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A Qualitative Study Examining and Comparing Families' and Teachers' Perceptions of School Readiness

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by

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DEDICATION

I would like to thank God for providing me with the courage to partake in such a huge undertaking and the strength to complete it. I without a shadow of a doubt owe all glory to him. Next, I dedicate this dissertation to my "sonshine," Ryen, who has made the ultimate sacrifice of offering up his mommy to this process. A point in his young life when he needed and wanted me the most, he had to share me with the process of writing this dissertation. He has motivated me and propelled me to be a better version of myself. I pray that seeing mommy be persistent and dedicated to completing this doctoral degree has provided you with a model that you will carry with you for the rest of your life. You are truly my inspiration, and I love you more than words could ever describe!

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ABSTRACT

A child's readiness for school can impact their trajectory in subsequent grades and later in life. Therefore, children must be prepared when transitioning to kindergarten. As a kindergarten teacher at a Title I elementary school, I noticed a lack of readiness and conducted this qualitative action research study to create a readiness plan for my school by examining and comparing families' and teachers' perceptions of school readiness. The participants included my students' parents and caretakers and my fellow kindergarten teachers. The findings indicate similar perceptions of school readiness. The family and teacher samples both associated readiness with academics and peer interactions. Both groups also believed families were responsible for preparing their children for school while calling for other support in place to assist them in preparing children for school. Overall, data suggested families needed additional support to aid in preparing their children for school. These insights informed the readiness plan I designed, which may be of interest to fellow educators and school leaders.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KRA ..... Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

MKO ..... more knowledgeable other

PDS ..... professional development school

ZPD ..... zone of proximal development

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I vividly recall all the fun I had as a kindergartener. I had an excellent teacher, and to this day, I revere her as my favorite. I relished my time at school and looked forward to attending every day, knowing I would have fun while learning, surrounded by my best friends. We could play house and engage in various games and centers throughout the day. I remember going to recess twice a day, and afterward, taking a nap. Once I awoke from my slumber, I ate a tasty snack.

During the instructional day, my teacher taught me the life skills of being kind and sharing, modeling how to treat others while encouraging me to do my best. She was a gifted storyteller, and I loved how she incorporated songs and movement. By infusing fun throughout the day, my teacher could transition smoothly into the academic portion of school, teaching us about colors, shapes, letters, and numbers. I practiced writing the letters and reviewed their sounds during the language arts block of learning time. During the math block, I identified shapes and colors and engaged in rote counting and number recognition. Life could get no better: I was having fun while learning! I knew how to share and how to navigate friendships. I knew my shapes and colors. I could print my name and the letters of the alphabet. At the end of the school year, I was sad to leave my teacher and this world of excitement, but I knew I would be well prepared for first grade.

Having taught early childhood students in South Carolina for nearly 20 years, I now have a dramatically different perspective of kindergarten. I do not view kindergarten

as the year students get acclimated to learning through fun and engaging lessons and activities. Developmentally appropriate learning centered on play has been replaced with a more prescriptive curriculum focused on academics (Miller & Almon, 2009), reflecting what Harmon and Viruru (2018) referred to as a *push-down curriculum*. Kindergarten teachers are feeling pressure from first-grade teachers to ensure students are academically prepared to meet the challenges of the next grade level, which causes anxiety about student benchmarks and goals. Fueled by this pressure, educational leaders in my district and teachers in my school now expect students to be ready to learn upon entering the doors of a kindergarten classroom. Because of this paradigm shift, I often question the concept of kindergarten readiness, and I find myself wondering: What does being ready—or unready—for kindergarten mean? What factors contribute to students' being ready or unready? What can I do to help?

Problem of Practice

In 1989, President George H. W. Bush convened with state governors to set six goals for U.S. education, the first being that by the year 2000, all children would enter school ready to learn (Klein, 2014). Placing school readiness at the top of the agenda suggested it was a national issue. Over 3 decades later, the problem of school readiness persists, and as an early childhood teacher, I have a firsthand view. Because of the push-down curriculum (Harmon & Viruru, 2018), an increasing number of students are entering kindergarten unprepared for the rigor it entails.

Year after year, I have observed students enter kindergarten lacking the necessary skills and prerequisites to succeed on state, district, and school assessments. In South Carolina, students complete the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) within the

first 45 days of school. The KRA provides an initial snapshot of students' abilities by measuring each child's readiness across four domains: Social Foundations, Language/Literacy, Mathematics, and Physical Well-Being. According to a 2019–2020 report by South Carolina First Steps (2020a), 48% of children ages 0–5 lived in poverty or a low-income household, 50% of children ages 0–5 were read to by their parents fewer than 4 days a week, and 54% of South Carolina's children were not enrolled in preschool. Meanwhile, the KRA found 61% of students were not ready for school.

District and school assessments show similarly disturbing results. According to the 2018–2019 state school report card, only 38.9% of students in the district where I teach demonstrated readiness to learn, while 43.9% of students enrolling in kindergarten at my school demonstrated readiness to learn. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened these already-alarming statistics about South Carolina's early learners, as the 2020–2021 report from South Carolina First Steps (2021) found 73% of students entered kindergarten unready to learn. During this same year, 39.5% of students demonstrated readiness in my school district, while only 32.9% of students entered my school ready to learn.

These numbers reflect my experience as a kindergarten teacher in South Carolina. At my school, I have witnessed an overwhelming number of unready kindergarten students, resulting in a persistent achievement gap evident in state and district reports and data from my classroom. By treating students' lack of readiness as a problem of practice, I took a necessary step toward resolving it. The problem was relevant to my work as an early childhood teacher and thus worth researching, as Efron and Ravid (2020) suggested action research must be meaningful and purposeful. I wanted to understand why students were coming to school unready and how external factors—such as parents, guardians,

and teachers—affected their level of readiness. This insight allowed me to make informed decisions regarding interventions to help my learners.

Theoretical Framework

My dissertation rested on several assumptions. First, I believe families of all sorts, teachers, school officials, and community members play a pivotal role in children's early development. Likewise, these stakeholders share a common interest in students' success. Additionally, I believe many students enter school unready because kindergarten is often students' first experience with formal schooling. Therefore, stakeholders must acknowledge this fact and examine the variables affecting students' readiness.

To deepen my own understanding of the variables in my problem of practice, I used constructivist theory and ecological systems theory. I elaborate on these lenses in Chapter 2. Briefly, Vygotsky conceptualized constructivism to explain that children construct knowledge based on early experiences (Elliott et al., 2000), including interactions with peers, parents, caregivers, or teachers. Children construct their knowledge through those interactions, and the interactions shape how they learn. Therefore, constructivism aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1999) ecological systems framework, which examines students' relationships within communities—such as schools, peer groups, families, and neighborhoods—and society as a whole. Bronfenbrenner developed the theory to explain how everything in a child's environment directly or indirectly affects their growth and development.

Purpose and Research Questions

Though I could not immediately change the policies that contribute to the push-down curriculum (Harmon & Viruru, 2018), I intended to mitigate the issue by promoting

readiness at my school. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to create a readiness plan by investigating families' and teachers' perceptions of school readiness. I believe understanding all stakeholders' views is vital to understanding how the students themselves enter kindergarten and at what level they achieve. Perceptions may encompass biases or misconceptions that affect students' learning. By investigating such perceptions, I took a different view of readiness by examining whether my students' families were ready for school and whether my colleagues were ready for the incoming kindergarteners. Through the assessment of stakeholders' perceptions, I aimed to take preemptive measures to address the factors impacting school readiness in future years. From a practical standpoint, the data I collected thus enabled me to improve my practice.

To assist all stakeholders in decision-making related to readiness by creating interventions that effectively prepare students for kindergarten, I first sought to understand the factors contributing to the unreadiness. Therefore, I proposed the following questions:

1. How do families in my community perceive school readiness?
2. How do teachers in my community perceive school readiness?
3. How do families' perceptions compare to teachers' perceptions of school readiness?

Families and teachers are essential to a child's overall growth and development. Answering Research Questions 1 and 2 provided insight into these key stakeholders' perceptions of school readiness. Gaining a better understanding of their perspectives was critical for understanding why children are ready or unready for school and provided insight into how to move forward in collaborating with them to ensure all children are

ready for school. As I envisioned future interventions, understanding how closely the perceptions of families and teachers aligned, in response to Question 3, reinforced the likelihood that such efforts will succeed.

Positionality

Researcher positionality is essential in all research (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Because action researchers' position can be especially significant, they must engage in reflexivity and become aware of their relationship to their participants (Efron & Ravid, 2020). I acted as both an insider and outsider in this study (Herr & Anderson, 2015). As an 18-year veteran kindergarten teacher, I served in the role of an insider in relation to the research problem. I was an insider in relation to the parental participants in my study by virtue of being their child's teacher, and I was also an insider who collaborated with other insiders as I examined my colleagues' perceptions. This aspect of my positionality had the potential to improve their practice by encouraging them to consider their interactions with students' caregivers. Our collaboration also had the potential to impact the learning of our kindergarten students as a whole unit. Because of demographic variations, I also served in the capacity of an outsider in relation to some families and teachers. I kept these differences in mind when designing my study.

Study Design

To examine perceptions of readiness among families and teachers in my community, I used basic qualitative research methods by collecting and triangulating data through surveys and interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through this approach, I sought to uncover, interpret, and better understand the factors that may contribute to students' being unprepared for school. Simultaneously, I kept my underlying aim,

promoting ready families and ready schools (Pretti-Frontczak, 2014; Regional Educational Laboratory Program, 2022; Shore, 1998), in view.

Data collection occurred in two phases: Phase 1 spanned October–December 2022, and Phase 2 occurred between January and February 2023. During Phase 1, I gained initial insights for addressing my research questions by administering a survey (Appendix A) to families of registered kindergarten students entering school and inviting kindergarten teachers at my school to take a similar survey (Appendix B). Surveying is a quick way to gain information on a large scale, including a wealth of knowledge about people's opinions, perceptions, and attitudes (Efron & Ravid, 2020). In December, I interviewed a subset of family members (n = 10), using a semi-structured protocol (Appendix C), to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions and more insight into their lives, specifically regarding their children's learning. I also interviewed my fellow kindergarten teachers (n = 4), using a different protocol (Appendix D), as I expected to hear varied viewpoints.

Phase 2 also made use of interviewing as a means of eliciting participants' opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions and understanding their lived experiences (Efron & Ravid, 2020). For additional insight into participants' perceptions of school readiness, several months into the school year, I conducted follow-up interviews with those who participated in the Phase 1 interviews, again following a similar semi-structured protocol for each set of participants (Appendix E–F). Conducting individualized interviews with families and colleagues allowed them to share their perceptions freely, with fewer hesitations or restrictions than I might have observed in a focus group interview.

To address Research Question 1, I used data obtained from the family-focused instruments (Appendix A, C, & E). To address Research Question 2, I used data derived from the teacher-focused instruments (Appendix B, D, & F). I used codes to organize the information and identify common themes (Miles et al., 2019). Additionally, using a two-phase approach in my data collection enabled me to address whether and how families' and teachers' perceptions of school readiness changed over time. Finally, I looked across all survey and interview data in search of similarities and differences among the families and teachers to address Research Question 3. As Chapter 4 reveals, these collective measures yielded a variety of beneficial perspectives. I then used those insights to create a plan, presented in Chapter 5, for a future intervention to promote school readiness for the 2023–2024 school year.

Chapter 3 elaborates on my procedures to ensure the research was ethical and high-quality. For example, because I collaborated with others who have a stake in the outcome of my findings (Herr & Anderson, 2015), I maintained participants' confidentiality, continually conducted member checks and peer reviews with my colleagues and use pseudonyms throughout this dissertation. I was also reflexive as I worked to mitigate any biases. These practices were essential to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collection and the overall significance of the study.

Significance

School readiness is essential. It is one of the most crucial factors in a child's life and future academic success because recovering from early learning deficits (i.e., unreadiness) is challenging (The Latino Family Literacy Project, 2018). Many factors—including those beyond my control—may inhibit students' readiness, yet understanding

the correlation between school readiness and future success led me to be reflective in my practice, asking how I can do my part to resolve this broader problem.

As a classroom teacher, I often reflect on my childhood experiences in kindergarten compared to those of my students and believe that kindergarten as I once knew it is dead. For over a decade, kindergarten has focused more on academics and less on experimental learning and play (Miller & Almon, 2009). My district does not provide nap time for students, and most schools have removed play centers. Curriculum and content have become a higher priority at the expense of social skills and character education, such that kindergarten is now standard-driven. Because of the push-down curriculum, the current reality is that kindergarten is more like first grade (Bassok et al., 2016; Harmon & Viruru, 2018).

Although kindergarten readiness is an issue at the school, district, state, and national levels, my action research is specific to my students and directly applies to my practice. Nevertheless, it has the potential to impact many stakeholders (Efron & Ravid, 2020). This research provided me with answers that may better assist caregivers in preparing their students for school. This newfound knowledge can potentially impact my instructional practice. This research can also help my colleagues improve their instruction to better equip their students academically by creating and implementing preemptive interventions before students begin formal schooling. This type of collaboration could potentially benefit future teachers in higher grades. These actions will help my students navigate through school and into the world.

Through this action research, I learned a lot, and Chapter 5 voices my intention to share my insights with other stakeholders across the district. Because school readiness

can impact a child's trajectory in school and life (Gregory et al., 2021), I remain committed to addressing this critical issue. Reflecting the cyclical nature of action research (Herr & Anderson, 2015), I still seek awareness and dialogue among various educational stakeholders in addressing the problem.

Key Terms

Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Practice that promotes each student's optimal learning by viewing the child as a unique individual and learning experiences that account for students' experiences, abilities, capabilities, learning styles, and family life (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.).

Early Childhood: A child's learning and development from birth–8 years old (The Center for High Impact Philanthropy, 2022).

Kindergarten: An early childhood institution where students learn, grow, and develop academically and socially. Typically, kindergarten marks when children between the ages of 5 and 6 enter or transition into formal schooling (Zoromski, 2019).

Perceptions: Lenses through which people view the world, shaped by background knowledge and life experiences to include family and culture (IRIS Center, 2022).

Push-Down Curriculum: The acceleration of curriculum and instruction that expects students to grasp concepts they typically would not have been taught or learned until the next school year (Harmon & Viruru, 2018; Shore, 1998).

School Readiness: Generally, and broadly defined, a child's qualities or capabilities when transitioning into a formal school setting (Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, n.d.).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 1 introduced the alarming state of school readiness in South Carolina, based on KRA data and other assessments, as well as my observations. Kindergarten is the foundational grade from which most students begin their formal education, so kindergarten teachers like me have the daunting task of transforming young children into students. Further complicating this role, the push-down curriculum (Harmon & Viruru, 2018) has intensified federal, state, and local accountability guidelines, placing higher academic expectations on students and teachers alike. Having taught in a Title I public elementary school for over 18 years, I have witnessed this problem firsthand. To address it, I needed to understand why students were coming to school unready. With this understanding, I could make informed decisions regarding interventions that will help my learners to reach their fullest potential and achieve optimal success in school.

As a teacher, I understand the importance of preparing students for the next grade level. As an early childhood teacher, I acknowledge early learning is the building block for future learning, and as a kindergarten teacher, I recognize students enter school with varied experiences and different levels of development, including disparate access to resources. These variables may impede students' academic success, so as I explained in Chapter 1, I saw a need to explore perceptions of school readiness among my students' caregivers and my fellow teachers. This chapter presents the scholarship that informed my approach. I begin by discussing the methodology for obtaining related literature. I

then discuss the history of early childhood education and explain its transformation. Next, I discuss school readiness and highlight the theories and concepts framing my study. Finally, I discuss relevant studies that supported my research aims and conclude by summarizing the chapter.

Literature Review Methodology

Much thought and preparation went into my process for addressing the topic of school readiness. I employed various strategies to find related literature, including a virtual meeting with a university librarian, who showed me how to use Boolean logic to combine search topics, along with truncation and wildcard searches. Keywords like *readiness*, *school readiness*, *early childhood*, and associated terms and variations guided my search of the following databases: Mendeley, ERIC, JSTOR, ProQuest, and Find It @ USC Libraries. I also searched through Google and Amazon. Through my research, I found related scientific articles from peer-reviewed journals, websites, and books. I also benefitted from locating some resources cited within articles, dissertations, and books.

History of Early Childhood Education Before 1900

To effectively address the issue of school readiness in children transitioning into kindergarten, understanding the history and evolution of early childhood education is essential. A German educator named Friedrich W. Froebel is responsible for introducing kindergarten to the world in 1837 (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000). Dissatisfied with the German system, Froebel thought school was too scripted. Relying too heavily on rote memorization called for students to sit and learn from the instructor's teaching, which stifled their learning, growth, and development. Froebel identified the need for students to have the freedom to explore and discover while learning.

At that time, German schools served students 7 and older, so Froebel's dissatisfaction, coupled with the fact that Germany's younger population of students was not being served or educated, inspired him to act (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000). Froebel believed a child's early years were the most important for learning, growth, and development—yet the most disregarded. These views transcend Froebel's era, as early childhood educators and scholars share similar sentiments today, arguing that learning and development begin at infancy (Allen & Kelly, 2015).

Froebel established a *kindergarten*, meaning the child's-garden (Blundell et al., 2012), to grow students by nurturing their curiosities and abilities (Nutbrown et al., 2008). The school reflected constructivist theory: the belief that students construct knowledge through interacting with the world around them. Froebel's philosophy hinged on the idea that young students specifically construct knowledge through play. To actively engage students in their learning in ways that enhance their development, Froebel suggested attending to their "gifts and occupations" (Peltzman, 1998, p. 27). He also viewed family as integral to children's development (Weber, 1984). By extension, given women's role in the family structure, he viewed them as natural-born teachers and intentionally employed women to teach kindergarten (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000).

Froebel attracted a lot of followers and fellow believers who began to open schools throughout Germany, the United Kingdom, and eventually the United States (Adelman, 2000). A woman named Elizabeth Peabody is credited with opening the first formal Froebel-inspired kindergarten in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1860 (Shirakawa & Saracho, 2021). Peabody recruited other women to teach kindergarten, after which an abundance of kindergarten classrooms popped up all over the United States.

Early Childhood Education During the 1900s

During the 1900s, additional early childhood classrooms emerged in the United States, both reflective of Froebel's theory and newly formed theories about how students learn (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000). For example, in the early 1900s, the first Montessori schools inspired by Maria Montessori were introduced to the United States. Montessori believed children should not be subjected to drill-and-skill and direct instruction; instead, they should construct their knowledge through self-discovery and exploration. Montessori's ideas mirrored those of philosopher and educator John Dewey, who believed children should engage in activities conducive to learning through discovery at their own pace. Other theorists supported these beliefs that children grow and develop by actively engaging in their learning. For example, in 1929, psychologist Jean Piaget maintained that children construct their knowledge and develop cognitively through stages as they socially interact with the environment (Nutbrown et al., 2008).

As theorists continued to study students' development, political stakeholders began to address educational issues on a wider platform. The mid-1900s saw a wave of programs and initiatives taking form to combat educational issues—most notably, the 1965 dawn of Head Start (Wagner, 2019). Part of the War on Poverty, Head Start created early preschool programs to serve disadvantaged children, providing them, in President Lyndon B. Johnson's words, with a "head start on learning." Despite such efforts, in 1983, The National Commission on Excellence in Education published a report entitled *A Nation at Risk* to emphasize that underperforming schools were failing U.S. youth (Strauss, 2018). In response, President Ronald Reagan sought to revitalize public education, sparking a massive push toward educational reform at the end of the century.

The Transformation of Kindergarten: The New First Grade

In Chapter 1, I noted that President George H. W. Bush and some of the nation's governors proposed a plan for improving U.S. education (Klein, 2014). This vision took the form of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which set academic standards by presenting six goals. The first goal was a priority: by the year 2000, all students would enter school ready to learn. Similar initiatives followed, including the No Child Left Behind Act, which sought to ensure nationwide success in school by requiring all states to measure students' academic success using the same criteria (Camera, 2015). This one-size-fits-all approach attempted to encompass all children, especially those who were disadvantaged, but the emphasis on assessing students in third through eighth grade in the content areas of reading and math had consequences: increased emphasis on testing and accountability. Therefore, decades after the National Education Goals Panel's intention to prioritize all students' entering school ready to learn by 2000 (Shore, 1998), rather than ensuring the nation's early learners were prepared, the implementation of high-stakes testing aligned with Common Core State Standards and Read to Succeed instead paved the way for the push-down curriculum in classrooms across the country.

Over the past 20 years, education has focused more on accountability at the state, district, and local levels, resulting in shifting expectations for educators and students alike. Children must perform at higher levels of achievement and reach higher levels of academic success at earlier ages (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2017). Such acceleration of curriculum and instruction has a push-down effect (Shore, 1998), meaning children are expected to grasp concepts typically reserved for the ensuing school year. For example, my kindergarten students must be able to read fluently, and exhibit comprehension skills

traditionally taught in first grade. Echoing my observations, some scholars have wondered if kindergarten is the new first grade (Bassok et al., 2016).

To formally examine the shift in kindergarten, Bassok et al. (2016) focused on five domains: (a) teachers' perception of school readiness, (b) time spent on academic vs. non-academic content, (c) classroom organization, (d) approaches to teaching, and (e) assessment practices. Using the domains as reference points, they compared the kindergarten classroom of 2010 to the first-grade classroom of the late '90s, wondering how close the resemblance was. They also explored whether the changes in the typical kindergarten experience systematically differed in schools with high proportions of students who received free or reduced-price lunch or students of color. The study consisted of two cohorts, from 1998 and 2010, and included surveys of parents, teachers, and administrators, along with student assessment data. Overall findings suggested considerable changes in kindergarten classrooms, including noticeable shifts in teacher perceptions regarding student expectations and school readiness. There were also differences in teachers' perceptions based on the schools' demographic composition.

In 2010, teachers had higher expectations for readiness, such as 62% believing parents should ensure students know the alphabet when they enter school and 80% believing students should be able to read in kindergarten (Bassok et al., 2016). These findings illustrated a drastic increase from 1998 to 2010. In 1998, only 29% of teachers expected parents to ensure their children knew the alphabet when they entered school and only 31% of teachers believed students would learn how to read in kindergarten. Data also depicted a shift from play and child-selected activities toward more challenging academic activities focused on literacy and mathematics. For example, teachers noted

fewer centers focusing on social interaction and more direct instruction with textbooks and workbooks. In 2010, teachers also admitted to giving more assessments: 30% reported assessing students at least once a month compared to 2.6% of first-grade teachers in 1999. These statistics support the claim that kindergarten has shifted. Given the more advanced curriculum and higher expectations, the question becomes how to ready children for school, which necessitates defining what readiness is.

Perceptions of School Readiness

School readiness is a puzzling construct due to stakeholders' varying perceptions. In fact, Pianta et al. (2007) attested that readiness cannot be defined because there are various components, and there is no single approach to measuring a child's readiness for school. However, scholars have offered some perspectives of what readiness means. Forget-Dubois et al. (2007) defined school readiness as a multifaceted construct that looks at the characteristics of the whole child in terms of their ability to adapt to the transition to school. Meisels (1998) viewed readiness in terms of a child's level of maturity, which is known as the maturationist or idealist view, and the way the child develops and constructs knowledge from interacting with people in their immediate environment, which reflects social constructivist theory.

In the past, a child's readiness for school depended on factors such as maturation, physical development, and the ability to perform skills and activities that required both cognitive and linguistic abilities (Kagan, 1992). The perception was that readiness depended solely on the child. However, perceptions of readiness have shifted. Not solely predicated on the child, readiness also involves others within their systems: families, school members, and community members (Grace & Brandt, 2005). As children's first

teachers, parents are directly and indirectly influential in a child's life, easily transferring their attitudes, beliefs, and values to their children (High, 2008). Teachers' roles in a child's development are also important, and their perceptions can dictate how they view and interact with the child (IRIS Center, 2022). Therefore, any discussion of readiness must acknowledge the significance of these adults' perceptions and examine similarities and variations in their beliefs. As Benner and Mistry (2007) maintained, parents' and teachers' beliefs, ideologies, and expectations can affect a child's academic success.

Measuring School Readiness

The idea that children's academic success and life trajectory are linked to early learning suggests a need to assess children during their early years (Seefeldt & Galper, 1998). However, just as there is no universal definition for readiness, there is no universal measurement tool for determining readiness in children transitioning to school (Boivin & Bierman, 2013). As a result, school district administrators and teachers have created their own assessments. These early childhood readiness assessments have improved as each state has established their own learning goals related to school readiness. Each state's early learning guidelines are reflective of their beliefs about school readiness.

South Carolina First Steps (2020b), a nonprofit organization devoted to improving early childhood education in the state and increasing school readiness, suggested the first identifier of a ready student is that they reach the age of 5 before September 1. The organization's profile of a ready student also suggests students show signs of readiness when they exhibit specific cognitive, emotional, physical, and social characteristics. These indicators align with the KRA's four domains. As Chapter 1 explained, South Carolina measures children's preparedness for kindergarten based on these traits.

A New View of Readiness

Moving beyond existing definitions and measures of readiness, Pretti-Frontczak (2014) offered the perspective that readiness depends on children's interactions with their families, the school, and the community. Ready families are committed to supporting children in their learning when they are engaged at home and work to build positive partnerships with the school (Regional Educational Laboratory Program, 2022). Pretti-Frontczak (2014) also suggested that families are ready when they have access to resources that can benefit the developing child.

Ready schools commit to helping all students succeed by forming partnerships with families and communities (Pretti-Frontczak, 2014). They work deliberately to ensure a smooth transition from a child's home—an early institution of learning—to school. Ready schools also strive to ensure educators and other stakeholders help children grow, develop, and make sense of their evolving world (Shore, 1998).

Finally, ready communities are committed to providing resources to support families in their efforts to prepare their children for school (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005). Ready communities aim to make children's transition to school smoother by ensuring families know about available resources and services their children will need when entering school. The system-wide view of readiness Pretti-Frontczak (2014) described thus aligns with my theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

As I noted in Chapter 1, I combined constructivist theory and ecological systems theory to establish a framework for my study. Both lenses corroborate the view that

students' readiness is not based on the individual; rather, it encompasses children and their environment. This section elaborates on the primary theorists.

Vygotsky

Vygotsky believed children learn, develop, and grow from their experiences, including social interactions (Mooney, 2013). Suggesting people surrounding a child can use prior knowledge to help the child make sense of the world, Vygotsky developed sociocultural constructivist theory, crediting families with helping children gain knowledge (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2010). Those who fill such roles by imparting their knowledge are known as more knowledgeable others (MKO). Vygotsky theorized that children under the guidance of MKOs could reach their potential within a certain limit, termed the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (National STEM Learning Centre, n.d.). The ZPD is where learning and development occur (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2010). McLeod (2019) suggested a child is in their ZPD when they have social interactions with a MKO who supports their development and learning through scaffolding. MKOs can include guardians and teachers who provide support throughout the learning process. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory thus aligns with my study because it emphasizes the effect families and teachers can have on children's growth and development.

Bronfenbrenner

Bronfenbrenner (1979) also studied child development and highlighted the impact of a child's environment, including family and other structures with direct or indirect influence. Specifically, Bronfenbrenner described five environmental systems that shape a growing child. In increasingly larger concentric circles, the whole ecological system

encompasses: (a) the microsystem, (b) the mesosystem, (c) the exosystem, (d) the macrosystem, and (e) the chronosystem.

The microsystem is the most important environmental component, as it encompasses the child's culture and those in their immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Culture in this sense refers to the values and beliefs of those in the environment that can affect both the child and the family (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2010). Moving outward, the mesosystem describes the interaction between the child and their setting during a given time (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). In the mesosystem, the child and their microsystems connect, interact, and engage. In the exosystem, the child is a part of a structure that can potentially affect them indirectly, as when something or someone directly affects an entity in a child's microsystem (Guy-Evans, 2020). Next, the macrosystem encompasses broader cultural influences: socioeconomic status, ethnicity, beliefs, and worldviews.

The chronosystem encompasses all components of the environment and reflects how changes can affect the developing child (Guy-Evans, 2020). For example, Chapter 1 noted the COVID-19 era's negative impact on readiness. Rather than proposing stand-alone systems, Bronfenbrenner emphasized the systems' interrelatedness and collective effect on a child's growth and development. In the context of my study, broader belief systems and perceptions at the macrosystem layer may impact school readiness, although families and teachers within the microsystem have a more immediate impact.

Positioning the Study

My theoretical framework prompted me to incorporate families' and teachers' perceptions in my effort to promote school readiness. Examining the mental models of

the two groups of stakeholders would allow me to see how they relate, as Senge et al. (2012) recommended examining people's mental models to identify misunderstandings and differences in their beliefs and assumptions. Similarly, Evans (1996) maintained that change can begin by uncovering people's basic assumptions and beliefs.

Puccioni et al. (2021) examined African American parents' perceptions of school readiness, aiming to identify associations between the parents' beliefs and their involvement in their child's academic life. They also sought to explore any connection between those factors and readiness assessment scores. Further, they looked for differences in school readiness beliefs and parental involvement by socioeconomic status and gender of the child. Collecting data from an existing early childhood longitudinal study that involved parents, teachers, students, and administrators, the researchers used a three-stage sampling process to ensure variety by region, public or private school attendance, and type of early childhood education, whether kindergarten or an ungraded format. Data included students' literacy and mathematics scores, teacher questionnaires to assess the students' social skills, and interviews with parents to gain their perceptions of school readiness and measure their involvement. Using a structural equation model, the researchers found strong associations between students' readiness for school based on performance and their parents' beliefs about school readiness. They also found a close relationship between parents' perceptions and their involvement with their child at home. In sum, adult perceptions of readiness can impact whether the children are, in fact, ready.

Chapter Summary

As evident throughout this chapter, the construct of school readiness is complex for many stakeholders. Theorists, scholars, parents, teachers, administrators, politicians,

and other stakeholders have different perceptions of school readiness and related factors (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). Without a universal definition of school readiness, there is no consensus on how to accurately measure readiness in children entering kindergarten (Boivin & Bierman, 2013). Also, parents' perceptions can affect how they prepare their children for school, which can impact a child's readiness.

Effectively addressing the issue of school readiness requires involvement of various stakeholders. Maxwell and Clifford (2004) suggested readiness depends heavily on a child and the child's environment, including their family, school, and community. Like the adage, it takes a village to raise a child. Having established an understanding of their shared responsibility, the stakeholders must form an alliance and work to create a shared vision (Senge et al., 2012), based on consensus around how to define and measure school readiness.

My literature review reinforced that I cannot solve the issue of a lack of school readiness on a large scale. However, I aimed to confront it at my school by collaborating with relevant stakeholders. Chapter 3 focuses on the methods I used to collect data to address the school readiness issue in my school setting.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

As I shared in the prior chapters, school readiness has been a national issue for decades (Shore, 1998). Moreover, in my 18+ years as an early childhood teacher, I have noticed more students are entering kindergarten unprepared for the rigor of the so-called push-down curriculum (Harmon & Viruru, 2018). State and district reports and data from my classroom show a persistent achievement gap among kindergarteners, yet differences correlating with race and ethnicity suggest the impact of educational inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Quinn, 2020). To do my part to narrow these gaps, I wanted to address students' lack of readiness by first seeking an understanding of the external factors. Specifically, my study focused on students' home and school environments.

The purpose of this action research study was to create a readiness intervention plan for my school. To gain actionable insights from key stakeholders, I posed the following research questions:

1. How do families in my community perceive school readiness?
2. How do teachers in my community perceive school readiness?
3. How do families' perceptions compare to teachers' perceptions of school readiness?

I chose a qualitative approach to capture the perspectives of families and teachers on the issue of school readiness. The goal in qualitative research is to understand others' beliefs, perceptions, and experiences (Efron & Ravid, 2020; MacNaughton & Hughes, 2008).

This chapter explains the process I took to gain insight into families' and teachers' perceptions of school readiness. I begin by discussing my plan to recruit participants. Then, after describing the approach I took for collecting and analyzing my data, I conclude the chapter by summarizing key aspects of my study.

Participant Recruitment

The populations relevant to this study included guardians of newly enrolled kindergarten students in my class ($N = 18$) and the other kindergarten teachers at my Title I public elementary school in South Carolina ($N = 5$). These groups of stakeholders exist in a child's microsystem, and as Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested, the microsystem has a direct impact on a child's development. Moreover, Efron and Ravid (2020) emphasized how the participants in an action research study have the potential to create change in response to the problem. Recruiting families and teachers brought a wealth of knowledge to the issue as they had the inside track. I specifically sought *family* participants, as opposed to parents, because of varying family dynamics; some children live with those other than their biological parents.

I anticipated both groups of stakeholders would benefit from participating in the study. I chose families as participants because they were invested in their children's school performance, yet I believed the study would also be relevant to kindergarten teachers as they worked to improve their instructional practices. The intervention plan I was pursuing had the potential to mitigate the readiness issue in their own classrooms.

I wanted to survey the largest possible sample of family members, anticipating multiple guardians in a household may have wanted to participate in the study. Therefore, I decided not to stipulate one survey per household, expecting to yield as much data as

possible. Not setting limits allowed me to view variations in family members' demographics, including gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, as Efron and Ravid (2020) suggested. Similarly, I hoped to survey all kindergarten teachers. Aside from these characteristics, I had no other inclusion criteria.

I recruited families with the invitation letter in Appendix G. Sent via email, it informed the prospective participants of my intentions and emphasized that participation in the study would be voluntary. I included a response deadline to ensure the data collection process could begin promptly. In the email, I also shared a link to the survey (Appendix A) for willing participants to access. Although I hoped for 100% participation, I was willing to proceed if at least 10 family members accepted the invitation. As Chapter 4 reveals, 11 family members—10 women and one man—completed the survey. While the sample was not representative of the entire population, they were invested in preparing their children for school.

I shared a similar invitation letter with my fellow kindergarten teachers via email (Appendix H), including a link to the teacher survey (Appendix B). The five female teachers on my grade level and I all have a good rapport, and I knew they were interested in school readiness. Therefore, I was confident I would have 80–100% participation. One of the teachers unexpectedly went on leave, yet the other four fully participated. I introduce them in Chapter 4.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Through the basic qualitative research method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I sought to uncover, interpret, and gain a better understanding of the external factors that may contribute to students' being unprepared or unready for school. My study included

data from surveys and interviews. Data collection took place in two phases over the course of 4 months, beginning with the surveys in October 2022 and concluding with the follow-up interviews in February 2023.

Surveys

My initial phase of data collection included surveying families and teachers. I chose this method because surveying is beneficial when gathering information from a larger group of people, surfacing various perspectives (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Although surveys are less personal than other methods (DeFranzo, 2022), surveying aligned with my aim of gaining an initial view of stakeholders' perspectives on school readiness. I adapted the surveys from a national study (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993) by incorporating readiness characteristics I have witnessed as a teacher. I sent the invitation letters in October and gave those who agreed to participate until October 20, 2022, to complete the survey online through Survey Monkey. I opted to use this platform because of my familiarity and its capacity to provide quick, confidential, and organized responses. I also gave prospective participants the option of filling out a paper copy of the survey and mailed copies as needed to accommodate the same deadline.

I expected the family survey (Appendix A) and the teacher survey (Appendix B) to take approximately 15 minutes to complete, as they included similar questions. Although I was recruiting a smaller sample of teachers, surveying was nevertheless a useful method for collecting basic demographic information (e.g., gender, race, educational background). Participants also provided their perceptions of school readiness by answering questions using structured response choices on a Likert scale, which can be

less stressful for participants (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Both surveys also included checklists and rank-ordered responses.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews also helped me understand participants' perspectives and life experiences (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Focusing on their ideas, values, and beliefs, I conducted in-depth interviews by posing a different set of open-ended questions for each group and phase (Appendix C–F). This approach allowed the participants to share their perceptions of school readiness without feeling restricted to answering in a certain manner (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Interviewing was beneficial because it yielded more knowledge about participants' perceptions than the surveys alone and provided me with data across Phase 1 and 2.

Phase 1 Interviews

Because kindergarten teachers had to administer several one-on-one assessments at the start of the school year, my principal allowed the kindergarten team to schedule our usual parent–teacher conferences in late October and early November, which coincided with my timeline for data collection. The conferences provided me with a perfect opportunity to explore families' perspectives on school readiness. Each interview session lasted between 20–30 minutes, guided by the protocol in Appendix C. I gave each participant the option of choosing how they wanted to meet with me during conferences: face-to-face, via Google Meet, or over the telephone. I informed the participants I would be taking notes in my journal to ensure I was capturing their thoughts and opinions accurately. When families chose to meet via Google Meet, I obtained their permission to record the interview.

Initial teacher interviews also took place in November, guided by the protocol in Appendix D. Because I had easy access to teachers, I interviewed them individually during the school day during our planning period. Teachers had the option to meet face-to-face in one of our classrooms or through Google Meet. Depending on the method, I recorded responses in my journal or recorded the session using a recording device after obtaining permission to do so. If teachers opted to meet with me face-to-face, I jotted their responses in my journal and recorded the interview using my cell phone. If teachers opted to meet via Google Meet, I recorded the session and used the transcripts as a backup to ensure I captured what the participant shared during the interview session.

Phase 2 Interviews

After the first phase of interviews, I contacted the family and teacher participants to schedule follow-up interviews. This second phase of data collection took place in February. I sent a reminder email after students returned from Winter Break in January. The Winter Break also marked the end of the first semester (i.e., 2 quarters). I intentionally set the second phase to begin after the second grading period had ended, when families had an opportunity to understand the dynamics of kindergarten a little better. Their children had been in school for 18 weeks, which is half the school year. Families had also received two report cards, indicating how their students faired academically. Additionally, teachers' experiences during the marking periods gave them background information and data to inform their decisions. Follow-up interviews thus enabled me to determine whether participants' perceptions of school readiness had changed and seek their input for improving our community's capacity to promote school readiness. Each follow-up interview lasted approximately 20 minutes, and participants

again chose whether they wanted the interview to take place in-person or through Google Meet. For families, I used the protocol in Appendix E, and for teachers, I asked the questions in Appendix F.

Data Analysis

My study prioritized democratic validity, as I collaborated with others who had a stake in the outcome (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Therefore, I followed Efron and Ravid's (2020) advice to share transcripts with participants and engage in analytical discussions about my interpretations during the interviews to engage in member checking with my colleagues, the kindergarten teacher sample, and use their feedback to mitigate my biases, I met with them individually and discussed the transcripts from our interview. I explained what I interpreted them saying during the interview process and asked them if I accurately captured their ideas. With the family sample, after each interview question, I intentionally repeated what I heard them say. Doing so allowed me to check for accuracy and helped to ensure that I precisely captured their ideas, opinions, and thoughts. At the end of the interview, I also reviewed my notes with the family participants. I used this process to clarify what they shared.

Triangulation was another means of enhancing the quality of my study. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), triangulation is when a researcher uses "multiple sources of data" for the sake of "comparing and cross-checking" (p. 245). Likewise, Efron and Ravid (2020) offered that triangulating data is a way to obtain varied perspectives from participants. In my case, I strengthened my conclusions by using surveys and interviews for each set of participants.

I used coding to analyze the data thematically, identifying relevant patterns (Creswell, 2014). I took a "manual approach" to analyzing the interview data (Tracy, 2019, p. 216) by printing the transcriptions to highlight repeated words and phrases and common themes. Next, I cut the paper up and placed the strips into piles that matched. Then, I determined commonalities to derive an overarching category for each new theme. This process helped me immensely, as I am a visual and tactile learner.

Looking across the survey and interview data, I first assessed families' perceptions of school readiness, in response to Research Question 1, followed by teachers' perceptions, in response to Research Question 2. When looking across each data set, I started a list of codes, using unique colors to identify the initial themes (Figure 3.1). Then, I looked across the common themes and patterns to determine how they connected in relation to Research Question 3. Efron and Ravid (2020) suggested such connection is a form of sense-making and an initial step toward addressing a problem of practice.

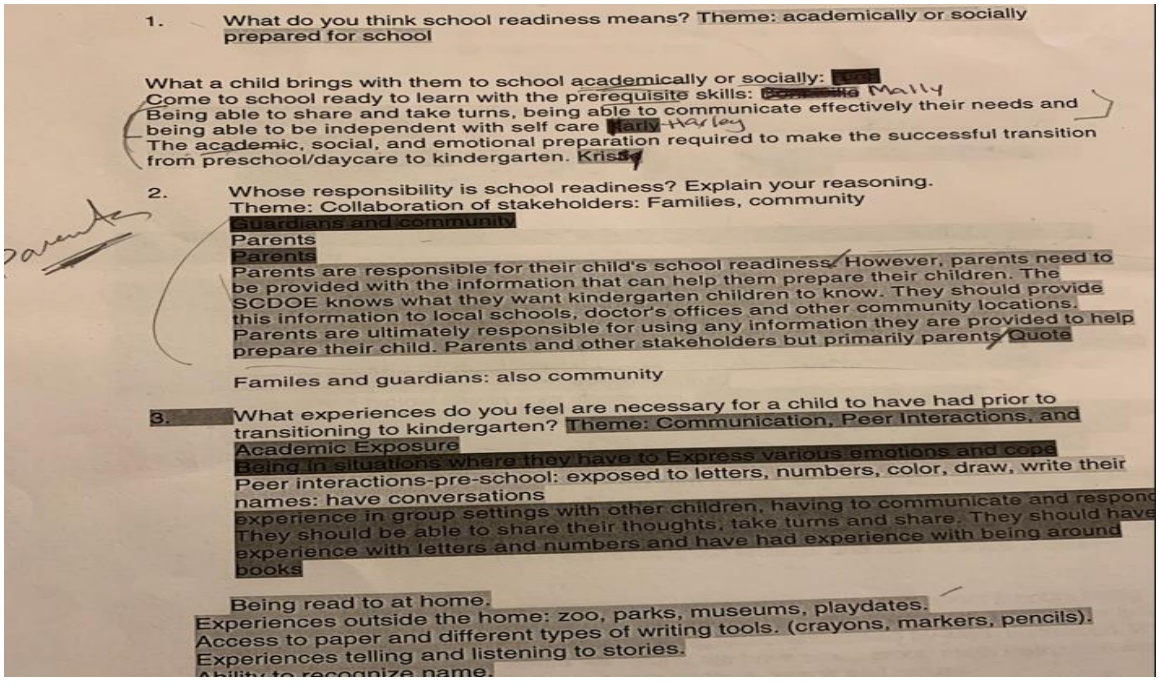

Figure 3.1 *Initial Teacher Coding*

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the data collection and analysis approach I took in my research. Each instrument was essential and beneficial in a unique way. As MacNaughton and Hughes (2008) argued, every method has strengths and limitations, but using multiple methods can enhance reliability. In the following chapter, I discuss the insights I gained from implementing this research plan. Understanding the various perceptions of families and teachers and then looking at the data collectively helped me create a plan to promote school readiness.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from my qualitative action research study on school readiness. After a brief overview of my problem of practice and various aspects of my study's design, I share the data I collected chronologically by participant group. I discuss the outcomes of my data analysis for each group before looking across the groups to triangulate their perspectives.

As I explained in prior chapters, school readiness has been an issue for decades at the state and national levels (Klein, 2014; South Carolina First Steps, 2021), as well as in my long-term experience as a kindergarten teacher. With the push-down curriculum placing a greater emphasis on academics in kindergarten, students must be ready to learn when they enter school. As Gregory et al. (2021) argued, a child's readiness for school can impact their trajectory throughout school and later in life.

To better understand the complex construct of school readiness and respond to the issue in my school, I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do families in my community perceive school readiness?
2. How do teachers in my community perceive school readiness?
3. How do families' perceptions compare to teachers' perceptions of school readiness?

I answered these questions by conducting action research in my Title I elementary school in South Carolina. My participants included my students' primary caretakers and my

fellow kindergarten teachers, whose insights assisted me in creating a readiness plan. Because I sought to investigate the perceptions of the various stakeholders, a qualitative design provided me with in-depth insights into participants' viewpoints (Tracy, 2019).

Presentation of the Findings

I used multiple qualitative data sources to capture the perceptions of families and teachers. As mentioned in Chapter 3, I collected survey and interview data across two phases. This section presents the findings by participant group, beginning with the families before moving to the kindergarten teachers and then looking across both groups. In other words, as Table 4.1 shows, each subsection aligns with one of the research questions that guided my study. The subsections are further organized chronologically by the data collection instruments.

Table 4.1 *Data Sources That Support the Research Questions*

Question	Participants	Phase	Source
1. How do families in my community perceive school readiness?	families	1	surveys initial interviews
		2	follow-up interviews
2. How do teachers in my community perceive school readiness?	teachers	1	surveys initial interviews
		2	follow-up interviews
3. How do families' perceptions compare to teachers' perceptions of school readiness?	families and teachers	1	surveys initial interviews
		2	follow-up interviews

Tracy (2019) encouraged researchers to organize their data and creatively manage their analysis. I organized my data in a couple of ways. First, I sorted the data by group (i.e., families or teachers) and by source (i.e., survey or interview). I also grouped the interview data by phase, which provided me with a more efficient way to dissect the data.

Data Collected From Families

As Chapter 3 explained, the recruitment phase of my study coincided with the start of data collection in October 2022. The recruitment letter in Appendix G included the link for families to access the survey in Appendix A. Completion of the survey indicated their agreement to participate. In addition to emailing the letter, I also mailed surveys to the families of all 18 students in my class.

Phase 1: Family Surveys

Surveys were beneficial for obtaining preliminary information from a large group because they were relatively easy to analyze and conducive to the information I sought (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Specifically, the survey in Appendix A enabled me to identify family participants' perceptions of and opinions about school readiness. It consisted of three parts, the first centered on gaining demographic information about the participants. The second and third parts of the survey consisted of a Likert scale and a ranking scale juxtaposed with statements related to school readiness.

Of the 18 households I invited, 11 family participants completed the survey, including nine from separate households and a husband-and-wife pair from the same household. In other words, over half of my students (56%) were represented. Table 4.2 introduces their caretakers using pseudonyms I created, along with background information from the first part of the survey. Validating my use of inclusive language, nine participants were parents, while two, Barbie, and Kathy, were grandmothers in the 50–59 age range. The other participants' ages ranged from 20–49. Most participants (91%) were African American, while one, Emari, was Hispanic. Moreover, most participants (91%) were female, except for Quin, a father between the ages of 40 and 49.

Table 4.2 *Demographic Characteristics of Family Participants*

Pseudonym	Role	Gender	Ethnicity/Race	Age	Degree	Prior Placement	Other Kindergarteners
Barbie	grandmother	female	African American	50–59	advanced	daycare	Yes
Emari	mother	female	Hispanic	30–39	2-year	home	Yes
Jazz	mother	female	African American	20–29	high school	home	Yes
Kathy	grandmother	female	African American	50–59	high school	daycare	Yes
LeeLee	mother	female	African American	20–29	high school	pre-K	Yes
Melody	mother	female	African American	30–39	high school	pre-K	Yes
Nakita	mother	female	African American	40–49	advanced	pre-K	Yes
Quin	father	male	African American	40–49	advanced	pre-K	No
Shley	mother	female	African American	30–39	2-year	pre-K	No
Sonya	mother	female	African American	40–49	doctorate	pre-K	No
Tae	mother	female	African American	20–29	high school	daycare	Yes

Quin was also one of three participants with an advanced degree, and one participant, Sonya, had a doctorate. Quin and Sonya were the married couple in my sample, and both of them are educators. Among the other family participants, five (45%) reported high school diplomas as their highest degrees, while two (18%) had received a 2-year degree.

Data from the first part of the survey also showed variations in the families' experiences related to kindergarten. When asked about the placement of their child prior to enrolling at our school, six families (55%) indicated their children attended pre-K, while three (27%) indicated they participated in a daycare. The other two families stated that their children were at home, confirming my assumption that for some students, kindergarten is their introduction to formal schooling. However, both of these family participants, when asked whether additional kids in the household had attended kindergarten, responded affirmatively, suggesting they had some idea of what to expect when their children became my students. In total, eight of the 11 families (73%) indicated prior experience with kindergarten students in the household, while three indicated being first-time kindergarten caregivers.

The second part of the survey included two sets of statements, each with a different Likert scale. Family participants responded to the first set of statements, about a child's readiness for school, by communicating the extent to which they agreed with each statement. As Table 4.3 illustrates, families placed stock in children's school readiness. To some extent, 10 participants disagreed with Statement 8, that a child does not need to prepare for kindergarten, and nine disagreed with Statement 9, suggesting children will learn all they need to know once they get to school.

Table 4.3 *Frequency of Family Participants' Responses to Statements 1–11*

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Attending a pre-K program to prepare for kindergarten is important.	0	0	2	4	5
2. Children exposed to reading and math instruction before school will do better academically.	1	0	0	5	5
3. Reading to your child is important.	1	0	0	4	6
4. Playing games with your child to build their cognitive skills is important.	1	0	1	3	6
5. Engaging your child in academic and social activities every day is important.	1	0	2	2	6
6. A child should be able to write their first name prior to coming to kindergarten.	0	0	2	4	5
7. A child should know how to share prior to coming to kindergarten.	1	0	2	1	7
8. A child does not need to prepare for kindergarten.	5	5	0	0	1
9. Children will learn all they need to know once they get in school.	3	6	1	1	0
10. Play is important for children at school.	0	0	2	5	4
11. Academics are more important than play.	0	3	2	5	1

Indicating their responsibility in the transition to formal schooling, 10 family participants, to some degree, emphasized the importance of reading to their children and supported using games to build their cognitive skills. The responses also showed the perceived importance of attending pre-K, as nine families, to some degree, responded affirmatively to Statement 1, while only two families were undecided. Overwhelmingly, families emphasized academics as related to readiness. Reflecting their belief that exposure to academics before entering school helps students succeed, 10 respondents felt children exposed to reading and math before school would do better academically.

The second set of statements yielded additional insights. Participants considered various readiness characteristics and used a different Likert scale to indicate the importance of each trait. Table 4.4 displays the results.

Table 4.4 *Frequency of Family Participants' Responses to Statements 12–24*

Statement	Not at All	Not Very	Somewhat	Very	Imperative
12. Can identify their name in written form.	0	0	0	8	3
13. Can count to 20 and beyond.	0	0	0	5	6
14. Can identify the letters of the alphabet.	0	0	1	4	6
15. Can correctly hold a pencil in their hand.	0	0	1	7	3
16. Can use crayons to color.	0	0	2	5	4
17. Can recognize colors and shapes.	0	0	0	7	4
18. Can appropriately hold and use scissors to cut.	0	0	5	5	1
19. Can think critically, etc.	0	2	1	4	4
20. Can take turns and share.	0	0	0	6	5
21. Can play and get along well with others.	0	0	0	4	7
22. Can focus attention for at least 5 minutes.	0	0	0	5	6
23. Can follow one-step directions.	0	0	0	4	7
24. Can verbally communicate wants and needs.	0	0	0	5	6

All respondents answered at least somewhat affirmatively to 12 of these statements. They conveyed the importance of students' being able to identify their names in written form, identify the letters of the alphabet, count to 20 and beyond, and recognize colors and shapes prior to entering kindergarten. In addition to academics, they also placed stock in social foundations as well as play, as 11 participants deemed the following skills important: taking turns and sharing, playing, and getting along well with others, focusing attention for at least 5 minutes, following one-step directions, and communicating wants and needs. These results align with the responses to Statement 10, as nine family participants asserted the importance of play, although six agreed, in response to Statement 11, that academics are more important than play (Table 4.3).

The final part of the survey included three questions that asked participants to rank the characteristics from Statements 12–24 in terms of their importance as related to a child's readiness for school. The rankings appear in Table 4.5, showing more than half of the family participants placed greater value on children's academic and social skills as indicative of a child's readiness for school: three family participants selected Statement 12, a child's ability to identify their name in written form, as the most important characteristic, while two each chose a child's ability to problem-solve (Statement 19) and verbally communicate their wants and needs (Statement 24).

Family participants' choices for the second most important characteristic also emphasized academics and social skills. Over half of the responses accounted for those who chose Statement 14, identifying the letters of the alphabet; Statement 20, taking turns and sharing; and Statement 23, following one-step directions. An equal number of participants believed these skills are essential elements of school readiness.

Table 4.5 *Frequency of Family Participants' Rankings of Readiness Characteristics*

Statement	First	Second	Third
12. Can identify their name in written form.	3	1	1
13. Can count to 20 and beyond.	0	0	0
14. Can identify the letters of the alphabet.	1	2	0
15. Can correctly hold a pencil in their hand.	0	0	0
16. Can use crayons to color.	0	0	0
17. Can recognize colors and shapes.	0	0	0
18. Can appropriately hold and use scissors to cut.	0	0	0
19. Can think critically, problem solve, and resolve an issue on their own.	2	1	1
20. Can take turns and share.	0	2	0
21. Can play and get along well with others.	1	1	5
22. Can focus attention for at least 5 minutes.	1	1	1
23. Can follow one-step directions.	1	2	1
24. Can verbally communicate wants and needs.	2	1	2

Though most of the survey responses constitute quantitative data, I used them as preliminary descriptive indicators of the families' perceptions of the construct of school readiness. Efron and Ravid (2020) asserted that using surveys for data collection allows researchers to gain diverse perspectives on a given topic. The ranking system was especially useful for adding validity and trustworthiness to the qualitative aspects of the research by providing a clear and systematic way to compare participants' viewpoints.

Phase 1: Family Interviews

During Phase 1, I used the interview protocol in Appendix C to collect a second set of data from the family participants, following Tracy's (2019) guidance that

interviews should be purposeful, reciprocal conversations based on guided questioning. As I explained in the recruitment letter (Appendix G), I contacted the family members who responded to the survey to thank them for their participation and invite them to schedule an interview so I could understand their perceptions of school readiness better. According to Efron and Ravid (2020), interviews allow researchers to gain knowledge about participants' belief systems and allow participants to voice their views. I posed open-ended questions because I wanted them to answer freely, in their own words, and on their terms (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I also intentionally practiced reflexivity when conducting the interviews to reinforce the sense of openness (Tracy, 2019).

Initially, I intended to interview the first 10 family members who returned the survey—a manageable sample. Quin and Sonya, the husband-and-wife team who individually completed the survey, requested to be interviewed together for convenience, so I was open to interviewing all 11 respondents, but Tae was unable to participate in the interview phase due to her work schedule. During my joint interview with Quin and Sonya, each participant answered each question individually.

The interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes each and occurred over the telephone, through Google Meet, and face-to-face, based on participants' preference. I was intentionally flexible in scheduling (Tracy, 2019), allowing all participants to choose what type of interview they preferred and a day and time that best fit their schedule. Providing participants with a choice was beneficial because they felt they had a voice in the development of the interview. As a result, our conversations were productive and revealed the following themes: (a) readiness as preparedness, (b) academic and

nonacademic skills, (c) technology, (d) family engagement, (e) community or other resources, and (f) negative perceptions.

Readiness as Preparedness. During the initial interview, I began by asking the family participants to define school readiness. Their responses did not indicate total agreement, but a few family members (n = 5) perceived readiness as meaning that children had some sense of preparedness as they transitioned to kindergarten. The two grandmothers were among these participants. For example, Barbie defined readiness as "a child being prepared for K," as indicated by "things they know before coming." Kathy used similar terms to describe readiness as "A child being prepared or understanding the purpose of school."

Academic and Nonacademic Skills. Asking families to define readiness also surfaced the theme of academic and nonacademic skills. Distinguishing between the two helped me see participants' varied perceptions. For example, illustrating a more academic view, Quin suggested readiness is "who you are in regard to your academic levels," and Melody stated that readiness is "being able to recognize the letters in their name and count to 10." In contrast, Lee Lee and Sonya identified readiness in nonacademic terms, such as a child's ability to follow directions. Likewise, Nakita suggested readiness "is how developed [a child is] socially and emotionally."

Whether participants gravitated to academic or nonacademic terms seemed to shape how they responded to other questions. For instance, those who associated readiness with academic skills acknowledged that children should be exposed to and have experience with alphabets, letter sounds, writing, and math prior to kindergarten. Shley specified they should be "able to read and write their name," in addition to "counting to

at least 20 and learning the alphabet." Similarly, Barbie stated that children should have experience with "alphabets, basic sounds, some solid number recognition, [and] identify their names." Participants also gave examples of how they acted on these perceptions by attempting to equip their children with academic skills when preparing them for school. Amari shared, "I bought books, flashcards, and letters," just as Shley shared, "I went to the store and bought kindergarten and first-grade assignments." Quin admitted Sonya exposed him to a lot of stuff, such as beaded number lines, numbers, and addition concepts. Likewise, Barbie prepared her grandson by teaching him numbers and also helping him to identify letters and shapes.

Other family members perceived children's need for experience with nonacademic skills, especially when I asked what they felt was the single most important factor in deciding whether a child was ready for school. Quin and Sonya agreed that a child's ability to follow directions is important. Similarly, Barbie shared, "Being able to listen and show attention and focus." Additional responses under this category pertained to communication. Lee Lee insisted children should be able to "communicate," especially for the purpose of sharing "needs and wants." Shley also felt a child should be able to "speak and understand."

As with the discussion of academic skills, family members who emphasized nonacademic skills pointed to actions or experiences for building those skills before the child's transition to kindergarten. For example, recognizing communication skills as a big part of readiness, Sonya shared that she talked with her son to help prepare him for school. Similarly, Lee Lee stated, "I communicated with [my daughter] and taught her positive communication." Likewise, Jazz reiterated the importance of communicating

with children to prepare for school by acknowledging, I talked to [my son] early. In making this statement she insinuated that she began talking to him at birth.

Participants also mentioned peer interactions and exposure to schedules as means of building nonacademic skills. Amari thought children "should definitely have interaction with other children," particularly "kids their own age." Similarly, Nakita expressed the importance of peer interactions when she stated, "Children need to have interactions with other children to be able to play and learn from their peers." Jazz and Lee Lee mentioned schedules as instrumental for preparing children for the classroom. Jazz shared that schedules were necessary, while Lee Lee emphasized that children needed them as they transitioned into the school.

Technology. Cutting across academic and nonacademic skills, technology was a common topic of discussion. Participants admitted to using technology to assist in preparing their children for school. Kathy shared the example of "viewing sight words on the Kindle," explaining how "links [her granddaughter] visits reinforced name writing." Melody reported using YouTube clips and other videos to prepare her child for school. Likewise, Quin and Sonya incorporated technology to prepare their son for school, with Quin admitting, "Technology has had a big influence on him."

Family Engagement. When the conversations shifted to who is responsible for preparing children for school, all family participants' responses centered on the family's engagement, suggesting they agreed that school readiness is the parent or guardian's responsibility. Nakita reasoned, "The child may not have had any other type of daycare or schooling prior to attending pre-K or kindergarten." Echoing this belief, Emari stated readiness is "definitely a parental responsibility because we are the primary caretakers."

Jazz's response especially resonated with me, as she argued, "It starts at home. If not, then [students] are thrown into a random situation or environment where they are left to figure it out on their own. From home to school is a big change."

Participants' perceptions of the importance of family engagement also shaped our discussion of experiences they felt were necessary for their children to have before transitioning to school, reinforcing the theme of academic and nonacademic skills. For example, Sonya maintained that going places as a family helped to prepare her child for school. Similarly, Melody shared, "We did stuff as a family," while Nakita reported, "We tried to prepare our children for school by taking them to parks, the children's museum, and the public library."

As my protocol indicates, I was also curious to know what, if any, resources provided to participants helped them prepare their children for school (Appendix C), and the theme of family engagement surfaced in response. For example, Sonya identified her family as her support system in helping to prepare her son for school. Offering a more concrete example, Nakita mentioned, "We received puzzles, coloring books, crayons, and paint from family members." Amari, whose parents kept her son while she and her husband worked, admitted how big of a role they played in her child's readiness. She shared, "My parents helped us learn, and my mom taught him sign language and different skills we didn't have time for." In other words, family engagement could include extended family, too.

Community or Other Resources. Beyond resources within or provided by the family, participants also described support they received through community outreach. Nakita shared, "We received books from our pediatrician and church," and Melody cited

the example of "the Dolly Parton program, which . . . provided [her family] with up to five free books every month." She added, "The Dolly Parton program was very helpful." These conversations illustrated participants' positive perceptions about the level of support provided. As another example, Lee Lee mentioned "BabyNet," which "provides suggestions based on kids' age on what they should be doing."

Negative Perceptions. Contrasting the positive perceptions of various resources families could access, several participants had negative perceptions. Data revealed a need to be more consistent in providing resources to aid families in readying their children for school. Not entirely shocked by their responses, I was saddened that some family members reported receiving no resources to help them prepare. When I asked Question 5 (Appendix C), Quin simply replied, "None." Jazz confirmed her child received "nothing prior to school other than mom and dad," adding, "I based my teaching off what I did in school." Barbie had a similarly negative perception of the resources her family received to prepare her grandson for school. She noted, "A state-issued voucher was issued for him to attend a daycare program. The providers were supposed to come to the house once a week, but it fell through."

Phase 2: Family Follow Up Interviews

Phase 2 gave me an opportunity to build on Phase 1 by learning more about families' perceptions of school readiness. During this data collection phase, after students had been in school for two 9-week terms (i.e., a semester), I conducted follow-up interviews to see whether families' perceptions had changed or remained the same. Before asking some of the same questions I posed in Phase 1, I asked them to reflect on their own kindergarten experiences as compared to those of their children (Appendix E).

In assessing the data, the themes that emerged were: (a) academics versus play, (b) greater expectations, (c) social skills, (d) family responsibility, and (e) desired resources.

Academics Versus Play. Mirroring the Phase 1 theme of academic and nonacademic skills, Phase 2 responses fell into broad categories of academics versus play. Many participants continued to view readiness in terms of their child's possession of academic skills. Shley, for example, defined school readiness as "preparing your child academically so they are not left behind," and offered some specific criteria: "Every kid should know how to write their name, know colors, and numbers." Similarly, to Melody, readiness meant "They know the basics: can count, know their name, can recognize some letters . . ., shapes, colors, [and] some of the nursery rhymes." Barbie also felt children should "know the basics: counting to 20, alphabet, say it if not recognize their name, general and basic things like colors." Likewise, Jazz emphasized academics by emphasizing specific skills children should demonstrate: "Practice with pencil and crayon because writing has to be taught, count 1–5, know basic colors, and the alphabet." Kathy shared that she felt children should "Read Bob books and write." Kathy's comment suggests that she felt children should have opportunities to practice reading and writing.

Indicating the roots of these academic-focused responses, several families acknowledged that their experiences in school mainly focused on academics. Amari, who attended a year-round school in Panama, noted her experiences were, "mostly academics—no nap and no center." Similarly, Nakita reported, "My experience in kindergarten was very academic. We sat at tables most of the day and worked on math and reading assignments."

While some family members admitted their school experiences centered on academics, others recalled play was a big part of their experiences in kindergarten. Lee Lee stated, “School was focused on play,” and Melody remembered, “a lot of games and play time.” Data also indicated some participants experienced a balance between play and academics. When Barbie was in kindergarten, she perceived “just as much play as education.” Similarly, Jazz perceived her kindergarten experience as “balanced play and academics.” Nodding to her observations as a kindergartener’s parent, she added, “not a lot of homework—not like y’all.” Likewise, Kathy shared, “We had play—kind of balanced, not like it is today. It was just letters, shapes, and numbers. The teacher did more reading; we did more listening.”

Lee Lee also perceived a difference between the past and present, sharing, “Kids are more focused on academics now.” Indicating a similar view that kindergarten today centers more on academics, Melody stated, “I can’t remember much of the academic. [Students today] are reading not simple words but reading books.” Overall, participants shared that their kindergarten experiences differed from those of their children, perceiving that school is more academically driven now.

Greater Expectations. Family members’ perceptions that school is more academic-focused now also surfaced the theme of greater expectations. Barbie stated, “Expectations are more now.” Sonya echoed Barbie’s sentiments when she acknowledged, “We require more of kids now.” Quin, an educator, suggested the typical “grading scale shows the difference.”. He further asserted that the present-day kindergarten report card was academic focused compared to the report card in the past

which focused on a child's growth and development of social skills. He further asserted, "Kids are expected to acquire knowledge quickly."

Family participants' perceptions of increased expectations also informed their responses when I asked what they would have liked to have known about school readiness prior to their children starting school. Kathy exclaimed, "expectations," adding, "It would have been helpful after pre-K to know what was expected in kindergarten." Quin stated, "From a parent perspective, I would have like to known what it looks like and what does my child need in order to be school ready." Barbie wished she had known how kindergarten had changed since she had been in school and what the new expectations for students entering kindergarten were. Sonya admitted wanting to know "what [kindergarten] encompasses and what [students] need to know." She specified, "Know[ing] what teachers were looking for" would have been helpful.

Social Skills. Phase 2 conversations expanded on nonacademic skills by focusing more specifically on social skills as an important complement to academic skills. Jazz maintained that a child was ready for school if they were "socially ready." She further asserted that children who were prepared for school could "interact with kids and get along." Nakita added, "I think readiness is the ability of the child to be socially ready for school." Barbie echoed Jazz and Nakita's sentiments in stating, "A child needs to be prepared to learn in a group setting."

The perception that social skills are important was also evident when family participants discussed specific experiences to prepare children for school. Amari emphasized the need for children to interact with kids their own age. Similarly, Melody

asserted that children "need play time with kids," specifically "interaction with kids their own age to develop social skills.

Family Responsibility. I wanted to know if participants' perceptions of whose responsibility school readiness is had changed since Phase 1. Data revealed very similar perceptions, as participants unanimously answered that families are responsible for preparing their children for school. As Barbie stated, the responsibility is "predominantly on the parent or guardian," whom she cited as the "first step in the learning process." Melody also acknowledged preparing children for school was parents' responsibility because they spend the most time with them. Amari maintained that readiness "starts at home," and furthered asserted, "That's where you start learning, and it can be easier to teach [children] things at an early age."

Desired Resources. While the family participants affirmed their responsibility to prepare children for school, they also pointed to some things that would improve their ability to prepare their children for school. Some responses fell under the category of strategies, such as when Lee Lee shared that she would have liked to have known "Different ways to prepare [her children]." Reflecting on her daughter's experience, Nakita admitted, "I would have liked to known how to better prepare her for literacy. I would have loved some tricks to making literacy come easily and naturally to her." Shley shared that she, too, would have liked to have had some "Additional activities I could have done with my child to prepare her." These responses echoed participants' emphasis on expectations.

Other responses expressed participants' wish that their children had been able to attend an early childhood program. Nakita felt her daughter could have benefited from

such an experience, explaining, “My other children all had daycare/preschool from the age of 2 or 3, but due to COVID-19, “Lai” did not receive the same.” Barbie also wished her grandchild had “Head Start or access to quality early childhood programs.”

Family members also suggested they would have liked having more resources provided by the school and within the community. Lee Lee wished “the school would have reached out.” Amari said she would have liked to have received “information from the school, like in the springtime, to prepare [students] for entering in the fall.” Similarly, participants suggested community involvement would have been helpful. Sonya noted she needed “Government programs, BabyNet, First Steps, or any program that provides families with knowledge or a pathway to get stuff for their child.” Quin echoed his wife’s view of “the community as an ally.” Jazz also affirmed that outside services would have proven beneficial, Amari suggested “more information from the community,” such as the library, would have helped. Sonya also suggested interaction with other parents could have been beneficial, envisioning “parent groups” that could have given her “more knowledge of activities to do with [her] child.”

Findings: Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked how families in my school community perceive school readiness. Based on survey and interview data across Phase 1 and 2, family participants described readiness as encompassing a child’s academic and social skills. Further, the families suggested readiness begins at home with parents and guardians and maintained that a ready student is one who has interacted with peers and others and had exposure to outside resources. Three themes were especially prominent across the different data sets: (a) academic skills, (b) social skills, and (c) parental responsibility.

Academic Skills. Based on survey data, 10 family participants believed children exposed to reading and math instruction before school would do better (Table 4.3). Moreover, 10 family participants emphasized the importance of being able to identify the letters of the alphabet before coming to school, and all 11 stressed the need to be able to count to 20 and beyond (Table 4.4). Reflecting this perception, Melody acknowledged that academics were a critical factor in a child's readiness for school by stating that a child should be able to "At least recognize the letters in your name, count to 10, and know some of the letters of the alphabet." Likewise, Shley, described a ready child as "able to read and write their name and count to at least 20."

During Phase 2, the family participants maintained that readiness included being academically ready for school. As Barbie stated, "[Children] need to know the basics such as counting to 20, say if not recognize the alphabet, and recognize their name. General and basic things like colors." Among other similar responses, Melody mentioned "basics like counting, know their name, be able to recognize some letters in their name, the alphabet, shapes, [and] colors," and Jazz expressed a belief that children should have experience with "basic learning skills, such as practicing with a pencil and a crayon, counting from 1 to 5, [and] going over the alphabet."

Social Skills. In examining the data, I also identified a recurring theme of children needing to have experiences with their peers or others before transitioning to kindergarten. Survey data suggested all 11 family participants, to some degree, acknowledged the characteristic of a child being able to play and get along with peers is important (Table 4.4). Respondents also emphasized children's ability to take turns and share. Likewise, five family interviewees emphasized peer interaction as critical in

ensuring a child is ready for school. Quin summarized the experiences a child should have before coming to school as "exposure to other children, interaction with other kids, [and] basic exposure to fundamental stuff." Nakita also expressed a belief that children should interact with other children before school starts, stating, "It is important that a child can be social with other children. Children learn a lot from other children."

Two family participants balanced their perceptions of peer interactions as essential with an emphasis on children's need for prior academic experiences. Nakita conceded, "Children need to have interactions with other children to be able to play and learn from their peers. They also need to be familiar with books, crayons, and pencils." Barbie made a similar claim that both interactions and academics are essential to a child's readiness by stating that children must have "Some intro to group settings to have interactions with other families [and] basic information such as identifying sounds, some solid number recognition, and identify their name." The family participants shared some of the same sentiments in the follow-up interview. Barbie reiterated, "They need to experience interaction in group settings. They need to be put in scenarios and role play."

Parental Responsibility. Across Phase 1 and 2, family participants perceived school readiness as primarily the parents' or guardians' responsibility. Nakita exclaimed, "It is the parent's responsibility to nurture the child and give them experiences with other children before starting school. Parents also have to be ready to support children's learning and reinforce the things taught at school." Melody further supported the notion that parents are responsible for readying their children for school by stating, "Parents: They spend most of their time before school with you. It is our job to have basic talks with your child and play with them."

Data Collected From Teachers

Just as I examined families' perspectives on school readiness through surveying and interviewing, I used the same methods to examine the teacher participants' perceptions. Again, my primary aim called for the thick descriptions I gained through interviews, yet surveying enabled me to triangulate the data and enhance the credibility of my study (Efron & Ravid, 2020). In October 2022, I disseminated the recruitment letter in Appendix H, including the link for teachers to access the survey in Appendix B. Completion of the survey indicated their agreement to participate.

Phase 1: Teacher Surveys

Like the family survey, the teacher survey began by asking demographic questions. Table 4.6 depicts this background information, using pseudonyms I selected. All four teachers were women. Two were African American, and two were White. Andrea and Mally were in their 20s at the time of the study, while Harley was in her 40s, and Chrissie was in her 50s. The teachers' degree levels also varied, as did their years of experience. Chrissie and Harley held advanced degrees, while Andrea and Mally had bachelor's degrees. Andrea and Mally had 5 or fewer years of experience teaching and had yet to gain experience teaching different grades, while Chrissie and Harley had 10 or more years of experience teaching multiple grades—Chrissie in third and Harley in first.

Table 4.6 *Demographic Characteristics of Teacher Participants*

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Degree	Years of Experience		Other Grades
					Overall	Kindergarten	
Andrea	female	African American	20–29	bachelor's	1	1	0
Chrissie	female	African American	50–59	advanced	10	9	third
Harley	female	White	40–49	advanced	21	15	first
Mally	female	White	20–29	bachelor's	5	5	0

The teacher survey also included Likert-scale questions. As on the family survey, the first section featuring these items invited participants to show their level of agreement with each statement. Table 4.7 provides the number of responses for each statement.

Table 4.7 *Frequency of Teacher Participants' Responses to Statements 1–11*

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Attending a pre-K program to prepare for kindergarten is important.	0	0	0	1	3
2. A child who's exposed to reading and math instruction before school will do better academically.	0	0	0	1	3
3. Parents or guardians should read to their child.	0	0	0	0	4
4. Parents should play games with their child to build their cognitive skills.	0	0	0	1	3
5. Parents should engage children in academic and social activities every day.	0	0	0	1	3
6. A child should be able to write their first name prior to coming to kindergarten.	0	0	1	1	2
7. A child should know how to share and get along with peers prior to coming to kindergarten.	0	0	0	2	2
8. A child does not need to prepare for kindergarten.	4	0	0	0	0
9. Children will learn all they need to know once they get to school.	4	0	0	0	0
10. Play is important for children at school.	0	0	0	0	4
11. Academics is more important than play.	2	1	1	0	0

All four teachers completely disagreed with Statements 8 and 9, which suggested children do not have to prepare for kindergarten and will learn all they need to know once they get to school. Conversely, all teachers answered affirmatively to Statement 1, indicating they agree at some level that children should attend pre-K to prepare for kindergarten. The teachers also showed that they placed a high value on academics as related to school readiness. All four agreed that children who were exposed to reading and math before they went to kindergarten would do better academically and felt that parents or guardians should read with their child daily.

As on the family survey, teachers ranked the importance of various readiness characteristics. Table 4.8 provides the rankings for each characteristic. Table 4.9 provides a breakdown of the responses by individual teachers.

Table 4.8 *Frequency of Teacher Participants' Rankings of Readiness Characteristics*

Statement	First	Second	Third
12. Can identify their name in written form.	0	0	0
13. Can count to 20 and beyond.	0	0	0
14. Can identify the letters of the alphabet.	0	2	0
15. Can correctly hold a pencil in their hand.	1	0	1
16. Can use crayons to color.	0	0	0
17. Can recognize colors and shapes.	0	0	0
18. Can appropriately hold and use scissors to cut.	0	0	0
19. Can think critically, problem solve, and resolve an issue on their own.	1	0	0
20. Can take turns and share.	0	0	0
21. Can play and get along well with others.	0	1	0
22. Can focus attention for at least 5 minutes.	1	0	2
23. Can follow one-step directions.	0	1	0
24. Can verbally communicate wants and needs.	1	0	1

Building from the information in Table 4.8, Table 4.9 breaks down the rankings by individual teacher, reiterating that no teachers identified the same readiness characteristic as the most important. However, the two teachers with the least teaching experience recognized the same characteristic—a child's ability to identify the letters of the alphabet—as second most important, suggesting similar views of readiness. Additionally, the two teachers with the most and least teaching experience recognized the same characteristic as third most important. Harley, who has been teaching for 21 years, and Andrea, who has been teaching for 1 year, both selected a child's ability to focus attention for at least 5 minutes.

Table 4.9 *Teacher Participants' Individual Rankings of Readiness Characteristics*

Teacher	First	Second	Third
Andrea	Statement 15	Statement 14	Statement 22
Chrissie	Statement 22	Statement 23	Statement 24
Harley	Statement 24	Statement 21	Statement 22
Mally	Statement 19	Statement 14	Statement 15

Phase 1: Teacher Interviews

As with the family participants, the second data collection instrument I used with teachers was a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix D). I used this initial interview to gain more insight into teachers' perceptions of school readiness. Employing the same strategy as before to analyze the data, four themes emerged: (a) academic versus social skills, (b) parental responsibility, (c) ineffective measures, and (d) effective resources and strategies.

Academic Versus Social Skills. In assessing the teacher data, I noticed a lack of consensus on what readiness means. However, the teacher participants collectively viewed readiness in terms of academic or social skills. Three teachers—Andrea, Chrissie, and Harley—acknowledged either academic or social aspects of readiness. Andrea said, "I think it means what a child brings to school with them whether it is academic or social." Chrissie identified readiness as "The academic, social, and emotional preparation required to make the successful transition from preschool/daycare to kindergarten."

The fourth teacher, Mally, primarily viewed readiness in terms of awareness and academic ability. She suggested students are prepared for school when "they have letter recognition, they know most of their letters, have handwriting skills and can already know how to write their names." Academically, Chrissie exclaimed that experiences should include "being read to at home." She also emphasized a need for "access to paper and different types of writing tools" and "experiences telling and listening to stories." Chrissie went on to say that children needed to be able to recognize their names. Mally also suggested children needed to have experiences with being able to "color, draw, write their name, and use crayons," while Harley stated, "They should have experience with letters and numbers and have had experience with being around books."

Despite some variation in their definitions of readiness, all four teachers had expectations of students' being familiar with and possessing academic skills. Andrea acknowledged students should, "Know what their names look like on paper, know what a pencil is and how to hold it, know how to count to three, and know their primary colors." Mally shared, "There should be an understanding of almost all letters." She continued that students should be able to "write their name and count to 100." Harley stated, "They

should be familiar with letters—at least the difference between letters and numbers." Chrissie shared that students, "should be familiar with books."

Balancing their views on academics, teachers also placed great value on social skills. Mally expressed the need for peer interactions, just as Harley believed incoming students "should have experience in group settings with other children." Chrissie likewise stated, "Children should have had experience playing and sharing with peers.

Parental Responsibility. All four teacher participants believed to some extent that readiness is a parental responsibility. In response to my second interview question (Appendix D), Mally exclaimed, "Parents!" Harley said, "Parents are responsible for getting their children ready for school." She added, "They must prepare them to be away from home and do things on their own either by teaching them or sending them to a pre-K program." Andrea responded, "Guardians of the child because they are who they spend the most time with," although she also said the community plays a role, explaining, "Children learn from what they see. It is like a mirror: what they see is what they do." Chrissie shared her colleagues' sentiments. She acknowledged that "Parents are primarily responsible for their child's school readiness." However, she also perceived community stakeholders as responsible.

Ineffective Measures. Discussing experiences children needed before transitioning to school also helped me understand the teachers' perceptions of their role in preparing students. When I asked them directly, I was met with negativity as they shared ineffective measures for assisting students in preparing for school. Mally asserted, "Teachers have no communication with kids before they enter school; therefore, we can't do anything!" She continued, "We don't really do anything," elaborating, "We have

orientation, but I feel like it's too late." Chrissie expressed a similar view, sharing, "I sent an email as soon as I received my class roster a couple of days before school started. Earlier was not possible." Essentially, these statements imply the teachers' efforts to assist in preparing children for school were minimal.

Effective Resources and Strategies. Given participants' perception that their efforts to prepare students were ineffective, I wanted to know what teachers believed would better serve families, and pre-kindergarten and community resources were common responses. Academically, teachers felt children should have access to attend an early childhood program prior to starting school. Chrissie shared, "I wish all children were required to attend public 4K." Mally shared this belief as evident in her response, "Free preschool should be available for everyone and required."

Teachers also pointed to families' need for community resources. Andrea suggested children should be "provided with a library card." Likewise, Harley exclaimed, "They should have access to books and programs. Libraries and community centers provide things like that." Acknowledging that families need resources and information to assist in preparing their children for school, Chrissie stated, "The only way I know to get this information to parents is through local schools, doctor's offices, and other community locations."

Phase 2: Teacher Interviews

As with the family participants, I built on the insights gained from the initial teacher interviews during the second data collection phase. I interviewed them a second time to see if their perceptions had changed after two 9-week terms (i.e., a semester),

using the follow-up protocol in Appendix F. These interviews surfaced two interwoven themes: parents and community.

During Phase 1, all teachers suggested school readiness was a parental responsibility, although two teachers noted community stakeholders' role. Data from the Phase 2 interviews indicated similar beliefs. Mally reiterated that parents "must be accountable." Similarly, Harley insisted parents need to take responsibility and seek resources to help them prepare their children for school:

> Parents need to really take that on. In order for a child to be ready they have to have some pre-knowledge. There are community centers and so many free resources that are out there. There are no excuses for a child not being ready.

Likewise, Andrea professed that readiness is "parents' responsibility because kids spend most of their time with their parents unless they are in a program. They spend the majority of their time with them and if it is used wisely, they can teach a skill."

Chrissie also reiterated her belief that readiness is parents' responsibility while maintaining that others should bear some of the responsibility: "Parents must be ultimately responsible, but we can't hold them responsible if they don't know. There must be community outreach." Chrissie's statement implies that other stakeholders should be involved in preparing students for school. Readiness requires partnerships among the various stakeholders.

Further discussion of the teachers' perceptions surfaced their thoughts about things they could have done differently to assist families in preparing their children for school and things they would like to see happen to mitigate this lack of school readiness.

In analyzing the data, one broad theme emerged: resources. All teachers admitted they would have provided various resources to help families prepare their children for school.

Mally thought families needed to know the school's expectations for their children and felt the school should share such information before the transition, "like when [guardians] register their kid for school." Andrea admitted she could have provided students with materials to work with at home, giving them hands-on experience ahead of using the materials in class. In thinking about what she could have done differently, Harley admitted,

> If we offered a kinder camp, you have to have parents who are willing to bring the kids. You would have to make it mandatory for them to come. Spend the first week getting to know the students. It would have to start in May. A week of learning would give parents a chance to practice.

Harley also suggested hosting a Parent University event to teach the parents. Similarly, Chrissie stated she could have "provided some parent workshops . . . in the summer."

When discussing these ways to mitigate the issue of school readiness, the teachers emphasized pre-K, partnerships, and early intervention. Chrissie, Harley, and Mally believe pre-K should be mandatory as a way to ensure all students are ready for school. Emphasizing early intervention in general, Andrea stated, "I would hope that the school would reach out to the families earlier than June," indicating the district especially has "the resources to get [the message] out to the masses and they have the funding." When Chrissie discussed her vision for summer parenting classes, she expressed concern for hosting them too late. Chrissie also proposed bringing back home visits because they would "provide us with insight."

Findings: Research Question 2

Question 2 guided my examination of teachers' perceptions of school readiness. My colleagues could not agree on the most important factor for determining a child's readiness, as evident in Table 4.11 and supported by the interview data. Overall, they viewed readiness in terms of having academic or social skills or a combination of both. To the teachers, a ready child has had experience with academics and interacting with peers. Further, the teachers believe families are primarily responsible for preparing a child for school but acknowledged other stakeholders' potential contributions.

Findings: Research Question 3

Finally, as I explored how families' perceptions of school readiness compared to teachers' perceptions, I was surprised to find some similarities. Both groups believed parents and guardians were responsible for readying children for school and that readiness encompasses academics and peer interactions. Despite this common ground, looking across both sets of findings reinforced the need for an intervention. My follow-up interview protocols (Appendix E–F) included questions about what our community could do better to ensure children are ready for school. As I looked across the interview data in response to these questions, I again found similar views. Both groups felt pre-K, or a comparable program, would prepare children for school. They also understood that attending such programs may not be feasible for all children, although three teachers felt pre-K should be mandatory. Such responses indicate the need for action.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described how families and teachers in my community perceive school readiness. The lack of consensus suggests a need for clarification. If families are

unclear about the meaning of readiness, they may struggle to prepare their children for school. Similarly, teachers may be unsure if they are taking the necessary steps to empower families to support incoming students. This uncertainty suggests families and teachers can benefit from forming a partnership to address the topic of school readiness.

Data also revealed the need for additional resources. In other words, to effectively promote school readiness, collaboration and partnerships among families and teachers must extend to schools and communities. Forming a network of supporters will increase the chance of resolving the problem of practice. To that end, I have committed to creating a readiness plan for my Title I professional development school (PDS), based on my understanding of families' and teachers' perceptions as presented in this chapter. As the next chapter outlines, this readiness plan includes initiatives such as parent workshops, informational sessions, and other resources to promote school readiness.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS

As discussed in previous chapters, my problem of practice centered on school readiness as I noticed students consistently entered school unprepared. My goal for this study was to create a readiness plan to mitigate the issue by examining perceptions of school readiness among families and kindergarten teachers in my school community. Three research questions guided this study:

1. How do families in my community perceive school readiness?
2. How do teachers in my community perceive school readiness?
3. How do families' perceptions compare to teachers' perceptions of school readiness?

The family participants included parents and caretakers of students enrolled in my kindergarten class in a Title I school in South Carolina. The teacher participants were my grade-level colleagues.

Building from Chapter 4, this chapter situates my findings in the context of existing scholarship and offers implications for practice and research. I apply these insights by discussing my next steps as a practitioner and a scholar. Finally, I summarize the chapter and share my overall conclusions to bring the dissertation to a close.

Review of Literature Related to the Findings

In Chapter 2, I discussed constructivist and ecological theories to show how students learn and grow through their interactions with those around them

(Bronfenbrenner, 2006; Vygotsky, 2003, as cited in Mooney, 2013). The perceptions of people with whom students interact impact how well students are prepared for transitioning to school. For the purposes of this study, I used surveys and interviews to capture how families and teachers perceive school readiness.

Research Question 1

The first research question examined the families' perceptions of school readiness. Based on the survey and interview data across the study's two phases, families maintained that readiness was multifaceted and included a child's academic ability and social skills. They suggested children needed to have experiences and interactions with peers to be ready for school. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Forget-Dubois et al. (2007) also proposed readiness was multifaceted and viewed readiness in terms of the whole child.

Further, families across the two phases agreed that readiness begins at home with parents and guardians. These findings align with Xia's (2018) study of perceptions of school readiness. The two Northern Californian mothers who participated emphasized students' social and academic skills as components of readiness. My family participants added that students should be exposed to outside resources and suggested a need for more consistent outreach to provide services to help them prepare children for school.

Research Question 2

The second research question examined my fellow kindergarten teachers' perceptions of school readiness. The participants viewed students' readiness in terms of academic and social skills. Although they agreed parents are primarily responsible for preparing their children for school, they also agreed community members and other external stakeholders should share the responsibility. These perceptions align with Pretti-

Frontczak's (2014) view that readiness involves families, schools, and communities working together to help ready children for school.

I also learned the teachers had little to no interaction with families prior to the start of school. This finding holds true for me as well. Typically, the only interaction I have with families is a few weeks prior to the start of school when families bring their children in for screening and assessments.

Research Question 3

I answered the third research question by merging the findings in response to Question 1 and Question 2 to compare the families' and teachers' perceptions of school readiness. Overall, participants' views aligned in terms of their definition of readiness and their understanding of who is responsible for preparing students for school. Both populations viewed readiness in terms of academic and social skills. Further, families and teachers considered peer interactions necessary for demonstrating school readiness. During Phase 1, both populations agreed parents and guardians are responsible for school readiness. Although they maintained that view in Phase 2, both groups added that families need outside resources to help them prepare children for school. Moreover, the family participants identified a need for clearer expectations regarding school readiness.

Limitations

This study gave me insight into families' and teachers' perspectives on school readiness. As action research, this study prioritized democratic validity, meaning the findings are relevant to my specific school setting (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Action research does not strive for generalizability because the goal is local improvement. However, I identified five potential limitations in this study.

First, the study was limited to one Title I school in South Carolina. In essence, Title I schools serve high-poverty communities with students at an elevated risk of failing (Bajak et al., 2020). Geographically, the study occurred in one urban community in the South. Historically, the particular region where my school is situated has primarily served students of color. Therefore, my family participants were more likely to have lower socioeconomic status and less access to resources to prepare their children for the transition to school, given academic disparities associated with students of color as related to socioeconomic status (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005). Conducting a similar study in a different demographic context such as a public school in an affluent area or a private school could yield different findings.

A second limitation of this study was the inclusion of small, homogenous samples. All the family participants were African American, except for one who identified as Hispanic. Also, 10 were female, while only one was male. Moreover, two family participants identified as caretakers, specifically grandmothers, while the other nine identified as parents. The kindergarten teacher sample was even smaller. Although I have five grade-level colleagues, one teacher was unable to participate. As with the family participants, this small sample size limited the findings. Although small samples are common in action research, recruiting a more diverse, heterogeneous sample may have increased the likelihood of transferability. In particular, including more male participants would have enabled me to garner varying viewpoints and perspectives, gaining insight into fathers' and other male caretakers' views of readiness.

A third limitation was that my family sample was not representative of the larger population. Data indicated the family participants were actively engaged in preparing

their children for school or were seeking ways to better prepare their children for school. Because all families did not participate in the study, I was only able to examine the perceptions of school readiness of the willing participants. From an action research perspective, engaging the families who were less involved could have enabled me to take a step toward resolving my problem of practice simply by conducting the study.

A fourth methodological limitation was the timing of data collection. I intended to conduct Phase 1 interviews in October. However, I had to be flexible. When I fell ill twice, I extended the timeline for both phases. Phase 1 interviews spanned October and November, and Phase 2 interviews occurred throughout January and February. Extending the timeline may have affected participants' answers. Although I was unable to implement my original plan, extending the timeline gave participants more time between the phases, which may have enhanced my findings because participants had more experience with school and all it entails. Regardless, flexibility plays a big part in supporting the cyclical nature of action research (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Finally, my positionality may have limited this research. My role as an insider likely influenced the interview process. As an early childhood teacher with over 17 years of experience teaching kindergarten and background knowledge on school readiness, I may have shaped the participants' responses, although I attempted to practice reflexivity to keep my biases, beliefs, and perceptions in check.

Recommendations for Future Research

In future studies, I would use more a heterogenous sample and look more specifically at gaining fathers' and male caretakers' perceptions of school readiness. In my experience, male parenting figures are often left out of conversations about school.

Conducting additional research alongside the South Carolina Fatherhood Coalition, which focuses on men's participation in their children's education would be interesting.

In addition to addressing the identified limitations, future research could extend this study's focus on significant educational stakeholders' perceptions of school readiness. For example, seeing how administrators in my school community perceive school readiness and whether those perceptions align with those of the teachers would be worthwhile, providing additional insight into whether our school is ready for students. Also, seeing how prekindergarten teachers perceive school readiness could be instrumental in creating a readiness plan for students transitioning into kindergarten. Not all students have equal access to or attend early childhood programs, yet comparing prekindergarten teachers' perceptions of school readiness to see if they align with those of kindergarten teachers would be interesting.

Including prekindergarten teachers as participants and co-researchers in future studies could also be beneficial as I plan my intervention to promote school readiness. Partnering with prekindergarten teachers is one of my goals for disseminating information to families of incoming kindergarten students. Providing information earlier can equip them to prepare their children for the transition to kindergarten. The next section expands on my plan for uniting all stakeholders who have a vested interest in school readiness.

Intervention Plan

Action research should "increase the researcher's knowledge of the problem in hopes of coming up with a solution" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 5). In my case, examining and comparing families' and teachers' perceptions of school readiness gave

me insight to create a readiness plan to mitigate my problem of practice by forming key partnerships. This data-driven intervention plan reflects my aim to engage stakeholders, including myself, to better prepare students for school.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, there is no universal consensus detailing how to determine school readiness, yet many scholars and stakeholders have independently offered their definitions. Some prior definitions deal explicitly with the child and their capabilities (Forget-Dubois et al., 2007; Kagan, 1992). Other scholars have maintained school readiness also encompasses the people with whom the child interacts, including family, school, and community members (Grace & Brandt, 2005; Maxwell & Clifford, 2004; Pretti-Frontczak, 2014). The data I collected align with the latter perspectives, and like my participants, I understand the value of including various stakeholders in conversations and action planning to promote school readiness.

The intervention I am proposing includes school, family, and community members. Forming collaborative partnerships will be vital in helping mitigate the lack of readiness because doing so will allow me to understand the perspectives of all stakeholders. Hinnant-Crawford (2020) acknowledged that improvement requires engaging those closest to the problem in conversations.

As I partake in this journey to promote school readiness, I understand the intervention's success will depend on having a specific plan as I meet with each group of stakeholders. My positionality will play a role in how family stakeholders view me. Despite my being an insider in this research, families could view me as an outsider because of my role as a teacher. If real change is the goal, rather than blaming those stakeholders closest to the problem (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020), such as implying that

parents and guardians are at fault for students' lack of readiness, I must ensure everyone feels like a valued member in the process. With these considerations in mind, Figure 5.1 presents an outline for meeting with the various stakeholder groups and how I intend to engage in conversation with them about the identified problem of practice.

Who	When	What
Administrators Kindergarten Teachers Prekindergarten Teachers	1st Wednesday in January	Preliminary meeting with the school-based team to discuss the problem and identify possible root causes.
Administrators Kindergarten Teachers Prekindergarten Teachers Families Community Representatives	2nd Wednesday in January	Preliminary meeting including other stakeholders to build a shared vision.
Administrators Kindergarten Teachers Prekindergarten Teachers Families Community Representatives	3rd Wednesday Monthly	Subsequent check-in meetings in the form of workshops, trainings, and informational sessions to promote readiness

Figure 5.1 *Intervention Calendar*

The various stakeholder groups include the administrative team at my Title I PDS site, comprising my principal, two assistant principals, and a curriculum specialist. The six kindergarten teachers at my school, including me, are also stakeholders. Further, I envision two pre-kindergarten teachers in the group. Previously, pre-kindergarten was housed at our school but under the direction of someone other than my principal. As of last year, the two pre-kindergarten teachers housed in my school building are under the direct supervision of my principal and are considered a part of our school faculty, thus making them full partners in education. I envision that this partnership will be welcomed

as my school is a PDS school. As a member of the PDS network, my school holds true to the National Association of Professional Development Schools (2021) vision of Nine Essentials for preparing and sustaining teacher leaders. With these principles in mind, my school community is committed to engaging in professional development that seeks to enhance our teaching practices and improve student achievement outcomes. The hope for this intervention is to enhance student outcomes by ensuring equity for all students in creating opportunities for their families to better prepare them for school.

As Figure 5.1 further illustrates, I also envision an expanded stakeholder group that includes parents and caretakers of students entering our kindergarten classrooms. Moreover, I plan to involve various members from the community, such as the public library, local pediatricians who service our school community, churches, and early intervention program representatives. All of these group members are key to the success of the intervention.

My tentative plan includes an initial meeting with specific stakeholder groups. I will first meet with the administrative team as well as kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers to discuss the trend we have continued to observe of students entering school unready. Meeting with this school-based team, ideally the first week of January, will allot time for planning and implementation. I will ensure I clearly articulate the need for change and suggest ways to enact the change, so all key stakeholders know the "why, what, and how" (Evans, 1996, p. 75) of the desired reform. I will emphasize our responsibility to address the problem, perhaps beginning with a root cause analysis, a method Hinnant-Crawford (2020) recommended for precisely defining the problem. Engaging in this process with the team will be a critical stepping-stone as I prepare to

meet with other stakeholders. I will also follow Hinnant-Crawford's advice to thwart deficit ideologies, focusing on data that support my claims about the issue of school readiness to avoid stereotypes and biases against marginalized students and their families.

After meeting with the school-based team, I will move forward with including the additional stakeholders identified in Figure 5.1. Ideally, this meeting will occur during the second week in January. During the initial meeting, I will again clearly state the reason for meeting and establish norms to ensure all voices are respected and heard. Building a shared vision will be important to promote school readiness. During this initial meeting, I will also assess the needs of the family stakeholders and determine what services the community stakeholders will be able to provide.

After the initial meetings, I will facilitate subsequent monthly check-ins by hosting events with stakeholders. Throughout this process, there will be opportunities to network with families, school representatives, and community members who can provide services to families who are working to prepare their children for school. As my data revealed, teachers expressed a need to meet with families and share information with them prior to school, and families felt they needed to know what the expectations were for students entering school. To better serve parents, my team of kindergarten teachers and I will meet with families monthly starting in the month of January leading up to the new school year. During that time, teachers will host workshops on academic skills we will review in kindergarten. During the workshops, families will engage in academic games and learn how to play the games at home with their children. The families will also receive academic resources to use at home. Next, there will be transition meetings where teachers will explain what families should know as their children prepare to

transition to kindergarten. Lastly, teacher-led informational sessions will cover various topics that are relevant to families, as shown in Figure 5.2.

Name of Event	When	What
Ready or Not, Here We Come: What is School Readiness?	3rd Wednesday in January	An explanation of what school readiness is and what it encompasses
The Dr. Is In: Signs of a Ready Student	3rd Wednesday in February	Local pediatrician's explanation of what a ready child should look like in regard to their health
Expectations: First 9 Weeks Report Card	3rd Wednesday in March	An overview of academic standards related to the first report card
We Have More Than Just Books	3rd Wednesday in April	Local library representative's presentation of the resources they have to support families

Figure 5.2 *Information Session Example*

In sum, the success of my proposed intervention depends on forming strong partnerships. Specifically, my findings called for family partnerships, community partnerships, and in-school partnerships. The following sections elaborate on each type.

Family Partnerships

The goal of establishing and maintaining family partnerships is to empower families. During the monthly workshops I proposed, my school-based team and I will ensure families get information about expectations for their children for the upcoming school year (e.g., curriculum and standards). As evidenced in Figure 5.2, the topic of the

monthly sessions will vary, but each one will share information, so parents become more knowledgeable and better prepared to ready their children for school.

Community Partnerships

Forming community partnerships will serve the goal of providing resources for families. My school-based team and I will enlist external members like physicians, nutritionists, and early interventionists, as shown in Figure 5.2, who can expand families' knowledge of and access to resources. As Figure 5.1 shows, these stakeholders will also be included in the check-in meetings.

Another way to garner community involvement is to enlist partners from various companies by soliciting their help with resources or donations. Our school could use these incentives to encourage families to attend workshops, family nights, and sessions geared toward improving school readiness. The resources may include school supplies, dinners, gift cards, household items, or other resources to help families meet their basic, everyday needs. This approach would align with our current school-wide behavior initiative of issuing school "bucks" for students to use when visiting our school store. Extending the incentive to families could encourage attendance at readiness workshops and informational sessions, ideally motivating them to become more actively engaged in their child's education as we work to mitigate the widespread lack of readiness. Furthermore, this initiative will strengthen the family–school–community ties. This partnering allows each stakeholder to share a collective responsibility in ensuring students' success.

Also, our affiliation as a PDS will be an additional component of these partnerships, as we could enlist preservice teachers from the university to volunteer

during Family Nights focused on such topics as health, nutrition, and education. For example, keeping with the theme of using in-house community outreach resources, our university liaison could invite some of his students to facilitate a Science Night, demonstrating how families can incorporate science into their daily routines. This type of collaboration further proves that communities who are ready are committed to helping families support their children as they work toward meeting readiness goals (Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, n.d.).

In-School Partnerships

The success of the other partnerships depends on having a coalition of teachers and staff who are invested in school improvement. These alliances are the cornerstone of all other partnerships in this readiness plan. Most importantly, with strong in-school partnerships, we will be in a better position to connect home and school.

In previous years, I assisted with two initiatives aligned with that goal: Kinder Nite and Kinder Kamp. On Kinder Nite, parents and guardians came to school to converse and interact with kindergarten teachers and administrators. Teachers shared expectations, gave tours of the building and classroom, and provided families with books. Kinder Nite was well-attended, which conveyed families' desire to become more informed and build relationships.

The other initiative, Kinder Kamp, was designed to bring incoming students to school for a half day, spanning a week. During this time, students completed pre-screening assessments and were able to meet the kindergarten teachers, their peers, and administrators. Students engaged in developmentally appropriate activities geared toward preparing them for school, and Kinder Kamp also afforded families opportunities to

interact with the faculty and staff. Although Kinder Kamp also proved to be successful, the school has not maintained either initiative due to administrative and kindergarten staff changes. Therefore, my readiness intervention proposes bringing back such initiatives because forming and maintaining these partnerships is key to promoting school readiness.

Conclusion

This study of families' and teachers' perceptions was grounded in a theoretical framework that defined school readiness as contingent upon students' interactions with those closest to them, including their family, school, and community. Constructivist theory suggests children construct their knowledge through interaction with such MKOs (Vygotsky, 1978). Similarly, ecological theory identifies the microsystem, which encompasses the child's family, school, and peers, as the closest layer of influence on the child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 2006). These theoretical perspectives have informed prior research on school readiness (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

Joining these scholars, I found that families and teachers in my community share some similar views of readiness. Data also revealed a few inconsistencies in their perceptions of school readiness. Based on these perceptions, to mitigate the lack of school readiness, I intend to continue to engage families, teachers, and other stakeholders in conversations. Collaboration will be key to promoting school readiness. As these stakeholders become MKOs, they will be better equipped to prepare students for school.

Undertaking the proposed intervention, like this research, will also influence my day-to-day practice as a kindergarten teacher. I expected my participants to benefit from the process of sharing their perspectives, but engaging in this study has proven beneficial to me as well. This research has enlightened me and informed me of the decisions I make

to ensure I am doing everything possible to ready students for school. As a result of this research, I have become more reflexive in conversations with my colleagues about readiness. Also, I have reflected on how I could have better assisted families in preparing their children for school, becoming more intentional in sharing information relating to readiness throughout the school year.

By implementing this intervention plan, my school and community can effectively support families in preparing their children for success. Empowering families will, in turn, benefit teachers due to the students' entering school ready to learn. Continually assessing the intervention and adapting as needed will ensure my community stays on track with addressing our needs.

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APPENDIX A

FAMILY SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. In October, I may contact you for an interview about your responses and perceptions on school readiness.

Name of person completing this survey: _____

Contact Information: phone _____ email _____

Which method of communication do you prefer? (Check one.) phone ____ OR email ____

What is the best day and time to contact you if I have questions? day _____ time _____

Identify your role (parent: mother or father, guardian, etc.): _____

Gender: male____ female ____ other (specify) _____

What is your race/ethnic background? (Check all that apply.)
African American __
Asian/Pacific Islander __
White __
Hispanic __
Native American __
other (specify): _____

Highest Level of Education:
high school ___
2-year degree ___
bachelor's degree ___
advanced degree ___
doctorate ___
other (specify): _____

Age: 19 or younger __ 20–29 __ 30–39 __ 40–49 __ 50–59 __ 60–69 __ 70 and above __

Where was your child prior to entering kindergarten? pre-K program __ daycare __ at home __

Are there any children in the household who previously attended kindergarten? Yes ___ No ___

Number of children in the household: ____

Statements 1–11 pertain to a child's readiness for school. Use the scale below to indicate your agreement with each statement.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

1. Attending a pre-K program to prepare for kindergarten is important.
2. Children exposed to reading and math instruction before school will do better academically.
3. Reading to your child is important.
4. Playing games with your child to build their cognitive skills is important.
5. Engaging your child in academic and social activities every day is important.
6. A child should be able to write their first name prior to coming to kindergarten.
7. A child should know how to share prior to coming to kindergarten.
8. A child does not need to prepare for kindergarten.
9. Children will learn all they need to know once they get in school.
10. Play is important for children at school.
11. Academics are more important than play.

Questions 12–24 suggest characteristics for kindergarten readiness. Use the scale below to indicate the level of importance of each skill.

Not Important at All	Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Imperative
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

12. Can identify their name in written form.
13. Can count to 20 and beyond.
14. Can identify the letters of the alphabet.
15. Can correctly hold a pencil in their hand.
16. Can use crayons to color.
17. Can recognize colors and shapes.
18. Can appropriately hold and use scissors to cut.
19. Can think critically, problem solve, and resolve an issue on their own.
20. Can take turns and share.
21. Can play and get along well with peers.
22. Can focus attention for at least 5 minutes.
23. Can follow one-step directions.
24. Can verbally communicate wants and needs.

Referencing Questions 12–24, rank the top three characteristics you feel are most important for a child's readiness for school.

Most Important: #_____

Second Most Important: #_____

Third Most Important: #_____

Adapted from: U.S. Department of Education *Kindergarten Teacher Survey on Student Readiness* (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993)

APPENDIX B

TEACHER SURVEY

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

Name of person completing this survey: _____

Contact Information: phone _____ email _____

Which method of communication do you prefer? (Check one.) phone ____ OR email ____

What is the best day and time to contact you if I have questions? day _____ time _____

Please identify your role in the classroom: _____

Gender: male____ female ____ other (specify) _____

What is your race/ethnic background? (Check all that apply.)
African American ___
Asian/Pacific Islander ___
White ___
Hispanic ___
Native American ___
other (specify): _____

Highest Level of Education:
high school ____
2-year degree ____
bachelor's degree ____
advanced degree ____
doctorate ____
other (specify): _____

Age: 20–29 ___ 30–39 ___ 40–49 ___ 50–59 ___ 60–69 ___

How long have you been teaching? _____ years

How long have you taught kindergarten? _____ years

How long have you taught at this school? _____ years

How long have you taught kindergarten at this school? _____ years

Have you taught other grades? Yes ___ No ___ If yes, what grade(s)? _____

Statements 1–11 pertain to a child's readiness for school. Use the scale below to indicate your agreement with each statement.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

1. Attending a pre-K program to prepare for kindergarten is important.
2. A child who's exposed to reading and math instruction before school will do better academically.
3. Parents or guardians should read to their child.
4. Parents should play games with their child to build their cognitive skills.
5. Parents should engage children in academic and social activities every day.
6. A child should be able to write their first name prior to coming to kindergarten.
7. A child should know how to share and get along with peers prior to coming to kindergarten.
8. A child does not need to prepare for kindergarten.
9. Children will learn all they need to know once they get in school.
10. Play is important for children at school.
11. Academics are more important than play.

Questions 12–24 suggest characteristics for kindergarten readiness. Use the scale below to indicate the level of importance of each skill.

Not Important at All	Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Imperative
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

12. Can identify their name in written form.
13. Can count to 20 and beyond.
14. Can identify the letters of the alphabet.
15. Can correctly hold a pencil in their hand.
16. Can use crayons to color.
17. Can recognize colors and shapes.
18. Can appropriately hold and use scissors to cut.
19. Can think critically, problem solve, and resolve an issue on their own.
20. Can take turns and share.
21. Can play and get along well with peers.
22. Can focus attention for at least five minutes.
23. Can follow one-step directions.
24. Can verbally communicate wants and needs.

Referencing Questions 12–24, rank the top three characteristics you feel are most important for a child's readiness for school.

Most Important: #_____

Second Most Important: #_____

Third Most Important: #_____

Adapted from: U.S. Department of Education *Kindergarten Teacher Survey on Student Readiness* (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993)

APPENDIX C

INITIAL FAMILY INTERVIEW

What are your views on school readiness?

1. What do you think school readiness means?
2. Whose responsibility is school readiness? Explain your reasoning.
3. What experiences do you feel are necessary for a child to have had prior to transitioning to kindergarten?
4. In what ways did you prepare your child to be ready for school?
5. What resources were provided to you and your family to help ready your child for school? By whom?
6. Prior to starting school, describe your child's typical day.
7. What do you feel is the single most important factor in deciding if a child is ready for school?
8. What are your expectations for your child as they transition to kindergarten?

APPENDIX D

INITIAL TEACHER INTERVIEW

What are your views on school readiness?

1. What do you think school readiness means?
2. Whose responsibility is school readiness? Explain your reasoning.
3. What experiences do you feel are necessary for a child to have had prior to transitioning to kindergarten?
4. In what ways did you prepare your students for school prior to the start of school?
5. What resources do you believe families should have to help them ready their child for school? Who should provide the resources?
6. Describe a typical day in your classroom.
7. What do you feel is the single most important factor in deciding if a child is ready for school?
8. What are your expectations for your students as they transition to kindergarten?

APPENDIX E

FOLLOW-UP FAMILY INTERVIEW

Your child has been in school for half a semester (2 quarters) now. Have your perceptions on school readiness changed or remained the same? How can school readiness be improved?

1. What were your experiences in kindergarten?
2. What do you think school readiness means? Explain your reasoning.
3. Whose responsibility is school readiness? Explain your reasoning.
4. What experiences do you feel a child should have to prepare for school?
5. What would you like to have known about readiness prior to your child starting kindergarten?
6. What are some things that would help you to prepare your child for school better?

APPENDIX F

FOLLOW-UP TEACHER INTERVIEW

Your students have been in school for half a semester (2 quarters) now. Have your perceptions on school readiness changed or remained the same? How can school readiness be improved?

1. What were your experiences in kindergarten?
2. Whose responsibility is school readiness? Explain your reasoning?
3. Is there anything that you feel you could have done differently to assist your families in readying their children for school?
4. What are some things that you would like to see happen to mitigate the issue of school readiness?

APPENDIX G

FAMILY INVITATION

Dear Families,

My name is Shalonya Knotts-Holiday, and I am a doctoral student at The University of South Carolina. I am researching the topic of school readiness, and my goal is to create a readiness intervention plan for my school, based on families' and teachers' perceptions on school readiness. I will also compare families' and teachers' perceptions to determine if there is a significant difference.

Interested volunteers will complete a survey, which should only take approximately 15 minutes, by accessing the link provided through Survey Monkey. Please understand that by filling out the survey, you are granting permission for your participation in my research and your responses will be confidential. If you wish to participate, please access, and complete the online survey by October 30, 2022.

Participation will also include two interviews. The initial interview will take place in November and should take approximately 20–30 minutes. There will be an option for a face-to-face interview at school or virtually through Google Meet. A follow-up interview will take place in January and should also take approximately 20–30 minutes, and the exact meeting options will be available as with the initial interview session.

If you no longer wish to participate in the study, you can withdraw at any time with no penalty. If you have questions, feel free to contact me or the University of South Carolina Office of Research Compliance:

Shalonya Knotts-Holiday
[Redacted]

Lisa Johnson
[Redacted]

APPENDIX H

TEACHER INVITATION

Dear Kindergarten Teachers,

I am currently a doctoral student at The University of South Carolina. I am researching the topic of school readiness, and my goal is to create a readiness intervention plan for our school, based on the perceptions of families and teachers. I will also compare families' and teachers' perceptions to determine if there is a significant difference.

If you would like to participate in this study, please access the link provided through Survey Monkey and complete the survey that should take approximately 15 minutes by October 30, 2022. Please understand that by filling out the survey, you are granting permission for your participation in my research and your responses will be confidential.

Participation will also include two interviews. The initial interview will take place in October and should take approximately 20–30 minutes. There will be an option for a face-to-face interview at school or virtually through Google Meet. A follow-up interview will take place in January and should take approximately 20 minutes. The exact meeting options will be available as with the initial interview session.

If you no longer wish to participate in the study, you can withdraw at any time without penalty. If you have questions, feel free to contact me or the University of South Carolina Office of Research Compliance:

Shalonya Knotts-Holiday
[Redacted]

Lisa Johnson
[Redacted]