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Components of Kindergarten School Readiness

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify beliefs of stakeholders regarding children’s readiness factors with respect to the transition from prekindergarten to Kindergarten. In particular, the study was guided by a curiosity regarding whether or not the stakeholders involved shared similar beliefs about such readiness factors. Teachers, administrators, and parents were interviewed to name and discuss the readiness factors they believed should be considered during this transition. Themes emerged demonstrating multiple commonalities among the stakeholders with regards to readiness for children entering kindergarten, namely social, behavioral, academic, emotional, routine, and motor-skill readiness. There was less agreement regarding age readiness. In addition, all interviewees called for increased communication among the stakeholders, and increased parent knowledge. Implications of these findings, and recommendations for the roles of each stakeholder are provided.
# Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction 4
  Background 4
  Statement of Problem 6
  Purpose of the Study 8
  Research Questions 9

Chapter Two: Review of Literature 11
  Cognitive Benefits of Prekindergarten 11
  Prekindergarten Program Quality 14
  Lasting Effects of Prekindergarten 19
  Conclusion 21

Chapter Three: Methodology 23
  Data Collection 23
  Setting 25
  Participants 26
  Design 27
  Materials 27
  Limitations 30
  Summary 30

Chapter Four: Findings and Results 31
  Findings 31
  Results 34
  Summary 48

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Recommendations, Future Research 50
  Conclusions 50
  Recommendations 52
  Future Research 53

References 55
Appendix A 58
Appendix B 59
Chapter 1: Introduction

Most people involved in education want the same thing, and that is to do what is best for children. In order for this to happen there is a need to make sure that children are appropriately prepared to enter kindergarten with universal readiness attributes that will help them succeed in kindergarten and beyond. As educators and professionals wanting what is best for children, it is important that we have a common understanding of what school readiness looks like at the prekindergarten level (Pre-K), kindergarten level, and elementary level so that every person involved at each level can help successfully prepare children to become life-long learners.

Background

Kindergarten, or garden for children, is an idea founded in Germany by a man named Friedrich Froebel, the Father of Kindergarten, in 1837. The theories and practices Froebel used in his kindergarten classrooms are still used to this day. His main focus and idea of the kindergarten classroom was that it should be a place where children use play in order to learn. He felt that through social interaction, children could learn and grow properly (Britannica, 2011). When Froebel first wrote about and introduced his ideas of kindergarten to the German community, the idea was shunned and his books were burned. They did not feel there was a place in learning that involved play. Eventually the idea of kindergarten was embraced, and in 1872 kindergarten gained support from the National Education Association in the United States. In 1884 the United States established a Department of Kindergarten Instruction (Britannica, 2011).

Today, in the United States, kindergartens are normally part of K-12 education systems and focus on children around the ages of 5 and 6. Depending on the state in which one may live would depend on if children must attend kindergarten. Some states’ compulsory schooling laws
begin at age 5, however others states’ compulsory laws start at ages 6 or 7. Even though kindergarten curriculum varies state by state, the overarching idea of Froebel’s first kindergarten is very common in the kindergarten of today. Those ideas comprise of children learning to communicate, play, and interact appropriately while learning academics such as math, reading, science, music, and art. These leanings help the child prepare for their continuing education and although it is considered their first formal year of education, many of the children who attend kindergarten also attend preschool or Pre-K.

In 1816 in New Lanark, Scotland it is said the “first” preschool known as the Institute for the Formation of Character was opened by a man named Robert Owen. This original preschool served approximately 100 children of workers from his cotton mills. It served children from the ages 18 months to 10 years, and there were separate classes for the 2 - 5 year olds where they spent half of their time in instruction and the other half engaged in play (Britannica, 2011).

In 1965 President Johnson began the publicly funded preschool program known as Head Start. The objective of the Head Start program was to provide support for young children, ages 3 and 4, from low-income areas, with education, nutrition, health screenings and support services for families. During the 1960’s, ten percent of children ages 3 and 4 were enrolled in Head Start. As its popularity grew and because of a lack of funding, some states began their own version of preschool geared toward low-income families. By the 1980’s these programs were rapidly growing.

From this first preschool to what is thought as preschool today, ideas are very similar and tend to focus on learning through play. However, in the United States there are both publicly and privately funded preschools. The major difference between the two is that privately funded preschools do not need to follow any curriculum guidelines mandated by the government. This
difference in learning objectives is crucial for my study, to point out expectations of school readiness for children entering kindergarten. I aim to find out if the stakeholders involved in this transition share similar ideas about what is expected of children when they take that unprecedented leap form the preschool years into the beginning of their formal education.

**Statement of the Problem**

Preschool programs can be extremely valuable for young children. When children are at the preschool age their brain is growing and developing rapidly. During this stage of development children are creating their foundation of language, social skills, and knowledge that will set the foundation for their continuing educational career (Stipek, 1998). Preschool helps to advance these development stages by offering children learning opportunities in a social and structured environment that is conducive to learning through interactive play and communication. If a child does not attend preschool they are at risk for missing these opportunities of communication, introduction to educational terminology, and being engaged in a socialized learning environment (Gill, Winters, & Friedman, 2006). Through attendance of a preschool program children will most likely be occupied in activities that will help them achieve many developmental and knowledge based milestones. Recent research shows that prekindergarten is highly associated with math and reading (Ruhm, Magnuson, & Waldfogel, 2007) and even more specifically, letter-word identification, spelling, and applied problem solving in mathematics (Gormley et al. 2005). These milestones allow preschool teachers to assess and report any progress or delays a child may have (Brooks-Gunn, 2003). These early interventions will lead to a child being supported early on for any learning disabilities and will help children to successfully be prepared for kindergarten. Stipek (1998) also found that in addition to high scores in math and reading, the benefits of prekindergarten programs that engage children in
instructional conversations and ask children to be reflective in their learning, (i.e. ask questions, provide information, reflect, record and report observations, test hypotheses, and infer) are overwhelming.

Another crucial component of any educational setting is communication amongst stakeholders. Early et al. (2001) found that readiness on the part of schools includes their making connections with families, communities, and preschool settings; establishing and sustaining long-term relationships; and making concerted efforts of appropriate intensity. Such effective communication requires a clear statement of the existing practices. Therefore, seeking information about current practices and expectations is a prerequisite to accomplishing these goals. In a study by Gill, Winters, & Friedman (2006) findings were that Pre-K and kindergarten programs perceived communication between the programs to be less than optimal. Gill et al. (2006) also found that in order for a preschool to be completely effective it must be able to help continue a child’s education by informing all stakeholders involved what each child has accomplished and what areas each child needs reinforcement. Although public schools can effectively make children stronger learners, it is their responsibility to make sure when those children enter their schools, the tools they have gained through their preschool program are built upon to ensure they reach their maximum potential.

Not only are the educational components of preschool important, the publicly funded aspects are critical now more than ever due to immense budget cuts. In 2001, 66% of 4-year olds were enrolled in a center or school-based preschool program, up 23% from 30 years ago (US Bureau of the Census, 1970; US Department of Education, 2003). Prekindergarten funding at state levels increased over 250% between 1990 and 2007. It now amounts to around $2.54 billion in funding expenditures (Ruhm, Magnuson, & Waldfogel, 2007).
With the rise in attendance within the preschool programs and for this type of spending to continue, it is imperative to understand what the expectations of these programs are and the expectations of the next level of education. As stakeholders in the future of education in this country both educators and parents need to understand how to continue children's growth of education at every level. There needs to be more articulation with parents, teachers, and administrators so that no one child is left behind.

As a teacher, this researcher knows the importance of children entering kindergarten and beginning their educational journey in the right direction. If children are entering kindergarten without the readiness attributes needed to sustain growth in elementary school and beyond then the need to look at and discuss universal readiness attributes is apparent.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine school readiness factors and look into what stakeholders believe should be achieved during the years prior to entering kindergarten and whether those ideas and beliefs are common among the stakeholders involved at the next level of learning. The research will help to understand if prekindergarten programs are helping children to be cognitively and socially prepared for kindergarten, and whether those preparations fit with common practice at the elementary level. The need for these readiness factors to be consistent is imperative due to the rising class sizes and the budget cuts, which are eliminating resources, such as classroom aides. Building upon knowledge gained in prior research, this study will provide information for stakeholders so they can develop a strategy to address the continued growth and learning of children and better serve the families at each level.

Examining the school readiness factors that most benefit children when transitioning from Pre-K to Kindergarten will help stakeholders better understand the nature of what is being
addressed in Pre-K programs. From the findings of this study, teachers and administrators at both the Pre-K and elementary level can incorporate the suggested readiness factors into their programs in order to build on children’s’ prior knowledge. Educators will benefit from this study because common readiness factors will help children build on prior knowledge and will help teachers understand where to begin with students and not spend time teaching concepts already taught or try to build on ideas not already learned. This study’s findings can help stakeholders make informed decisions on developing lessons and implementing the curriculum effectively, and can also help guide future research on where to begin when looking at how to generate cross-curricular goals of Pre-K into kindergarten.

Research Questions

The question that leads this study is: What are the beliefs regarding school readiness for children entering kindergarten among the stakeholders involved—parents, teachers, administrators? Other questions that follow upon the main research question are: What do educators in prekindergarten want children to know when entering kindergarten? What do kindergarten teachers think children should be prepared in knowing when entering kindergarten? Do parents share the same ideas about school readiness factors as educators? Do parents feel that proper communication exists between their child’s preschool and their child’s elementary school? Do administrators at the elementary level believe in the same school readiness factors as directors of prekindergarten programs? This study attempts to answer these questions, and will then offer recommendations of readiness factors for teachers, administrators, directors, and parents.

In the next chapter the researcher introduces literature that defines current findings on the cognitive benefits of prekindergarten programs, prekindergarten program quality with regards to
classroom quality, academic achievement, and indicators of quality programs, and finally lasting effects that prekindergarten has on students who attend.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Due to the recent budget cuts within our education system, especially in California, the conditions in which students are entering kindergarten are less than optimal. With the increases in class size and lack of aides in the classroom, school readiness plays an important role in setting the foundation of success for children when entering school. Therefore, the need to look at prekindergarten programs and the readiness effects they have on our children was crucial for the researcher to consider how to best prepare and help America’s youngsters start school on the right track.

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature that looks at Pre-K programs and the effects they have on young learners. The focus of this literature review will be on children who attend prekindergarten for at least one year prior to entering kindergarten. To consider which components of prekindergarten may be most beneficial for kindergarten readiness, the researcher examined the cognitive benefits of prekindergarten, prekindergarten program quality, and the lasting effects of prekindergarten.

Cognitive Benefits of Prekindergarten

Prekindergarten can have many cognitive benefits on children in regards to school readiness. Recent research shows that prekindergarten is highly associated with advanced math and reading (Ruhm, Magnuson, & Waldfogel, 2007) and even more specifically, letter-word identification, spelling, and applied problem solving in mathematics (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005). Stipek (1998) also found that in addition to high scores in math and reading, the benefits of prekindergarten programs that engage children in instructional conversations and ask children to be reflective in their learning (i.e. ask questions, provide information, reflect, record and report observations, test hypotheses, and infer), are overwhelming. These attributes
of cognitive benefits also point towards social factors of prekindergarten and their influence on the cognitive components. When looking at different prekindergarten programs, Chien, Howes, Burchinal, and Pianta (2010) found prekindergarten programs that incorporate free play, accompanied by high-quality scaffolding interactions with teachers, have the highest rate of cognitive benefits for children towards school readiness.

Gormley et al. (2005) examined the overall effect of the Oklahoma universal Pre-K program, a movement which provides access to preschool education for all families, similar to the availability of kindergarten, with focus on school readiness as assessed by three subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Test (Mather & Woodcock, 2001). The researchers were focused on adopting a design that reduced the threat of selection bias by using a standardized assessment instrument and relying on college-educated and specially trained teachers to administer the tests to the children. Their main objective was to examine differential Pre-K effects by family income using free lunch eligibility as a proxy for family income and racial or ethnic groups of the children, and by their enrollment in half- or full-day programs, in order to determine cognitive benefits of Pre-K.

The participants within this study consisted of Pre-K and kindergarten children enrolled in the Tulsa, Oklahoma public schools. With a total of 1,847 Pre-K students and 3,727 kindergarten students, 85% (1,567) of Pre-K and 84.5% (3,149) of kindergarten students were tested.

As mentioned above, the researchers used the Woodcock-Johnson Achievement test, which consisted of three subtests, the Letter-Word Identification subtest, the Spelling subtest, and the Applied Problems subtest, as their testing instruments.
Teachers administered the tests from both the Pre-K and kindergarten classrooms. They were specially trained in August of 2003 to in order to administer the test properly. Although there were high rates of English Language Learners being tested, teachers were told to administer the test exclusively in English and to administer the test to all children. The testing took place during the first week of school. When analyzing the gathered data, the researchers used a traditional cross-sectional analysis.

The study found that the effects of school-based universal Pre-K improves cognitive tests of pre-reading and reading skills, pre-writing and spelling skills, and math reasoning and problem-solving abilities. Gormley et al.’s (2005) findings coincide with those of Xiang and Schweinhart (2002) in their similar study conducted in Michigan, in which teachers rated students who attend Pre-K programs compared to those who do not attend Pre-K are higher in language, literacy, math, music, and social relations in regards to cognitive benefits. Gormley et al. (2005) consider that the reason these findings coincide may be due to two variables: 1) Oklahoma compensates Pre-K teachers at the same level as primary and secondary teachers, which helps in recruitment of talented teachers; 2) The Tulsa Reads program, which provides 7 days of professional development training to all of its Pre-K teachers. It was found that students from diverse income levels benefitted from the universal Pre-K program as well.

Finally, Gormley et al. (2005) found that children exposed to Pre-K experience a gain of 7 to 8 months in Letter-Word Identification, 6 to 7 months in Spelling, and 4 months in Applied Problems, which are above and beyond the gains of aging or maturation.

Gormley et al. (2005) concluded that Pre-K programs can have a cognitive benefit on all children no matter what their income-level is. Their study also suggests that if a child is in a prekindergarten that is of high quality, then there is a good chance of gains in reading, spelling
and math. They feel that high compensation for teachers and appropriate training aide in helping Pre-K programs succeed by creating a pathway for developing school readiness in children.

The aforementioned studies highlight that prekindergarten, if implemented effectively, can have a vast impact on the cognitive benefits for children. As previously noted, such benefits include higher levels of reading, spelling, and applied problems solving. It is important to understand the aspects that create a high quality prekindergarten in order to fully prepare all children who are in prekindergarten, and provide them the opportunity to succeed.

**Prekindergarten Program Quality**

In addition to the cognitive benefits prekindergarten can have on our children, it is also crucial for society to understand what an effective program looks like, how it is run, and what it offers to our children. By looking at high-quality preschools we can help pave the way towards making our programs more cognitively effective and cost efficient for our society. Research shows that there are many specific aspects of prekindergarten programs that make them high quality. Espinosa (2002) found that teacher child ratio, class size, teacher qualifications, teacher compensation, and square footage of classrooms are all factors that play a role in the type of quality provided from a preschool. These findings coincide with Gormley et al. (2005) who found that professional development and teacher compensation that coincides with elementary and high school teacher wages were main factors in sustaining a high-quality program.

Ruhm, Magnuson, & Waldfogel (2007) found that behavior problems were not as frequent in prekindergarten programs that were located in the same school as the kindergarten program. They concluded that this evidence indicates “prekindergarten programs located within public schools may be of relatively high quality” (p. 49). All of these conclusions coincide with the findings of Karoly, Ghosh-Dastidar, Zellman, Perlman, and Fernyhough (2005) in a study
funded by the RAND Corporation, that financial reward and professional development are key components of high quality care, and that children who attend center-based care “fall short on key quality benchmarks, especially those linked to early learning” (p. 17). The following literature will show, more specifically, aspects of prekindergarten programs which make them high quality, and what the essential components are that contribute to effective learning in the lives of young children. In particular the components are classroom quality and academic achievement, quality indicators, and lasting effects.

**Classroom Quality and Academic Achievement.** Burchinal et al. (2008) focused their research on evaluating specific aspects of classroom quality and children’s academic achievement in both the prekindergarten and kindergarten year. They were curious to identify the qualities of Pre-K that served to enhance the learning and behavior abilities of children one year prior to kindergarten and whether those high quality instruction components help children succeed within the kindergarten setting.

Burchinal et al. (2008) examined 240 randomly selected prekindergarten programs in six states in order to evaluate specific aspects of classroom quality. They used two observational measures, the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales-Revised (ECERS-R; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; LaParo, Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2002). By using these two measurements the researchers were able to focus on which specific dimensions of prekindergarten would help children achieve high language, academic, and social outcomes, specifically after they left prekindergarten and experienced a year of kindergarten.

Burchinal et al. (2008) found that academic gains occurred when teachers “interacted positively with students and promoted the use of language in the classroom, provided scaffolding,
coherent instruction, and contingent informative feedback” (p. 150). Additionally, analysis of the ECERS Interactions data suggested that classrooms where teachers were working with students independently, or with small groups had interactions that were positive and enriching, encouraged children to communicate, and use language to develop reasoning skills. The ECERS data also suggested that children showed greater reading and language skills at the end of kindergarten when their prekindergarten teacher’s scaffold concepts of the children’s skill levels. The same results were also true when prekindergarten teachers “provided clear, positive, and specific feedback” (p. 151).

Another finding was that prekindergarten programs, which operated for less than 25 hours per week, did not portray these similar characteristics. The researchers felt that one possible reason for this finding was that those prekindergarten programs did not have the time to set up their schedules to include specific direct instruction for children. When looking at the findings of the CLASS Instructional Climate factor, the researchers noted that even though the prekindergarten programs had relatively high structural standards, children, for the most part, did not receive “either, highly interactive and responsive teaching, or clear, content-rich instruction” (p. 151).

One last finding Burchinal et al. (2008) discovered coincided with the findings of Burchinal et al. (2006), indicating that frequent responsive interactions between teachers and children that promote language and reasoning may be especially important for enhancing social skills of children with at least the one social risk factor of low maternal education.

Burchinal et al. (2008) concluded that responsive and stimulating interactions with teachers and instructional quality of prekindergarten classroom could predict the acquisition of
language, social, and pre-academic skills. However, most prekindergarten programs were not high quality.

Limitations of this study point towards the fact that there was no comparison group, which leads the researchers to note that the study cannot be viewed as an evaluation of whether children gain from attending prekindergarten programs. Because of this limitation, the researchers must acknowledge that the research should not be used for inferring causality.

From these findings, Burchinal et al. (2008) suggest that in order for a prekindergarten to be of high quality, the programs must have teachers who encourage children to communicate and use language to develop reasoning skills, interact frequently with children, provide clear and positive discipline and supervision, develop concepts coherently, and also give clear and positive feedback.

In order for this to happen the researchers recommend the findings of their study must be brought to the attention of people at the state and local levels in order to look at ways to provide professional development, training, and curriculum initiatives to ensure access to high quality Pre-K on a more uniform basis than is currently happening across America.

**Prekindergarten Quality Indicators.** In another study on prekindergarten program quality, Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney, and Abbott–Shim (2000) focused on specific quality indicators, which point towards strong links to children’s experiences in childcare. They also focused on the association of quality of care as indicated by structural features, process indicators, and compliancy with state regulations. They felt that looking at these components would broaden the perspective on all aspects that render a prekindergarten to be of the highest quality. This study is of main interest to my research because of its implications of the financial and regulatory aspects of childcare in the setting of paid care in relation to state offered programs.
For their study they looked at three sites, Boston, Massachusetts, the central area of Virginia, and Atlanta, Georgia, which focused on 104 childcare centers. These sites were selected purposely to represent a range of stringency regulations for childcare centers.

The tools used to assess the quality of the classroom environment were the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS; Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 1986), and Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale and Assessment Profile for Early Childhood Programs (Abbott-Shim & Sibley, 1987). These instruments measure the quality of the physical setting, curriculum, caregiver-child interactions, health, safety, scheduling, indoor and outdoor play spaces, teacher qualifications, and play materials of the classroom. When focusing on the structural indicators of quality in childcare, the researchers looked at wages, class size and ratios, parent fees, and teacher education and training.

Findings from this study suggest that classroom quality had a stronger relationship with regards to teacher wages than with any other structural aspect. This finding coincides with the previously stated research of Gormley et al. (2005). Also found was a strong correlation between higher cost childcare and the quality of the center. This finding corresponds the first observation concerning teacher wages, and suggests that if a program charges more for services rendered, they have the ability to pay higher wages. Finally, the researchers found that in order for a preschool classroom to reach its full potential of effectiveness, it must have small child/teacher ratios.

Taken together, these studies on Pre-K program quality indicate that in order for a Pre-K program to be of the highest quality it must provide an environment that encourages children to be effective communicators, have small teacher/student ratios, emphasize strong classroom structure and discipline, and employ teachers who are qualified and adequately compensated for
their knowledge and skills. As in the first section, this section underlies the importance of the social aspects of Pre-K. It shows that for children to obtain higher learning skills, and for a program to provide those learning components, social factors must have a commonplace within the program in order to be effective and have lasting effects.

**Lasting Effects of Prekindergarten**

If Pre-K programs are going to be a productive aspect of the future of America’s education, it is important to look at and understand the lasting effects Pre-K has on the children it serves. In Barnett’s (2008) summary of preschool and its lasting effects, he noted that in 2006-07 federal spending for the Head Start program was about $6.2 billion and almost $700 million on the Early Head Start program. These programs only serve 11% of America’s four-year olds and 8% of three-year olds. State prekindergarten programs enroll 22% of four-year olds and 11% of three-year olds. Thirty-eight states, including the District of Columbia, spent more than $3.7 billion programs nationwide for Pre-K programs. If our local, state, and federal government is going to dedicate this much money towards Pre-K programs, it is imperative to see if effects on learning were lasting and whether or not Pre-K programs have economic benefits as well.

In a social policy report from the Society for Research in Child Development, Brooks-Gunn (2003) found that children who are enrolled in a high quality center-based program show positive benefits of Pre-K “into the late elementary school and high school years, although effects are smaller than they were at the beginning of elementary school” (p. 1). She also found that programs which continue into the elementary school (i.e. Head Start, etc.) and “offer high ‘doses’ of early intervention have the most sustained long-term effects” (p. 1). Ruhm et al. (2007), who evaluated the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K), came to similar conclusions. They found that 70-80% of cognitive gains of prekindergarten
students in the study faded out by the spring of the first grade. This leads to the belief that the students who are not in state or federal Pre-K programs are not reaping the benefits of high quality care.

When looking at the economic returns of Pre-K, Doggett and Wat’s (2010) review of literature found “if middle- and upper-income students reaped only 25% to 50% of the benefits that low-income children received, a high-quality prekindergarten-for-all program in California would still return $3 for every dollar invested” (p. 9). This corresponds to findings from Ruhm et al. (2007) that “prekindergarten has few lasting positive effects on advantaged children’s skills by the first grade” (p. 50). These findings lead us to believe that just because people are spending money on childcare does not mean it will produce beneficial outcomes.

Barnett (2008) reviewed the results of numerous research studies regarding the short- and long-term effects of preschool education on children’s learning and development. He focused his review on the research of different capacities in which prekindergarten is offered and the overall effects they have on the youth of our country.

The review provided an overview of the types of programs offered: childcare; the caring of a child during the day by a person other than the child’s legal guardians, not necessarily an academic setting; Head Start, a program of the United States Department of Health and Human Services that provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families; and other state and local prekindergarten programs. Barnett talked about the number of children in the United States that attend these different types of programs and how over the past 50 years the attendance and focus of prekindergarten programs has risen dramatically. Under each category, between two and five separate studies were discussed in depth. Barnett made it clear that it was of the upmost
importance to have a distinct understanding of what each program offered and what the findings were in order for the reader to conclude on their own as to which programs were effective, rather than to rely on the author’s knowledge for validation. Although many of the studies pointed to the same characteristics of “positive effects” (p. 12) (i.e. small class sizes; supervision and coaching of prekindergarten teachers; assess learning and development regularly; develop whole child including social and emotional development) Barnett concluded that “preschool education should be developed in the context of comprehensive public policies and programs to effectively support child development from birth to age 5 and beyond” (p. 21).

This review of literature discussed the multiple ideas that lead to effective aspects of Pre-K. The first discussed benefit was the cognitive benefits of prekindergarten, such as higher levels of reading, spelling, and applied problem solving. Attributes of prekindergarten program quality, such as effective communication within the classes and teachers, small class sizes, strong classroom structure and discipline, and employ qualified teachers, were considered next. And finally, Barnett (2008) reviewed the possible lasting effects that a prekindergarten can have on children who attend high quality preschools; these effects were found in settings where children were exposed to early intervention programs and attended high quality Pre-K programs.

I used these findings to make sense of what readiness factors children need, in order to be successful in transitioning from prekindergarten to kindergarten. I also focused on one aspect he feels is missing from the cited research; the role communication plays in the transitioning of children from Pre-K to kindergarten.

Conclusion

Although previous studies examined specific measures for prekindergarten to be successful, there remains to be little research regarding the continuity of school readiness, the
shared beliefs between all people involved, and how communication effects the lasting benefits of prekindergarten. The present study examines the beliefs regarding school readiness at both the prekindergarten and elementary level, and the desired outcomes for prekindergarten. It hopes to prove a clear understanding of the prekindergarten process with specific ideas shared by prekindergarten personnel and public education personnel. These findings may help educators understand expectations of children at each level in order to properly identify what needs are being met at the prekindergarten level and what the expectations are of the prekindergarteners when entering the next level of education.

The next chapter describes the research methodology and the qualitative data gathered from the interviews of the stakeholders involved in the readiness of children entering kindergarten. Chapter 4 will present what the interviewed stakeholders felt were important readiness factors in regards to children entering kindergarten.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The focus of this study was to determine if the stakeholders involved in childrens’ transition from Pre-K to kindergarten share a mutual understanding of what is expected, or if there are a multitude of differences in opinion about what should be expected of children entering kindergarten. Following the prior literature, this study focused on three broad areas for the research question: 1) Cognitive benefits of prekindergarten 2) Program quality of prekindergarten 3) Lasting effects of prekindergarten. The research question asked in this study was: What are the beliefs of school readiness among all people involved for children entering kindergarten?

This chapter focuses on the methodology that was used in this research, detailing the design, setting, participants, and procedures involved in this study. This chapter will help the reader understand the methodology the researcher used in data-collection and the process the researcher implemented to analyze the data.

Data Collection

The primary method for data collection in this qualitative study was a semi-structured interview process. The semi-structured interview process is a method of providing the participant with a base question, but also having the option of following up a given response with alternative, optional questions whose use depends on the situation (Mertler & Charles, 2010).

The researcher in this study used two types of interviews. The first type of interview used was face-to-face interviews (Mertler & Charles, 2010). This type of interview involved a one-on-one interview with the participant and the researcher. This method allowed the interviewer to sit one-on-one with participants and adapt the questions as necessary. It also allowed the researcher to clarify doubt and ensure that the responses were properly understood,
by repeating or rephrasing the questions. This interview method was beneficial because it allowed the interviewer to pick up nonverbal cues from the participant. Also, any discomfort, stress, and problems that the respondent experienced was detected through body language. This would be impossible to detect in a telephone interview. The face-to-face interviews helped the researcher get the desired results and helped the researcher understand the expression of the person of who was interviewed. Looking at facial expressions made it easier for the researcher to notice if the participant was confused and to know if the participant looked as though they wanted to add more. The main disadvantage of the face-to-face interviews was the geographical and participant limitations they placed on the research. The researcher was unable to interview a large number of participants, which led to a small sample size for the data collection.

The second type of interview used was the focus group interview (Mertler & Charles, 2010). This type of interview allowed the researcher to interview several participants at one time. This technique helped the researcher gain multiple insights during one sitting. It also helped in regards to time constraints. This method also proved useful in that it allowed participants to build upon each other’s responses during the interviews and provided the researcher a chance to clarify answers given by the participants. One disadvantage of focus groups was that the participants may be hesitant to express their thoughts, especially when their thoughts oppose the views of another participant.

The interviews were held with a total of 9 participants, all of which were full-length semi-structured interviews lasting no less than 45 minutes and no more than 60 minutes. Two of the interviews were face-to-face, while the other half consisted of focus group interviews. The information shared by the participants of the interviews provided narrative data with regards to the readiness factors of students entering kindergarten. After the interviews were completed, the
researcher analyzed transcripts of the interviews by utilizing a system of categorization known as a coding scheme (Mertler & Charles, 2010). The researcher used a coding scheme to group data that provided similar types of information given within each interview. The similar types of information were noted, from which patterns emerged. These patterns helped the researcher focus on the information that was crucial to identifying readiness factors for students entering kindergarten.

**Setting**

The research was conducted at three specific locations in North County San Diego, California, selected primarily for convenience. The first was a public elementary school located in the heart of a beach community, Sandwater Elementary (pseudonym). However, due to the exact location of the school, its demographics were more diverse than the majority of the surrounding area. According to the 2010 United States Census, the cities population at that time was approximately 59,000. This population consisted of 78% White, 14% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 4% other. As for this particular elementary school, it hosted classes for students in K-6th grade. At the time, the school had just over 480 students enrolled for the 2011-2012 school year. This school was an optimal selection for the study because it served a well-rounded demographic population, having a mixture of students with regards to race, academic ability, and socio-economic background. For the 2009-10 school year, the student body of Sandwater consisted of 54% Hispanic, 43% White, 2% Asian, and 1% African American. Forty four percent of the students within the school were from low-income households (CBEDS census of October 2009).

The second location for the interviews was held at a prekindergarten school also located in Northern San Diego County. This site was a prekindergarten designed to serve an abundance of community members from students and faculty from a university, in addition to residents of
the local city. In 2008, this city had a population of approximately 83,000. The demographic groups of the city in 2008 consisted of 38% Hispanic, 62% White, 2% Black, 6% Asian, and less than 1% of American Indian, Hawaiian, and other. This site was a prime selection for this study because it serves a well-rounded demographic population and has an abundant mixture of students from race, academic ability, and socio-economic backgrounds. The prekindergarten had a total enrollment of 138 students which breaks down to 78 Caucasian, 11 African-American, 26 Hispanic/Latino, 17 Asian/Pacific Islander, 1 Native American, and 5 other.

The third interview location was the home of the researcher. This site was most convenient for the focus group interview that involved two parents, both of which had children who attended school districts located in North County San Diego.

Each participant in the interview process was interviewed as either a one-on-one interview or as a focus group interview. The purpose of the focus group interview was to gain information from multiple sources during one sitting. Each interview, whether face-to-face or focus group, was held in a quiet, isolated environment at the elementary school, a prekindergarten located within the city of San Marcos, or the home of the researcher. Due to time constraints each face-to-face interview was held to a maximum of 45 minutes and each focus group was held to a maximum of 60 minutes. The research took multiple weeks to complete as the researcher was only able to hold one interview per day and had to spread interview dates out according to the participants’ schedule. There were no interruptions while the interviews took place.

**Participants**

In developing the study, the researcher decided to gather input from all stakeholders involved in the transition of children leaving Pre-K and entering kindergarten. The researcher
felt the input from each stakeholder would encompass all realms of what was believed best for children at this stage. The decision was made to interview 9 participants. Those participants included 2 elementary school principals, 2 elementary kindergarten teachers, 1 director of education for a preschool, 2 preschool teachers, and 2 parents of kindergarten children who had previously attended a prekindergarten program. The researcher did not interview these participants in any particular order. The interviews were held according to earliest availability and convenience. These participants were selected as a convenience sample because of the easy access to these participants for the researcher. The researcher already knew each participant and they were chosen due to their involvement with kindergarten readiness and their easy access by the researcher. This was a volunteered interview, and all participants were given consent forms (Appendix B) discussing the purpose of the interview and the procedures that would be taken to complete the process. The participants were approached face-to-face enabling the researcher to describe and discuss the purpose of the research and the procedures taken to complete the interview process at least one week prior to the interview.

**Design**

A qualitative research design was conducted using the aforementioned two types of interviews, face-to-face individual and focus group interviews. The interviews were designed to gain insight on what readiness factors children should behold when leaving Pre-K and getting ready to enter kindergarten. The interview process used was sufficient for this study because through the semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to gain insight and dig deep into the exact feelings of the stakeholders.

**Instruments**
The materials used during the collection of data were a set of interview questions (Appendix A), which helped to guide the semi-structured interview process. Each set of interview questions was similar, however they were formatted specifically for each type of participant interviewed. This was important to mention because although the focus of the interview was the same for each group of participants, the individual or group being interviewed, had to be able to relate to the questions posed.

**Interview Questions**

When developing the research questions the researcher wanted to gain a true understanding of what kindergarten readiness looked like in the eyes of each stakeholder. The researcher felt this was important in order to analyze the interviews and find common, or uncommon themes, which enabled him to decipher between what was viewed as most crucial for students to be successful in the transition from Pre-K and kindergarten. The first two questions asked the specifics of what children who are entering kindergarten should know and be able to do efficiently, and if there were any areas the interviewee felt children seem to be lacking more than others when entering kindergarten. These questions were crucial for the purpose of finding out the areas that each stakeholder views as important areas of development in children’s lives and also to find if there was a difference in opinion between stakeholders in regards to this area of focus.

The next focus of the interview questions dealt with the communication amongst the stakeholders. The questions posed were: 1) How do the Pre-K programs and local schools communicate about curriculum and expectations? 2) If they don’t, how do you feel this should be done? If they do, what is effective/ineffective about the communication? 3) What should a parent’s role be in preparing their children for kindergarten? These questions were followed up
by asking the stakeholders who worked in an educational setting how they expected parents to understand their role as a parent?

The final focus of the research questions dealt with age of entry for kindergarten. The research question posed was: Explain the ideal age that you feel is appropriate for entry of kindergarten? The researcher felt this question was important because of the inconsistencies of age entry across the country. In some states kindergarten is not a required year of school whereas others it is. Also, some states require that students are at the age of 5 before entering kindergarten and others have the cutoff of December 1st. This inconsistency within our education system, helped guide the researcher to see if there were consistencies between stakeholders and examine the reasoning behind the age entry.

Analysis

Once data was collected the researcher analyzed the data using inductive analysis (Mertler & Charles, 2010). This allowed the researcher to properly analyze the data using a system of categorization known as coding scheme. This approach helped the researcher group the narrative data that provided similar types of information. Next the researcher described the main features of the categories to make connections between the data and the research question. From these connections the researcher interpreted the findings and compiled a list of school readiness attributes and suggestions for stakeholders to properly prepare children for kindergarten. To ensure the accuracy of the findings, the researcher used a method known as member checking. Member checking is the sharing of interview transcripts with the participants of the study to ensure that the data has been represented accurately. The researcher used member checking with some participants to ensure that the quality of the data was represented correctly. These findings and analysis of data are reported in Chapter 4.
Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study included a limited sample size of the population. It included two Pre-K teachers, one Pre-K director, two kindergarten teachers, two elementary principals, and two parents. The researcher only sampled people from the North County area of San Diego. This research may not generalize to other regions of the state or other states. The interviews of the Pre-K were done at one location and the beliefs and standards taught at this location may vary from other sites.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to determine what similarities and differences exist between the stakeholders involved in the transition of students from Pre-K to kindergarten, and to answer the research question proposed; what are the beliefs of school readiness among all people involved for children entering kindergarten? The participants are the stakeholders involved in the transition from Pre-K to kindergarten. The researcher used semi-structured interviews, which involved either a face-to-face or focus group format, to conduct the research. The interviews were transcribed and coded for themes. The next chapter will discuss the themes that emerged from these interviews, answering the question driving this study: What are the beliefs regarding kindergarten readiness among the stakeholders involved—parents, teachers, administrators?
Chapter 4: Findings and Results

To gain insight and knowledge for Kindergarten readiness that supports children’s success, a variety of stakeholders involved in kindergarten readiness were interviewed. Seven questions were used to conduct individual and focus group interviews with nine stakeholders, each having a key role in the readiness of kindergarteners. In particular the questions asked: What do you feel children should know and be able to do when entering kindergarten? What are the areas you feel children are lacking when entering kindergarten? Tell me about the communication that exists between the local public schools and the prekindergarten programs in your area. From these questions and the data collected within the answers, the researcher coded the interviews and found seven readiness factors that were commonly mentioned throughout each interview. These readiness factors were: social readiness, behavior readiness, academic readiness, emotional readiness, routine readiness, motor-skill readiness, and age readiness. Another common theme that emerged was the desire/need for communication between each of the stakeholders. Throughout this chapter you will find a report of the stakeholders responses to these questions and the readiness factors that emerged for those responses.

Findings

Multiple commonalities were found among the responses of the interviewed stakeholders. Each of the stakeholders interviewed currently or previously had involvement in children’s lives in kindergarten however; the involvement of each group interviewed differed. Stakeholder involvement ranged from two current kindergarten teachers, two elementary school principals, one who was recently retired, two parents with children in kindergarten, two Pre-K teachers working at an off-site prekindergarten, and one prekindergarten director. They were coded as follows:
Table 1

*Participants of the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K Teacher 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K Teacher2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K Director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout the course of the interviews, patterns emerged in the responses of the participants and the researcher identified common themes—seven factors they believed led to proper kindergarten readiness. The 7 kindergarten readiness factors found were: Social Readiness, Behavior Readiness, Academic Readiness, Emotional Readiness, Routine Readiness, Age Readiness, and Motor-Skill Readiness.

In the interviews, participants shared their experiences, which included examples of these specific readiness factors. Some participants mentioned certain readiness factors more frequently than others. If they mentioned a readiness factor four or more times I considered it to be an important factor to that stakeholder and what they believed children should be prepared with prior to kindergarten. Table 2 indicates the readiness factors that were incorporated as important by each stakeholder. If the stakeholders felt it was important readiness for children entering kindergarten, an X was used in Table 1 to indicate so. The discussion of these results are found in Chapter 5. Interview data stressed the importance of these readiness factors that ensures children will be ready to enter Kindergarten when they were: socially ready, such as
being able to communicate effectively; behaviorally ready by understanding how to listen to and follow commands; academically ready by having a strong repertoire of beginning letter sense and number sense; emotionally ready such as having a strong self-esteem; routine readiness in where a child understands that activities have a beginning and end; age readiness which points to children being a certain age in order to enter kindergarten; motor-skill readiness where children should be able to have motor-skills such as holding a pencil correctly or being able to hop or jump correctly. All of these readiness factors were seen as vital for the development of successful entry into kindergarten. Stakeholders need to understand all of these readiness factors and make sure children are being reinforced with each one in each stage in their education to help children become well rounded and properly prepared for kindergarten.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readiness factors stakeholders believed were critical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K Teacher 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K Teacher 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K Director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: If the readiness factor indicates an X, the stakeholder mentioned that factor more than 4 times which was the amount of times the researcher felt it be mentioned in order to be deemed significant.
Results – Readiness Factors

Next, each of the 7 readiness factors are further clarified.

Social Readiness. In regards to social readiness, stakeholders offered multiple ideas as to how children become socially prepared for Kindergarten. The interview data suggests that social readiness were factors that helped prepare the children to be engaged socially around peers and adults. In regards to adults, these social readiness factors should be present when surrounded by their parents as the authority figure or other adults in the authority role. They suggested the 10 Social Readiness factors, labeled a.-j., in Table 3.

Table 3

Social Readiness Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Social Readiness Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Use of simple problem-solving skills with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Abundance of social interactions with other children and adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Understand their role in a group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Decision making skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. How to share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Able to communicate between peers and adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Cooperative and parallel play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Respond to questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Working in pairs or individually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Basic manner skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When discussing Kindergarten readiness the Pre-K director shared:

“I think all children, prior to entering kindergarten, or by the first day of kindergarten, should be able to relate well to others. I feel that, first and foremost they need to be confident, comfortable with who they are, and comfortable to interact with all different types of people.”
This quote confirmed social readiness factors, especially c, f, g, and i.

Parent 1 agreed by saying:

“When my child was growing up I made sure I engaged her in multiple activities in order to help her make friends and be able to socialize with people outside of our family. I feel it is important that children learn how to share, play, and problem-solve before entering kindergarten.”

Principal 1 stated:

“I think it’s important that students are not only able to speak in a complete short sentence, but that they are also understood by other children and adults. The other component I feel is critical for them is for them to have other social skills primarily the ability to take part in a group setting or activity where they understand that they are a member of that particular group and they realize that there are certain rights and wrongs within that group. And those right and wrongs must be followed for the best interest of the group.”

With regards to the social readiness the researcher felt it was a main focus of interest because each participant in the study mentioned most, if not all of the above mentioned attributes.

**Behavior Readiness.** When discussing behavior readiness stakeholders mentioned multiple aspects of behavior that children should have in place when entering kindergarten. Behavior Readiness was different from the other readiness factors in that it discusses specifics about how a child should be able to behave when entering kindergarten. They suggested the 6 Behavior Readiness factors, labeled a.-f., in Table 4.
When talking about behavior of Kindergarteners and what attributes they should show, Principal 2 commented on specific behaviors readiness:

“I feel that to be a productive member of a kindergarten classroom setting, children not only need to understand how to socially engage themselves with other children, but they must be able to listen to the teacher and follow the rules of the classroom and those of the school. They must be able to perform simple tasks such as sitting on the floor and listening to a story, standing and walking in a line the proper way when leaving the classroom, follow simple commands given by the teacher. These types of experiences are just as important for children to understand as well.”

Pre-K teacher 2 added:

“I feel that a child who is entering kindergarten should first and foremost be able to listen and follow specific commands. I feel that this is important even before academics and even being ahead in areas like reading. Also students must be able to follow directions and problem solve on their own, or in small groups, so that when it comes time for the educational and instructional aspect of kindergarten they understand how to listen and attend to the adult in charge when it is appropriate.”
Parent 1 said:

“As a parent you need to know your role in preparing your child and their behaviors to make sure they are ready for kindergarten. When my child first entered Pre-K she had a difficult time following the teacher’s directions. I had to really work with her and have talks with her about when she is in school her teacher is in charge and that she must listen to her teacher. I feel that parents must be willing to work with the child at home. These days teachers have way more children in their classes and if the parents want their child to succeed, they must work with them at home.”

The participants focused on behavior as a crucial component in a child’s overall ability to properly function when entering kindergarten. The researcher felt that the stakeholders viewed behavior as a component that will come about if the adults involved are consistent with the children not matter what setting the child was in, whether it was a structured Pre-K setting or within the child’s home. In correlation to this finding the Pre-K Director stated:

“For me I want to make sure that in our Pre-K setting I am encouraging the staff and our parents to prepare the children with certain behavior protocols. For example, I feel it is crucial that students should be able to sit on the floor and listen to a story for ten minutes…I feel that children should understand how to listen to a teachers commands and understand how classroom rules work. If the teacher tells a child it is time to clean up, the child needs to understand that the teacher is in charge and this command means it is time to clean up. The same should happen in the home setting. If a parent tells a child to get ready for bed, the child needs to understand what is expected and show the correct behavior. I think these are things that need to be practiced not only within the school setting, but in the home as well if we want children to be prepared for a proper educational setting.”
**Academic Readiness.** In responding to the question, *What do you feel children should be able to do when entering kindergarten?*, academic readiness was the most common factor discussed. The academic readiness factor discusses which areas of academia the stakeholders feel children should be prepared with when enter kindergarten. Academic readiness factors for children entering Kindergarten are as follows: They suggested the 11 Academic Readiness factors, labeled a.-k., in Table 5.

**Table 5**

**Academic Readiness Factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Academic Readiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Know sounds of letters and recognize all of the ABC’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Write basic letter formations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Able to name and recognize colors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Recognize numbers up to 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Count up to 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Write their name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Recognize their name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Beginning to read some words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Matching opposites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Understand simple patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Simple problem solving using numbers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In discussing academic readiness, Kindergarten teacher 1 stated:

“When children enter kindergarten, I feel they need to be able to write their name and be able to recognize their name in some way in order to identify themselves. I would like them to have some basic knowledge of colors and ideally recognize the difference between letters and numbers.”

The Pre-K Director shared:
“I think when children leave my prekindergarten program it is important they can recognize letters and numbers at least to 10. I would like them to be able to recognize letters not in the traditional A-Z alphabet, not just memorization, but able to understand that if letters or numbers are mixed up then they must be placed in a specific order. They need to be able to write their name. I feel it is important they also grasp the concept of reading and understand what reading is. I also think that things like matching and very basic patterns are important for them to know.”

Parent 2 added:

“I think it was important for my child to have a basic understanding of the ABC’s, know their number to at least 10, write their name, and also to be able to read some sight words. I also think it is important to know shapes and colors. I would make sure to continually ask my child what shape things were and what color they were so I was sure they could identify those properly when they reached kindergarten. I know those were things that were being worked on in the Pre-K program so that’s what I did with her.”

Parent 1 added:

“It was difficult for me to know what my child needed to be ready for. I really had no idea. I went to Costco and found a kindergarten study book and had my child work on that the summer before kindergarten. It helped a lot. I didn’t even know what sight words were until I bought this book. I felt it helped my child and I in knowing what to expect when they reached kindergarten.”

**Emotional Readiness.** In regards to the emotional readiness factors pertaining to Kindergarten the research found children need to: They suggested the 8 Emotional Readiness factors, labeled a.-f., in Table 6.

Table 6
Emotional Readiness Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Emotional Readiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Have a high self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Have a sense of empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Display a sense of accomplishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Be confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Not afraid to try new things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Be independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Make correct decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Show an inner self want to succeed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The components of emotional readiness stress the idea that children need to feel good about who they are and be able to understand what they need and how to succeed on their own. Stakeholders felt this was an absolutely crucial component of any child who was entering kindergarten so they would be able to know how to cope with certain situations and function independently. In relation to emotional readiness and the question *What area of development do you feel children are lacking in when they enter Kindergarten?*, Kindergarten teacher 2 stated:

“I feel when entering Kindergarten, an abundance of my children lack independence. There is a lot of crying and they have a hard time being away from their parents. I can tell between those students that have attended a quality preschool or had an abundance of social interaction and the students that attended a day care or no preschool at all with little social interactions. Those with the experiences have no problem transitioning and understanding what is expected of them in Kindergarten. They are able to say goodbye to their parents without crying and engage themselves socially with others.”

Pre-K Teacher 2 said:
“One huge component we strive to teach our children is to be confident. We want them to try new things and not be afraid. We want them to experience stuff they never have before so when they leave they have the tools to feel good about themselves.”

Pre-K Teacher 1 added:

“All being able to stand up for themselves and not be a follower. It is important that we teach these children how to make their own decisions. Setting this groundwork will set the child up with the emotional well-being so they can recall and build skills of being able to have a voice and talk to others and stand up for themselves.”

When speaking about emotional readiness and the effects the Pre-K program had on their child’s emotional well-being, Parent 2 stated:

“At first in my child’s Pre-K program, he had a difficult time with me leaving. I guess you could say he had a little bit of anxiety when I would leave. However, it didn’t take too long for that to change, and I feel that because of that experience within the Pre-K setting there was no problem dropping him off at school for his first day of kindergarten. However, there were multiple other children who were crying and not ready to be left at the school. I am so glad that we had already had this under control because I knew he felt confident enough and understood why he was there and why I was leaving.”

Principal 1 summed up emotional readiness by stating:

“When children come to our school we would like them to have a sense of understanding how to handle themselves emotionally. We would like them know that they have the power to make their own choices and those choices are going to determine how their day goes. We feel this is something they should not have mastered at this age, but if they have that foundation laid it will make the classroom as a whole a more cohesive community.”
**Routine Readiness.** Throughout these interviews, routines were continually addressed during this discussion. Stakeholders felt that in order for children to get the most out of their kindergarten experience they need to understand what routines are and how to properly handle structure and change. These ideas helped me to categorize routine as a readiness factor by itself. Routine readiness includes: They suggested the 6 Routine Readiness factors, labeled a.-f., in Table 7.

Table 7

*Routine Readiness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Routine Readiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. The ability to understand routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Comply to structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Respond to transitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Distinguish between the beginning and end of activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Day-to-day consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Adapting to change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When discussing routines and their importance with children Pre-K teacher 1 responded:

“Routines and transitions are the most important thing. I feel this is important because it helps people in every aspect of life. Even as a grown-up. Being able to adapt to change is crucial. Children need to know that things change periodically and they need to understand how to handle that situation when it is time to change.”

Kindergarten Teacher 2 added:

“I have one child who has a hard time with transitions. It throws everybody else off. Trying to help him through those times and keeping the other children on task is very difficult. Everything runs much smoother when proper transitions are in place.”

Principal 1 shared:
“Knowing that when you come to school there are going to be different things that you are going to do is crucial towards the success of the classroom. We hope that when children enter our school they know that within the day there is going to be a beginning and an end, a beginning and an end to everything they do. In order to make it easy for the class all boys and girls must understand this. This is where I see the majority of behavior problems because children have not been exposed to or do not know why that has to happen.”

Parent 2 agreed:

“It’s important for me to make sure my child understands that every evening she needs to sit down and do her homework. She needs to also understand that I am going to make sure she is doing it correctly and not just rushing through it. I feel it is important to set this routine in place now so that she understands what is expected of her.”

Principal 2 stated:

“It is important for parents to make sure and set daily and consistent routines and structure for their children. By this I mean things like getting up at the same time every morning and going to bed at the same time every night. Making sure they understand that school is at the same time every day whether they want to go or not. Throughout the day they need to make sure their children understand that they eat lunch and dinner at the same time. They need to introduce their children to structure and help them to understand that this is what structure is like in the real world. I think in this country there should be no excuses because there are so many opportunities for those who want to take advantage of them. If we show our children how the real world is run then by the time they come to kindergarten they will have an idea of routines and structure, and the only thing this readiness can do is set them up for success.”
Motor-Skill Readiness. Beyond connecting to the academic and social side of readiness for children, another factor that emerged was motor-skill readiness. Motor-Skill readiness addresses the motor-skills that most stakeholders believe a child should be able to perform when they enter kindergarten. The stakeholders believe that these skills build a certain self-confidence and it helps children to be well rounded. They suggested the 6 Motor-Skill Readiness factors, labeled a.-f., in Table 8.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. Motor-Skill Readiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Fine motor-skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Physical skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
</tr>
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In regards to motor-skills, Principal 2 shared:

“I don’t think children get out and play enough. They don’t climb trees or run around outside which helps them learn how to hop, skip, and develop their motor-skills. Things like hopping on one foot, playing follow the leader, knowing their right hand from their left hand. I think these aspects are all important for kindergarteners to understand.”

Pre-K director stated:

“I think the physical side of development is important also. I feel it is important that they are able to run, skip, hop, and jump. Those things are important for them to be able to do in order to be a well balanced child.”

Age Readiness. The 7th and final readiness factor mentioned in the interviews was age. Age readiness was an attribute that attends to the specifics on the appropriate age of entry for
kindergarten. Several the stakeholders felt it was important that children should be at least the age of 5 when they enter Kindergarten.

Kindergarten Teacher 1:

“I think there should definitely be an age limit of 5. I believe age should be as much of a deciding factor as anything else.”

Kindergarten Teacher 2 added:

“I don’t feel that age would be an issue except for the fact that our district would not let us retain any children last year. The district told us studies show that retention does not work. I feel that if a child is going to be retained it must happen in Kindergarten. Because of this I feel that age must be a factor because the students who enter at the age of four, most of the time are too immature to handle a full day of Kindergarten.”

Parent 2 explained:

“I feel my child would have been more prepared for Kindergarten if he would have entered at the age of six. He was just turning five when Kindergarten started and I feel there was a lot of things he wasn’t quite ready for academically.”

In contrast, other stakeholders felt that age was not as strong of a predictor for readiness as other factors. Pre-K director stated:

“I don’t know if there should be a particular age because I feel that some children are socially, cognitively, emotionally, and physically ready for kindergarten at age four and then there are six-year-olds who aren’t. What I don’t want to see happen is a four-year-old to go in and succeed and a six-year-old behind and playing catch-up.”

The debate on how old a child should be was apparent within this study. The stakeholders in this study had differing opinions about whether there should be an appropriate age when children enter kindergarten, a readiness factor that should be further discussed and studied.
Unexpected Results

This study was designed to look for ways in which a prekindergarten environment could best prepare students for the soon to come kindergarten classroom. Surprisingly, in addition to the 7 readiness factors that emerged, there were strong indicators of other issues involved in the Pre-K to kindergarten transition, in particular communication and parent knowledge.

Communication. As this study looked at readiness factors that lead to children’s potential success in kindergarten, the researcher also asked the participants about the communication that was happening among, and between the different stakeholders. This stakeholder perspective gives insight to every person involved to help better understand where communication was happening and where it was lacking within the realm of kindergarten readiness. In regards to communication Principal 2 shared:

“I think my role is to reach out to the government-funded preschools because that is where I see the majority of our academic problems stemming from…. If I were in charge of a preschool I would want to find out what the local Kindergartens were doing so I could develop my program around it. I feel it would be important for me to prepare my children for the routine and schedule of Kindergarten…As an elementary principal I would like my teachers to communicate with local preschools to understand how we can collaborate to make sure the transition is as smooth as possible for the children.”

Pre-K Teacher 1 stated:

“I would love to communicate with local schools. This is my first time teaching prekindergarten and I’m always thinking ‘Okay, what should they know when they enter kindergarten?’ Being able to collaborate with other colleagues is extremely important because then we are not doing something that is completely off the wall of what they are expecting.”
Kindergarten Teacher 1 added:

“I feel that communication needs to start with the director and administrator of each program. I think it needs to be consistent. If they are learning one way at a preschool and another way in kindergarten then it’s not necessarily what’s best for the child. I feel the director and administrator should communicate by talking about the math program, reading program, and share student expectations as well.”

When asking the parents about communication and how they felt in regards to schools and preschools communicating expectations the researcher found that it was an area of frustration and confusion. Parent 1 stated:

“Even though my child’s prekindergarten program was on the campus of his future elementary school, there was absolutely no communication between his Pre-K teacher and his kindergarten teacher. I felt as though there was a huge gap. At his kindergarten orientation his kindergarten teacher asked me if he attended a preschool. I told her that he attended to preschool that was on campus. She replied, “Oh yeah that one.” I felt it was strange because they had no idea who my child was and he had been at that school for a year.”

Parent 2 added:

“My situation was similar. My child also attended a preschool program at her future school site. The kindergarten teacher had no idea she had attended that program. I think the communication between the preschool and kindergarten should be there, especially in regards to the social aspect. If the two teachers would have spoken before the school year I feel there could have been a lot of things done differently with my child and it would have helped us in preparing her.”
**Parent Knowledge.** Another frustration found with the parents was a lack of knowledge given to them in regards to what their child should know when entering Kindergarten. They felt unsure what to expect of their child in kindergarten because they did not know where to find information regarding what children should be able to do when entering kindergarten. Parent 2 stated:

> “I think it would be wonderful if the districts provided some type on summer program for students entering kindergarten so we know what to work on and help them with before they reach that crucial stage in their life…I feel my role as a parent is to know exactly what is expected of my child. I didn’t find out what she needed to know until kindergarten orientation two weeks prior to the school year. This was frustrating. I feel that if there was proper communication through some type of parent night the spring before the following year, that told us how to help our children become prepared for Kindergarten, it would have put me to some ease.”

Parent 1 added:

> “I feel that a parent night the spring before would be beneficial for the parents and the school as well. It would give them a good idea of what their demographic is going to be, which parents speak English, and which parents are going to be involved. It is the beginning stages of building a strong community.”

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the interviews the researcher conducted to find what the stakeholders involved in kindergarten readiness feel are the most important attributes children should be ready with. They were: 1. Social readiness—the focus on how children can become socially prepared for Kindergarten; 2. Behavior readiness—the behaviors a child should exhibit in order to be a cohesive member of a group; 3. Academic readiness—areas of academia the
stakeholders feel children should be knowledgeable in; 4. Emotional readiness—the idea that children need to feel good about who they are and be able to understand their own needs and how to succeed independently; 5. Routine readiness—how children are properly able to handle structure and change; 6. Motor-skill readiness—movements that children can perform independently to produce an action in order to master a particular task; and 7. Age readiness—the appropriate age of entry for kindergarten.

Another important finding dealt with the communication between the various stakeholders involved in kindergarten readiness and the knowledge parents felt they had in regards to the proper readiness for their children to enter kindergarten. This specifically deals with how one group distributes ideas to another group through various types of communication and the effects that communication has on the recipients.

In the next chapter the researcher will discuss how these factors affect the readiness of kindergarteners and will give suggestions to all stakeholders on how to effectively provide children with the proper tools to become productive members of a cohesive group setting within a school and beyond.
Chapter 5: Conclusions, Recommendations, Future Research

With the correct implementation of these readiness factors children will have a better chance entering Kindergarten ready for success. Burchinal et al. (2008) suggested;

That in order for a prekindergarten to be of high quality, the programs must have teachers who encourage children to communicate and use language to develop reasoning skills, interact frequently with children, provide clear and positive discipline and supervision, develop concepts coherently, and also give clear and positive feedback.

Coinciding with this belief, Chien et al. (2010) found prekindergarten programs that incorporate free play, accompanied by high-quality scaffolding interactions with teachers, have the highest rate of cognitive benefits for children towards school readiness.

Most people involved in education want the same thing, and that is to do what is best for children. For this to happen correctly, there is a strong need to ensure that children are appropriately prepared to enter kindergarten with universal readiness attributes that will help them succeed not only in kindergarten, but beyond. It is important that educators, administrators, and parents have a common understanding of what school readiness looks like at the prekindergarten level, kindergarten level, and beyond so the stakeholders can help to successfully prepare children in order for them to become life-long learners.

Conclusions

This study reviewed literature and interviewed participants to examine kindergarten readiness factors, to determine what readiness factors the stakeholders believe children should be prepared with so they will enter kindergarten ready for success and continue that success. As a result, seven readiness factors were identified that were beliefs common among stakeholders and
prior research. These reflections will act as a guide as to what stakeholders should view as important attributes for our children’s successes.

Another commonality brought to the discussion during the data collection was communication. Every stakeholder involved felt there was an immense lack of communication between all parties involved. The parents felt neither the Pre-K program nor the elementary school communicated enough with them in regards to the transitioning between the two schools. The Pre-K program admitted to having no communication between themselves and the local schools. And the local school personnel discussed that there has not been any type of consistency in communicating with the local Pre-K programs that feed into the school. As found in a study by Bailey (1999), “communication is recognized as one of the key components of a successful transition from Pre-K to kindergarten” (p. xv). This lack of communication pointed out that the readiness factors cannot be implemented correctly and efficiently if there is no communication among all stakeholders involved. Ruhm et al. (2007) found that “prekindergarten has few lasting positive effects on advantaged children’s skills by the first grade” (p. 50). From data collected during interviews and the analysis of that data, the researcher suggests that communication among the stakeholders must be practiced so that prekindergarten not only has lasting effects, but also lasting effects that have a positive impact on the children. None of the studies examined in the literature review regarding the lasting effects of prekindergarten identified the communication that took place between the prekindergarten itself, the local elementary schools, and the parents. Since these studies indicated that high-quality preschool has positive effects on children’s cognitive and social abilities, but these effects diminished by the first or second grade; and the present study demonstrated that communication was a major emphasis among the stakeholders, it suggests that communication between
stakeholders is a main cause for concern. Especially for success not being continued or the correct readiness factors properly implemented to begin with.

This study demonstrated that the stakeholders represented by the participants in this study believe that children could possibly benefit from prekindergarten programs that implement the identified readiness factors effectively and consistently. Because the readiness factors identified are common among all stakeholders, this seems to indicate the possibility that ensuring the factors are addressed will likely lead to greater success for the children attending prekindergarten. However, if communication between these stakeholders is not present, then these readiness factors have a greater chance to be unsuccessful. And thus, children have a less chance of sustaining any advantage they may have gained while being enrolled in the prekindergarten program.

**Recommendations**

It is apparent with prior research and the findings of this study that there are multiple attributes that lead to the success of children enrolled in a prekindergarten program, Social, Behavior, Academic, Emotional, Routine, Motor-skill, and Age readiness. Each stakeholder can impact children’s lives by knowing and understanding the importance of each readiness factor. Following are the researchers’ recommendations for stakeholders that will provide a stronger chance for children’s success beginning in prekindergarten and continuing beyond:

- **Parents**
  - Setup routines in your child’s life that mirror those of their educational setting
  - Talk to your child everyday about what they learned
  - Interact them with other children and adults frequently
  - Communicate all your questions and concerns to anyone involved in their
education so you can better understand what is expected of your child and be consistent with those expectations

- Implement the readiness factors found in this study into your child’s life daily

• Principals/Directors
  - Implement a communication program between your site and the future/past site of the children within your program
  - Create conversations with your teachers about how to effectively communicate with parents in your community
  - Make sure all the stated readiness factors are being implemented within your school classrooms
  - Hold a parent night for parents to attend prior to their child’s school year; inviting all parents from the surrounding preschools you are in communication with

• Pre-K/kindergarten teachers
  - Communicate to your parents before the school year what is expected of every child
  - Create conversations with your colleagues and principal/director on how to effectively communicate between the elementary/preschool
  - Implement all readiness factors discussed in this study on a daily basis to create consistency within your relationship between schools and for the children who will be immersed in these settings

Future Research

Future research must be done to properly identify the relationship and communication of prekindergarten and their local schools counterpart to have a better understanding if there is a
strong correlation to communication and the implementation of these readiness factors. This would also help to determine if the lasting effects of a prekindergarten program would be more sustainable. Research also needs to be done on if parents are effectively communicating with the different educational settings and if their communication is a reason for higher or lower expectations of prekindergarten programs.

With the correct implementation of these readiness factors, and making sure that the communication is implemented properly, the researcher believes stakeholders will have the greatest chance to help children succeed at every level and in every opportunity presented to them. Principal 2 commented:

“Every parent is sending their child to a preschool because they want their child to enter kindergarten with a certain level of competency and they want their child to be successful.”

It is our jobs as educators to make sure we continue to learn and grow from educational research. We must use research properly to help guide our decisions and reinforce the belief that we are doing what is best for all children, all the time.
References


APPENDIX A

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW

1. What do you feel children should know and be able to do when entering kindergarten?

2. What is the best way for this to happen?

3. Is there an area of development that you feel children are lacking when starting kindergarten?

4. Do you feel that proper communication exists between you the prekindergarten programs and the kindergarten programs?

5. What should a parents’ role be in preparing their child for school? How do you expect them to know this role?
APPENDIX B

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

Bryan E. Boyd, graduate student in the School of Education at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM), is conducting a study that seeks to understand what various stakeholders believe children should know when entering Kindergarten. You are being approached because you are a stakeholder in the education of children of this age.

Study Objectives: The goal of this study is to find and document shared and possibly discordant beliefs of those involved with the education of children entering Kindergarten.

Procedures: We will meet one time for a face-to-face interview, lasting no longer than 45 minutes. I will take only written notes and audio recordings of your responses to the interview questions. Later, I will return to these fieldnotes and audio recordings for my analysis.

Risks and Inconveniences: There are no foreseeable risks related to participating in this study. No additional time will be asked beyond your participation during the interview. Due to the record keeping associated with the fieldnotes, your only risk is the potential loss of confidentiality.

Safeguards: To minimize the risk of confidentiality, all interview data will be kept secured in my office or on a password-protected computer. It will only be available to my faculty advisor and myself, for purposes solely related to analysis.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is entirely voluntary, and may be withdrawn by you at any time. There are no consequences if you decide not to participate.

Incentives: You will receive a $10 Starbucks gift card if you complete the interview process, and allow for your interview to be used in the study.

Benefits: This study may have no direct benefit to you, however I believe that the information obtained in this study will have a positive effect on the effectiveness of both prekindergarten and kindergarten programs.

Questions: This study has been approved by the CSUSM Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions about the study, you may direct those to the researcher, Bryan E. Boyd, boydo16@csusm.edu, 801.8709.0766, or his faculty advisor Dr. Brian R. Lawler, blawler@csusm.edu, 760.750.4260. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the IRB at 760.750.4029. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

____ I agree to participate in this study     ____ I agree to be audio recorded

______________________________________  ___________________________________
Participant’s Name                                           Date

______________________________________  ___________________________________
Participant’s Signature                                      Researcher’s Signature