early childhood leaders promote readiness for children entering kindergarten, through collaboration with parents and community members?

To answer the research question, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 participants. The participants included five parents, three teachers,

and three school leaders from three Head Start centers in a state located in the southeastern United States. The interview questions and focus questions were designed to explore their beliefs and perceptions concerning readiness, and the ways readiness is promoted in children. The multicase study design allowed me to conduct in-depth interviews with the three particular groups within the three Head Start centers for a richer discussion.

Eleven interview transcripts were analyzed, and eight major themes emerged from the data. For the parent group, two major themes emerged. The field notes and artifacts I collected from participants during the interviews were consistent with the themes that emerged from the interview data. Theme P1 described readiness as a cognitive ability. Parents expressed this in terms of abilities in reading, writing, and mathematics. Theme P2 associated readiness with family support, and with consistency and routines.

In the teacher participant group, three major themes were apparent. Theme T1 depicted readiness mainly as being able to sit, listen, and follow directions. Teachers attributed these skills to being socially and emotionally ready, one the five dimensions of readiness proposed by the National Education Goals Panel (1995). Theme T2 focused on teachers' beliefs that readiness was in part a cognitive ability, or skill, similar to the theme that emerged from parents. Theme T3 revealed teachers' perceptions that readiness was promoted when there was an increased level of school and family communication, and family support for the child.

Themes from school leaders included Theme L1, readiness is multidimensional. School leaders noted that readiness encompasses more than the general knowledge the

child possesses, but also includes social and emotional readiness, motor skills, and academic skills. These descriptions of readiness from school leaders aligned with the different domains of readiness presented by NEGP (1995). The second theme that emerged from the data focused on readiness strategies used by school leaders, and parent engagement as a key component of promoting readiness. Consistent with past research studies, school leaders have indicated a link between parent engagement and student success on many levels (Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010; Knisely, 2011). School leaders discussed similar strategies at each center, but noted that parent involvement was low. The third theme from school leader data (Theme L3) suggested that readiness in children is affected by parents' understandings of what readiness means. School leaders noted parents' understandings about readiness affected the activities parents elected to take part in, and their children's preparedness for school.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

To answer the research question *How do Head Start parents, teachers and school leaders perceive and promote school readiness*, this section is organized according to the focus questions generated by the overarching research question. Themes that emerged from the analyzed data will be discussed according to the literature and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979).

Bronfenbrenner's Theory (1979) emphasized that child development occurs within the different layers of a system of interconnected environments. These different layers of environment influence what parents, teachers, and school leaders perceive as

readiness, and how these groups interact with each other. Moreover, these environmental systems include processes that are not independent of other environments and settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The context of readiness was explored according to Bronfenbrenner's theory, and was seen as embedded in the perceptions and beliefs of the participants, their actions, and their environments.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and the embedded context in which readiness is exemplified can be seen in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

*Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and the Embedded Context of Family, School and Community*

Research Question: How do parents, teachers, and school leaders perceive and promote school readiness?	Microsystem: The system closest to the developing child and the one in which they have direct contact.	Mesosystem: <i>A system of microsystems</i> that includes interrelations among the different structures where the developing child actively participates.	Exosystem: structures such as parental work places, mass media, government agencies, and other institutions that are an extension of the mesosystem which impact the child.	Macrosystem: The larger and broader context of the culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems	Cronosystem: The dimension of time that incorporates changes and transitions that occur during the child's life.
Focus Questions:  How do parents perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?  What strategies do parents use to promote readiness for children	Parents expressed the values held by their families, and the structures they had in place for preparing their child for school. Some parents took advantage of resources within their communities that helped to	Parents demonstrated positive relationships with teachers and school leaders on this level, and worked to ensure work sent home from school was completed in a timely fashion. Parent participation in a 'mom' group.	Parents impacted by school and district policies and procedures concerning attendance and acceptable behavior. Parents also worked toward the reading and kindergarten expectations they believed	Beliefs about readiness informed by the cultural environment and parent social experiences, including past schooling experience. The economy and family SES influenced parents' ability to participate in a	Personal experiences with school, and family events that affected parent perception of readiness, and activities they participated in with children



entering kindergarten?	promote readiness in children.		necessary for readiness.	Head Start Center Program that targets low-income families	
<p>Focus Questions:</p> <p>How do preschool teachers perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?</p> <p>How do preschool teachers promote readiness for the children in their classroom?</p>	Teachers' beliefs and perceptions of readiness influence what they do and how they teach in the classroom. Also, "teachers' beliefs serve as filters for their knowledge bases and will ultimately affect their actions"	Teachers noted open communication between teacher and parent, and home visits to promote parent engagement.	Policies originating from the Corporate Head Start Center affected curriculum choices, school resources, community involvement and teacher interaction with students, families, and community members. On this level of environment, teachers' beliefs and perceptions of readiness were directly impacted by structures in the social system surrounding them.	Teachers' perceptions imbedded in their concern about the importance of school readiness, and the roles and responsibilities of teachers, parents and community members in promoting readiness.	Teacher values and concerns about the changing nature of kindergarten, and children's long term success in the school system.
<p>Focus Questions:</p> <p>How do preschool leaders perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?</p> <p>How do preschool leaders promote readiness for children entering</p>	School leaders' views that readiness as a multidimensional concept was evident in the relationships they had with the children, and the families at the Head Start Center. School leaders not only worked to promote readiness in children, they also forged relationships	Evident in the influence of the Head Start Center on children's readiness levels.	Policy changes in the Head Start Program that affect funding and financial assistance, learning standards, staff qualifications, program participation and other important aspects of Head Start affect the quality of the services	The study exposed school leaders' perceptions about readiness both influenced and were influenced by the greater culture of the parents who frequented the school building.	Represented in the beliefs and perceptions of school leaders who witnessed the evolving nature of the academic demands of early childhood centers and kindergarten classrooms.

kindergarten through collaboration with parents and community members?	with parents and families who had direct contact and the most influence on children.		offered, and school leaders' experiences with parents and community members.		
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Bronfenbrenner's Theory (1979) emphasized relationships and interactions between people and objects in different environments that influence human development. While parents, teachers, and school leaders in this study were located in the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem environments respectively, the findings suggest there were very limited interactions between these groups.

**Parents' Perceptions of Readiness**

How do parents perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten? The Head Start parent group data revealed one major theme for this focus question. The results of the study indicated that parents described their understandings of readiness as children's mastery of skills such as the ability to write their names, count to 10, and recite the ABC's. This view of readiness is supported by the literature as the traditional view of readiness that incorporates cognitive skills and abilities as readiness factors.

Additionally, this finding is consistent with past research on parent perception of school readiness (Thompson & Raikes, 2007; Desmangles, 2016). Cognitive skills and abilities are also noted in NEGP's (1995) five dimensions of readiness. One parent expressed tangible skills such as "writing their name, colors, counting, reading simple words, sight words" as what it means to be ready for school. Other descriptions of readiness from parents incorporated the same words or phrases such as "knowing his ABC's" and

“writing her name”. There were no apparent differences in the perceptions of parents across the three Head Start centers.

Parents’ beliefs about readiness influenced their actions, and influenced student readiness in concrete ways. Parents relied on their subjective feelings and observations to make a determination about their children’s readiness. The observations parents made about their child’s school readiness influenced the strategies they used to promote readiness at home. Parents who believed that readiness was a set of cognitive skills, and who worked with their children to promote readiness, mainly worked to help children acquire the cognitive skills they felt were appropriate for kindergarten. Therefore, it is easy to assume that the skills parents did not feel were necessary for kindergarten readiness were not as readily promoted. Being that parents and teachers have differing views about what school readiness is (Barbarin et al., 2008; Thompson & Raikes, 2007), the strategies that parents chose to promote school readiness skills at home impacted their child’s readiness, and indirectly impacted the instruction in the classroom.

### **Strategies Parents Use to Promote Readiness**

What strategies do parents use to promote readiness for children entering kindergarten? The results of this study suggested that parents promoted readiness in children by instituting a set pattern of routines at home, and being supportive at home by helping with homework and activities sent home by the school. In general, parents believed that establishing a set of routines at home facilitated children’s learning and development. The routines discussed by parents included having a set bedtime, reading with children, and helping with educational activities. Additionally, the results of the

study indicated that parents believed helping children with work sent home from the Head Start center promoted children's readiness for kindergarten.

Research on parent activities to promote readiness indicates the importance of parent engagement and involvement in activities that increase literacy, mathematical, and social and emotional skills. Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) asserted that the importance of the first five years of a child's life, and the development of cognitive and social and emotional skills. Epstein (2001) specified that parent involvement impacts students' academic achievement, and family and community involvement is key for development. Stipek et al (1992) noted a strong relationship between parents' readiness beliefs and their behaviors at home. Beliefs influence what parents do, and how they interact with their children, teachers, and school leaders.

### **Ecological Systems Theory and Parents' Perceptions**

According to Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979), the microsystem level of environment is where the family is situated. Examples of the immediate settings in this level of environment include the home, the school, and the workplace. As parents are the primary source of development, and are known to have the most influence on preparing a child for school (Bronfenbrenner, 2004), interactions on this level are crucial to the developing child. Bronfenbrenner's environmental layers and the relationships and interactions within each environment can be seen in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

*Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and the Interactions Between the Environments and the Developing Person*

Environment	Where Interactions and Relationships may Occur	Examples of Types of Interactions and Relationships
Microsystem	Immediate environment such as the home, school, neighborhood, church where there is direct contact.	Direct effects on developing person. Relationships with family members, friends, classmates, teachers, caregivers
Mesosystem	Interrelationships between the microsystems that developing person has direct contact with	Direct and indirect effects on the developing person. Relationship between the home and the school (teacher and parent), the home and neighborhood, church
Exosystem	Broader institutions and social systems such as mass media, government agencies, school boards	Indirect effects on the developing person – for example, school district policies or curriculum choices
Macrosystem	The larger overarching patterns of the culture, such as political, educational, and economic systems where the individual lives	Indirect effects on the developing person – for example socio-economic conditions or changes in the economy
Chronosystem	The dimension of time and events that occur within the developing person's lifetime	Direct and indirect effects. Examples of changes include birthdays, changes in family structure such as parental marriage/divorce, death

The results of the study indicated that parent participants demonstrated their beliefs and perceptions of readiness on this level by expressing the values held by their families, and the structures they had in place for preparing their child for school. The outcomes of the study also indicated that parents took advantage of resources within their

communities that helped to promote readiness in children – like going to the park or the children’s museum. Noted in the data was the general importance parents placed on the level of readiness their child needed to be ready for kindergarten.

The mesosystem level of environment, as described by Bronfenbrenner (1977), includes the relationships and interactions between the different parts of the microsystem. This would include the relationship between the parents, and teachers and school leaders, and their involvement in school. These relationships have an impact on the developing child in either a positive or negative way, and influence the child’s growth and development. The study revealed that parents demonstrated positive relationships with teachers and school leaders on this level, and also worked to ensure work sent home was completed in a timely fashion.

Parent relationships with other parents, and involvement in activities outside of the home are evident on this level of environment and can have an impact on children’s readiness. As noted in Chapter Four, one parent emphasized learning through a “mom” group she participated in which included friends, parents, and grandparents. In the “mom” group, the parents shared their thoughts about strategies to increase school readiness. For example, the parent discussed the following:

I’m in a mom group and we have play dates and stuff like that. We just learned things to work at with at home with the kids to help prepare them for kindergarten. It’s like a home schooling, but I don’t home school. It’s really just a bunch of moms that come together and collaborate thoughts and stuff like that.

Some kids are not as advanced in school as others. So we just kind of, hey what works for you? What works for you? What are you doing? What are you doing?

The exosystem layer of environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) includes structures such as parental work places, mass media, government agencies, and other institutions that are an extension of the mesosystem which impact the child. The outcome of the study implied that parents' beliefs of readiness were exemplified in this layer of environment as parents adhered to school and district policies and procedures concerning attendance and acceptable behavior. The findings of the study also indicated that parents worked toward the reading and kindergarten expectations they believed were necessary for the growth and development of their child. Additionally, the results of the study suggested that working parents had limited time to be involved in school based activities or to volunteer on a consistent basis. As noted previously, parent involvement is a key factor impacting children's success in school (Epstein, 2001).

The macrosystem layer of environment is where Bronfenbrenner (1979) noted the existence of the larger and broader context of the culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems. The results of the study revealed that parents' beliefs about readiness were informed by their cultural environment in which they lived, and their social experiences, including past schooling experiences. Moreover, the economy and family SES influenced parents' abilities to participate in a Head Start center program that targets low-income families, and families considered at risk. These systems – economic, social, educational, cultural, and political played a role in shaping the perceptions and experiences parents had about readiness.

The chronosystem, known as the dimension of time that incorporates changes and transitions that occur during the child's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), was also evident in how parents perceived readiness. Parents described their personal experiences with school and family events that affected their perception of readiness, and activities they participated in with their child. Some of these experiences and events included moving, getting married or divorced, having other children, or being unable to participate in activities because of incarceration or lack of funding.

### **Early Childhood Teachers' Perceptions of Readiness**

How do early childhood teachers perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten? The outcomes of this study revealed that teachers in all three Head Start centers primarily discussed readiness as being able to sit, listen and follow directions. The results of the study also exposed early childhood teachers' beliefs that pre-academic skills were less important, but necessary for success in kindergarten. Early childhood teachers' placed more emphasis on behavioral skills to define their perceptions of school readiness and skills necessary to function in kindergarten. This view of readiness from teachers is consistent with research from Lin, Lawrence and Gorrell, (2003). One teacher clearly noted:

It's mostly being ready to sit and learn. Readiness is more social. Like more being able to sit because as you sit you can learn, you can process, but if you are not sitting there is no way that you can learn – and neither can anyone else.

It is not surprising that early childhood teachers noted their beliefs about readiness to chiefly reflect social behaviors. Teachers indicated that a students' abilities to follow



classroom routines, rules, and directions on a consistent basis, and cooperating and working well with others was a key to readiness. However, while it is clear that the skills described by teachers (sitting, listening, and following directions) are important for school success, teachers incorrectly labeled these skills as *social and emotional development* skills.

Many teachers discussed specific skills such as sitting, listening and following directions, and attributed these skills to social and emotional readiness. Though these skills are clearly important for student learning, sitting, listening and following directions are not skills included in the social and emotional development domain. Social and emotional development is one of the five dimensions of readiness discussed by the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP, 1995). According to NEGP, social development refers to how ready children are to interact with others in the environment, and their ability to control their emotions and to make meaningful friendships with others. Emotional development includes children's self concept, a positive self-esteem and the ability to interpret and express feelings. The general definition of social and emotional development given by the NEGP (1995) is

Emotional and social development, though entwined conceptually and practically, can and need to be separated for this discussion. Thus, this report shall regard emotional characteristics as those that involve the individual's feeling states regarding the self and others. In contrast, social characteristics are those that involve the interaction of two or more people, especially interactions with peers

and adults. Social functioning, then, refers to the interpersonal relationships and behavior that the individual establishes with others (p. 18).

The definition of social and emotional development from the NEGP (1995) does not correlate with what teachers and school leaders describe as social and emotional development (sitting, listening and following directions).

The finding that teachers are concerned with student behavior in the classroom is consistent with current research that supports the idea that the lack of behavioral skills may cause disruptions in the classroom and interfere with both children's opportunities for learning, and with instruction (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Teachers placed less importance on cognitive skills, but indicated the necessity of abilities in reading and mathematics. Not unlike the beliefs of parents, teachers remarked that students with higher levels of reading and mathematical skills are better prepared for kindergarten than those that do not have those specific skills. This is consistent with literature supporting the notion that children who enter kindergarten with fewer academic skills are more likely to have problems adjusting to the rigors of a kindergarten classroom (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

### **Strategies Early Childhood Teachers Use to Promote Readiness**

How do early childhood teachers promote readiness for the children in their classroom? The findings from this study indicated that teachers' perceived readiness was promoted in children when there was an increased level of school and family communication, and family support for the child at home. Teachers used words such as

“open communication” and “talking with parents” to describe strategies they perceived worked best to increase parent involvement and promote readiness in children.

Current literature supports the concept that parental involvement is related to higher levels of student success (Epstein, 1991). Additionally, Epstein noted it is the teachers’ communication practices and invitations to parents that make the difference in parent involvement (Epstein 1988). Sheldon & Epstein (2005) also suggested that partnerships between schools and families are important in increasing student achievement.

### **Ecological Systems Theory and Teacher’s Perceptions**

In this study, Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979) was embedded in the context of teachers’ perceptions and beliefs about readiness. The microsystem layer of environment, which included interactions between the teacher and child, affected how teachers perceived readiness in students. Teacher’s beliefs and perceptions of readiness developed from their lived experiences and current realities, and influence what they do and how they teach in the classroom (Kagan, 1992). Moreover, Pohan & Aguilar (2001) stated that, “teachers’ beliefs serve as filters for their knowledge bases and will ultimately affect their actions” (p. 160). Jacobs & Harvey (2010) further suggested that teacher expectations of readiness affect not only their teaching practices, but also student success.

The findings of the study exposed that in the microsystem layer of environment, teachers noted different strategies used to connect with children and promote readiness

based on their perceptions of what readiness looks like. One teacher discussed how her views of readiness impacted her instruction in the classroom, and her interaction with the students. Her perceptions of readiness dictated the amount of time she spent in small groups, and the amount of time she spent working with students she felt needed more help in certain areas. In the microsystem, the interactions between the student and child are important and influence readiness. This teacher indicated that she chose to do certain activities with the students based on the level she felt the students were on and what she believed they would need to be ready for kindergarten.

While teachers focused on readiness primarily in terms of social behaviors, and less so in terms of academic knowledge, the results of the study revealed that teachers' perceived their communication with parents promoted readiness. Open communication between teachers and parents denotes the interactions located in the mesosystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's Theory (1979). Interactions between teachers and parents in this layer indirectly affect the developing child.

Teachers expressed several ways in which they communicated with parents and encouraged parent involvement within the school, and at home. One teacher indicated her communications included discussions during pick up and drop off times, notes in children's bags, and calling parents on the phone to discuss student progress. Another teacher noted that conducting home visits completed during the beginning of the school year was an excellent way to get to know families, and to enhance the relationship between the school and the home. A study on home visits conducted by Cowan, Kim, St.

Roseman, & Echandia (2002) supported the indication that home visits improved the relationships between families, teachers, and schools.

Teachers' readiness beliefs were also evidenced in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) exosystem layer of environment via education policies, mass media, and cultural values of the school and school system. Policies originating from the Corporate Head Start Center affected curriculum choices, school resources, community involvement and teacher interaction with students, families, and community members. On this level of environment, teachers' perceptions of readiness were directly impacted by structures in the social system surrounding them. For example, this study revealed that one teacher's beliefs about readiness shaped her classroom philosophy of working with children in a more structured way, but the structure she preferred was not represented in the High Scope curriculum she was given by the Head Start center. While there was nothing the teacher felt she could do about the choice of curriculum used at the Head Start center, she indicated her desire to have children succeed in every way possible.

In the macrosystem layer of environment, which incorporates the belief patterns of the culture or subculture, this study showed teachers' perceptions of readiness were imbedded in their concern about the importance of school readiness, and the roles and responsibilities of teachers, parents, and community members in promoting readiness. Teachers discussed the importance of attending an early childhood center, such as Head Start, to aid in preparing children for the rigors of the kindergarten classroom. The study also underscored teacher's perceptions of the importance of the community in helping prepare children for kindergarten.

The study revealed that in the exosystem layer (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), teachers' beliefs were reflected their values and concerns regarding the changing nature of kindergarten, and children's long term success in the school system. Teachers noted the need for students to be better prepared for the kindergarten classroom, as it has become more demanding. One teacher noted that the things children were expected to know in kindergarten, like word lists, started with knowing their letters in preschool. She stressed her love of working with the children, and her desire for students to succeed in their academic careers.

Teachers' concerns about readiness are supported by past research which indicates a move toward an increasingly academic kindergarten classroom (Hatch, 2002). Moreover, according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1995), "children entering kindergarten are now typically expected to be ready for what previously constituted the first grade curriculum. As a result, more children are struggling and failing" (NAEYC, 1995).

### **Early Childhood School Leaders' Perception of Readiness**

How do early childhood leaders perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten? The results of the study exposed early childhood school leaders' perceptions of readiness as a multidimensional concept that encompassed the whole child. School leaders expressed their beliefs that readiness incorporated many things, including a willingness to learn, social and emotional development, and motor development. These broad descriptions of readiness presented by school leaders

represent a holistic view of readiness and development, and are supported in literature by the “whole child” view of development and the five dimensions of readiness proposed by NEGP (1995). The NEGP’s five dimensions of readiness are expressed as: physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches toward learning; language development; and cognition and general knowledge. These domains are independent of one another, but are connected in that there is a constant overlap of skills in each domain. Skills learned in one domain are strengthened as skills are acquired in another domain.

The multidimensional view of readiness perceived by school leaders is also consistent with the NAEYC perspective of readiness which incorporates the whole child. Research by Pianta (2002) further supported the concept of readiness relating to the whole child, “not just to verbal proficiency, but also to emotional maturity, social skills, attention span, and, at the most fundamental level, the child's physical condition" (p. 2).

### **Strategies Early Childhood School Leaders Use to Promote Readiness through Collaboration with Parents and Community Members**

How do early childhood leaders promote readiness for children entering kindergarten through collaboration with parents and community members? The outcomes of the study revealed that early childhood school leaders, like the teachers, utilized a variety of strategies to collaborate with parents and community members about readiness. School leaders described inviting parents to monthly parent meetings, conferences and school-based activities, and going on home visits as strategies used to

encourage parent and family involvement. Additionally, school leaders involved community members in school activities and developed relationships with community businesses that promoted readiness.

The relationship between family involvement in children's schooling and children's academic success has been documented extensively in the literature - see for example studies conducted by Arnold, Zeljo, & Doctoroff, 2008; Epstein, 1985, 1991. Epstein (1998) noted the importance of parents and schools working together to promote children's success in schools. Despite these studies and efforts made by the school to engage parents and encourage family involvement, school leaders stated parental involvement was low or lacking.

The results of the study also revealed that school leaders' perceived parent's understanding of readiness affected the readiness levels of their children. School leaders remarked that parents who did not value the education offered at the Head Start center, or who did not understand readiness did less to prepare their children for kindergarten. School leaders attributed parents' understandings of readiness to their experiences, and their sources of information on readiness. According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), parents' beliefs and perceptions are formed by the interactions they have within their different social contexts. Environments such as home, school, and surrounding neighborhoods are part of these social contexts and help to shape the perceptions parents have about what readiness means.



## **Ecological Systems Theory and School Leaders' Perceptions**

School leaders' perceptions of readiness were emphasized clearly in the microsystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). The findings of the study indicated that school leaders' views of readiness as a multidimensional concept was evident in the relationships they had with the children, and the families at the Head Start center. School leaders' understandings of readiness and the importance of parents' involvement and family dynamics was influential in helping them work with families to further promote readiness in children. One school leader articulated her beliefs of readiness and family influence in this way:

I would say that at the beginning maybe have some type of mandatory parent meetings. So that we could educate parents. A lot of these parents, they have other children, but they don't know what readiness is. I think if they're educated in the beginning on what we do, what our purpose is, what our mission is then they would be better prepared to help their child throughout the year. And it's not just that one child, the other kids in that family would benefit from what the parents know and do too.

School leaders not only worked to promote readiness in children, they labored to forge relationships with parents and families who had direct contact and the most influence on children (Bronfenbrenner, 1984; Barbarin et al., 2008). The results of the study emphasized school leaders' understandings of readiness as multidimensional and encompassing the whole child influenced their actions with parents on the microsystem level. From an ecological perspective, though school leaders had a holistic view of

readiness and were in contact with parents to increase parent involvement in school activities, the study revealed that school leader interactions with parents and community members were limited. The type and amount of contact with parents and community members are important in fostering involvement and increasing student readiness.

The mesosystem layer of environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) impacted school leaders' beliefs in readiness and was evident in the influence of the Head Start Center on children's readiness levels. The study showed that school leaders' perceptions of the importance of readiness was reinforced by their support of the Head Start philosophy and educational system. One school leader stated the following about her beliefs of the Head Start program:

Here at Head Start, we provide nutrition, medical, dental, education. There's so many things that we do, and I can see every year that we are getting better. We are improving and growing, and we have to improve and grow or we wouldn't be NAEYC accredited, wouldn't be ABC vouchered, those kind of things. Like I said, there's always room to grow with training for our teachers, new federal mandates on education levels for school. I believe in what we are doing here and Head Start's way. It's a wonderful program that helps the kids and their families. I mean, where else would these children go? What would happen to them?

The Head Start philosophy is generally centered on the approach of teaching the whole-child, as opposed to specific content area skills such as language or math (Office of School Readiness, 2014). School leaders emphasized their beliefs in educating the whole child, and encouraged interactions between the school, home and community. The

relationships on the mesosystem level of environment have both direct and indirect impacts on the child and their readiness for formal school.

The exosystem layer of environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which includes educational policies and political and legal systems, influenced school leaders' perceptions of readiness. Policy changes in the Head Start program that affect funding and financial assistance, learning standards, staff qualifications, program participation and other important aspects of Head Start affect the quality of the services offered, and school leaders' experiences with parents and community members. Much in the same way, policies and systems that affect programs offered to adults and community members influence parent involvement and student readiness. School leaders' noted a variety of programs and adult learning activities offered by Head Start to adults and community members. According to the Office of Head Start, the intent of the adult programs offered by Head Start are to support parents and families in achieving their own goals, strengthen parent-child relationships, and engage families around children's learning and development.

Kagan (1994) discussed the need for getting children ready for school, and getting schools ready for children by providing developmentally appropriate early childhood programs that would be beneficial for all children. Political, legal and educational policies affecting Head Start play a role in school leaders' perceptions of readiness and influence parent involvement in the exosystem layer of environment.

Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem layer of environment (1979) was embedded in the context of the cultural beliefs and values that school leaders, parents, and community

members held about school readiness and the importance of education. The findings of the present study revealed school leaders' perceptions about readiness both influenced and were influenced by the greater culture of the parents who frequented the school building. Parents' cultural beliefs about readiness, participation, kindergarten expectations, and education as a whole were evident in their conversations, actions, and responses to school leaders' recommendations. Additionally, parents' cultural beliefs about readiness were made clear by the educational goals they articulated for their children, and their views about school.

The outcome of the study also specified that communication strategies that school leaders employed to target families with common readiness beliefs, families from different cultures who spoke languages other than English, or families who paid little attention to readiness. Strategies were designed to encourage participation from parents and families, and to help promote readiness in children, despite cultural beliefs that may discourage parental involvement.

The chronosystem layer of Bronfenbrenner's Theory (1995) was represented in the beliefs and perceptions of school leaders who witnessed the evolving nature of the academic demands of early childhood centers and kindergarten classrooms. School leaders' perceptions were reflected in their attitudes about readiness practices and goals for students as they progress through the Head Start program. As noted previously, current trends in education support the notion that kindergarten classrooms are evolving and becoming more and more academic in nature (Graue, 2010; Hatch, 2000). School leaders' perceptions of readiness were also evident in this layer of environment as they

emphasized changes in the environment affecting children, and changes that occur in children as they develop and grow older.

### **Implications for Practice**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the readiness perceptions of parents, teachers, and school leaders in a Head Start center, and to understand how these individuals promoted school readiness in students.

Parents' beliefs about readiness influence their decisions about school, and the actions they take at home to promote readiness in their children. Parents' beliefs about readiness also influence their level of engagement in school (Barbarin et al., 2008), choices they make and activities they engage in with their children (Graue, 1992), and ultimately children's preparedness for school and success in school (Graue, Clements, Reynolds, & Niles, 2004; Epstein, 1991).

Similarly, the beliefs that teachers have about readiness influences what they do and how they teach in the classroom (Kagan, 1992; Pohan & Aguilar, 2001). Teachers act according to their beliefs and impact children's readiness through their instructional practices. Unfortunately, though many studies present the readiness beliefs of teachers, few studies discuss the role of leadership in early childhood education (Mujis, Aubrey, Harris & Briggs, 2008), or parents' beliefs of readiness (Barbarin et al., 2008; Graue, 1993a). The findings from this study contribute to the base of knowledge surrounding the perceptions of teachers, parents, and school leaders in regards to their perceptions of school readiness. The findings can also help promote changes that affect standards and

policies in early childhood education, and decisions made by parents and school leaders about early childhood education programs.

Understanding the perceptions that parents, teachers, and school leaders have about readiness may help improve the readiness skills that children have upon entry into kindergarten. Understanding these beliefs can also strengthen the relationships between parents, schools and communities, increase involvement in schools, and may help in developing a common language among those involved in early childhood education.

#### *Implications for Parents*

In this study, parents discussed readiness for school in terms of academic progress and cognitive ability in reading and math. The results of the study revealed that parents' beliefs about readiness were influenced by their personal experiences with school, their environment, and the relationships and interactions they had within their environmental contexts. Parents' beliefs that readiness was a level of academic skill and cognitive ability implied that they did not understand or view other aspects of readiness to be as important.

The most commonly accepted definition of readiness incorporates the five dimensions of readiness proposed by NEGP (1995). These domains are noted as, physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches toward learning; language development; and cognition and general knowledge. While each domain is separate and distinct, progress in one domain affects progress in another domain. The study implied that parents' views of readiness included

only one domain of readiness, which is one-fifth of the total domains of readiness presented by NEGP (1995).

Therefore, to increase school readiness in children, parents can employ strategies that would encompass all five domains of readiness presented by NEGP (1995). Parents can also take advantage of resources available in their local contexts, such as those in schools or neighborhoods. Increasing communications with teachers and school leaders, taking children on educational trips to the local library, or museum, or social areas such as the local playground, may also help increase school readiness in young children. Additionally, tactics such as reading with children at home to increase literacy skills (Kington et al., 2013), increasing math skills through number talk activities (Gunderson & Levine, 2011), being involved in school activities (Epstein, 2008) and promoting social skills are just some examples of activities that parents could participate in to increase school readiness in children.

#### *Implications for Teachers*

Teachers in this study noted their perceptions that skills such as sitting, listening, and following directions were key factors in determining readiness for children entering into a kindergarten setting. Unfortunately, the study revealed that teachers wrongly attributed these skills to social and emotional development and readiness. While teachers loosely used the term *social and emotional readiness* to describe sitting, listening, and following directions, they were not aware that the definition of social and emotional readiness actually describes children's self-concept, self-efficacy, and the ability to form and sustain social relationships with adults and friends (NEGP, 1995).

Additionally, the study revealed that teachers considered children with higher levels of reading and mathematical abilities ready for kindergarten. Though teachers placed less importance on these cognitive skills, they indicated that cognitive skills were necessary for school readiness. The implication is that teachers perceived sitting, listening, and following directions as skills associated with social and emotional readiness, and these skills were superior to academic readiness for early childhood students. Teacher's perceptions that sitting, listening, and following directions were the most important aspects of school readiness was in direct contrast with parents' views that academic skills were the most important for readiness.

Based on the findings of this study, teachers would benefit from training on the descriptions and definitions of the five dimensions of readiness as described by the NGEF (1995). Teachers need to understand the different domains of readiness, and would benefit from examples of the skills noted in each domain. Training may help increase teachers' understandings of what social and emotional development skills are, and may help to curb the dissemination of incorrect information amongst teachers and school leaders concerning this area.

Additionally, teachers can do more to increase school readiness in children. Building relationships and having positive interactions with students, parents, families, and community members can help increase student readiness in many ways. Also, recognizing the beliefs of parents, and the fact that parents may have diverse beliefs, may help increase parent involvement, which leads to an increase in student readiness (Epstein, 1995). Recognizing the beliefs of others may lead to a change in how teachers



approach or interact with parents, families, and community members in order to meet their needs. The relationships and interactions between these parties are important and impact student readiness in direct and indirect ways.

To increase student readiness in math and reading, Burger (2015) noted that teachers should incorporate daily direct instruction in these content areas. To increase student readiness and to build social skills, teachers can begin with creating nurturing environments in the classroom, and fostering nurturing relationships with children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

#### *Implications for School leaders*

The findings from this study indicated that school leaders perceived readiness to be a multidimensional concept that incorporated a mix of skills and abilities which each child must have in order to be ready for school. School leaders' beliefs that readiness is multidimensional implied that parents and school leaders did not share the same understanding of readiness. The implication of a dissimilarity in parents' and school leaders' beliefs may affect parents' expectations, involvement, and also school leaders' responses and communications with parents and community members.

Epstein (1998) noted that parents and schools need to work together to help children be successful in school. School leaders could help improve school readiness in children by working together with all stakeholders involved in preparing children for school (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). Research on school leadership suggests the importance of leadership in influencing student learning, and also in improving teaching and learning

“through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions” (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 28).

One major responsibility of a school leader is direction setting, or creating a shared vision for the school. School leaders interested in increasing the readiness of students should increase ongoing collaboration and communication with parents and the community to work towards “creating a shared understanding of readiness as an interactive concept and a community-wide responsibility” (Wesley & Buysse, 2003, p371). The differing views of readiness shared by teachers and school leaders may be an indication of the need for school leaders to work with teachers to revise or revamp and communicate the vision of the school to increase student learning and success.

The National Education Goals Panel noted the importance of school readiness in three components: readiness of families, the readiness of schools to receive children with different backgrounds and capabilities, and community supports for children and families. Kagan (1994) also discussed the need for getting children ready for school, and getting schools ready for children by providing developmentally appropriate preschool programs. The importance of having a unified approach to school readiness is a necessary element in preparing children for success in kindergarten and beyond. As parents, teachers and school leaders play an important role in student development, learning, and achievement, it is necessary that they work together to prepare children for the transition into formal schooling, and for the expectations of a kindergarten classroom.

The findings of this study indicated not only a difference in the readiness beliefs of parents, teachers, and school leaders, but also that the strategies employed by each

group to promote readiness were different. Parents were reinforcing academic skills at home, while teachers and school leaders emphasized behavioral skills necessary in the classroom, and learning through play. The necessity of all stakeholders working in tandem to promote school readiness by focusing on all areas of readiness, and not just specific skills, can be beneficial in promoting readiness in young children. A shared concept of school readiness is important in this regard, but requires a grass-roots approach to disseminate information to families and communities who may have different cultural beliefs or understandings of what school readiness is.

While teachers and school leaders indicated that they used many communication tactics to reach parents, families, and community members, this study revealed that these strategies fell short, as parent involvement was reported to be low. The lack of parent involvement may be the result of a deficiency in understanding and communication between schools and families to address readiness beliefs, the responsibilities of the family in preparing children for school, Head Start's role in preparing children for school, and the expectations of a kindergarten classroom. Future research to address these deficiencies are necessary to improve collaboration between parents, teachers, and school leaders in order to increase student readiness and academic achievement.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of parents, teachers, and school leaders surrounding school readiness, and their actions to promote readiness in children. Several limitations were noted in this study. In this study I used interview

data from a small number of parent, teacher, and school leader participants, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research on perceptions of parents, teachers, and school leaders should include a larger population and sample size.

Additionally, only parents, teachers, and school leaders in Head Start centers from two adjacent counties in one state in the southeastern United States were involved in this study. Future studies investigating the beliefs of these groups of people might include those outside of a Head Start center. Studies exploring the perceptions of parents, teachers and school leaders in a public four year old kindergarten setting would be beneficial for understanding the perceptions of those in different environments and at different socio-economic levels. Furthermore, future research on parent, teacher, and school leader perceptions of readiness should be conducted using other research designs and methodologies.

Future research that would broaden parents' perspectives to incorporate the skills that teachers find important in being ready for school should be conducted. In addition, research into early childhood programs or professional development activities to help teachers and school leaders better understand how to provide support to the diverse communities and cultures surrounding the Head Start centers would be beneficial for all stakeholders. Teachers and school leaders must work with community members and parents and be cognizant of their cultural values and beliefs about readiness.

More research is needed for the development of community-wide expectations regarding school readiness. Statewide communication of preferred skills and activities for children, additional communications between schools and parents, and increased parent

involvement such as out-reach programs, and activities within the school may be helpful in preparing children and parents for the rigors of the formal school setting.

Further research is needed to replicate studies such as the current one that specifically focus on the perceptions of parents and teachers in order to bridge the gulf in perceptions of school readiness between these groups.

### **Conclusion**

This study lends insight into the existing research on the perceptions of teachers, parents, and school leaders in regards to school readiness, and actions they take to promote school readiness. Specifically, this study revealed differences in the perceptions of parents, teachers, and school leaders regarding school readiness. These differences were evident in the actions taken by these individuals to promote readiness in children.

Parents in this study viewed readiness as an academic or cognitive skill level needed to enter kindergarten. Parents also discussed having routines at home, and working with children on work sent home from school helped to promote readiness in children. The comments and the views expressed by these parents suggested that parents believed working with children on cognitive skills improved readiness.

Teachers indicated that readiness was primarily being able to sit, listen and follow directions, but was also a mix of cognitive skills. Teacher views suggested that being able to sit and control behavior was more important than cognitive skills that can be learned later. Teachers also discussed strategies used to engage parents and to work with students to promote readiness in the classroom and at home.

School leaders discussed a multidimensional view of readiness which included the domains of readiness presented by NEGP (1995). School leaders also revealed strategies used to encourage involvement and participation from parents, families, and community members. Lastly, the study showed that teachers' and school leaders' views were more aligned than parent and school leader views, or parent and teacher views of readiness.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Planning Matrix for Research Questions and Interview Questions

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>What do I need to know</b>	<b>Interview Questions - Parent</b>	<b>Interview Questions - School Leader</b>	<b>Interview Questions – Teacher</b>
1. How do parents understand readiness for children entering kindergarten settings?	What does readiness mean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does being “ready for kindergarten” mean to you? What do you think children need to know and be able to do before entering kindergarten?</li> <li>• Why do you think those things are important?</li> <li>• How ready do you feel you were for school and what things did you do? (How did you get ready?)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does being “ready for kindergarten” mean to you?</li> <li>• What do you think parents’ views of school readiness are? (probe: How do you know? What examples do you see of these views?)</li> <li>• How do you think parents’ views of readiness are formed?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does being “ready for kindergarten” mean to you? (Probe: Describe what you consider to be essential for a child to master/learn/understand before leaving early childhood for kindergarten.)</li> </ul>
2. What strategies do parents use to prepare children for kindergarten?	What are parents and school leaders doing to get children ready?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What things (or strategies) do you use at home with your child to help him/her be ready for school?</li> <li>• Why do you use those particular strategies?</li> <li>• Where did you learn about the strategies you use at home?</li> <li>• How do you think your personal experience in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What strategies do you use to get families and community members involved in ways that help get children ready?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How do you encourage parents to take part activities with their children</li> <li>○ How do you encourage community involvement?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you communicate with parents and promote family engagement? (Probe: Do you have any artifacts you can share to demonstrate what you do and how you involve parents?)</li> </ul>



		school affect the things (strategies) you use with your child?		
3. How do early childhood teachers perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?	What does readiness mean to early childhood teachers?	•	•	
4. What strategies do early childhood teachers use in the classroom with students to promote readiness?	What are teachers doing to prepare students?	•	•	
5. How do early childhood leaders perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?	What does readiness mean to early childhood leaders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you work with the school to help your child become ready for school?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has been your experience working with parents at the school?</li> <li>• How do you use what you know about parents' readiness views to help you work with them?</li> <li>• Do you feel parents' experiences play a</li> </ul>	

			role in how much they are involved in the school?	
6. How do early childhood leaders promote readiness for children entering kindergarten through collaboration with parents and community members?	<p>What do early childhood leaders do?</p> <p>How do early childhood leaders work with parents? With the community?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways do you think the school is preparing your child for kindergarten?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you want (or prefer) to work with parents? What works, what doesn't work?</li> </ul>	

Appendix B

Interview Questions

**Research Question: How do Head Start Parents, Teachers and School Leaders perceive and promote school readiness?**

**Focus Questions:**

1. How do parents perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
2. What strategies do parents use to promote readiness for children entering kindergarten?
3. How do preschool teachers perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
4. How do preschool teachers promote readiness for the children in their classroom?
5. How do preschool leaders perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?
6. How do preschool leaders promote readiness for children entering kindergarten through collaboration with parents and community members?

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
<b>Parents</b>  <b>Focus Question 1</b>  How do parents perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What does being “ready for kindergarten” mean to you? What do you think children need to know and be able to do before entering kindergarten?</li><li>2. Why do you think those things are important?</li><li>3. In what ways do you think the school is preparing your child for kindergarten?</li><li>4. How ready do you feel you were for school and what things did you do? (How did you get ready?)</li></ol>
<b>Parents</b>  <b>Focus Question 2</b>  What strategies do parents use to promote readiness for children entering kindergarten?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What things (or strategies) do you use at home with your child to help him/her be ready for school?</li><li>2. Why do you use those particular strategies?</li><li>3. Where did you learn about the strategies you use at home? (Probe: Does the school help you with this?)</li><li>4. How do you think your personal experience in school affect the things (strategies) you use with your child?</li><li>5. How do you work with the school to help your</li></ol>

	<p>child become ready for school?</p> <p>6. What parts of the HS program do you feel really help you prepare your child for school?</p>
<p><b>Early Childhood Teachers</b></p> <p><b>Focus Question 3</b></p> <p>How do preschool teachers perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What does being “ready for kindergarten” mean to you? (Probe: Describe what you consider to be essential for a child to master/learn/understand before leaving preschool for kindergarten.)</li> <li>2. How do you know what skills you need to focus on to prepare your students for kindergarten?</li> <li>3. What has been your experience in what works best to prepare children for school?</li> <li>4. Can you recommend one student in your classroom who is meeting or exceeding kindergarten readiness requirements and one student who is struggling in these same areas so that I can contact the parents about a possible interview?</li> </ol>
<p><b>Early Childhood Teachers</b></p> <p><b>Focus Question 4</b></p> <p>How do preschool teachers promote readiness for the children in their classroom?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What curriculum do you use or teach in this classroom do you believe help prepare students for kindergarten? (Probe: What are some activities students do at school? At home?)</li> <li>2. What are some strategies you use in the classroom to help struggling students? (Probe: What skills do you believe these strategies focus on?)</li> <li>3. How do you communicate with parents and promote family engagement? (Probe: Do you have any artifacts you can share to demonstrate what you do and how you involve parents?)</li> </ol>
<p><b>Early Childhood School Leaders</b></p> <p><b>Focus Question 5</b></p> <p>How do preschool leaders perceive readiness for children entering kindergarten?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. What does being “ready for kindergarten” mean to you?</li> <li>5. What has been your experience working with parents at the school?</li> <li>6. What do you think parents’ views of school readiness are? (probe: How do you know? What examples do you see of these views?)</li> <li>7. How do you think parental views of readiness are formed?</li> <li>8. How do you use what you know about parental readiness views to help you work with them?</li> <li>9. Do you feel parental experiences play a role in</li> </ol>

	how much they are involved in the school?
<p><b>Early Childhood School Leaders</b></p> <p><b>Focus Question 6</b>  How do preschool leaders promote readiness for children entering kindergarten through collaboration with parents and community members?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What strategies do you use to get families and community members involved in ways that help get children ready? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How do you encourage parents to take part in activities with their children</li> <li>b. How do you encourage community involvement?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. How do you want (or prefer) to work with parents? What works, what doesn't work?</li> <li>3. What do you believe is the best part of the HS program that prepares children for school? (Probe: Why? What can be improved? )</li> <li>4. What artifacts can you share that shows how the school works with parents and community members to prepare children for school?</li> </ol>

Appendix C

Teacher Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan

pg. 1

PRESCHOOL A

Teaching Team/Equipo de Enseñanza: \_\_\_\_\_

Week of/Semana de: August 15-19, 2016

Center Manager's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

<p><b>Special Classroom Activities/Especial actividades del Salón de Clase:</b></p> <p><u>Nutrition Activity/Actividades de nutrición:</u> The Very Hungry Caterpillar (CT:2/Mon)</p> <p><u>Health and Safety Activity/Actividades de Salud y Seguridad:</u> Demonstrating Washing Hands (89: Tues/Wed) Classroom/Playground Rulers (CT:1 Tues-Fri)</p> <p><u>Oral Health Activity/Actividades de Salud Oral:</u> Demonstrating Brushing Teeth (CT:1, Thurs)</p> <p><u>Mental Health Activity/Actividades de Salud Mental:</u> Does anybody love Me? (Thurs CT:2)</p> <p><u>Transportation Activity/Actividades de Transporte:</u> The Seats on the Bus (CT:2/Fri)</p> <p><u>Fieldtrip/Resource Person/Paseos/Recurso Especial:</u></p> <p><b>Additional Preschool Activities:</b> <u>Venn Diagram Activities:</u> Bus Riders / Car Riders (CT:2/Wed)</p> <p><u>Second Step Activities:</u> Introducing Second's Steps (Wed/CT:1)</p> <p><u>Growing Readers Activities:</u> Posie's Walk (89/Tues./Wed)</p>	<p align="right">Tra</p> <p><b>List Transitions to be used:</b> Swim like a f 5 minute war Clean Up Song Let's make a c</p> <hr/> <p align="right">Center/</p> <p><b>List addition/rotation of materials:</b> <u>House Area/Area de la Casa:</u> Plastic Food</p> <p><u>Art Area/Area de Artes:</u> Paper / Crayon</p> <p><u>Toy Area/Area de Juguetes:</u> Maga-Tila</p> <p><u>Book Area/Area de Libros:</u> Posie's Walk</p> <p><u>Block Area/Area de Bloques:</u> Cars / Trucks</p> <p><u>Other/Otro:</u> CD's, tapes, box</p>
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PAGE

PLAN

Center/Centro: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Padre: \_\_\_\_\_

ms/Cambios

o  
ng

the w/ our feet

room Materials

Evaluation/Evaluación:

End of the Week Evaluation:

Describe what was successful/worked well this week and how it enhanced the children's learning:

Reading books that caught the children's attention. The children respond very well with questions. MV, MU, BC were very engage asking about the books.

MD grasp using the unifix cubes

What activities do you need to expand/modify to meet the individual needs of the children:

The activities would be washing hands, recognizing colors, and shapes, and counting

Revised 9/15

1000

Teaching Team/Equipo de Enseñanza:

Individualization/ Individualización	Standards and Domains SC ELS HS ELF	Time/Hora Daily Schedule	Monday/Lun
Self-skills KM, AM HB	ELA-4K- Language L.N	Circle Time 1/Hora de Estudio 1	Open House
Math/Literacy MD, JW, LL, EL	ELA-4K 3.13 Literacy	Planning Time/Hora de Planeación	
Approaching to learn DR, MM, TC	AL 1 Approach to Learning	Work Time/Hora de Trabajar	
Math MN, MY, BC	M-2 Math	Recall Time/Hora de Recordar	
Language JW, SS	M-2 Language	Circle Time 2/Hora de Planeación	
Washing Hands KM, AR, BB	M-4K 1.5 K-4 Math	Small Group Time/Hora de Grupos Pequeños	
Gross Motor SH, NW	PD 1 Gross Motor	Outside Time/Hora de Jugar Afuera	

Open Ended Questions	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
		How do you washing your hands? When do you washing your hands?	How many? How many? What is go

What can you tell me about people?










## Appendix D

### Preschool Activity Calendars



March 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
			On a windy day, show your child how to fly a kite at the park. (Coordination)		Make a simple windsock by stapling ribbons onto a 3" strip of paper, then wrap the paper into a ring and tape together. (Art/Science)	Practice blowing ping pong balls across a table or floor. (Coordination)
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	Hold up a ribbon. Let your child blow it fast then slow, just like the wind. (Science)	Read "Green Eggs & Ham" by Dr. Seuss to your children. (Literature)	Use green food coloring to make green scrambled eggs with your child. (Cooking)	Have your child make green peas from green play dough. (Sm. Muscle Development)	Give your child green crayons to write his favorite letters. (Letters)	Have your child tear green pictures out of old magazines. (Color Recognition)
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Make shamrock pictures by gluing three green heart shapes together on a piece of paper. (Shapes/Art)	Hide paper shamrocks around the house for your child to find. (Problem Solving)		Ask your child what she would wish for if she found a real four-leaf clover. (Imagination)	Sing "Leprechaun" to the tune of "This Old Man". (Music)	<b>Happy St. Patrick's Day</b> 	Play some Irish music and dance a jig with your child. (Movement)
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Read your child a children's story about spring. (Science/Literature)	<b>Spring Begins</b> 	Take a walk and look for signs of spring. (Science)	Plant some spring flowers. (Science/Gardening)	Write a postcard to a friend. Have your child sign his name. (Writing)	Plan a green snack today with your child. (Nutrition/Colors)	Make the color green by mixing yellow and blue food coloring in water. (Science)
26	27	28	29	30	31	
Make a guitar using an empty tissue box and rubber bands. (Music)	Make a shaker by placing dried beans in a paper sack. Twist and tape the top of the sack to make a handle. (Music)	Make a drum for your child using an empty oatmeal box and a wooden spoon. (Music)	Have your child act out his favorite fairy tale. (Dramatics)	Lay plain paper on the bark of a tree and do crayon rubbings. (Art)	Look around your home for other objects you could use to make crayon rubbings. (Problem Solving)	

## Activity Calendar

March 2017						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1. Read a book on animals	2 Find picture in a magazine or a book on different animal	3 draw your favorite animals	4. Play red rover, red rover
5 Discuss the importance of hand washing	6. Discuss animals that have four legs	7 Discuss animals that have two legs	8 Discuss animals that can fly	9. Go over these letters and sound of R, C, and Y	10. Discuss animals that live in the water	11. Come up with a plan for tornado and practice
12. Help prepare a meal	13. Write your name	14. Which animals cannot fly	15. Find items in your home that are green	16. Cook or prepare a vegetable or fruit that is green	17. Cut out a rectangle and three heart to make shamrock	18. Sing the alphabet song and name a animals that represent each letter
19 Make a puppet out of an old sock	20 match the different types and color socks together	21 Discuss stranger Danger and why is it important to be aware of your surrounding	22 Discuss healthy items to eat and where do they come from	23. Make up a story about animals	24 Help make up your bed	25. Dance with your child around the house
26. Find different shapes on your way to the store or on your way home	27 Make a graph using two legged animals and four legged animals	28. Draw a spring picture	29. Practice zipping, tying, and snapping clothes	30. Make a graph for animals that fly and animal that walk or crawl	31 Read nursery rhymes	

## Activity Calendar


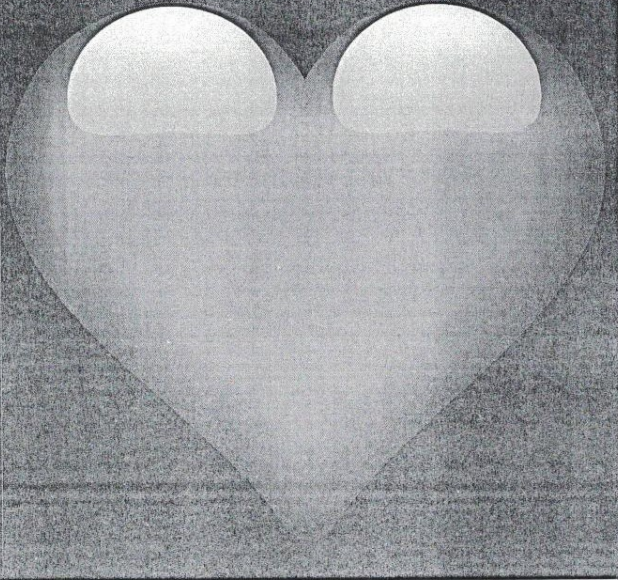
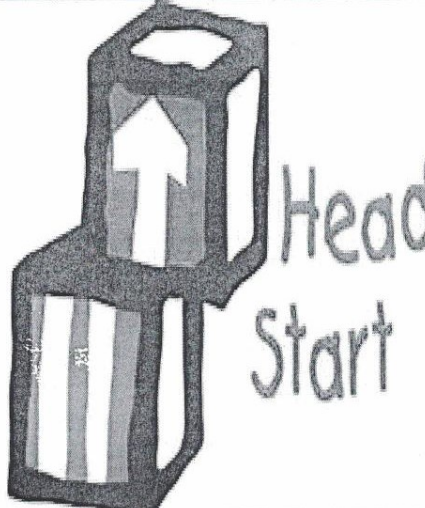
Student \_\_\_\_\_

Choose **22** activities to complete with your child for the month of **September**. Please initial each activity you complete.

<p>Tell a family member about the letters you learned this week. What sound does each letter make? What words start with that sound?</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Draw a picture of two things that begin with the same sound as the first letter in your name.</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Use a magazine/newspaper and cut out letters to make an alphabet collage. Play I Spy and identify each letter.</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Ask a family member to listen to you count by 1's. I counted to the number _____ on my own. Counting to 25 is the goal for the 1<sup>st</sup> 9 Weeks.</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Write your first name three times using your finger in one of the following: shaving cream in a baking pan, gifts in a large container, or sand/dirt outside. Note: first letter uppercase, remaining letters lowercase</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Go on a scavenger hunt and see if you can find the numbers 0 through 10. (Hint: look on phones, license plates, mailbox, books, television remote, etc.)</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Help your family by setting the table. Put one napkin, one plate, one cup, etc. at each place setting.</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Find 20 small objects (buttons, cheerios, toy cars, pennies, etc.) and put them in a line. Touch each object and count from 1 to 20.</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>After reading your child's library book or one from home, ask him/her questions about the story (who, what, where, why, and how).</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Use chalk outside to create a game of hopscotch. Write the numbers 1 through 10 in the boxes.</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Ask your child to name some of his/her classroom rules and the consequences for not following those rules.</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Look around your home and find a circle, square, rectangle, and triangle. Can you find a hexagon too?</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Draw a picture. Encourage your child to label the picture with words or include a short sentence.</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Practice identifying shapes with Purpy's Shape Game: <a href="http://www.sheppardsoftware.com/preschool/ngames/shapes.htm">www.sheppardsoftware.com/preschool/ngames/shapes.htm</a></p> <p>_____</p>	<p>As you ride in the car with a family member, look for the letters of the alphabet on street signs, buildings, fast food signs, etc.</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Complete a math page of your choice in your my Math Workbook to review skills from this month.</p>	<p>Spell your first name out loud. Write your name with a pencil, marker, or crayon two times.</p>	<p>Write numbers 0-5 (using your finger) in one of the following: shaving cream on a table, sand/dirt outside, gifts in a</p>

Appendix E

Parent Meeting Invitations and Agendas

 <p><b>Parent Meeting</b></p>	
<p><b>You are invited to attend our monthly parent meeting at the _____ Library. If you are in need of transportation you can contact _____</b></p>	
	<p><b>DETAILS</b></p> <p><b>DATE: February 18, 2016</b></p> <p><b>TIME: 9:00 am</b></p> <p><b>LOCATION: _____ Library</b></p>

# Parent Participation Day!

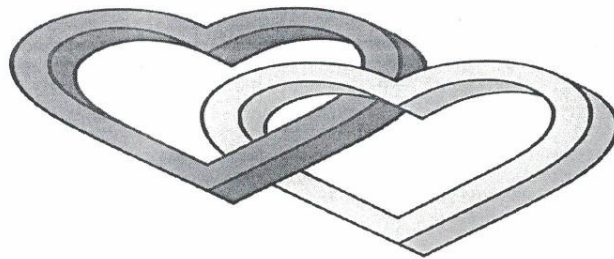


When: 2/10/17

Where: \_\_\_\_\_ Head Start \_\_\_\_\_

Time: 9:30 – 11:00

We look forward to seeing everyone. We have lots of fun activities planned!!



PARENT MEETING  
TOPICS  
TRANSITIONING WORKSHOPS  
CINCO DE MAYO  
MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

LAST PARENT MEETING OF THE YEAR! IT IS VERY  
IMPORTANT THAT IF YOU FILLED OUT A RETURNING  
PACKET THAT YOU BE AT THIS MEETING. THAT GOES FOR  
EARLY AND HEAD START PARENTS BECAUSE WE WILL  
HAVE A VERY SPECIAL GUEST COMING TO SPEAK ON  
TRANSITIONING. I ASK THAT PARENTS PLEASE ATTEND  
THIS VERY IMPORTANT MEETING. NOTICE THE TIME  
CHANGE OF THE MEETING

REFRESHMENT WILL BE SERVED

TIME 12:00 NOON

PLACE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE FRIDAY MAY 5 2017

PARENT MEETING

TOPIC

PARENT GROWTH AND DEVELOPEMENT

POSITIVE PARENTING

THE CHILDREN HAVE BEEN WORKING HARD ALL YEAR  
AND HAVE A PRESENTATION THEY WOULD LIKE TO  
PRESENT TO THE PARENTS SO COME OUT AND CHECK  
OUT THE HARD WORK OF YOUR CHILDREN AND TO GET  
MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAM.

TIME 9:00 am

PLACE \_\_\_\_\_ HEAD START

DAY&DATE THURSDAY JANUARY 19<sup>TH</sup>

SEE YOU ALL THEN!

Appendix F

Parent Conference Form

Head Start

First Staff/Parent Conference Form

School Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Adult(s) in Attendance and Relationship(s) to child: \_\_\_\_\_ Center: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Conference Location: \_\_\_\_\_

**INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN**

Were the child's screening results reviewed? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no  
\*For children with special needs, the child's IEP goals and objectives have been reviewed and agreed upon by the teacher and family.

Did the teacher review the Work Sampling Family Report, anecdotal notes, and portfolio items with family members? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

Does the parent(s) wish to make any additional changes to the child's Educational objectives? If yes, what are they? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

Were activities discussed and/or left in the home to support the child's educational needs? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

**EMERGENCY INFORMATION**

Was the information on the emergency card reviewed and updated if needed? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

**CHANGES IN FAMILY COMPOSITION**

\_\_\_\_\_ New Baby \_\_\_\_\_ Separation \_\_\_\_\_ Marriage \_\_\_\_\_ Divorce \_\_\_\_\_ Other

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher's Signature Date Parent/Guardian's Signature Date

Original-Central File

Copy-Child's Center File

Revised 8/06



Appendix G

Home Visit Form

**HEAD START**



**SECOND HOME VISIT FORM**

School Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Adult(s) in Attendance and Relationship(s) to Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Center: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

**EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT/EDUCATION PLAN**

Were the child's assessment/screening results reviewed? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no  
\* For children with special needs, the child's IEP goals and objectives have been reviewed and agreed upon by the teacher and family.

Was an educational plan developed based on these results and mutually agreed upon by the teacher and the family? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

Were educational activities discussed and/or left in the home to support the identified objectives on the educational plan? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

Were program and classroom rules and expectations reviewed and shared with the family? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

Is there any information about the family's background, culture, and/or beliefs that would assist with making the child's classroom experiences more meaningful? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

If yes, please explain \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

**NUTRITION**

Does the child have any special dietary needs? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

Does the child have any food allergies? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

Comments:

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**PARENT INFORMATION PLAN**

Have the parent(s) encountered any problems in attending Parent Committee meetings? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

What problem(s) if any, have the parents encountered in attending Center meetings?  
\_\_\_\_Time \_\_\_\_Babysitting \_\_\_\_Day of the Week \_\_\_\_Work \_\_\_\_Health \_\_\_\_Other

Have the parent(s) received a Parent Handbook? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no  
(If no, a Parent Handbook was given to and reviewed with parent.)

Comments:

**HEALTH/DISABILITIES**

Were all health screenings reviewed with the parent/guardian? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

Are there any health concerns or needs of the child or other siblings in the family who need assistance from Head Start? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no  
If so, what are they? \_\_\_\_\_  
(If yes, make a written referral to the Health Specialist)

Does the child go to the health clinic or doctor who provides ongoing health care? (If no, make a written referral to the Health Specialist) \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

Would you like information on Disability Services? (If yes, make a written referral to the Disability Specialist) \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

**TEACHER/PARENT OBSERVATIONS**

Circle the behaviors or conditions that you have frequently observed in this child.

Temper tantrums/ impulsiveness/overactive/restlessness/withdrawn/inactive/sleepy/poor coordination/poor writing or drawing/low energy levels/seizures/stares into space/red, runny, or itchy eyes/poor vision/crossed eyes/poor hearing/runny ears/cough or shortness of breath/wheezing/skin rash/pale or yellow skin/stomach aches/vomiting/frequent urination/wets pants/soils pants/unclear speech/none of the above.

Comments:

**CHANGES IN FAMILY COMPOSITION**

New Baby \_\_\_\_\_ Separation \_\_\_\_\_ Marriage \_\_\_\_\_ Divorce \_\_\_\_\_ Other

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of SHARE Head Start Teacher/Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian/Date

Original-Central File

Copy-Child's Center File

Revised 8/06

## Appendix H

### Parent-Child Activities Handout



Developmental Indicators for  
the Assessment of Learning  
Fourth Edition

## Parent-Child Activities

Carol Mardell, PhD  
Dorothea S. Goldenberg, EdD

### Your role is very important!

As a parent (or caregiver), YOU are your child's first and most important teacher. You can support your child by showing how learning can be fun. By following your child's interests at a natural pace, you can promote a full and happy childhood and success in school.

### Watch and Learn

Every child has different interests, skills, and attention span. Try to observe your child's behaviors, watching for new tasks or interests that may be good times to sit down with your child. Pay attention to what your child chooses to do most often, and find ways to work new tasks into something he or she already does well. When you follow your child's pace, it will be easier to know when it's time for a new task, or when it's time for a break.

### Make Time to Be Together

Your days are busy, but there are ways to show your child that he or she is important to you. It's a good idea to do things, such as mealtime and bedtime, at the same time every day so your child knows what to expect. Your child will enjoy even a short time when you can give your full attention. If you are asked to play when you are too busy, give another time to your child and an option of other things to do for the time being. Be sure to keep your promise to play later.

### Lead by Showing

Children like to do what they see older children or adults doing. Make learning activities part of the culture of your home. Read for your own pleasure, and keep books, magazines, or newspapers in your home to show your child that reading is important to you. Go to cultural events or classes for adults at local libraries, museums, and parks—many are offered at little or no cost.

### Be Practical

Some parents feel pressure for their children to be the best in everything. Be sure to show love and affection for your child often and for no special reason. Try not to compare your child to other children, including your other children. Remember that all kinds of skills have value, not only school or sports performance. Young children are learning all the time, and social and life skills are quite valuable. Teaching your child how to have fun and how to rest can be good lessons, too.

### Assist Being Independent

Children can often do a lot more than you expect. Encourage your child to desire to do things on his or her own. Often this means involving your child in your family's everyday activities. He or she may be able to help with chores, such as putting dishes on a low shelf. Even if things aren't done perfectly (or quickly), your child will be proud to help. Once your child picks a task, allow him or her enough time to do it well before moving on to a new task.

### Your Child's Space

Fewer items in a space can help a young child to pay attention, while a space with lots of toys or books can be too exciting. Use low shelves with a few toys or books at a time, and rotate items in when your child is ready for a change. Have one low shelf for crayons, paper, or other items that your child can use with or without you. Whenever possible, provide child-sized furniture and other items, such as small blunt-nosed scissors or small plates and cups. Children often prefer real items, such as wooden spoons and bowls like yours, over plastic toy versions.

### Keep Trying

Don't worry about small setbacks or be surprised when an activity or item your child loved one day is ignored the next. Your child is always growing into new ideas and talents. Keep in mind that repeating things is helpful for young children; you don't need to find a new place to visit every week or a brand-new story to read every night. Repeating instructions and taking small steps in learning a new task is normal. If you or your child feels frustrated, set the task aside for a while or offer nonfood rewards for trying. As your child learns, watch for things he or she enjoys and does well. Your praise will help your child to keep trying until he or she succeeds.

### Have Fun

Show your child you are happy when he or she does a good job, and be upbeat even when you need to correct an error (or clean up a mess!). The way your child does a task and what she or he thinks is a task "well done" may be different from what you think. Allow plenty of time and space for trial and error. Find ways to play with your child that you enjoy, too. Whether you're playing games to teach or purely for fun, plan to stop playing before either of you get too tired or bored. If the end of playtime is still fun, your child will look forward to the next time.

The next few pages provide ideas for games and activities you can share with your preschool or kindergarten child. Resources and references are listed at the end of each skill area. You may also want to visit <http://www.familyeducation.com/home/>, an online network of learning resources for parents, teachers, and children of all ages.

PEARSON

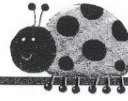
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## DEVELOPING MOTOR SKILLS



Promoting large-muscle skills, small-muscle skills, and skills that depend on the eyes and hands working together will give your child confidence and help him or her develop independence.

### Large-Muscle Activities

Building large-muscle strength is important for children's balance, coordination, and posture, and it helps them to develop other skills such as writing. Some activities to build large muscles are:

- **Walking** forward, sideways, backward, and marching.
- **Balancing games**, such as walking on a piece of string or tape on the floor, or along a sidewalk crack or low curb outside. Also practice walking on uneven surfaces (e.g., sand, rocks, pillows/cushions on the floor).
- **Kicking, bouncing, throwing, and catching games** with objects of different sizes and weights (e.g., beanbags, beach balls, soccer balls). Make up games of throwing balls or beanbags into an empty container, or play a game of soccer or basketball without keeping score.
- **Jumping games**, such as hopscotch

or jumping rope. Play "Follow the Leader" with hopping and skipping.

- **Swinging, sliding, and climbing** at a park or indoor playground.
- **Riding bikes, tricycles, scooters**, or other ride-on toys.
- **Pulling or pushing** wagons or carts.
- **Building and going on a race** using common objects (e.g., crawling under chairs and tables, jumping over a stack of books, walking on crooked lines, weaving between toys on the floor).
- **Dancing** or other free movement to music/songs (e.g., "Ring Around the Rosie").

### Small-Muscle Activities

Having good finger, wrist, and hand strength, skill, and coordination helps with many daily tasks, including eating, dressing, and writing. Some activities to build small muscles are:

- **Molding clay** by squeezing, pinching, and shaping it into objects or animals.
- **Building with blocks** of all sizes, shapes, and textures. Use ring stackers and puzzles to practice putting things together.

- **Putting small objects in containers**, such as plastic bottle caps into a box with a small opening. Always supervise your child when he/she is playing with small objects.
- **Lacing or threading**, such as stringing beads, cereal pieces, or macaroni onto pipe cleaners.
- **Drawing and coloring** using crayons, colored pencils, markers, chalk, etc. Bath tub crayons are great tools to make bath time fun and educational!
- **Cutting** out shapes or pictures from old catalogs or magazines. Use hole-punches or other shape punches to make designs or patterns.
- **Playing with toys** with dials to turn, lids to twist, keys to wind up, or strings to pull.
- **Putting clothes on dolls or toy animals**, especially clothes with zippers, buttons, or snaps.
- **Common tasks**, such as using a trigger sprayer to water plants, closing zipper-lock plastic bags, or squeezing out sponges filled with water.

### Resources

<http://www.healthychildren.org>

HealthyChildren.org is a parenting website created by pediatricians with information from the American Academy of Pediatrics' publications and child health resources.

<http://www.gameskidsplay.net/>

This listing of kids' games includes rules for playground games and verses for jump-rope rhymes.

<http://www.serve.gov/lrlm.asp>

*Let's Read. Let's Move.* This website was created to combat childhood obesity and summer reading loss by engaging youth in physical activity and encouraging summer reading. It is led by the Corporation for National and Community Service in collaboration with First Lady Michelle Obama, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Institute of Museums and Libraries.

<http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/>

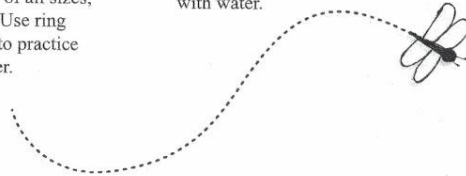
ZERO TO THREE is a national nonprofit organization that provides information and support to professionals, policymakers, and parents in order to improve the lives of infants and toddlers.

[http://donnayoung.org/penmanship/k\\_1.htm](http://donnayoung.org/penmanship/k_1.htm)

This website offers free printable handwriting exercises (e.g., how to print letters, numbers).

<http://www.do2learn.com/activities/artprojects/howtodraw/index.htm>

This website provides free, step-by-step, simple instructions for drawing basic figures such as dogs, people, flowers, houses, etc.



## DEVELOPING CONCEPT SKILLS



Learning basic concepts such as colors, sizes, shapes, and numbers helps children understand new words and ideas. It also gives children ways to tell you about what they see or want.

- **Name parts of the body** as you wash during bath time, or ask your child to point to body parts on dolls or toy animals. Even very young children learn to sing “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes” quickly.
- **Play the game “Same and Different”** using pictures from magazines, small toys and other objects, or playing cards for matching games. Start with two piles of pictures or objects and match same items or pictures (e.g., two boats, two pennies, two queens) or match objects that often go together (e.g., a shoe and sock, knife and fork, salt and pepper).
- **Practice counting** by making counting part of your daily routine. Play “Simon Says” and ask children to “Jump two times” or “Wiggle your finger four times” or “Blink one time.” In the car or bus, count types of things you see through the window to teach the idea that a number stands for a certain amount. You might count cars of a certain color or model, the number of stoplights during the trip, etc.
- **Name the colors** of your child’s most liked toys or shirts to help your child learn the colors he or she sees often. Household items, such as socks or books, can be sorted or arranged by colors. Try a color hunt at home and ask your child to find objects that are the color you name.
- **Compare the shapes and sizes** of common items, or make up a guessing game: “Which is bigger? A raisin or an apple?” Make a game of naming which item doesn’t belong by showing your child three small items that look alike and one larger one. Ask your child to find all the objects in the house that are shaped like a circle, square, diamond, etc.
- **Memory games** are fun to play with children. Place various objects on a tray and have your child look at them for 5 seconds. Then, have your child cover his/her eyes and remove an object. Ask your child which object was removed.

### Resources

**Toys:** Bingo and lotto games, simple card games like “Go Fish”

Many board games and digital games require memory and matching skills. Look for themes or pictures that your child may be curious about (e.g., animals, a particular cartoon character).

<http://www.minimops.com/>

This free website features games and activities for children ages 2 through 5 years.

[http://www.fisher-price.com/fp.aspx?st=10&e=gameslanding&mcid=game\\_infant\\_game\\_toddler\\_game\\_preschool](http://www.fisher-price.com/fp.aspx?st=10&e=gameslanding&mcid=game_infant_game_toddler_game_preschool)

The toy and gear manufacturer’s website includes a section of online games designed for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

<http://www.sesamestreet.org/games>

With popular Sesame Street® characters, these free computer video games show children how to sort, count, put like things together, and more.

<http://pbskids.org/>

Characters including Curious George®, Sid the Science Kid™, and Clifford the Big Red Dog™ show children how to organize, count, put like things together, etc.



## DEVELOPING LANGUAGE SKILLS

Being able to perceive, produce, and use words to understand and communicate with others is essential for children to get along well with other people and to learn how to read and write. Children develop language skills by hearing, seeing, doing, and repeating.

- **Read together every day.** Talk about the pictures and ask your child to tell you what's happening. Go to the library and check out books together. Most libraries also have free story time.
- **Sing simple songs or recite nursery rhymes.** Once your child knows a song or rhyme well, surprise your child with funny changes (e.g., a cow says "oink" and a pig says "meow").
- **Make up a story** or act out common tasks with your child (e.g., cooking food, going to the doctor). Use puppets, dolls, and other toys as story props to make it more fun. You can make a book of your child's story, or if you have a video camera, you can film your child's movie.
- **Talk about daily activities** as they happen, such as the steps to make breakfast each morning (e.g., "First we get a bowl then we get the cereal."). Wherever you go, describe the smells, sounds, people, and things that you see.
- **Expand your child's language** by answering him or her with a well-formed sentence that includes a new word or idea. For example, if your child says, "Truck broke," you might respond by saying, "The truck is broken. It needs a new wheel."
- **Play games with sounds and words,** such as clapping out syllables of words, finding an object that starts with a certain sound or letter, and playing opposite-word games (e.g., "Soup is hot but ice cream is \_\_\_\_\_").
- **Show that printed words have meaning** by showing examples other than in books, such as signs on your street and items at home like food boxes.
- **In the bath using foam letters,** have your child stick the letters on the bathtub wall and make up words or spell a name. Whatever he or she spells, try to sound it out, even if it's a nonsense word!
- **Encourage use of any language** your child hears often. Young children's brains can understand more than one language.



### Resources

<http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/chart.htm>

<http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/parent-stim-activities.htm>

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association offers information representing, on average, the age by which most children speaking one language will be able to do certain things. The website provides a chart of what your child should be able to do and ideas for activities to improve skills.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/7833>

The Reading Rockets website features reading tips for parents of preschoolers, including tip sheets in other languages. Reading Rockets is an educational first step of WETA, the most popular public television and radio station in Washington, D.C., and is funded by a major grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.

[www.bobbooks.com](http://www.bobbooks.com)

With only four letters in the beginning Bob Books®, your child can sound out all the words and read the whole book on his or her own, thus increasing confidence.

<http://www.ldonline.org/article/6313>

The Learning Disabilities Association of America has published a speech and language milestone chart online.

<http://literacynetwork.verizon.org/tln/31days/>

Thirty-one fun activities for you and your child (ages 3 to 5) to do together to help build literacy skills.

<http://fun.familyeducation.com/preschool/extracurricular-activities/33392.html?detoured=1>

The Family Education Network shares activity ideas for your preschool-aged child to build learning skills.

<http://www.storylineonline.net/>

This streaming video program features Screen Actors Guild members reading children's books.

<http://pbskids.org/read>

PBS Ready to Learn Program



## DEVELOPING SELF-HELP SKILLS



Children, just like adults, want to be independent. Becoming skilled at common tasks, such as dressing, grooming, and daily chores, will help build self-importance and allow your child to gain the confidence to try new things.

- **Set daily routines** so your child learns that some tasks come before others, such as washing hands before cooking or eating food and brushing teeth before going to bed.
- **Break tasks into small steps** with clear and short directions (e.g., for hand washing: wet hands, use soap, scrub front and back of hands, rinse, and dry).
- **Show how to do a task** many times before you ask your child to try it on his or her own. Describe what you are doing as you complete each step.
- **Allow lots of time for practice** of a new skill. Give lots of praise both for trying and for completing a new task.
- **Work together as a family** to get chores done. Teaching your child at a young age to help out will prepare him or her to become a helpful and responsible adult.
- **Explain safety rules** and be sure your child is aware of dangerous things in your home (e.g., don't touch the dials or buttons on the stove). Teach your child his or her full name, phone number, address, and how and when to call 911.
- **Chore charts** that use stickers and a reward system for doing tasks (e.g., getting dressed, putting away toys, washing hands without a reminder) can build self-esteem and foster independence.



### Resources

<http://kidshealth.org/>

This resource website provides articles about child health, development, and behavior.

<http://ada.org/3230.aspx>

The American Dental Association offers videos for children on brushing their teeth.

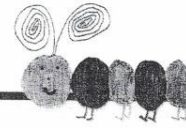
[http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_display/index.php?info\\_center=14&tax\\_level=2&tax\\_subject=231&topic\\_id=1196](http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=14&tax_level=2&tax_subject=231&topic_id=1196)

This U.S. Department of Agriculture website includes food safety games and activities designed for children.

<http://www.freeprintablebehaviorcharts.com/>

In addition to free printable chore charts that include popular characters, this website offers behavior management resources for parents and teachers.

## DEVELOPING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS



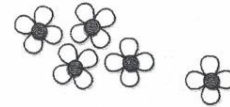
Understanding their own feelings helps children know how to express themselves and how to behave in difficult situations. Understanding the feelings of others helps children build strong friendships and learn fairness and compassion.

- **Set practical goals** for your child's social skills development. Limit your requests and be clear when you ask your child to act differently. For example, asking a child to keep his body still is clearer than asking him to be good. Plan social events at good times of the day for your child, and don't let them last too long. A hungry or tired child may behave poorly in a new situation that could otherwise be fun. Say clearly what happens if rules are not followed, and always follow through on any results you've stated.
- **Set daily routines** to help your child learn order and structure. For example, a daily routine might include choosing a shirt, getting dressed, eating breakfast, and then brushing teeth at the same time every morning. When your child completes tasks and routines without being distracted, give a lot of praise.
- **Model good behavior** in settings where your child must be polite, honest, or make mistakes without getting upset. Talk with your child

about different kinds of feelings, and show how to be caring toward others. For example, small children will quickly learn to ask a crying person if he or she needs a tissue or a hug. Remind your child often of polite words to use, such as, "Excuse me" or "I'm sorry" or "Are you okay?" Practice how to wait until the other person is done talking in a conversation and how to nicely say no to a friend's request. If your child gets upset or throws a tantrum, try to stay calm. A parent who gets upset during a tantrum will only reinforce bad behavior. Instead, calmly tell your child to ask for what he or she wants without crying or whining. Another plan that may be useful is calmly setting a time-out period where the child decides when he or she is ready to come out.

- **Let your child pay attention to one thing at a time.** Often the toys or activities children choose give them a chance practice a new skill at their own rate and in their own way. Make time to play with your child. You can pretend to be a patient for the doctor or a customer at the restaurant. Don't be surprised if your child often picks the same activity or toy, or if he or she stays on one task longer than expected. Your child will move on to the next thing when the time is right.

- **Encourage your child to play with other children.** He or she will learn to show feelings, to respect others by sharing and taking turns, and how to get along with new people. When children are very young, invite one or two other children of the same age to play in your home.
- **Assist independent thinking** by going along with your child's pretend play. Your child's imaginary play is made up of his or her first original ideas, and it's important to show that you value those ideas. Encourage your child's creativity by playing along even when it feels silly. Provide dress-up clothes, pretend or real kitchen items, or puppets for creative play. Offer your child plain paper rather than printed coloring books. Ask your child to describe the things he or she likes or dislikes and tell you why. Start a "This is Me" album for keepsakes or pictures your child decides are important. This album may become a journal or diary as he or she grows older.



### Resources

<http://www.brightfutures.org/mentalhealth/pdf/tools.html#families>

The early childhood section of the mental health tool kit from Bright Futures at Georgetown University includes PDFs of articles and activities related to fears, sleep, limit setting, creating special time, behavior, communication, sibling interaction, and time outs.

<http://www.freepirit.com>

Free Spirit Publishing offers books for children and parents about children's social-emotional needs.

If you need more ideas, consider talking with other people who have young children's interests in mind, such as early childhood family education (ECFE) program coordinators, other parents, your family doctor, a social worker, librarians (especially those who lead preschool activities), and daycare professionals or teachers you meet in your neighborhood or at your place of worship.

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Appendix I

DIAL-4 Teacher Questionnaire Form



**Teacher Questionnaire**

Carol Mardell, PhD  
Dorothea S. Goldenberg, EdD

**Child Information**

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Sex:  Male  Female

Child's age in years and months (do not round)			
	Year	Month	Day
Date Form Filled Out			
Birth Date			
Age			

**Teacher Information**

Teacher's name \_\_\_\_\_ Work phone # \_\_\_\_\_

School/Daycare Center \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**To the Teacher:**

This questionnaire has three parts that ask for information about this child's development.

**Part 1. Self-Help Development** asks about everyday skills that children are expected to learn (for example, dressing and feeding themselves).

**Part 2. Social-Emotional Development** asks about how this child gets along with other children and how he or she feels about himself or herself.

**Part 3. Overall Development** asks about your overall level of concern regarding this child's development in eight areas.

It is important to note that this questionnaire is used for children ages 2 years 6 months through 5 years 11 months. The items cover a broad range of development that includes skills and behaviors many 2-year-olds demonstrate as well as skills that may be difficult for 5-year-olds.

The information you provide is important to the evaluation of this child's development.

Thank you for your help.



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Product Number 14707

## Part 1. Self-Help Development

**Directions:** Place an **X** in the appropriate box to indicate how often this child does each task. A young child's behavior is not the same from day to day. Think of this child's typical or usual behavior at school, not his or her very best or worst day. For tasks that you do not allow or don't ask this child to do, place an **X** in the last box. Please provide **ONLY** one rating for each task.

Task	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely or never	Not allowed or not asked
1. Puts toys or books away when asked	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Washes and dries hands when needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Blows and wipes nose without being asked	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Puts each shoe on correct foot	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Tells you when he or she needs to go to the bathroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Uses the toilet without help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Uses a fork, a spoon, or chopsticks correctly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Dresses self for outdoor activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Buttons clothing without help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Follows safety or classroom rules without being asked	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Self-Help Development Raw Score  
(max = 20)

## Part 2. Social-Emotional Development

**Directions:** Place an **X** in the appropriate box to indicate how often this child shows each feeling or behavior. Think of this child's usual behavior at school. If you have not observed this child performing the behavior, place an **X** in the "Rarely or never" box. Please provide **ONLY** one rating for each item.

Feeling or Behavior	Always or almost always	Sometimes	Rarely or never
1. Smiles or laughs when something is funny	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Argues when denied own way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Breaks toys or other objects on purpose	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Plays well with other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Has tantrums (stamps feet, screams, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Solves problems by talking rather than by hitting, pushing, or biting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Acts without thinking (runs into street without looking both ways, runs with scissors, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Admits when he or she makes a mistake	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Stays calm when things do not go as planned	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Blames others when bad things happen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Knows when people are happy or sad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Interrupts (talks when others are speaking)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Asks before using other people's things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Works well with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Shows pride in doing something well	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Bangs head on the floor or wall	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Clings or hangs on to you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Whines or pouts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Seems afraid of many things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Shows concern for someone who is crying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Hurts others (hits, bites, kicks, punches, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Gives up easily	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Makes transitions easily (moves easily from one activity to the next, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Is restless and can't sit still	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Disrupts others who are working	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. Says mean things to others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Makes fun of others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. Actively seeks out friendships (asks a child if he or she wants to play)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. Tells others how he or she feels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. Says "please" or "thank you"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. Respects teachers and school staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. Responds appropriately to questions from familiar adults (for example, if asked "How are you?" the child says "I'm fine")	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. Acts very sad or withdrawn	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. Follows daily routines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Social-Emotional Development Raw Score  
(max = 68)

### Part 3. Overall Development

**Directions:** Place an **X** in the box that best describes your level of worry about each of the areas below. We would like to know about any areas that you think may be problem areas for this child. This information will be used to help us understand this child's growth and needs.

Area	I'm not worried	I'm a little worried	I'm worried	I'm very worried	I do not know this child well enough to comment
Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Motor skills (walking, throwing, balancing, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cognitive skills (learning, thinking, problem solving, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Language skills (talking and understanding)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self-care skills (dressing and feeding self, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social-emotional skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vision (seeing)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hearing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Appendix J

DIAL-4 Parent Questionnaire



**Parent Questionnaire**

Carol Mardell, PhD  
Dorothea S. Goldenberg, EdD

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Sex:  Male  Female

Child's age in years and months (do not round)			
	Year	Month	Day
Date Form Filled Out	2016	8	25
Birth Date	2012	1	13
Age	4	7	12

**This form was filled out by:**

Mother  Father  Other (please specify relationship) \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person filling out form \_\_\_\_\_ Home phone # \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address of person filling out form \_\_\_\_\_

**To the Parent:**

This form has three parts that ask for information about your child.

**Part 1. Self-Help Development** asks about everyday skills that children are expected to learn (for example, dressing and feeding themselves).

**Part 2. Social-Emotional Development** asks about how your child gets along with other children and how he or she feels about himself or herself.

**Part 3. Overall Development** asks about any concerns or worries you might have about your child.

Please note that some items may ask about skills that your child is just not ready for yet. Please do not be concerned. We use the same form for children ages 2 years 6 months through 5 years 11 months, and we ask about some skills that are difficult even for the oldest children.

Thank you for your help.

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## Part 1. Self-Help Development

**Directions:** Place an **X** in the appropriate box to indicate how often your child does each task. A young child's behavior is not the same from day to day. Think of your child's typical or usual behavior at home, not his or her very best or worst day. For tasks that you do not allow or don't ask your child to do, place an **X** in the last box. Please provide **ONLY** one rating for each task.

Task	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely or never	Not allowed or not asked
1. Buttons clothing without help	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Puts toys or books away when asked	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Spills food or drink when eating	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Unscrews bottle caps without help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Wets or soils pants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Washes and dries hands when needed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Puts clothes or shoes where they belong when asked	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Brushes teeth without help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Blows and wipes nose without being asked	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Puts clothes on <i>backward</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Puts each shoe on correct foot	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Gets dressed without help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Wets bed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Picks up after self without being asked	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Brushes or combs hair without being asked	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Washes self during bath or shower	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Pours from a small can or carton without spilling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Uses a fork, a spoon, or chopsticks correctly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Pours dry cereal and milk into bowl without spilling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Uses the toilet without help	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Wakes up and needs help going back to sleep	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Follows safety rules (stays away from hot oven, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Self-Help Development Raw Score  
(max = 44)

19

## Part 2. Social-Emotional Development

**Directions:** Place an **X** in the appropriate box to indicate how often your child shows each feeling or behavior. Think of your child's usual behavior at home or with friends. If you have not observed your child performing the behavior, place an **X** in the "Rarely or never" box. Please provide **ONLY** one rating for each item.

Feeling or Behavior	Always or almost always	Sometimes	Rarely or never
1. Smiles or laughs when something is funny	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Argues when denied own way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Breaks toys or other objects on purpose	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Plays well with other children	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Has tantrums (stamps feet, screams, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Solves problems by talking rather than by hitting, pushing, or biting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Acts without thinking (runs into street without looking both ways, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Admits when he or she makes a mistake	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Stays calm when things do not go as planned	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Blames others when bad things happen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Knows when people are happy or sad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Interrupts (talks when others are speaking)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Goes to bed easily	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Asks before using other people's things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Works well with others	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Shows pride in doing something well	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Bangs head on the floor, wall, or bed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Clings or hangs on to you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Whines or pouts	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Seems afraid of many things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Shows concern for someone who is crying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Hurts others (hits, bites, kicks, punches, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Gives up easily	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. Makes transitions easily (moves easily from one activity to the next, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. Falls and hurts self	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. Is restless and can't sit still	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Wanders away from you in public places	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. Acts very sad or withdrawn	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Social-Emotional Development Raw Score  
(max = 56)

28

### Part 3. Overall Development

**Directions:** Place an **X** in the box that best describes your level of worry about each of the areas below. We understand that you are naturally concerned about all of these areas. We would like to know about any areas that you think may be problem areas for your child. This information will be used to help us understand your child's growth and needs.

Area	I'm not worried	I'm a little worried	I'm worried	I'm very worried
Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Motor skills (walking, throwing, balancing, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cognitive skills (learning, thinking, problem solving, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Language skills (talking and understanding)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self-care skills (dressing and feeding self, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social-emotional skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vision (seeing)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hearing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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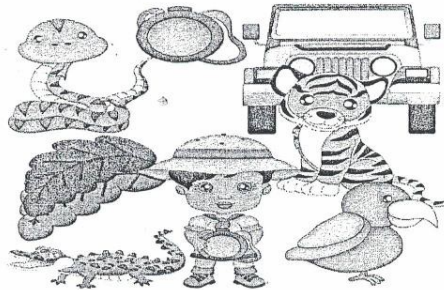
Appendix K

Weekly Parent Newsletter

*Weekly newsletter*

Week of:  
September 21-25

News!



Theme Focus

Fall

Math Notes  
Sorting &  
Counting

Reading Notes  
Focus Story: When Autumn Comes  
ZooPhonics: Ff  
Sight Word: see

Mark Your  
Calendar

9/24: Parent Meeting at \_\_\_\_\_ library



Remember...

- \*If you haven't turn in Physicals and dentals please do so ASAP.
- \*Please send in a family photo if you have not already done so.
- \*As the weather begins to change please be sure to send a light jacket with your child.

## Appendix L

### Family Project Assignment

#### Family Project

Family projects are designed with the goal of increasing family togetherness and increasing fine motor skills and creativity in students.

#### "The TAIL of the kite"

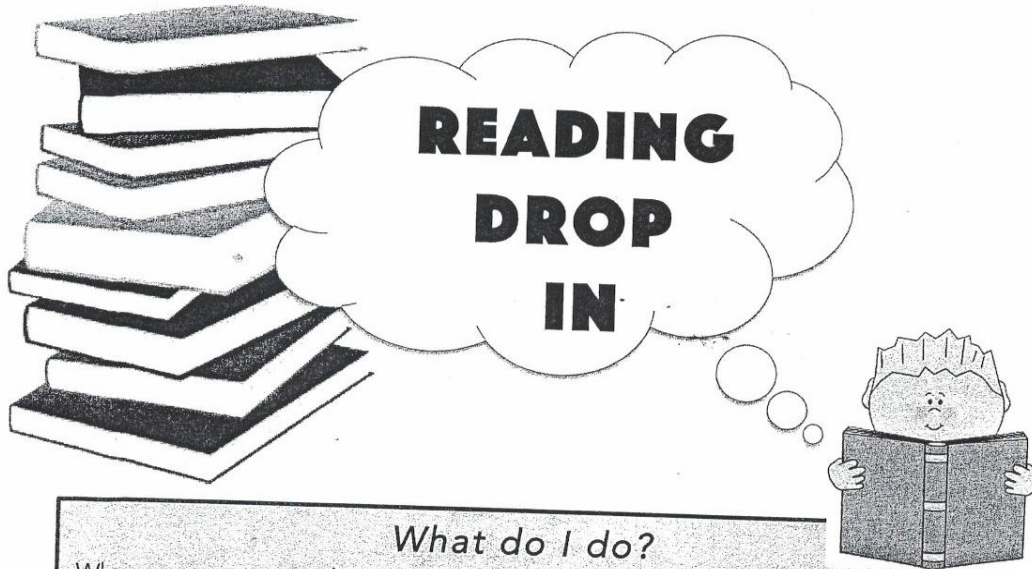
Animals have tails, shirts have tails and even people sometimes wear ponytails. But do kites have tails? Of course! Your child is bringing home a shape of a typical kite. Please have your child carefully cut out the kite. Then, as a family work to turn this dull white kite into...

A beautiful kite with a design of their choice and a long tail.

Please return your finished Kite to school by Thursday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>.

## Appendix M

### Reading Drop In Information Sheet



#### *What do I do?*

When you come to drop off your child in the morning, feel free to stay a few minutes longer than usual. Let your child pick out a book, and find a place in the classroom to sit and read together. Invite other students to join you and your child, and read in small groups. Your child may bring a book from home if he or she would like.

#### *When do I do it?*

Friday morning, March 4<sup>th</sup> when you drop your child off at Head Start.

\*\*This is completely optional, but we would love to have you join our classroom for a few extra minutes!

#### *Why should I do this?*

Reading a book with your child is a fun, easy way to spend a little bit more time with each other before the day truly begins. They could show you their favorite book and even practice their reading skills! By taking the time to read with your child, you are showing them that school is important.

Appendix N

Reading Ideas to do at Home Information Sheet

Reading at home makes a difference!

What you can do at home...

Read with Me

**Reading Ideas:**

- Read bedtime stories... (You read to your child and your child reads to you.)
- Have your child read the grocery list to you as you shop.
- Write down a recipe for your child's favorite food then read it together as you make it.
- Get excited to check out your local library.
- Play a board game... (Have your child read all the playing cards to you.)

**Reading Tips:**

- Don't leave home without it! Always have reading materials available to read in the car or if your child has to wait for an appointment.
- Once is not enough. Encourage your child to re-read favorite stories. This helps to build fluency, speed and accuracy.
- Dig deeper! Ask your child questions about what they just read. Why do they think something happened? What else might have happened?
- Encourage your beginning reader to follow along with their finger on the words as they read and to sound out unfamiliar words.
- Be patient, correct gently and praise with enthusiasm!

Your child is interested in reading about...

© <http://www.teachersnateachers.com/Store/SunnyDaze>

## Appendix O

### **Institutional Review Board (IRB) Form**

Information about Being in a Research Study  
Clemson University

### **Quality Early Childhood Education and School Readiness (Phase II)**

#### **Description of the Study and Your Part in It**

Dr. Hans Klar, and Dr. Sandra Linder along with Julie Desmangles are inviting you to take part in a research study. Dr. Hans Klar is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership, and Dr. Sandra Linder is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Mathematics Education at Clemson University. Mrs. Julie Desmangles is a student at Clemson University, conducting this study with the help of Drs. Klar and Linder. The purpose of this research is to determine how parents, teachers, and school leaders perceive and promote *school readiness*.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are center director, a teacher, or a parent/guardian of a student in a Head Start Program within the [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] County School District. Your participation in this study involves being interviewed for approximately one hour. With your permission, we will audio record the interview. Your participation in this study can help make ongoing quality improvements to preschool programs, and any future quality development initiatives.

#### **Risks and Discomforts**

We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

#### **Possible Benefits**

While this research may not benefit you personally, this study may lead to a better understanding of how parents and school leaders perceive and promote school readiness.

#### **Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. The information we collect will be used in a confidential manner. All data will be collected using secure online software. Only members of the research team will see it in its original format. The data will be maintained on password-protected computers belonging to research team members. Information which identifies the Head Start Centers, or the

names of all participants will **not** be shared. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the confidentiality of the Head Start Centers, and participants.

Audio files of the interviews will be transcribed. After the audio files are transcribed, the original audio file will be deleted. The transcribed data will be maintained for at least five years after the completion of the study, in accordance with Clemson University's archival storage policies.

### **Choosing to Be in the Study**

Participation in this study is voluntary; you do not have to be in this study. If you do participate in the study, you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to take part in this study, or to stop taking part in this study.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Hans Klar at Clemson University at 864-656-5091.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or [irb@clemson.edu](mailto:irb@clemson.edu). If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC's toll-free number, 866-297-3071.

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are at least 18 years of age

You may print a copy of this informational letter for your files.

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