Investigating Social and Emotional School Readiness and Assessment:
A Multiple Case Study Approach
by
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Title of Thesis: Investigating Social and Emotional School Readiness and Assessment: A Multiple Case Study Approach

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This study utilized a qualitative, multiple case study design to investigate how social and emotional school readiness is defined and to determine what strategies are pursued within one community in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia to assess social and emotional school readiness in preschool and kindergarten aged children. Nine key stakeholders were contacted and interviewed regarding their understanding of social and emotional school readiness including the various intervening factors that foster social and emotional competence. Factors thought to inhibit and facilitate assessment practices for this population were addressed. The data revealed no definite consensus on what constitutes social and emotional school competence or readiness. Social and emotional competence, certain personality characteristics, specific classroom skills and language development were thought to be recurrent themes in respondents’ definitions. Several intraindividual (gender, age, temperament) and interindividual (culture, parenting, programs) factors were found to influence social and emotional school readiness. As anticipated, assessment practices were found to be largely informal in nature. Factors inhibiting assessment appear to be related to limited time and resources, particularly, having access to culturally appropriate and psychometrically sound assessment tools as well as trained individuals to administer and interpret assessments. Further research is needed to determine whether interventions can be designed to promote social and emotional learning and if there is empirical evidence that social and emotional competence improves children’s early school success.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Theoretical Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework: Personal Assumptions, Biases and Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Purpose of the Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Case Study Research Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Significance of the Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Definitions of Terminology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Emotional School Readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter II Review of the Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Differing Views on “Readiness”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Social and Emotional School Readiness: Federal, Provincial and Local Initiatives and Interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Current Issues in Social and Emotional School Readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding an Academic Definition of School Readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Risk and Protective Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing Culture and Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender: Perpetuation of Biases and Stereotypes Starts Early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs to Enhance Social and Emotional Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of Social and Emotional School Readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Case Study Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Case Study Design Rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Limitations of a Case Study Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for Selecting Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Instrumentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Case Study Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Strategies for Developing and Verifying Conclusions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Demographics of the Sample ......................................................... 26
Chapter One: Introduction

The importance of children's social and emotional development as an antecedent for early school success and later life competence pervades a recent and convincing body of literature. Given increased concerns within the school readiness literature regarding the number of children entering Canadian schools without the social and emotional competencies central to positive early school outcomes, the need for research investigating how to conceptualize, measure and target young children's social and emotional development is escalating (Denham & Weissberg, 2003; Halle, Zaff, Calkins, & Margie, 2000; Mustard & Picherack, 2002).

A recent report prepared for the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research highlights the need to enhance early childhood development in British Columbia and to reduce the number of vulnerable children in the early years age cohort (Mustard & Picherack, 2002). The authors refer to existing research from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) demonstrating that 25% of young children in British Columbia are identified as being vulnerable for poor outcomes in cognitive and behavioral domains (e.g. rated as having a difficult temperament or classified as having any one of six behaviour disorders including emotional disorders, aggression or anxiety) (Willms, 2002). With close to one in four young children in British Columbia being susceptible or liable to experience some undesirable cognitive or behavioural life outcome, unless there is a concentrated and prolonged effort to intervene on their behalf and to explore the interplay between school readiness and early social and emotional development, their chances of leading healthy and productive lives are reduced (Willms, 2002). Furthermore, for a large number of young children, particularly those children exposed to multiple risk factors, habituated and ingrained social and emotional problems are highly resistant to change and without intervention, are likely to intensify over time (Walker & Shinn, 2002).
Chapter One provides a rationale for why investigating factors that contribute to early school success is needed. The purpose of the study is presented and the research questions guiding this study are outlined. Following this, the significance of the study is presented and important terms are defined.

**Background**

Fostering positive school climates and promoting the child's readiness to learn has become a priority within Canada at the federal, provincial and local levels. In British Columbia one of six health goals in 2004 was to ensure that all children have support for "the best possible start in life, including appropriate early stimulation, socialization, and education" (BC Ministry of Health, 2004). As this broad goal evolved and became more encompassing, a question raised by developmental theorists resurfaced: what does it mean to be socially and emotionally ready for school?

Developing social and emotional competencies during early childhood is critical for making successful school entry transitions as well as contributing to the child’s learning through the elementary years (Huffman, Mehlinger & Kerivan, 2000). There is compelling evidence that social, emotional and behavioural problems interfere with the acquisition of basic academic and relationship-building skills, thereby negatively altering the early and subsequent school experience (Doherty, 1997; Raver, 2002). With this in mind, a positive transition to school requires children to demonstrate certain social and emotional competencies which may include: the ability to take turns, to work cooperatively in a group, to show empathy, to defer immediate gratification and to be able to ask questions in an assertive manner without aggressiveness (Doherty, 1997; Halle et al., 2000). Furthermore, research shows that having a positive self-concept and the ability to interpret one's own feelings as well as those of others, leads to
increased positive interactions, increased academic engagement and a more successful overall school performance (Halle et al., 2000).

As the need to consider a broader definition of readiness was identified in research and practice, the recognition that children's ongoing development and readiness for school is multifaceted began to infuse the literature (Cavanaugh, Lippitt, & Moyo, 2000; Greenspan, 1996; Raver, 2002). Furthermore, because individual child development is multidimensional, variable, episodic, culturally and contextually influenced, readiness understood as a single and definable construct became misleading (Greenspan, 1996; Kagan, Moore, & Bredekamp, 1995). Thus it is widely accepted that no single readiness definition was appropriate and that readiness research became aligned with five interrelated dimensions critical to understanding children's readiness for school: 1) physical well-being and motor development, 2) social and emotional development, 3) approaches towards development, 4) approaches toward learning, 4) language development, 5) cognition and general knowledge (National Education Goals Panel, 1998).

**Theoretical Framework**

To fully understand how children become socially and emotionally ready for school and to investigate the possible ways to assess readiness, it is not only necessary to understand child development, but also the multiple influences that bear on developing social and emotional competencies. Major influences cited in the literature include characteristics of the child (Umanskey, 1983), parental style and parental characteristics (Werner, 1984), family characteristics (Bowlby, 1988), environmental influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and the various interactions of these factors (Bowlby, 1988; Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Because the development of social and emotional competence is complex, attention to only one influencing factor is considered somewhat limiting (Keith & Campbell, 2000).

Given the complex and dynamic nature of development, this investigation will consider the many influences on developing social and emotional competencies and will focus on the
interaction of the various factors (environment- parent characteristics- child characteristics).

Bronfenbrenner (1977) outlined one of the most comprehensive theories of the interaction of factors. His model provides a broad understanding of the entire ecology of the child and is therefore frequently referred to as an ecological or systemic theory. School Readiness may be taken in the context of home, school, community, and child factors that interact to promote development and learning (Bronfenbrenner 1977). His arrangement of concentric circles represents interacting settings (child, family, agencies, culture) that influence the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). He described the microsystem as the interaction between the child and direct influences (e.g. parents and peers). The mesosystem represents the relationships between micro systems or the connections between situational determinants (e.g. home-school). Next, the exosystem represents the settings in which the person does not participate but in which significant decisions are made affecting the individuals who interact directly with the person (e.g. local school board). The macrosystem is considered the "blueprint" for defining and organizing the institutional life of the society within which the individual functions (e.g. ideology, social policy).

Empirical evidence for an ecological framework for understanding the developmental process, for conducting assessments and for guiding interventions, is abundant (Bracken, 2000; Halle et al., 2000; Meisels, 1996; Zaslow et al., 2000). Consequently, an interaction of factors approach to exploring social and emotional school readiness represents the theoretical framework of this study and is further reflected in the orientation of School Psychology, the discipline that grounds this investigation. The purpose of this study, and the research questions outlined in the following sections, were derived from this framework, from the investigator's experiences working with young children and their families as well as from the investigator's own training in School Psychology. An interaction of influences approach also guided the
research process in terms of the specific questions investigated, selection of a research design, sampling procedures, data analysis and interpretation of findings.

Theoretical Framework: Personal Assumptions, Biases and Values

To ensure that any conclusions yielded from this investigation depend on the respondents and conditions of the inquiry rather than on the investigator's preconceived ideas, it is important to explicitly acknowledge any personal assumptions, values and biases and discuss how they might come into play during the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, the investigator believes certain social and emotional competencies to be important for school entry. Second, because of the dynamic nature of development, the investigator assumes that social and emotional school readiness will mean different things to different individuals. These assumptions have influenced the methodology, particularly the sampling procedures and interview questions within this study. Third, the investigator's graduate training is in School Psychology, a discipline that promotes both informal and formal assessment practices. While tests cannot measure any child's full range of abilities, it is the investigator's belief that many competencies thought to comprise social and emotional school readiness can be reliably and accurately measured with psychometrically sound and culturally sensitive assessment tools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how social and emotional school readiness is defined and operationalized by various practitioners, professionals and parents in one target community in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The investigation explored what assessment strategies are pursued within the community to measure social and emotional school readiness in preschool and kindergarten aged children. Key facilitators and inhibitors to assessment and service for this population were addressed. A case study design was applied to target those professionals involved in the education and assessment of children aged three
through five (e.g. school psychologists, public health nurses, kindergarten and preschool teachers). Two parents with children entering kindergarten and a policy maker whose decisions impact this cohort were also targeted.

Case Study Research Questions

This investigation was guided by four broad research questions identified from the literature, from practice and derived from an ecological framework. Although this is an exploratory study and no definitive conclusions were expected, certain findings were anticipated. Following are the research questions that were investigated and the anticipated findings.

1. How do practitioners across disciplines (e.g. teachers, early interventionists, public health nurses, psychologists) and parents determine whether a child is socially and emotionally ready for school? It was anticipated that practitioners and parents would vary in their definitions of social and emotional school readiness and would differ in how they came to determine whether a child was socially and emotionally school ready.

2. What assessment practices are currently used in the community to determine whether a child has secured the key social/emotional competencies necessary for formal schooling? It was expected that social and emotional school readiness is not formally assessed. It was anticipated that assessment practices for this population are informal (e.g. observations, interviews).

3. Are assessment practices aligned with developmental theory and does practice integrate an ecological focus? Again, it was expected that teachers, public health nurses and school psychologists use assessment strategies that are based on developmental theory. It is also likely that these professionals attempted to include the parents in the assessment process and attempt to integrate findings and interventions with other systems (e.g. health care).
4. What are some key facilitators and inhibitors to assessing young children’s social and emotional school readiness? It is expected that time, financial and professional resources inhibit assessment practices. Facilitators may include having preschool and kindergarten teachers with training in child development, having parents who are aware of strategies that promote social and emotional competencies and having access to community supports (e.g. community activities, play groups, parent support groups).

Significance of the Study

There is a need to fully understand the factors that contribute to early school success especially in light of the following: (1) an increasing number of children are entering school, perceived to be cognitively ready, but lacking critical social and emotional skills necessary for a positive transition and early school experience (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000) (2) the belief that social and emotional problems are identifiable early and therefore amenable to change (Raver, 2002) (3) the need to develop assessment and intervention efforts early that target children who are vulnerable for negative social and emotional outcomes.

It is anticipated that information gained from this study will provide an understanding of how social and emotional school readiness is defined and measured in the community under study. The results of this study are intended to extend our understanding of current practice and to contribute to a more expansive knowledge base for assessment and intervention planning.

Definitions of Terminology

School Readiness

There are multiple definitions of school readiness: one view of school readiness reflects chronological age (i.e. physiological and psychosocial growth are age-related); another is that of developmental growth or maturation (i.e. children will automatically show signs of readiness for school) (Gredler, 1992). Other theorists include a view of readiness that assigns a primary role to
the child’s culture and the nature of the interaction between the child and knowledgeable members of the culture (Gredler, 1992).

In this study, school readiness is defined as a child's ability to meet task demands of school based, in part, on the child's physiological maturation, individual temperament, innate abilities (e.g. language and cognitive skills), motivation and social and emotional development (Doherty, 1997). In keeping with an ecological framework, school readiness in the present study was defined as three dimensional: 1) readiness in the child; 2) schools’ readiness for children; and 3) family and community supports and services that impact children’s readiness for the demands of school (NEGP, 1998).

**Social and Emotional School Readiness**

Social and emotional school readiness can be social and emotional development, social and emotional ability, social and emotional management and social and emotional competence. In this study, social and emotional school readiness is defined as those social and emotional competencies thought to be important for school entry and early school success. The research upholds the view that a socially and emotionally school ready child has many of the following competencies: confidence, good peer relationships, tackles and persists at challenging tasks, has good language development, can communicate with others well, can listen to instructions and pay attention, can defer immediate gratification and is able to positively communicate emotions and cope with momentary failures (Huffman, et al, 2000; Raver, 2002).

Although related, social and emotional competence are considered separable constructs, however, both are vital to school readiness (Denham, et al., 2003). Social competence in the present study is defined as effectiveness in interaction, the result of organized behaviours that meet a child’s developmental needs (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Rose-Krasnor’s (1997) model of social competence includes specific social, emotional and cognitive abilities, behaviours and motivations that are mostly individual. It is at this level, that components of emotional
competence (e.g. emotional expressiveness, emotional knowledge, emotional regulation) may contribute to more general social competence (e.g. positive interactions with teacher or peers).
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature relevant to social and emotional school readiness and to understand current issues in the assessment of social and emotional readiness in young children. First, the question of whether “readiness” is a definable construct that can be reliably and validly measured, is addressed. Second, federal, provincial and local interest in school readiness, including assessment and service initiatives in British Columbia, are reviewed. Third, risk and protective factors influencing the development of social and emotional competence and early school outcomes are discussed. Next, the roles of culture and gender are highlighted as important for understanding the interplay between social and emotional competence and school readiness. Finally, the need for programs and assessment practices that specifically target early social and emotional development are outlined.

Differing Views on “Readiness”

Despite the recent attention that the topic of school readiness has received, there is still debate on what it means to be socially and emotionally ready for school. The lack of a clear conceptual definition of the prerequisite social and emotional competencies thought to be necessary for school, or the rich complex interrelationships among developmental processes that facilitate success in traditional classroom environments, has created confusion and conflict among practitioners and policy makers (Kagan, 1990). Kagan (1990) has suggested that school readiness, as currently understood, is “a narrow and artificial construct of questionable merit” (p. 272). In her paper Kagan (1990) noted that the empirical work in the area has been devoted to three major issues: (1) distinguishing between readiness to learn and readiness for school, (2) discerning the various differences between chronological and maturational approaches to readiness, and (3) differentiating correlates of readiness (predominantly specific child abilities).
Given that there is still debate regarding the construct of “readiness”, it is understandable that some question whether readiness can be reliably and accurately measured. Because schools define success in school in different ways, readiness criteria and the concept of who is at risk for poor school outcomes, vary considerably. Finally, because the reliability, validity and cultural sensitivity of some assessment tools for this population have been questioned, traditional assessment measures can be limiting.

Due to this controversy, many researchers have advocated for a reconceptualization or a more encompassing definition of readiness, one that includes social and emotional competence (Kagan, 1996; Meisels, 1996). In order to begin such a reconceptualization, it is helpful to review some of the issues that have influenced this investigation and to highlight issues unique to the community under investigation and the province of British Columbia.

Social and Emotional School Readiness: Federal, Provincial and Local Initiatives and Interests

Historically, advocacy for social and emotional school readiness in young children has not been a priority for action and funding in British Columbia. The fact that there is currently no statutory agency responsible for children aged three to five further complicates policy initiatives as well as the distribution of resources to this cohort. However, more recent federal, provincial and local interest promoting the larger goal of school readiness, and the appointment a Minister of State for Early Childhood Development, Linda Reid, in the restructured Ministry of Children and Family Development, is encouraging (Doherty 1997; Janus & Offord, 2000; Mustard & Picherack, 2002; Reid, 2002).

Part of this interest in promoting readiness, according to Mustard and Picherack (2002), includes identifying key areas for action and funding commitment in British Columbia. According to the authors, a key action and funding priority for government and communities
includes strengthening early childhood development, learning and care. Mustard and Picherack (2002) found the following:

Quality early childhood development, learning and care have been shown to promote physical, language and motor skills; and social, emotional cognitive development. This includes supports that promote health development, provide opportunities for interaction and play, help prepare children for school and respond to the diverse and changing needs of families. (p.7)

Within British Columbia, an initiative to ensure all children received, the best possible start in life, including appropriate early stimulation, socialization and education surfaced in the 1996 B.C. Health Goals and more recently, in Minister Reid’s Early Childhood Development Action Plan (2002). Furthermore, data provided by the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (2002), has provided a substantial knowledge base for identifying factors impacting Canadian children’s social and emotional health. Finally, the Human Early Learning Partnership’s community mapping project using the Early Development Instrument (EDI) (2003) has offered the infrastructure to support research for measuring children’s readiness to learn, including their ability to meet the social and emotional demands of school.

*National initiatives.*

In the United States, the first set of goals put forth by the National Education Goals Panel in 1990 were instrumental in identifying school readiness as a shared responsibility of the family and community (Zaslow, Calkins & Halle, 2000). The objective was that by the year 2000 all children in America would start school ready to learn (NEGP, 1998). Although the language of this goal has evolved, more recent formulations have focused less on child outcomes (namely formal learning tasks and the skill set within the child) and more on characteristics of school, the family and the function of early development on school readiness.
Despite increased attention on readiness, there are still significant gaps between what are empirically supported methods for improving early school outcomes, and provincial programs that are implemented (Huffman et al., 2000). Many contend that practice and research needs to be interconnected so that knowledge about what works can be transferred to those who directly care for children on a daily basis (e.g. teachers, day care workers, mental health practitioners, physicians) (Huffman et al., 2000).

Current Issues in Social and Emotional School Readiness

Expanding an Academic Definition of School Readiness

The relationship between early social and emotional competence, later behaviour and coping skills is well supported empirically (Doherty, 1997; Meisels, 1996; Raver, 2002; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Although the importance of determining how social and emotional competencies develop has intensified in recent years, "psychologists' and educators' emphasis on cognition and on children's academic preparedness continues to overshadow the importance of children's social and emotional development for early school readiness" (Raver, 2002, p.3).

Traditionally, the impression that cognitive abilities and perceived academic preparedness (i.e. intelligence, ability to sustain concentration, use a pencil, etc.) predict school success, has comprised the foundation for school entry. However, a recent study targeting kindergarten teachers concluded that these teachers consistently ranked social and emotional competence as highly desirable, more so than discrete cognitive abilities (Rimm-Kaufman, et al., 2000). These teachers also maintained that although the majority of children arrive at school with the cognitive capacities to participate in school, many children are not socially and emotionally ready to make the transition to school and lack the necessary skills to make a smooth transition (Rimm-Kaufman, et al., 2000).
Research documents that a child's academic performance in the early years of schooling and their emotional and social competence is bi-directionally related: children who have early learning difficulties may become increasingly frustrated and disruptive in the classroom (Huffman et al., 2000; Raver, 2002; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Given that there is a reciprocal relationship, it can be challenging to make a clear distinction between academic performance and social and emotional competence. Albeit, two studies have demonstrated a causal link between a child's emotional and social competence and their early academic achievement; children who are disruptive and spend less time on task are often considered difficult to teach and are more likely to lose out on valuable instructional time (Raver, 2002; Rimm-Kaufman, et al., 2000).

Research also demonstrates that a young child’s ability to establish and maintain positive peer relationships during the first few weeks of school is directly related to their success adjusting to school (Doherty, 1997). Children who have lower levels of social and emotional competence tend to be more disliked by teachers and peers which in turn, creates multiple consequences; school avoidance, negative attitude toward learning, lower self esteem and overall lower school attendance and participation (Raver, 2002). In addition, children who lack emotional knowledge and have difficulty expressing pro-social behaviour may miss opportunities to interact with other students and adults by means of group projects or buddy work: activities that build communication skills and foster encouragement (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Raver, 2002).

As a result of these combined effects, children can lose out on necessary instruction and opportunities to interact socially with peers, which are precisely the kinds of experiences that they need to be active, engaged and successful learners as well as socially and emotionally competent students. Children who have developed the social and emotional competencies necessary for positive peer interaction are at less risk for peer rejection, alienation and school withdrawal (Doherty, 1997). Given that children who demonstrate more socially acceptable
behaviours are more likely to be accepted by classmates and teachers and participate more in class, it is probable that these children spend more time actively engaged and thus are more involved in their own learning (Ladd et al., 1999).

Understanding Risk and Protective Factors Influencing Social and Emotional School Readiness

According to several studies, there are numerous risk factors that have the potential to impede young children’s social and emotional competence and early school outcomes. Generally, risk factors are organized into two categories: intrapersonal (e.g. early cognitive deficits, gender-related vulnerabilities, language development, temperament, insecure attachments, emotional regulation) and interpersonal or contextual (e.g. low socioeconomic status, lower maternal education, violent or chaotic neighborhoods) (Denham & Weissberg, 2003; Peth-Pierce, 2001; Huffman et al., 2000; Raver, 2002). Understanding the processes of risk and resilience is central to understanding not only the daily context of young children’s lives, but also for interpreting assessments, directing resources and individualizing interventions.

One recurring risk factor identified in the literature as a marker for multiple risk processes is low socio-economic status (Denham & Weissberg, 2003; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Young children from poorer neighborhoods and communities are at greater risk for developing emotional and social difficulties prior to school (Meisels, 1998; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). These children are often exposed to chronic multiple risk factors (e.g. hunger, low maternal education, chaotic neighborhoods) that can lead to difficulty with socialization. Persistent family instability, including residence changes, lack of routine, marital conflict, lack of social support, and other negative life events predict concurrent and later behaviour problems, particularly when these stressors are cumulative (Denham & Weissberg, 2003). Additionally, the pre-eminence of the media, especially television, has received attention in the literature as being a powerful and potentially harmful socialization agent (King, Chipman & Cruz-Janzen, 1994).
Once risk factors are identified, the challenge becomes one of fostering protective factors that can buffer and offset the damaging effects of exposure to risks thereby ensuring a more positive school transition (Walker & Shinn, 2002). Several protective factors that have the potential to moderate the effects of risk are identified in the literature: supportive family relationships; increasing parental and other adult involvement in the child’s development; community networking and access to support services (Huffman et al., 2000; Walker & Shinn, 2002). Fostering child resiliency factors such as self-confidence, school achievement, self-regulation, empathy, internal source of control, problem solving and good coping styles, may reduce the impact of other risk factors thereby increasing the likelihood of school success (Huffman et al., 2000; Walker & Shinn, 2002).

Addressing Culture and Ethnicity

There are multiple issues to be addressed within a cultural or diversity perspective in respect to readiness and in developing social and emotional competence. Racism, poverty or economic hardship, and sensitivity to different learning and communication styles of minority children, all influence a child’s transition to formal schooling (Peth-Pierce, 2001). Furthermore, with growing numbers of immigrant families and their children attending schools, the impact of English as a second language is yet to be clearly identified as a readiness issue. In a culturally (and linguistically) diverse city such as the community under investigation, developing relevant classroom strategies, assessment tools, curriculum materials and ways to build home-school-community partnerships is a major priority in meeting the needs of a diverse school population.

Culture can provide young children with a sense of identity and a frame of reference that can help them understand their world (Denham & Weissberg, 2003). There is the potential to seriously misunderstand the needs or behaviours of a child if the child’s culture, our own cultural perspective and the limitations of assessment techniques for a culturally diverse population are
not considered. All too often, minority children are forced to examine, confront and question their cultural assumptions, beliefs, values and perspectives when they enter school (King, Chipman & Cruz-Janzen, 1994). Furthermore, when young children experience programming that may be cognitively, linguistically and emotionally disconnected from the language and culture of their home, their ability to develop social and emotional competencies during the first year of formal schooling may be threatened (King et al., 1994).

**Gender: Perpetuation of Biases and Stereotypes Starts Early**

Parents and teachers play a central role in the process of modeling, reinforcing or suppressing gender-appropriate behaviour. By the time children are four or five years old, they are cognizant of sex role behaviour that is appropriate in the culture and when they enter school, they are immersed in a world that tends to support and promote the roles and expectations they bring with them (King et al., 1994).

Research has shown that adults in schools often reward girls for their neatness, patience and helping nature, whereas boys are encouraged to be independent thinkers and risk takers (King et al., 1994; Gredler, 1992). Within the same classroom, both sexes may not receive the same quantity and quality of educational experiences because of unconscious teacher biases, differing expectations and unequal interactions from adults. Sometimes, boys find it more difficult to display feelings and are expected to repress their emotions and show control (King et al., 1994). Research has shown that boys are referred more frequently for behavioural and special education services (King et al., 1994; Doherty, 1996). Girls may be expected to adhere to the nuances of “nice” behaviour towards others, so that their emotional regulation may be an especially important part of the emotional competence that predicts concurrent social competence (Denham, et al., 2003). In the classroom, girls’ negative behaviour may be less overt. The precursors and emergence of girl’s relational aggression in preschool and kindergarten identified by participants in this study and within the literature, warrants study.
Programs to Enhance Social and Emotional Competence

Several of the current programs that are designed to improve the health and overall development of young children in British Columbia attempt to address risk factors during pregnancy and infancy identified as a threat to healthy development (e.g., inadequate nutrition, parenting practices, immunizations). Although a focus on physical health and healthy pregnancies is important, social and emotional competence during the preschool years is often not directly acknowledged, isolated and targeted.

One notable exception is The Roots of Empathy Project (2000); a program currently implemented in targeted schools throughout British Columbia, including the community under study. The program aims to develop social and emotional competencies (i.e. emotion knowledge, social understanding, prosocial behaviour) for children beginning in kindergarten. Program evaluation research demonstrates empirical support for the Roots of Empathy program to increase positive developmental changes in social and emotional competence in targeted children (Schonert-Reichl, 2001). According to the Ministry of Children and Family Development and BC’s Annual Report on Early Childhood Development Activities, funding in 2002/2003 for the Roots of Empathy program has expanded and a First Nations component has been piloted.

Assessment of Social and Emotional School Readiness

Increasingly, professionals are called upon to evaluate young children’s cognitive, language and social and emotional functioning. Keith and Campbell (2000) identify four primary purposes of assessment for this population: 1) screening to lessen the impact of a predicted negative outcome through early treatment; 2) to gather data for the description or diagnosis of specific conditions; 3) to recommend interventions to minimize the diagnosed condition and 4) to research, prevent and treat disorders identified in young children. Methods for evaluating social and emotional competencies and readiness for school frequently includes; interviewing,
direct observation, third party ratings, projective techniques and play based assessment (Keith & Campbell, 2000).

Readiness tests are generally considered distinct from screening tests and attempt to link the measurement of the child's abilities to early school performance (Gredler, 1992). An important concern regarding school readiness assessments involves the tests themselves. Few such tests have withstood rigorous reliability and validity tests and many have not been subjected to basic psychometric analyses (Meisels, 1999). Furthermore, the predictive validity of many of these tools, including the risk of excluding vulnerable children (false negatives) or identifying children who are really not at risk (false positives), has been questioned in the literature (Gredler, 1992).

Assessment of social and emotional readiness is not standardized practice in Canadian schools. The fact that there is no consensus on how best to define, operationalize or measure this multifaceted construct further complicates the rationale for assessment. Progressive assessment practices should be implemented at multiple points in time, should rely on multiple informants, should include multiple measurement strategies and needs to acknowledge cultural differences (Meisels, 1999). In addition, accurate, affordable and culturally sensitive assessment strategies have been difficult to develop. As a result, assessing young children's social and emotional competence is often left undone until problems reach significant levels and require substantial intervention resources (Squires, Bricker & Twombly, 2002). Furthermore, inappropriate assessment practices can result in inaccurate labels which focus on the child's internal skills and abilities and overlook less overtly measurable factors such as the readiness of schools and the availability of community supports (Zaslow, et al., 2002).

Keith and Campbell (2000) identify three predominant problems that have the potential to limit the assessment of social and emotional school readiness in young children. First, four and five-year-old children are unique in their cognitive and language abilities (Keith & Campbell,
Second, behaviour is not always stable and it is challenging to reliably describe social and emotional readiness compared to other characteristics of young children, such as perceptual-motor skills, cognitive skills and academic achievement (Martin, 1991; Gredler, 1992). Third, the range of normal development variability is broader for this population as compared to older children (Keith & Campbell, 2000).

Despite the aforementioned general limitations, sound practices exist for assessing social and emotional competence in this population (e.g. using questionnaires, conducting structured observations, administering rating scales). With increasing demands for accountability in the preschool and early school years, defining and measuring readiness has become even more important in the past decade. Furthermore, even clinicians with considerable experience, recommend using standardized assessment tools such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, the Battelle Developmental Inventory (1997) or Greenspan’s Functional Emotional Assessment Scale (2002), to support decisions about a child’s developmental status (Brynelsen, 2004). Used with integrity, screening and assessment tools can help identify at risk children while also enabling educators to design and deliver services and track children's status at kindergarten entry (Zaslow et al., 2000).
Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter Three provides information about the design methodology and data analysis procedures of this study. First, case study as a research strategy is defined and the rationale, including the perceived limitations for applying a multiple case study design, is explained. Next, sampling procedures and a description of case construction, is provided. Following this, the instrumentation, including the procedure for developing interview questions and conducting interviews, is introduced. Finally, the strategies for data analysis, and the considerations for developing and verifying conclusions, are discussed.

Case Study Definition

This study utilized a qualitative, multiple case study design to investigate how social and emotional school readiness is defined and to determine what strategies are pursued within British Columbia to assess social and emotional school readiness in preschool and kindergarten aged children. A “qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Merriam, 1998 p.27). Information was collected from nine individuals: these individuals were organized into six cases forming a multiple case study design.

Case Study Design Rationale

The rationale for choosing a qualitative case study design is threefold. First, a case study design is particularly efficacious when the interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than in a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation (Merriam, 1998). A multiple case study design allowed for a narrative framework whereby several individuals from the same geographic area were encouraged to tell the unique stories of their experience and
programs. By focusing on process, meaning and understanding, the product of this study was richly descriptive.

Second, a case study design is recommended when ‘how’ or ‘why’ research questions are being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the researcher has little control (Yin, 2003). Social and emotional school readiness is contextual in that it occurs within the context of many interacting systems: home, school and community. Given that the investigator had little control or influence over these interacting systems, a case study design was advantageous because there was an opportunity to expand the number questions asked. Also, by applying a multiple case study design, the investigator could attempt to cover the influence of the complex, contextual conditions of the topic being studied (Yin, 2003).

The third advantage of a case study design is its application to practice (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this investigation, a specific goal was to understand practice and to develop propositions for future research. This investigation has the potential to provide a snapshot of current practice from multiple sources of evidence and as a result, contribute to a more expansive knowledge base for assessment and interventions.

*Perceived Limitations of a Case Study Design*

Case study research is not without its critics. One of the recurring criticisms of case study research is its alleged lack of rigor (Stake 1995; Yin, 2003). This study followed systematic procedures for collecting and analyzing the data that are recommended as standards for rigorous case study. In addition, attempts were made to ensure that equivocal evidence or biased views did not influence the conclusions.

A second perceived limitation of case study methodology focuses on the issue of generalization. Some argue that case studies provide little basis for scientific generalization (Yin, 2003). This investigation developed conclusions and recommendations based on multiple cases.
from a specific geographic area. The conclusions reflected the individual responses of the participants and were not generalized to entire populations.

A final criticism is that case studies are time consuming thereby resulting in unmanageably large documents (Yin, 2003). This study accounted for this by focusing less on detailed, observational evidence and by placing more emphasis investigating the larger phenomenon being studied.

Despite these potential limitations, case study research has received considerable support and recognition and is often a recommended methodology for addressing questions in which understanding is sought in order to improve practice and services for young children (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Participants

Recruitment

Participants consisted of nine individuals involved in the assessment of social and emotional competence and assessment of children entering school. In this study, participants were recruited by the investigator based on input from the investigator’s research supervisor, committee, research team and from community contacts. Professionals who reported to have expertise in assessment in this population were purposefully recruited. Letters were sent to five parents, four preschool teachers, one day care worker, four kindergarten teachers, two public health nurses, two school psychologists and two individuals involved in policy. Once individuals responded, nine participants were selected based on several criteria: their profession, working population as well as certain demographic variables (e.g. family characteristics, level of education, ethnicity, neighborhood) identified in HELP’s Early Development Instrument Outcome Maps displaying neighborhood social competence and emotional maturity outcomes.
The nine participants were organized into six cases. Cases were designed based on the theoretical framework of this investigation: each case represented one or more of the overlapping, ecological systems (e.g. microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem) in Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) model of development. For example, two parents from two different families formed the first case. One preschool teacher comprised case two. Case three included two kindergarten teachers. A public health nurse constituted case four and case five was a school psychologist. An individual from the Ministry of Early Childhood Development represented the policy maker for case six.

**Rationale for Selecting Participants**

1. Parents (Case 1): In any investigation of young children's development, it is critical to include the voice of the parent: the home environment is particularly relevant for preschool and kindergarten aged children whose social world is only beginning to expand (Denham & Weissberg, 2003). Investigating parents' awareness of the social and emotional competencies required for a successful school transition is important because of the potential to inform teachers and professionals of ways to improve or expand existing programs and information for parents of this population. In this study, two parents from two different families with children aged four or five, transitioning to kindergarten, were interviewed. The purpose of this interview was to investigate how social and emotional school readiness is defined and how parents determine whether their child is socially and emotionally ready for school. It was anticipated that parents would differ in how they determined whether their child had secured the social and emotional competencies important for school entry.

2. Preschool Teacher (Case 2): Preschool teachers play an instrumental role in shaping young children’s social and emotional competence during a time of formidable change. It is important to include the perspective of a preschool teacher given their influence on a child’s early school outcomes through preparation for formal schooling. The purpose of the
interview was to understand what social and emotional competencies are considered important for the transition to kindergarten as well as to determine how the preschool teacher prepares a child socially and emotionally for formal schooling. The Preschool teacher was also asked to discuss assessment practices or screening procedures (i.e. developmental checklists including social and emotional criteria) during this time of transition.

3. Kindergarten Teachers (Case 3): Including the voice of two kindergarten teachers is critical to understanding social and emotional school readiness given their involvement in the transition to school, as well as the amount of time they spend with children on a daily basis. Interview questions focused on how these teachers identify a child who is socially and emotionally school ready: specifically, to determine what competencies this child has. Kindergarten teachers were also asked whether they participate in any formal or informal assessment of social and emotional readiness or competence in the classroom. Questions were also directed at teacher training, to determine whether the teacher received explicit training or programmatic support in building the social and emotional competence of young children in the classroom.

4. Community Professionals: Public Health Nurse, Psychologist (Cases 4 & 5): Often during the preschool years, community professionals are the frontline service providers for children with social and emotional needs. The purpose of interviewing community professionals was twofold: first to establish whether there was consensus across the education and healthcare systems on what it means to be socially and emotionally school ready and second, to identify any formal or informal assessment procedures used with this population. A secondary question addressed whether assessment practices integrate an ecological focus (family-school-community partnership). These professionals were asked to speak to potential barriers to assessing young children’s social and emotional development, particularly those barriers relevant to children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
5. Policy Maker (Case 6): The purpose of interviewing the Minister of State for Early Childhood Development was to understand the political perspective of a government representative involved in forming policy for this population. Interview questions focused on what social and emotional competencies are considered necessary for a successful school transition. Questions also addressed what resources are being directed to ensure the appropriate social and emotional development of young children.

Table 1: Demographics of the Sample (n=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>BA + diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Teacher 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>BA + diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P Teacher 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>ECE certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P H Nurse</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>East Indian</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>BSc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Psych.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>45-50</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P Maker 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>MEd</td>
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</tbody>
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Note. *Respondent was not asked age.

Instrumentation

Interview Questions

Interviewing is a common method for collecting qualitative case study data (Merriam, 1998). In this study, one-to-one interviews were used to obtain data. The decision to use interviewing as the primary method of data collection was based on the type of information needed to address the research questions (i.e. individual, specialized).
Semi-structured interviews provided a framework for the interview process. The interviews were individualized based on the respondent and the appropriate case: certain information was desired from all the respondents, however the unique perspective of the respondents was incorporated. The interview structure reflected the four research questions: neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions was rigidly determined in advance (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This encouraged open-ended responses and allowed the investigator to respond to the situation at hand, to the perspective of the respondent and to new ideas presented. Interview questions were developed in consultation with the investigator’s supervisor and research team. Questions were generated from the literature and from the investigator’s prior experiences in working with young children. Discussions with early childhood educators and parents of young children beginning school also influenced question development. Once a preliminary list of interview questions was established and before the pilot case study was conducted, three members from the research team reviewed the questions, provided feedback and assisted in question revision. In this study, the research team consisted of four graduate students and the investigator’s supervisor from the faculty of education at the University of British Columbia. Three members of the team (termed co-researchers) were involved in participant selection, question development, interview debriefing and data analysis strategies. The fourth member of the research team acted as a second data coder for the study.

Pilot Case Study Interview

Once the interview questions were established and before data collection began, a pilot case study interview was conducted. The pilot interview was critical for interview practice, question selection, refinement and provisional data analysis. During the pilot interview, the interviewer learned which questions and procedures were confusing, which questions yielded useless data and which questions, suggested by the respondent, should have been included.
**Procedure**

Purposive sampling was used to obtain the sample of participants in this study. Once cases were established, an initial letter of inquiry was sent to determine whether individuals were interested in participating. If the individuals expressed interest, they returned an enclosed postcard, emailed or phoned the investigator indicating a desire to participate. Following this, an information letter was sent outlining the purpose of the study and the expectations. The investigator then contacted the individual to further discuss the purpose of the study, to obtain schedules in order to arrange meetings and to answer any questions. Confidentiality and consent to participate was discussed during initial contact.

Attempts were made to schedule interviews in a variety of locations around the community to ensure that travel restrictions did not hinder participation. Within reason, interviews were conducted at a time and location that was convenient for the participants. As a token of appreciation and to cover any expenses the participant incurred, participants received twenty-five dollars at the completion of the interview. Confidentiality, informed consent and demographic information were obtained from all participants prior to the beginning of each interview. Each participant was notified of his or her right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants were also informed of their right to refuse to answer any questions the interviewer posed.

Interviews were conducted by the investigator who received prior training in interviewing techniques, transcription, data collection and analysis for qualitative case study methodology. Training was conducted and supervised by a university faculty member experienced in this methodology. Interviews were recorded both in written field notes and by audiotape with the consent of the participants. Field notes were used to record any thoughts, suggestions or feelings of the participants and researcher during and after the interview. Once the interviews were
transcribed, a contact summary was completed to help develop themes and to further refine the data collection process.

After the interviews, the investigator and two co-researchers engaged in peer debriefing. This is a process whereby team members share and discuss ideas, themes and any issues that emerged from the interview data. These discussions focused on modifying the interview questions. Strategies for data analysis were also investigated during these meetings.

Data Analysis

Case study researchers generally concur that there is no uniform way of establishing criteria for interpreting findings, although there is consensus that in qualitative case study research, data analysis is an emergent and dynamic process (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). In this investigation the case studies are basically descriptive accounts of the construct being studied, social and emotional school readiness. However, in case study research, there is the potential to be merely descriptive. To transcend the descriptive, systematic and interpretative data analysis strategies were applied.

Data resulting from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed following each interview session. Transcription data were broken down into informational (idea) units; a process called unitizing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Unitizing involves reading through typed transcripts, noting major units (e.g. ideas/phrases/words) in responses, copying these units from the transcripts to a computer spreadsheet. Each informational unit served as a basis for defining codes and categories that cut across the data (Merriam, 1998).

Units were assigned descriptive codes or category labels (e.g. ideas/phrases/words) by the investigator. For example, the coded units of information were organized according to each research question (e.g. SEDEF-IND: Research question one / Definition of social and emotional school readiness – Independence). While codes changed and emerged throughout the data
analysis process, a provisional list of codes was established prior to fieldwork (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Provisional codes were formulated based on the theoretical framework, list of research questions and hypotheses identified at the onset of the study. Codes were added and expanded during the analysis stage until a master code list was finalized.

The fourth member of the research team acted as a second data coder for the study. This individual briefly reviewed salient parts of the literature and met several times with the investigator to gain familiarity with the investigation, procedure and data analysis strategies. To help achieve an acceptable level agreement and consistency, all interview data was coded independently, first by the investigator and then again by the second data coder. Each coder recorded their first code choice and for some units, a possible second choice was identified. First-choice coding agreement was 92.4%. After discussing first and second choices, a final code selection was made with an agreement of 91.9%.

In order to identify patterns, themes and to determine what “goes together”, a computer spreadsheet was used to tabulate frequencies and to isolate recurring codes. The “number of times” a code surfaced was based on counting – when codes were noted frequently (e.g. counted as appearing over 6 times) a code was considered “significant” or “recurrent”. Developing themes based on counting, not only enabled the investigator to see the distribution of the data and to verify hypotheses, but also protected against researcher bias (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Strategies for Developing and Verifying Conclusions

The qualitative researcher must establish a way to develop and verify the quality and reliability of conclusions reached in the investigation. In qualitative research, the correlates to internal and external validity and reliability are referred to as triangulation, credibility,
transferability, dependability and confirmability (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lincoln & Gruba, 1985).

**Triangulation and Trustworthiness**

Triangulation is a method used in qualitative research to provide reliability and validity support for the data. Triangulation may involve using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data and multiple methods to confirm findings. In this investigation, information gathered from field notes, observations, interview data and debriefing sessions were used to support or “triangulate” emerging themes and conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Two members from the research team reviewed the transcripts and confirmed theme development. Once data were collected, and before the results are summarized, the investigator ensured that participants had an opportunity to check both the original transcript and review the themes that result for accuracy.

**Credibility**

Credibility in qualitative research is the counterpart to internal validity in quantitative research. To determine credibility the researcher must determine whether the findings make sense and whether the results accurately reflect the participants’ views and ideas. Credibility is achieved through triangulation, or cross checking the findings from one source of information with another source. In this study, members of the research team reviewed categories and compared different interviews for similar themes. When similar themes result, credibility is achieved (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Transferability**

In qualitative research, transferability is the extent to which findings could be applied to other studies or contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Transferability is difficult to achieve when applying a case study design: cases, settings and interview questions are different across domains thereby making it difficult to generalize. However, in this study, transferability was achieved if the characteristics (and limiting effects) of the original sample were described enough to permit
adequate comparison with other samples (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Transferability also occurred when participants reported that the findings were consistent with their own experience and appropriate for their settings.

**Dependability**

Dependability is the equivalent to reliability in quantitative research. Dependability focuses on the consistency of the study and focuses on whether the methods and procedures are replicable. To address dependability, the data collection and data analysis procedures were explicit and connected to the research questions. Replication logic was used in that the actual sequence of how data were collected, processed, condensed and displayed for conclusion drawing were explicit. Throughout the investigation, dependability was enhanced by clear case study protocols (i.e. contact summary sheets).

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is analogous to objectivity in quantitative research. The goal of confirmability is to identify potential bias in the investigation. To account for confirmability, the researcher acknowledged any personal assumptions, values and biases and discuss how they might come into play during the study. Issues of potential bias were monitored through debriefing sessions with the research team.
Chapter Four: Results

The intent of this chapter is to present the results of the study. Results from the data are organized according to the four broad research questions guiding the investigation. Within each research question, broad and sub themes emerged from the data. Following are the research questions that were investigated and the findings.

Research Question 1: How do practitioners across disciplines and parents determine whether a child is socially and emotional ready for school?

As anticipated, data reveals no definite consensus across cases on what constitutes social and emotional school readiness and no one competency (e.g. independence, resiliency, language, listening skills) was consistently mentioned by all respondents. Despite variability, results appear to be consistent with previous studies demonstrating that a socially and emotionally school ready child has many of the following competencies: confidence, good peer relationships, tackles and persists at challenging tasks, has good language development, can communicate with others well, can listen to instructions and pay attention and is able to positively communicate emotions (Huffman, et al. 2000; Raver, 2002). In this study, Responses were categorized into six major themes:

- Social competence (e.g. positive interactions with teachers/peers)
- Emotional competence (e.g. emotional expression, emotion knowledge and regulation)
- Language development (e.g. ability to communicate needs)
- Personality or individual characteristics (e.g. showing independence, being assertiveness, confident)
- The ability to demonstrate certain skills within the school and classroom environment (e.g. listening skills, participate in activities)
• Physical contact (e.g. being accepting of physical contact)

Social competence, or effectiveness in interaction, was mentioned most frequently in respondents’ definitions of social and emotional school readiness. Within this theme, interest in and ability to initiate friendships (including adult relationships) and the ability to demonstrate cooperative behaviors (e.g. turn taking, sharing) were noted as recurrent codes. Demonstrating age-appropriate problem solving skills, the ability to make decisions/choices and being assertive were counted most frequently within theme two: personality or individual characteristics. Emotional competence emerged as the third broad theme. This included such competencies as emotional expressiveness, emotional knowledge and emotional regulation. Finally, specific classroom skills (e.g. prior preschool experience, listening skills, classroom participation) were included in the respondents’ definitions of social and emotional school readiness.

As with other studies investigating social and emotional school readiness, language emerged as a recurrent theme. To many of the respondents, a child who is socially and emotionally competent and school ready has language and can use their verbal and nonverbal language skills to communicate feelings and express emotions. As one kindergarten teacher explains: “I would like them to be able to say I’m feeling unhappy even if they can’t put their finger on why”.

Several respondents highlighted that a quality preschool environment promotes language skills.

While similar themes cut across the data, there was not consensus across the education and healthcare systems on what competencies a socially and emotionally school ready child should have. The community health nurse emphasized the importance of peer socialization before formal schooling and interpersonal factors (e.g. neighborhood, cultural differences) surfaced more frequently: “Within [the community] there is a huge cultural mix – so each group has a different idea for what it means to have their child ready”. Those working within the educational setting placed more emphasis on intraindividual skills: listening skills, a child’s ability to express emotions and communicate feelings, language skills, classroom participation,
ability to demonstrate cooperative behaviours and a child’s ability to initiate friendships. Most kindergarten teachers agreed that social and emotional competencies are highly desirable for school entry. However, as one kindergarten teacher explained, while many children arrive at school with the cognitive capacities to participate in school, an increasing number of children lack important independent physical skills:

I’m seeing more and more I think children who don’t have the physical skills set to come to school but have the mental agility to be there all day...I have at least 7 children who cannot put their shoes on by themselves, never have tried! ...They can’t put their own coat on and they can’t put their own shirt on and they can’t hang anything in their cubbies so what I see in terms of the difference in my teaching career, where it used to be that kids came to school being able to put on their shoes, comb their hair, wash their hands, bathroom themselves. I have three parents say to me that their child may have to ask for help to wipe their bum if they have to go at school and I sort of said, sorry not allowed to do that!

What Influences Social and Emotional School Readiness?

Respondents were asked to discuss what influences social and emotional school readiness. Responses are organized into two broad themes: intrapersonal or within child factors such as cognitive skills, gender, language development, temperament and emotional regulation and interpersonal or contextual factors such as classroom environment, parent involvement, neighborhood and culture.

Intrapersonal Factors

Several respondents acknowledged that a child’s individual temperament, level of physical maturation and general life experience influences social and emotional school readiness. Gender surfaced as an influencing factor most frequently, particularly for those working within educational settings (i.e. kindergarten classrooms and preschool environments). Most respondents acknowledged that gender differences exist. For example, one kindergarten teacher stated: “I think in some regards girls, in some ways I see them being a little bit further ahead than boys...I think they have a little easier time socially”. After volunteering in her son’s preschool, a parent explains: “girls are easier usually to listen and are more socially able to adapt than boys
are”. Others commented that while gender differences exist, differences today appear less pronounced:

I have noticed in my career of 25 years that those things (gender differences) have leveled out a lot. It used to be that girls were more quieter and more passive and more low-key than boys and I don’t think that that is necessarily true anymore. I think there are still differences. I do think that generally see a lot more physical play with boys than girls. And those physical boundaries are really hard for them to keep to and it is not necessarily punching or kicking or hurting someone it is cuddling and kissing and hands on one another. Boys have a really hard time with that – keeping their hands to themselves and over the last five years I have had way more cuddly, kissy guys than I’ve had.

Interpersonal Factors

When discussing what influences social and emotional school readiness, respondents emphasized the interaction between interpersonal factors (e.g. classroom environment/teacher characteristics or parent characteristics-child characteristics). Of the many influences coded, the home environment, classroom environment, cultural differences and values, including the importance of community and school programs, emerged as the most prevalent influences on children’s social and emotional competence and school readiness.

Consistent with the literature, several factors within the home environment were found to influence social and emotional competence and school readiness (e.g. having siblings who are attending school, parenting skills, consistent routines at home, limited television). One kindergarten teacher highlighted to be what she sees as the relationship between being socially and emotionally school ready and a decrease in multi-children families: “I see more and more single children because the population is getting a bit older or maybe it is not so easy to have children... So that whole sort of having to deal with not being the most important person in the entire world....”

Within the classroom and school environment, prior preschool experience, parent involvement, having a high adult to student ratio and specific teaching skills (e.g. giving specific praise, modeling empathy and conflict resolution skills) were counted frequently as positively
influencing social and emotional school readiness. Many considered parent involvement in the classroom to not only promote social and emotional competence, but parenting skills and family networks as well. One parent explained that as a result of having a high adult to child ratio in the classroom, children “learn to trust a lot of adults, not just the parent or the teacher” and they “become more confident”. As one kindergarten teacher pointed out, for parents: “I think too it encourages them to see other children and other children’s development while also building relationships.”

Culture also emerged as an important influence. While many respondents acknowledged individual differences in learning and communication styles of minority children, racism, poverty or economic hardship were not mentioned as influencing social and emotional competence. Many highlighted the linguistic and cultural diversity within Vancouver and acknowledged that cultural differences can influence a child’s readiness for school. Individual variability was also emphasized. As one kindergarten teacher explains:

I would say that (students whose first language is not English) are much quieter, much more reserved, much more tendency to sit back and allow the adults to take control but that’s a sweeping generalization. Because there are children that come in and are angry. Very angry that they are there because they don’t know why they’re there or they don’t know what their name is, nobody has told them that they have an English name, that horrendous when you have to deal with that. But culturally, parents that bring their children to learn English, they choose to put children in our school to learn English, they are very much on side and they are very much aware, their whole agenda is behave nicely and listen to the teacher.

There were also examples of children whose first language is not English who have successfully transitioned to kindergarten:

There are significant cultural differences in the teaching of prosocial behaviour – I see that across the different schools that I work at. For example one school I work at is predominantly East Indian and these kids have excellent prosocial behaviours – they are doing something right there. The students have incredible social skills when compared to some of the west side schools I work at. It is really interesting. It probably has to do with parenting and teaching.
Research Question 2: What assessment practices (and assessment resources) are currently used within the community to determine whether a child has secured the key social/emotional competencies necessary for formal schooling?

Respondents from cases two through five were asked whether they participate in any formal or informal assessment of social and emotional school readiness. As hypothesized, social and emotional school readiness is rarely formally assessed - informal assessment practices are more prevalent. Respondents from cases four and five discussed the value in, and importance of, conducting informal assessments (e.g. conducting observations, administering rating scales, participating in school based teams).

While six out of the nine respondents considered social and emotional school readiness to be a measurable construct, culturally appropriate and psychometrically sound assessment tools, including access to trained individuals to administer and interpret assessments, are difficult to come by. The school psychologist said: “The problem is that these tools are not readily accessible and used more in emergency situations”. She further explained that while such assessment tools as the Behaviour Assessment System for Children and the Social Skills Rating System are available, their utility is sometime limited in a school setting particularly “because others aren’t familiar with the results” and “there isn’t a lot of interventions associated with it”.

While screening tools and criterion based measures were available in the preschool under study, the preschool teacher interviewed explained that she does not use these tools. According to preschool staff: “parents get panicky...they get nervous when Johnny can’t do X...and then what I don’t want them to do is to use that criteria and go home and pressure their children”. Instead preschool staff prefers to conduct observations and “to give parents tangible suggestions”. One parent with a child transitioning to kindergarten discussed having to complete a questionnaire before school entry: “These questionnaires were kind of strange because of course we’ll say our child is this rather than that because of wanting to present that they are
ready emotionally”. The same parent explained that after completing the questionnaire, no one from the school debriefed the results and/or impressions and therefore the exercise felt “useless”.

The community health nurse and the school psychologist considered formal assessment tools to be important for understanding children’s social and emotional competence and school readiness. When working with families who have young children transitioning to school, the community health nurse interviewed sometimes uses the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) with the social and emotional component. In her opinion, working through the ASQ with parents is “a really good way of engaging the parents and is also a good way for some parents to see the skills their child has”.

**Research Question 3**: Are assessment practices aligned with developmental theory and does practice integrate an ecological focus?

When investigating assessment practices, the teachers, community health nurse and the school psychologist interviewed did not specifically mention using or selecting assessment strategies based on developmental theory. While some discussed using tools that were “available”; most respondents, particularly the teachers, highlighted relying on their background knowledge and experiences to select tools and to informally assess: “I think it is that core feeling that you have that there is something more to this than meets the eye.” Others cautioned that even “if you have that gut feeling, it may be nothing” and “you don’t want to compare and contrast because every little individual is different”. The preschool teacher emphasized individual differences in development and how this may influence assessment: “I feel really strongly that you need to look at where your child is today. Just because yesterday he was able to do such and such doesn’t necessarily mean it is the same today.”

Two teachers and the school psychologist acknowledged that developmental theories have advanced and explained their own training in young children’s social and emotional development is limited or outdated which in turn, influences assessment. When discussing her doctoral
training, the school psychologist stated: “We didn’t have a specific course on social and emotional assessment...there was a lot about attachment – not a lot about intervention or ways to enhance social and emotional development”.

As anticipated, parental involvement emerged as an important theme in assessment and many respondents attempt to include the parents in the assessment process. For example, the school psychologist stated that: “parents are a big part of the assessment process for me”. Two teachers highlighted the value in bringing parents in for a meeting to discuss expectations as well as a way to foster continued dialogue.

As with including parents, the importance of building partnerships across systems surfaced (e.g. school staff working with health units). While the value in having trained professions who work with this age group was emphasized, the kindergarten and preschool teachers acknowledged that it is difficult to get access to trained professionals, particularly for this population: “We do have a community health nurse who works throughout the schools – again though the difficulty is accessibility. I don’t really know who this person is and I don’t come into contact with her on a regular basis”. Others explained that although partnerships are possible, it is challenging to integrate assessment findings and interventions with other systems (e.g. school system – mental health).

**Research Question 4:** What are some key facilitators and inhibitors to assessing young children’s social and emotional school readiness?

**Facilitators to Assessment**

Facilitators to assessment included: having access to trained professionals, building professional partnerships, increased knowledge of culturally appropriate tools and supporting research in the area of assessment and development. When discussing assessment, the community health nurse highlighted the value of having preschool health fairs within the community to include parents who have children at home who may not have accessed formal
care. She also explained that newborn home visits are another way of accessing parents, observing older siblings and engaging parents in discussions about preschool and school entry. According to kindergarten teachers, home visits and transition meetings with preschools also emerged as valuable ways to identify students who are at risk for negative early school outcomes.

Inhibitors to Assessment

As expected that time, financial and professional resources inhibit assessment of this population. While assessment and early identification is possible, time to meet with teams and time between assessment and service (e.g. waiting lists) including access to programs (e.g. preschool, daycare, family resource programs) and professional support (e.g. mental health services) were identified as potential barriers to assessment. As one kindergarten teacher states: “I think the identification process for kids that are having difficulties is pretty good. I think we can identify them, we have a lot of tests we can do that kind of pinpoint areas but getting the support programs and getting them all in place takes way too long.” Two teachers explained that a perceived focus on the zero to three population (e.g. infant development programs, pregnancy outreach) complicates and sometimes inhibits services to the preschool population: “I think too in terms of hearing and things like that, generally speaking, that seems to taken care of...more of the health issues but the social problems or the emotional development of children I think that’s kind of pushed to the side until the behaviours escalate so badly that they become out of control and then you really got to make a decision rather than use a proactive, preventative approach...”

Barriers to assessment can also be related to a lack of interventions. As one teacher said, “Why would I assess or screen if there is nothing we can do afterwards?” According to the teachers interviewed, “social skills training programs are hard to find and counselors are busy”. Even when programs are in place at the school level, program content can be dated, inconsistently presented and culturally or developmentally inappropriate. Furthermore, as one
teacher noted, kindergarten students are sometimes excluded from school wide interventions that focus on building social and emotional competencies: "There has been lots of focus in the schools on bullying and prosocial behaviour but not really with young children in mind". In addition, finding appropriate interventions is particularly challenging for children and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Teachers explained that acquiring parental permission for assessment from families who do not speak English is often a barrier.

Teacher training also surfaced as inhibiting assessment practices. Few teachers in this investigation received explicit training in assessment or programmatic support in identifying and building the social and emotional competence of young children in the classroom. As the preschool teacher said: "I'd love to see kindergarten teachers have part of their education be early childhood because there's not much difference between who I've had in June and who you are going to get in September except for a few months and yet the expectation is enormous"
Chapter Five: Discussion

The objective of this chapter is to discuss the implications of the findings, including how the information gained can be used to better understand social and emotional school readiness, program and intervention services, including assessment. Protective factors identified in this study are outlined. The limitations of the study are presented and directions for future research are identified.

Implications of the Study

Social and Emotional School Readiness: Conceptual Consensus?

While several prerequisite social and emotional competencies thought to be necessary for school cut across the data, the respondents did not give a uniform definition of what it means to be socially and emotionally ready for school. It was evident early in this investigation, that in order to understand social and emotional development, learning and readiness for school, one must examine the multiple influences that bear on development some of which include; characteristics of the child, parental style and parental characteristics, family characteristics, classroom and school environments, community influences, the broader social/political context including the various interactions of these factors.

Moreover, respondents had different reactions (positive or negative) about the meaningfulness or utility of the term “school readiness”. For example, when asked about the term school readiness, the preschool teacher said: “...actually to be honest, I kind of cringe. I do because I think there has been so much emphasis on being ready for school and it’s gotten to be earlier and earlier and I don’t think that you can have children being ready for school, I think we need to get schools ready for children”. Two kindergarten teachers highlighted that readiness “…means different things to different people and different students” whereas the pilot kindergarten teacher interviewed stated: “...it would be easy to characterize a child that I have
witnessed or worked with who is ready.” Similarly, the community health nurse identified school readiness as being specifically targeted and as “one of the things we really try to work towards right from birth”. The Minister of State for Early Childhood Development explained: “we define it [school readiness] as resiliency: the child is faced with a number of different circumstances, a number of different eventualities – how does that young learner cope across a variety of settings”.

Variable definitions and reactions to the term “readiness”, may have been influenced by the respondent’s gender, profession, working population, education, professional training, school experience, culture and age. For instance, a parent’s understanding of social and emotional school readiness may be linked to their knowledge of development (education) as well as their past experiences with educational systems. In this investigation, the parents whose children had positive preschool experiences generally anticipated a positive kindergarten transition. Furthermore, kindergarten and preschool teachers who had an early childhood education background coupled with more teaching experience (i.e. over 10 years), highlighted the importance of prior preschool experience, parent education as well as the importance of teacher training in child development. Finally, the demographics of the sample, particularly the fact that all respondents were female and university educated, may limit transferability.

Assessment of Social and Emotional School Readiness: The Debate Continues

Within the literature and in practice, there is still discussion as to how to define and measure social and emotional school readiness across systems. Data from this investigation confirms the initial assumption that assessment is most often informal in nature. Because key stakeholders define success in school in different ways, readiness criteria and the concept of who is at risk for poor school outcomes varied somewhat.
Some respondents expressed mistrust in formal assessments of social behaviour. This was more prevalent when practitioners worked with culturally and linguistically diverse children and families. One respondent referred to a perceived lack of stability of social behaviours for this age group, which has been reported in the literature (La Paro & Pianta, 2000). For this practitioner, “inconsistent” social behaviours raises questions about whether measuring social behaviours are reliable and informative. Other respondents considered children’s social behaviour and emotional expression to be context specific. For several key stakeholders, factors outside the child (e.g. economic hardship, neighbourhoods, parent education, school climate) should be considered a part of the assessment process.

On the positive side, three key stakeholders explained feeling optimistic about renewed interest in early childhood assessment, particularly early screening for infants and toddlers. In their opinion, the importance of, and value in, measuring developmental outcomes for very young children, is being recognized federally and provincially. For example, support for the Early Development Instrument (EDI) as a way to assess school readiness, the expansion of the Healthy Babies Program, the Infant Development and the Building Blocks Program (both which include such programs as home visiting, Roots of Empathy, Family literacy) is evident at the provincial and community level.

While this interest is encouraging, the community health nurse cautioned that different screening and assessment tools being used in different health regions has the potential to complicate assessment practices and thwart interventions for this population. The challenge of different health regions and education systems using consistent or universal assessment tools appears to be supported by others working with young children and their families in British Columbia. This exact question was addressed in Dana Brynelsen’s (Provincial Advisor, Infant Development Program) closing address for the assessment workshop at the Early Childhood
Educators of British Columbia conference: “How do we compare developmental outcomes for children if we are using different tools, even if we are able to gather the information from the various regions?” (2004)

**Protective Factors**

Research on protective factors, or those factors that guard against early school failure continues to expand (Peth-Pierce, 2001). Data from this investigation complements existing research by identifying several protective factors that have the potential to promote social and emotional school readiness and moderate the effects of risk.

At the individual level, interview data showed that a child who is self-confident, independent, has an easy temperament, good language skills, can make decisions, is cooperative and demonstrates interest in others has an easier transition to formal schooling. At the microsystem level, having a stable, organized and predictable family environment, positive parenting practices, social supports, secure attachments in the early years, classroom friends, high quality child care or preschool and warm and open relationships with teachers appeared to promote social and emotional school readiness (Peth-Pierce, 2000). At the mesosystem level, school-neighborhood programs (e.g. after school care), home-school collaboration (e.g. parent involvement in the preschool and kindergarten class), community programs (e.g. parenting classes, family resource centres) were considered protective factors. At the exosystem level, local school board initiatives (e.g. Roots of Empathy program), although in the early stages, were thought to moderate the effects of risk. Finally, at the macrosystem level, respondents considered increased federal and provincial interest in early childhood development, particularly the importance of play, to be an important step in preventing early school failure.
Bridging Research and Practice: Improving Assessment Practices, Programs and Interventions

In May 2002, Minister Reid released the BC Early Childhood Development Action Plan: A Work in Progress which identified five major priorities for 2002-2003 including quality childcare programs, parental education initiatives and partnerships to broaden community involvement and capacity for ECD initiatives. The Action Plan also endorsed the use of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) as a baseline measure across BC. Within the Ministry of Children and Family Development, funding has been announced to HELP to complete the province-wide assessment of all kindergarten children in BC.

The goal of EDI Mapping is to assist communities to use the maps to monitor early child development, and to create effective community-based responses that support the needs of children and families in their communities. The mapping project helps to measure readiness to learn in children, assess effectiveness of early childhood interventions, and predict how children will do in elementary school.

While province wide assessment using the EDI is very encouraging, many of the respondents in this investigation continued to emphasize the need for interventions and program supports for this population (e.g. accessible, high quality and affordable preschool). As one kindergarten teacher explains:

As much as I love the fact that people are identifying the need, on the other hand, it doesn’t take rocket science to identify the need and what I am concerned about is where is the what happens now? How do they fund new stuff? Why not use all the money that it took for me to have a sub that day, which is quite a lot of money, why not take that money and actually give it to a child, we could have probably actually paid for a term of preschool for someone who didn’t have enough money to do it.

Intervention Research

Several respondents remarked that interventions (e.g. counseling services, mental health support) for young children with social and emotional challenges are limited and a lack of services must be addressed before assessment advances. When asked how we could improve
services for this population, the Minister of State for Early Childhood Development explains: “I think we can do a better job around counseling services for very young learners, I think in the years I’ve been in the system or observing the system, it’s been very cyclical where we’ve put those resources in and then moved or returned those resources”.

Furthermore, interventions that span a range of programmatic intensity are necessary (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg, 2004). Some respondents noted the promise of the Roots of Empathy project; a primary intervention as a way to build social and emotional competence in school aged children. While other interventions (e.g. school wide anti-bullying programs) may contribute to more positive (and less chaotic) classroom environments, some respondents considered more intensive interventions for those students who are at gravest risk for negative emotional and academic problems, to be necessary (Raver, 2002). In addition, because efforts to promote social and emotional competence are sometimes fragmented, that is, there are separate programs to promote health, violence, etc., some children will need integrated, comprehensive services available to multiple members of their families in order for gains in children’s school readiness to be realized (Raver, 2002; Zins et al., 2004).

Several respondents acknowledged the importance of providing support for parents. One kindergarten teacher stated: “I am amazed at how many bright, articulate parents don’t feel confident in what they know about kids”. Both parents interviewed, while university educated, reported wanting to increase or expand their knowledge about child development. Data from this investigation appears to discredit the myth that parents who are young, poor or lack education, are the only parents who need access to information to support in their parenting role (Brynelsen, 2004).

*Teacher Training and School Programs*

Because schools have access to virtually all children, they are ideal settings in which to promote social and emotional development (Zins et al., 2004). One teacher emphasized that early
elementary educational curriculum needs to expand to include children's emotional and social competence as key programmatic goals. In fact, British Columbia has developed Social Responsibility Performance Standards for kindergarten aged students for use in schools. These standards are "intended to provide a framework that schools and families can use to focus and monitor their efforts to enhance social responsibility among students and to improve the social climate of their schools" (BC Ministry of Education, 2004). The teachers interviewed did not mention using these standards when developing lessons or as a tool for informal assessment.

Two teachers indicated that new professionals entering the teaching force require training in how to address social and emotional development and learning not only to expand classroom management strategies but also to teach young students to cope more successfully (Zins et al, 2004). Similarly, the preschool and one kindergarten teacher (a former childcare worker) expressed concern that some staff lack training to identify risk factors and developmental signs of social and emotional delay. While most early childhood educators want to learn more, professional developmental opportunities are reported to be limited.

Limitations of this Investigation

Qualitative studies, particularly those that adhere to a case study approach, focus intensively on a small sample size. As such, the research findings in this study are likely to be most reflective of the nine participants who were interviewed. The dependability of findings to other parents, practitioners and professionals may be limited given the small sample size. The fact that all of the respondents were female and university educated may limit the generalizability of these findings to other professionals and parents. If this study and a similar methodology were replicated, generalizability may be strengthened.

Future Research Directions

Future research is needed to determine which interventions can best promote social and emotional competence and if there is empirical evidence that social and emotional competencies
improve children’s early school success (Zins et al., 2004). For example, a universal intervention that helps parents foster their preschool aged child’s social and emotional learning would contribute to understanding the role of parenting in school readiness. Once interventions are established, additional and continued research is needed to evaluate program effectiveness for this population.

Replications with other parents and professionals, both similar and dissimilar in backgrounds (e.g. gender, ethnicity, geographic location, education) would be helpful. Common themes among these groups, or differences, would expand our knowledge base on understanding how others define and operationalize social and emotional school readiness. Finally, future research pursuits to understand the processes of risk and resilience is central to not only understand the daily context of young children’s lives, but also critical for interpreting assessments, directing resources and individualizing interventions.
References


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Peth-Pierce, R. (2000). *A good beginning: Sending America’s children to school with the social*

Retrieved November 1, 2002 from http://www.srcd.org


3. The interviews will be audiotaped. The audiotapes will then be written up. Your real name will not be on the interview write-up.

4. Taking part is voluntary and will not affect your job or child in any way. You have the right to say no and to not take part in the study at any time. You also have the right to not answer any of the questions the interviewer may ask.

5. The information you give us is confidential. **No individual information will be reported and no participant will be identified by name** in any reports about the study. The only people who will see to the information you give us are the people working on this project.

6. You will receive general information about the results of our project if you would like them.

7. By taking part in this project, you may help to improve services for young children getting ready for school.

8. You will receive $25 per interview session as an appreciation of your inconvenience and to cover any expenses you may have as a result of taking part in this study (i.e. parking, travel).

Thank-you for your interest in this study. If you are interested in taking part in the study or would like to learn more about the study please contact one of the investigators by phone or email listed at the beginning of this letter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Laurie Ford, PhD  
Principal Investigator

Allison Mitchell  
Co-Investigator
Taking Part in our Study Means:

- If you agree to take part in our study, you will participate in a one-on-one interview about what being socially and emotionally ready for school means to you.

- The interview will take about thirty minutes to one hour and will happen when and where it is convenient for you.

- The interviews will be audiotaped. The audiotapes will then be written up. Your real name will not be on the interview write-up.

- Taking part is voluntary and will not affect your job or child in any way. You have the right to say no and to not take part in the study at any time. You also have the right to not answer any of the questions the interviewer may ask.

- The information you give us is confidential. No individual information will be reported and no participant will be identified by name in any reports about the study. The only people who will see the information you give us are the people working on this project.

- You will receive general information about the results of our project if you would like them.

- By taking part in this project, you may help to improve services for young children getting ready for school.

Thank-you for your interest in this study. If you are interested in taking part in the study or would like to learn more about the study please contact one of the investigators by phone or email listed at the beginning of this letter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Laurie Ford, PhD
Principal Investigator

Allison Mitchell
Co-Investigator
11. The interviews will be audiotaped. The audiotapes will then be written up. Your real name will not be on the interview write-up.

12. Taking part is voluntary and will not affect your job or child in any way. You have the right to say no and to not take part in the study at any time. You also have the right to not answer any of the questions the interviewer may ask.

13. The information you give us is confidential. **No individual information will be reported and no participant will be identified by name** in any reports about the study. The only people who will see to the information you give us are the people working on this project.

14. You will receive general information about the results of our project if you would like them.

15. If the information you provide is to be used in the future (i.e. another research project), you will be contacted directly for your consent.

16. By taking part in this project, you may help to improve services for young children getting ready for school.

17. You will receive $25 per interview session as an appreciation of your inconvenience and to cover any expenses you may have as a result of taking part in this study (i.e. parking, travel).

18. If at any time you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia at (604) 822-8598.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project you may call any of the researchers at numbers written above.

Laurie Ford, PhD  
Principal Investigator  
Allison Mitchell  
Co- Investigator
Consent Form

Please check one of the following and return it to the investigator:

___ Yes, I agree to take part in this project

___ No, I do not wish to take part in the project (please do not sign this consent form)

IF YES ABOVE

___ Yes, I agree to have my interview audiotaped

___ No, I do not agree to have my interview audiotaped

Your signature (please sign):

__________________________

Your name (please print your name):

__________________________

Date:

When you sign this it means that you have received a copy of this consent form (Pages 1 & 2) for your own records.

Thank you very much for your help.
**Preschool Teacher Interview Questions**

1. What is your definition of school readiness?
2. What sorts of things do young children need to be ready for school?
3. In your opinion, how do we know whether a child is socially and emotionally ready for school?
4. What competencies does a socially and emotionally school ready child have?
5. How do you socially and emotionally prepare a young child for kindergarten?
6. Do you use any formal or informal assessment tools to determine whether children are socially and emotionally school ready?
7. In your classroom, do you have any programs that specifically promote social and emotional learning?
8. How is social and emotional learning integrated across children’s daily activities?
9. How do you involve parents in their children’s social and emotional learning and development?
10. How does the preschool setting contribute to social and emotional development?
11. What kind of training did you receive that was related to young children’s social and emotional development?
12. If you had a child in preschool who was experiencing social and emotional difficulties, what would you do?
13. As a preschool teacher, what barriers do you face when referring children for social and emotional difficulties?
14. As a preschool teacher, what information about social and emotional development or services would be helpful to you?
15. As a preschool teacher, what do you think is going right for young children? (i.e. programs, resources, services)
16. What do you think is needed to help children be socially and emotionally ready for kindergarten?

**Kindergarten Teacher Interview Questions**

1. What is your definition of school readiness?
2. What sorts of things do young children need to be ready for school?
3. In your opinion, how do we know whether a child is socially and emotionally ready for school?
4. What competencies does a socially and emotionally school ready child have?
5. Do you use any formal or informal assessment tools to determine whether children are socially and emotionally school ready?
6. In your classroom, do you have any programs that specifically promote social and emotional learning?
7. How is social and emotional learning integrated across children’s daily activities?
8. How do you involve parents in their children’s social and emotional learning and development?
9. How does the kindergarten setting contribute to social and emotional development?
10. What kind of training did you receive that was related to young children’s social and emotional development?
11. If you had a child in your classroom who was experiencing social and emotional difficulties, what would you do?
12. As a kindergarten teacher, what barriers do you face when referring children for social and emotional difficulties?
13. As a kindergarten teacher, what information about social and emotional development or services would be helpful to you?
14. What do you think is going right for young children? (i.e. programs, resources, services)
15. What do you think is needed to help children be socially and emotionally ready for kindergarten?
Public Health Nurse Interview Questions
1. What is your definition of school readiness?
2. What sorts of things do young children need to be ready for school?
3. In your opinion, how do we know whether a child is socially and emotionally ready for school?
4. What competencies does a socially and emotionally school ready child have?
5. Do you use any formal or informal assessment tools to determine whether children are socially and emotionally school ready?
6. Do you think it is possible to measure a child's social and emotional school readiness?
7. In your opinion are these tools helpful?
8. Are assessment tools linked to intervention?
9. How do you involve parents in their children's social and emotional learning and development?
10. In terms of school readiness, do you feel there are opportunities to be involved in a school-community partnership?
11. What kind of training did you receive that was related to young children's social and emotional development?
12. As a public health nurse, what barriers do you face when referring children for social and emotional difficulties?
13. As a public health nurse, what information about social and emotional development or services would be helpful to you?
14. What do you think is going right for young children? (i.e. programs, resources, services)
15. What do you think is needed to help children be socially and emotionally ready for formal schooling

Policy Maker Interview Questions
1. What is your definition of school readiness?
2. What sorts of things do young children need to be ready for school?
3. In your opinion, how do we know whether a child is socially and emotionally ready for school?
4. What competencies does a socially and emotionally school ready child have?
5. Is the government investing resources in the area of social and emotional school readiness?
6. In your opinion are resources being spent in the right places to ensure the appropriate social and emotional development of young children?
7. Are we doing all we can to ensure that children in B.C. are starting out on the right foot?
8. What are the gaps between existing policies or, between research and policy?
9. What are some obstacles in creating programs or a system of care that will insure children's social and emotional school readiness?
10. Do you think it is possible to establish a measure for the proportion of kindergarten aged children who are "ready to learn"?
11. As a policy maker, what information about social and emotional development or services would be helpful to you?
12. What do you think is going right for young children? (i.e. programs, resources, services)
13. What do you think is needed to help children be socially and emotionally ready for formal schooling?
### Appendix 5: Table 2 - Summary of Themes & Units (Research Question 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Themes</th>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Total Number of Coded Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Percentage of Sub-themes</th>
<th>Percentage of Broad Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Competence</strong></td>
<td>Cooperative behaviours (turn-taking, sharing)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of social skills</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socialization &amp; relationships</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual/Personality</strong></td>
<td>Independence</td>
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<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Resiliency</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to make decisions/choices</td>
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<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being assertive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem solving &amp; negotiating</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<td><strong>Emotional Competence</strong></td>
<td>Ability to leave parent Or caregiver</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional knowledge</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional regulation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to express emotions &amp; communicate feelings</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Skills</strong></td>
<td>Preschool Experience</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening skills</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom Participation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Development</strong></td>
<td>Language (verbal and non-verbal)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accepting of physical contact</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>
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The University of British Columbia Library maintains The Bibliography of Theses on British Columbia History and Related Subjects. This important online reference source is available on the Internet through the UBC Library online catalogue. The Bibliography is used by students and researchers at UBC and other libraries and research institutions in British Columbia, Canada, and other countries.

If your thesis topic is related to British Columbia (e.g., history, geography, literature, science, special topics, etc.), please complete in the following:

Name: Mitchell, Allison

Degree: MA School Psychology
Graduating Year: 2004

Department: Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education; School Psychology

Title of thesis: Investigating Social and Emotional School Readiness and Assessment: A Multiple Case Study Approach

Accompanying Materials: □ Yes ☑ No

If yes, indicate type: 

List keywords that describe your thesis topic (be specific and use as many as possible):

School Readiness
Assessment
Social and Emotional Competence
Current practice
Case study
Lower Mainland

Thank you for your assistance.