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Changing Kindergarten Readiness Perceptions in the Rural South

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Cover Page Footnote

The authors would like to thank our study participants for sharing their time and thoughts with us.

CHANGING KINDERGARTEN READINESS PERCEPTIONS IN THE RURAL SOUTH



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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the perceptions and understandings of various stakeholders in the early childhood sector of the Southeastern United States about kindergarten readiness in response to the implementation of more rigorous academic standards in kindergarten. The study combined interviews, observations, and documents to assess experiences, expectations, and challenges in meeting the strong accountability standards imposed by accountability measures and the implementation of new standards. The qualitative analysis showed that as more rigorous standards are implemented in kindergarten, all stakeholder groups are experiencing high levels of pressure related to the testing and accountability requirements related to the standards. The study further revealed that the stakeholder groups did not share a common understanding of the level of school readiness necessary for the children to reach by first grade and that early communication with parents is necessary for a successful transition of children into the school environment. The results of the study provide insight into the perceptions and understandings of the participants as they experience the readiness process from preschool through participation in kindergarten.

Introduction

Quality preschool education has been credited with both supporting the healthy development of young children and promoting their readiness for school (Copples & Bredekamp, 2009; Elliott & Olliff, 2008; Fontaine, Torre, & Grafwallner, 2006; Umek, Kranjc, Fekonja, & Bajc, 2008; Welsh, Nix, Blair, Bierman, & Nelson, 2010; Wright, Diener, & Kay, 2000). The brain research of recent decades (Elliott & Olliff, 2008; Rushton, Juola-Rushton, & Larkin, 2010; Rushton & Larkin, 2001) has pointed to the essential nature of the experiences of young children in their preschool years. Fontaine et al. (2006) reported that studies like the Carolina Abecedarian Project and the Perry Preschool Project had indicated long-term advantages for children who attend quality preschool programs, particularly for children with risk factors such as growing up in poverty.

These previous studies investigated advantages produced by programs with a play-based, developmentally appropriate philosophy with an emphasis on the social-emotional skills. The standards movement of recent years and implementation of both Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and locally developed standards in many states in the United States has created a shift to a more academically focused kindergarten classroom (Rushton et al., 2010). The present study sought to understand the perceptions of parents and teachers in the early childhood education sector of the Southeastern United States about the impact of standards on preschool and kindergarten experiences.

Literature Review

Families, educators, and policymakers must have a common understanding of school readiness for students to enter kindergarten, ready to learn. Currently, the most common indicator of kindergarten readiness is the child's age with most states determining children as ready they reach age five by fall of the kindergarten year (Saluja, Scott-Little, & Clifford, 2000). Research has pointed to the early years as a time of rapid growth and development with children successfully entering kindergarten ready to learn and continuing that success as they progress through school (Boethel, 2004; Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Many different viewpoints exist as to what determines when a child is ready for kindergarten.

Defining Kindergarten Readiness

Prior research has not produced a standard definition of school readiness (Diamond, Reagan, & Bandyk, 2000; Graue, 2006; & Barbari, Early, Clifford, Bryant, Frome, Burchinal, & Pianta, 2008). In the past, determining school readiness was defined by a child's age; however, today, it is regarded as a much more complex paradigm (Dockett & Perry, 2002). The definition of readiness differs according to the perspectives embraced by different people, yet it impacts important decisions concerning young children and early childhood programs. Kindergarten has evolved from an informal educational year of learning to get along with others, developing self-concepts, and bridging home to school to the mastery of crucial curricula objectives, prescribed instruction in language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science (Enz, Perry, & Yi, 2003). A common understanding of a child's readiness for entering the school must be agreed upon by parents, teachers, and other stakeholders.

Family Perspectives

The role of the family is vital in the educational process from the early preschool years throughout the later years of higher education. As many consider the role of the parent as the child's first teacher, varying characteristics can be explored which contribute to the overall degree of school preparedness. According to research findings from Joe and Davis (2009), parents have a significant impact on the degree of school readiness and success that their children experience. Since there is disagreement on a universal definition for kindergarten readiness, (Barbarin et al., 2008; Diamond et al., 2000; Graue, 2006); parental impact on school readiness can also be vague due to a lack of understanding what school readiness entails or what specifically parents do to promote it. Parental perceptions are influenced by parental income level, education level, ethnicity, and immigration background. However, regardless of these factors, parents often implicate more of an academic focus in their descriptions of readiness than educators do (Kim, Murdock, & Choi, 2005).

The report on *America's Kindergarteners* (Denton, Germino-Hausken, & West, 2000) derived from the study from NCEES ECLS-KA. A total of 22,000 kindergarteners and their parents and teachers participated in the study representing over 1,000 kindergarten classrooms from both public and private settings. Dual-Frame, multistage sampling design was used. There were multiple data collection methods utilizing child assessments, parent interviews, and teacher questionnaires. Results from the study indicated a disparity between the parents and teachers as to their perceptions of social-emotional readiness with parents rating children more ready than teachers.

Several studies found a disconnect between how parents view kindergarten readiness, as opposed to the viewpoints of kindergarten teachers. In a meta-analytic study of 70 published reports on the cognitive, personal, and social domains of school readiness, LaParo and Pianta

(2000) found that parents define readiness more in terms of academic skills with teachers emphasizing readiness in terms of the children's personal and social skills. Another study (Piotrkowski, Bosko, & Matthews, 2001) using focus group interviews with kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarteners found that parents valued necessary knowledge skills such as knowing the alphabet and colors as being more critical for readiness while kindergarten teachers did not think these skills were as critical as the social-emotional readiness skills.

The emphasis by parents on academic skills versus social-emotional skills for kindergarten readiness shown in previous studies raises essential questions: a) is the perception that academic skills are most important for kindergarten readiness accurate? b) Why do parents view academic skills as more important over social-emotional skills? In order to understand how the perspectives of the family about kindergarten readiness impact actual readiness, it is also essential to understand how family characteristics impact perceptions of readiness.

Preschool Teachers' Perspectives

Often, the preschool teacher is one of the first educators outside the family that a young child encounter. Along with the parent, the preschool teacher embodies some core beliefs in preparing young children for later school success. While these teachers serve in a variety of programs to diverse groups of children, they share a desire to meet the basic needs of young children (Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes, & Karoly, 2008).

Grace and Brandt (2006) point to the development of social, emotional skills as a theme in the beliefs of preschool teachers about kindergarten readiness. They state that preschool teachers tend to think children need to develop the skills of getting along with others in a group setting to be most successful in the formal school setting (Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2008). Additionally, many preschool teachers cite practical communication skills and engaged curiosity as being essential for school readiness (Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2008). Like their kindergarten teacher counterparts, preschool teachers often identify social and problem-solving skills as critical predictors of school readiness, while rating academic skills among the least influential predictors of readiness (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003).

In a study using focus group interviews with preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and parents of kindergarteners, Piotrkowski and colleagues (2001) found that preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers placed different values on the importance of academic skills such as knowing colors or the alphabet. The preschool teachers reported necessary academic skills as significantly more critical than the kindergarten teachers. This disparity in beliefs may cause preschool teachers to focus on the acquisition of academic skills at the expense of emphasizing social-emotional competency.

While many preschool teachers share these common beliefs, there is often a disparity between beliefs and practices. One study was designed to identify teachers' ideas of practical strategies and challenges in promoting children's phonological awareness and vocabulary knowledge in Head Start schools. In one study researchers conducted semi-structured group interviews of 81 lead teachers and 56 assistant teachers from 21 Head Start programs. Many teachers' opinions differed on their beliefs and approaches in teaching letters and sounds (O'Leary, Cockburn, Powell, & Diamond, 2010). Choices about content and instruction seemed to be made based on the teacher's personal preferences than on evidence-based practices. This choice of instructional practices based on personal preferences may be because early educators do not fully understand the way the brain develops.

Recent brain research summarized by Rushton and colleagues (2010) seems to support the idea that young children learn and develop best in an environment that is more child-centered, providing a variety of options and an integrated curriculum based around a central theme. However, many preschool classrooms are based on a more teacher-directed environment that focuses on the mastery of academic skills in isolation. The method of teaching skills in isolation is in stark contrast to the way the brain works, as the brain is an integrated system, with various areas of the brain, stimulates as one engages in activities. This disparity between the prevailing philosophy of preschool teachers and actual implementation in the classroom may be due to the early educator's knowledge about how the brain works. Zambo (2008) found that preschool teachers were more likely to know the types of interactions that support brain development and how these interactions impact the development of the brain. Therefore, regarding teachers, not having an understanding of why the interactions are essential may cause some teachers to place less emphasis on these types of interactions (Rushton & Larkin, 2001).

This disconnect of the lack of understanding of why specific interactions are important may also impact the preschool teacher's understanding of practices that encourage school readiness. Lara-Cinisomo and colleagues (2008) conducted a study designed to assess how early childhood educators define readiness for school. The results indicated that preschool teachers view readiness as a combination of contributions by the child, home, and teacher. However, a disparity was shown to exist between stated beliefs and observed practices of preschool teachers. While they state that they agree with a developmentally appropriate philosophy, they do not consistently implement developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom.

It is crucial to gain further clarity about what essential skills preschool teachers believe are necessary and how they perceive these skills should be promoted to facilitate the best readiness outcomes. With the implementation of standards, preschool teachers' experience increased pressure to focus on academic skills over social-emotional skills. It is also important to evaluate not only what the preschool teachers perceive to promote readiness, but also how these perceptions match actual classroom practices.

Kindergarten Teacher Perspectives

Kindergarten teachers are vital stakeholders in the kindergarten readiness process and offer valuable perspectives for educating children with varying levels of readiness. These teachers tend to emphasize the value of students entering kindergarten with social and emotional competencies (Denton et al., 2000; Heaviside & Farris, 1993; Huey-Ling, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003; Hymel, LeMare, & McKee, 2011). However, this does not mean that kindergarten teachers are seeing children enter school with desired academic skills either (Denton et al., 2000; Hymel et al., 2011; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000).

A study conducted by Heaviside and Farris (1993) examined public school kindergarten teachers' views and beliefs about school readiness. A sample of 1,416 teachers participated in the survey, and 88% believed the most critical aspect of school readiness is that children are physically fit, rested, and well-nourished. The study also showed that the majority of these public school kindergarten teachers believed children should have the ability to communicate their wants, needs, and thoughts verbally and that enthusiasm is more important than knowledge of the alphabet or counting ability. Additionally, the teachers in the study stated that they believed that readiness should not be forced upon a child. A similar study conducted by the National Education Goals Panel (Kagan, Moore, & Bredekamp, 1995) also studied kindergarten teachers' beliefs about readiness skills. The results indicate that teachers rate enthusiasm,

practical communication skills, and appropriate behavior being more important than knowledge. Heaviside and Farris (1993) emphasize that kindergarten teachers indicate that the personal and social domains of learning as more important than the cognitive domains as they relate to school readiness.

In their study involving 20 focus groups with 118 participants including parents of kindergarteners, preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and school administrators, Wesley and Buissee (2003) also found an emphasis by kindergarten teachers on the importance of social-emotional skills versus academic skills upon kindergarten entry. The kindergarten teacher participants in the study tended to stress the importance of social-emotional and language development over academic skills. The general belief was that if children entered kindergarten with the ability to get along well with others, follow simple classroom rules, and engage in some level of independence, then the kindergarten teachers could teach the academic skills needed to be successful in school.

A more recent study (Barnidge, Carlson, Cooke, Kuklinski, Larson, Latchaw, & Wallace, 2005) seems to indicate a trend toward kindergarten teachers emphasizing academic skills for readiness. The kindergarten teachers in this study reported that only 46 percent of their students were proficient in mathematics and only 47 percent were proficient in language and literacy. The emphasis on the social-emotional domain was not missing though, with teachers reporting that 51 percent of children were proficient in personal and social skills upon kindergarten entry. While it is clear that kindergarten teachers have placed a strong emphasis on children having social-emotional skills versus academic skills upon kindergarten entry (Denton et al., 2000; Feeney, Grace, & Brandt, 2001; Heaviside & Farris, 1993; Huey-Ling et al., 2003; Wesley & Buissee, 2003), a growing concern is developing among kindergarten teachers about children not entering with the necessary academic skills (Denton et al., 2000; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). With the recent implementation of the CCSS, this trend focus on academic skills by kindergarten teachers has continued. It seems, however, that a combination of readiness skills in both the social-emotional and academic domains may be necessary for students to be successful in school.

The Study

Theoretical Framework

The study sought to identify multiple perceptions about kindergarten readiness and how preparing children in preschool for kindergarten. The social-interactionist perspective served to provide a theoretical framework for this study that includes a combination of a maturationist perspective on kindergarten readiness. The environmental-behaviorist framework that provides linkage between behavior and learning in the context of educational skills and knowledge, and the social constructivist perspective that views readiness in terms of the perspectives of the greater community (Dockett & Perry, 2002). By adding social identity theory as an extension to the theoretical framework of the study, the individual perspectives and how these perspectives influence personal identity and group participation based on the roles derived from meanings individuals assign to phenomena, and themselves were able to be evaluated (Carter, 2013). This model works particularly well to analyze intergroup relations and applied issues. It does this by emphasizing that group identities play a critical role in behaviors, self-categorizations influence behavior of individuals in group settings, working with social identities between groups creates

synergy, and intervention becomes a political process because it involves the management of social identity (Haslam, 2014).

The social-interactionist perspective is often used in qualitative studies, particularly those investigating family and community issues such as kindergarten readiness (Dockett & Perry, 2002; Nelson & Quintana, 2005). The social identity theory has been used in previous studies involving decisions about pedagogy, well-being and in-group bias, and department reorganization (Mills, Bettis, Miller, & Nolan, 2005; Tapper, 2013; Yampolsky, Amiot, & de la Sablonniere, 2013). The combination of these perspectives worked well as a framework for both analyzing various pedagogical approaches and how individual perspectives impact personal identity and group membership impacting policy and practice.

Research Questions

Because this study sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of various stakeholders in the early childhood sector of Mississippi, qualitative methods were used to address two research questions. These questions included:

- (1) What are the perceptions of parents and teachers in the early childhood sector of the Southeastern United States about the impact of standards on preschool and kindergarten experiences, and are there understandings about experiences that promote kindergarten readiness?
- (2) What are the challenges faced in readying students for more rigorous standards in kindergarten?

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from the following sources: (1) semi-structured interviews, (2) collections of pertinent documents, (3) casual conversations that took place before and after more formal data collection, and (4) observations of classroom interactions. The participants were chosen due to their stakeholder role in the early childhood sector of the Southeastern United States.

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, the researchers served as the instruments. Interviews were conducted using scaffolded interview topics (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The 45-minute interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. In addition to an initial semi-structured interview, we engaged the participants in casual conversations for member check of data. The follow-up interviews were used to gain further understanding and to serve as a point of triangulation and validity check (Berg & Lune, 2012). Just as with the first interviews, these were recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis.

Documents including teacher lesson plans and student work samples were chosen to provide information about the types of activities preschool and kindergarten students are engaged in and the kinds of skills assessed during these activities. At the heart of all the interviews and follow-up discussions were questions about perceptions on changing preschool to better prepare students for the expected academic standards implemented in kindergarten. The interview, field note, and archival document data were triangulated. Wolcott (2009) identifies the triangulation of data as strengthening fieldwork by double-checking collected data with other sources. We understand better what it is like for someone with these experiences because of the analysis of these various data points.

The phenomenological approach used in this study addressed information on perspectives during a time of change; especially addressing how to get children ready for the academic standards in kindergarten. This qualitative study provided thick, rich descriptions (Creswell,

2013) obtained through semi-structured interviews with early childhood stakeholders to evaluate these perspectives.

Context

Parents, pre-K teachers, and kindergarten teachers from four different schools were interviewed (pseudonyms described for the schools for confidentiality purposes). The schools selected to participate in the study each had a summer program for either pre-K or kindergarten students. The interviewees were chosen because they could provide excellent insight into the world of kindergarten readiness. Each person interviewed was expected to provide answers that were well-thought-out and insightful. Documents chosen by the researchers would also provide information into the types of activities pre-K, and kindergarten students participate and the kinds of skills used during these activities.

Big River Elementary. Big River Elementary School (BRE) is in a rural county in northern Mississippi. BRE houses pre-K through sixth grades and enrolls approximately 300 students. The school is in a low socio-economic area and receives Title I funding. The student body is 97% Black and 3% White, and 94% of the students receive free or reduced-priced meals. Title I funds financially supports the BRE's pre-K program. The salaries for the pre-K teachers also comes from the Title I funds.

Gwinnet Elementary School. Gwinnet Elementary School (GES) is also a rural school located in a low socio-economic area in Alabama. GES houses preschool through sixth grades. The student population at GES is 91% White, 8% Black, and 1% Hispanic. Of these students, 63% are considered as free or reduced lunch recipients. The school currently has a state-sponsored pre-K program serving 18 students.

Ciqala Elementary School. The third school in our study, Ciqala Elementary School (CES), is operated on a Native American reservation. CES is in the Ciqala community of the reservation. The school serves 286 students pre-K through eighth grade. It is comprised solely of those who present a degree of Indian Blood. All students are considered English Language Learners. As this is a school that receives funding from the band of native Americans, none of these students receive free or reduced-priced meals.

The Center for Early Childhood. The Center for Early Childhood (CEC), located on a university campus in the Southeastern United States, is an academic/teaching and research facility that provides educational opportunities for children from the ages of 8 weeks to 5 years. These students come from a variety of backgrounds, with families at different levels of income. The CEC provides opportunities for research and study as well as training for students. The programs for child participants are designed to develop and enhance the whole child through the implementation of an experimental, comprehensive, child-centered curriculum.

Participant Selection

A purposeful sample of four preschool teachers, four parents/guardians of preschool children, and four kindergarten teachers participated in this study. PreK teachers/parents/and kindergarteners from each of the four southern sites identified for the study. In qualitative studies, the sample size is intentionally kept small in order to provide an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon to be studied (Berg & Lune, 2012). The preschool teacher participants were selected to represent varied experiences with children representing diverse backgrounds, including but not limited to, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family makeup. We decided to select teacher participants who either had degrees or were pursuing them because we desired

input from professional educators versus individuals who may only be teaching preschool for pay until they find something else.

After gaining permission to conduct the study from the child development center director and school district leadership and upon obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the study design, a snowballing recruitment method was used by first having the preschool director and elementary principal connect us with potential preschool and kindergarten teachers as possible recruits for the study. The teacher participants then assisted in recruiting parent participants.

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis approach was used to analyze data in this study. This thematic analysis included: 1) becoming familiar with data; 2) generalizing initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes and 6) producing a report of findings. The steps of the model operate in a cyclical nature; each step revisited as they emerge throughout the process of analysis. As a concept emerged from the data, we identified it as a reoccurring concept if six or more participants reported it. Concepts were considered consensus concepts of all 12 participants reported them. Additionally, concepts emerged as a reoccurring group theme in most of the participant groups (e.g., three out of four kindergarten teachers) reported the concept and group consensus, assuming all participant groups reported on the concept (e.g., all pre-K teachers).

Coding of the Data

The qualitative researcher should examine the data to find words, phrases, and patterns that repeat and emerge as crucial in the collected data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). We used a semi-structured interview process with the 12 participants and an individual versus a group-level unit of analysis. A set of 18 interview prompts guided each of the interviews, which lasted approximately 45 minutes. We digitally recorded the interviews using a smartphone. We also took field notes during and after each interview and gathered documents from the teacher participants. We listened to all the interview recordings immediately following each interview and made notes on initial impressions. We later transcribed the recordings verbatim. While this took a good bit of time, it allowed us to go through the data again looking for possible emerging themes related to the research questions. As we went through this process, we made notes about our impressions. We then read through the transcripts one more time and made notes. After this, we created a series of codes based on what we perceived as emerging themes that were also related to the research questions and our theoretical framework. We then categorized the data based on the color-coding. From this catalog, we created a matrix for the themes we were able to triangulate. Our next step was to compare specific interview questions among groups to the research questions and verify triangulation and to make sure there was not missing anything in the coding. After finishing all interpretations, we created a matrix to show reoccurring themes and provided evidence from the participant groups, as well as from the documents.

Member Checking

Data obtained from the subsequent interviews were merged to create a matrix based on key topics from the guide used for the interviews, as well as unexpected themes that emerged. Included in this matrix and subsequent analysis were data collected through the follow-up interviews to provide member check of themes that were common within all the participants.

The next step in the analysis was categorizing into codes. We used the concepts and themes that we established through our initial pen and paper analysis. A hierarchy of codes was

created based on established and emerging themes. We also had a code for social- interactionist theoretical model depicted by stakeholders representing various levels of environmental-behaviorist and social constructivist instructional practices. The goal of this second phase of analysis was to move to identify important concepts.

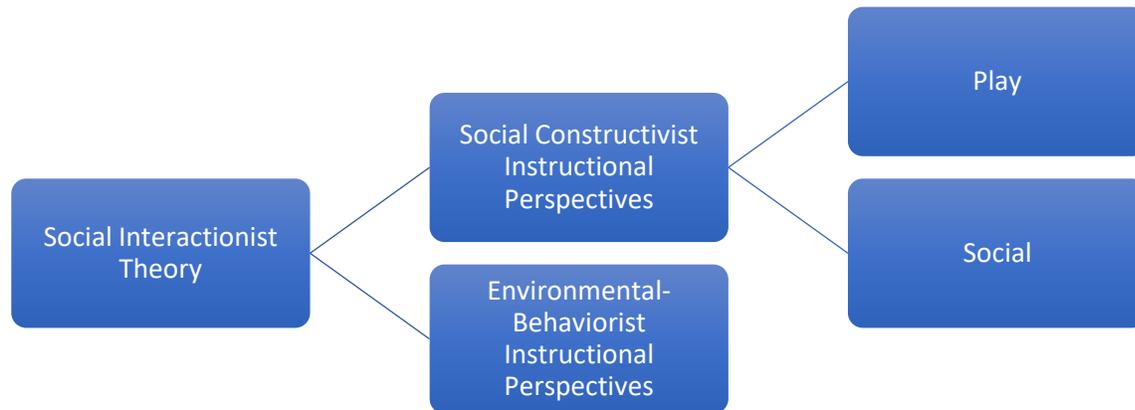


Figure 1. Social-Interactionist Theoretical Framework.

The final stage of the data analysis process was to consolidate the emerging categories into a series of significant concepts that portrayed the meaning derived from the data (Berg & Lune, 2012). Through this process, we were able to provide a detailed description of the meaning portrayed by the data so that there is a better understanding of the readiness perspectives and understandings of various early childhood stakeholder groups.

Findings

Expectations

All the parents agreed that students must have academic experiences to be successful in kindergarten. Each parent portrayed the importance of kindergarten as mostly of an academic nature, with social opportunities falling second in importance. Learning the letters of the alphabet was a priority for learning mentioned by all parents. In the university setting, the expectation was most pronounced as “having a basic knowledge of the alphabet, knowing names of letters and most sounds and numbers.”

Results obtained from pre-K teacher interviews and observations indicated that priorities for instruction included pro-social skills, problem-solving skills, attending a prior pre-K experience, toileting, and having prior home experiences with reading. The kindergarten teachers presented some of the same expectations as the pre-K teachers, but also shared other educational impacts. For example, the kindergarten teacher from the rural low socio-economic school stressed the importance of preparing students to be successful on standardized testing in grades three through six. She stated that proficiency was needed in skill areas, including phonemic awareness concepts, number recognition and utilization, communication skills, and taking care of physical needs. She appreciated serving the developmental needs of the child but

understood that accountability measures required her to prepare her students for the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) requirements in the kindergarten classroom.

Experiences

The parent from the rural, low socio-economic setting relayed her son's readiness experiences with pre-K attendance, church involvement, and playing educational video games, whereas, the parent from the Native American setting presented a different approach to learning. She stated, "I make him point out things while we are driving down the road, like the colors of cars or shapes of signs. I want him to learn." Insight from the Head-Start parent interview relayed the importance of reading bedtime stories to her child and allowing him opportunities to make up stories. She also allowed her son to create things from newspapers and cereal boxes to expand his imagination. These parents felt these experiences helped to prepare their child for the school environment.

Frustration

This study found that the pre-K parent, pre-K teacher, and the kindergarten teacher all have experienced some frustration in preparing their children or students for the pressure to focus on academics due to the demands of accountability measures. The most fundamental of which is to truly understand what each group qualifies the term school readiness as. Among these challenges is providing an understanding through establishing a universal definition and understanding of school readiness. Some of the barriers include lack of time, background, culture, family/home environment, parental training, and proper training on curriculum implementation for pre-K and kindergarten teachers. The data shows that respondents all believe it is of the utmost importance for parents, pre-K teachers, and kindergarten teachers to communicate expectations to one another. For example, in all settings, parents had the opportunity to learn about readiness standards via workshops, newsletters, via technology, or informational meetings to better enable them to understand expectations. These attempts are not deemed as effective, as the different care providers still lack in their understanding of the expectations of one another.

Approaches to Instruction

The pre-K and kindergarten teachers in this study all exhibited an approach to instruction that focused on social skill training and behavioral expectations to build the foundation for students to learn academic concepts while exposing students to pre-literacy experiences and math understanding. These teachers wanted their students prepared for the next level of academic challenge, and mindful of the reality of the readiness limitations. They also perform quite a balancing act in standing in the gap for maturational and developmental shortcomings of their students. They attempt to imbed learning concepts in their students' young minds, but they often fail to see a noticeable impact until the child is truly ready to embrace the concept. Evidenced are everyday struggles experienced by all the parents and teachers in preparing children to all be at the same level of mastery for first grade. To bridge these varying viewpoints of what children should be prepared for in kindergarten, tools and strategies should be clearly defined in a very succinct and straight-forward manner catering to the educational level of the parent who needs support. Human and material resources should extend to the household to designate the home as the first classroom.

Discussion

Our study revealed a conflict among educators and parents as to whether social-emotional or academic preparation is most famous for kindergarten success. Researchers such as Grace and

Brandt (2006) have discovered a theme among early educators of believing social, emotional development as an essential factor of readiness. They state that children need to develop the skills of getting along with one another and participating in a group setting to be successful in kindergarten. Our study also revealed that both pre-K teachers and kindergarten teachers value the child's ability to get along well with others and follow classroom rules. Since kindergarten teachers perceive that they have little time in kindergarten for social, emotional preparation, pre-K and kindergarten teachers should be prepared to teach social-emotional skills most efficiently and effectively possible intentionally.

We found that among the various sites and individuals in this study, the concept of school readiness has varied meanings. Each person had very different ideas about school readiness, including what skills and knowledge children should possess upon entering school. The way education is viewed within the local culture shapes the mindsets of individuals and thus becomes a generalized perception of the community. Incongruent conceptions of readiness between parents and teachers create a barrier that gets in the way of adequately preparing young children for kindergarten and later school success.

Overall, the current study revealed a need for enhanced communication between early educators and parents revolving around a commonly agreed-upon set of skills identified as necessary for kindergarten readiness. The interactionist view promotes a secure connection between all stakeholders, including the family, classroom, and community based on strong relationships (Dockett & Perry, 2002). As new standards and accountability measures are implemented, further research should investigate the success and challenges experienced by kindergarten teachers and effective means of communication and collaboration between elementary schools, pre-K programs and parents.

Delimitations and Limitations

Limitations of this study include researcher bias, self-reported data, the demographic make-up of the sample population, and limited literature on this topic with the population. We were aware that professional responsibilities could pose potential biases for ourselves and some of our study participants. The participants were stakeholders from impoverished areas in the Southeastern United States. While this study could lead to similar investigations in other geographic regions to create a body of research to inform position statements and practices, the results of this study would most likely initially be generalized. While the findings from this study may not be generalizable to other populations, the description of the stakeholders' experiences will add to the body of literature on school readiness.

Conclusion

For this investigation, we collected interview data on three sets of stakeholders in a child's kindergarten preparation, including the parent, pre-K teacher, and the kindergarten teacher. The purpose of our study was to explore the perspectives of kindergarten readiness by parents, pre-K teachers, and kindergarten teachers. The study provides data determining the expectations and experiences of the three groups that impact the meaning they attach to kindergarten readiness.

The current study demonstrated a disconnect between the professional educators and the parents about what kindergarten readiness means, as well as a breakdown in communication between education professionals and parents. While the pre-K and kindergarten teachers did express the importance of academic skills preparation, they emphasized the social-emotional preparation for kindergarten first. Conversely, the parents were more likely to emphasize the

academic skills preparation first and the social, emotional development as secondary. Despite the varied types of communication discovered through our investigation, the information and support parents need to promote readiness is not making its way through. The findings from this study are consistent with the studies of others finding that there is disagreement about a definition for kindergarten readiness, particularly between different individuals (Graue, 2006; Barbarin et al., 2008; & Diamond et al., 2000).

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