

2016

# Preparing Early Learners for Kindergarten Success

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Deidre Stewart

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Walden University  
2016

Abstract

Preparing Early Learners for Kindergarten Success

by

Deidre Jeanean Stewart

MS, Howard University, 1995

BS, Grambling State University, 1993

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2016

## Abstract

Many early childhood learners enter kindergarten not academically and social-emotionally prepared. This qualitative study explored teachers' perceptions of what constitutes high-quality learning concerning kindergarten readiness and parents' understanding and support of kindergarten readiness. The conceptual framework is based on recent studies by early childhood researchers on how and what early learners should experience during their pre-k years. The research questions focused on teachers' understanding of structural quality and process quality, kindergarten readiness, and age-appropriate curriculum. In addition, parents' understanding of kindergarten readiness and what types of learning opportunities they offer their children were examined. Through purposeful sampling, 16 teachers and 17 parents were interviewed from an early childhood site. Interview data were analyzed using a thematic analysis. The data were analyzed by coding and observing for recurrent categories and themes. Key findings indicated that teachers demonstrated a lack of understanding of structural quality and process quality and believed that the current curriculum is outdated and should be replaced to significantly impact student learning. Parents perceived that academics were far more important than social-emotional development and that affording their children learning opportunities outside of school was important. As a result of this study, a professional development program was developed for teachers intended to enhance their instructional practices in preparing early learners towards kindergarten success. Parents will also receive training from teachers to support social-emotional learning opportunities. The training could enable both teachers and parents to better support the cognitive and social-emotional growth of children.

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## Dedication

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. John 19:28

I would like to dedicate this work to my caring and loving parents, John and Alma Stewart, whose push for persistence and words of reassurance was a driving force through this journey, and my brother, John, and sisters, Jennifer and Dana, who offered words of encouragement.

I also dedicate this work and give special thanks to my mentor and cheerleader, Sherril English. Her guidance, encouragement, and support throughout my study were heart felt.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

Early learning is critical to the growth and development of young children during the early stages of their lives. These early stages of growth and development should include learning experiences from a positive environment that includes social-emotional, cognitive, and physical activities (Frabutt & Waldron, 2013). The early formative developmental experiences that early learners encounter from ages 0 to 5 categorically support and shape their young lives academically. In fact, a child's social environment is important in the progress of early stages of development (Frabutt & Waldron, 2013). In addition, these early formative developmental contexts can be experienced while a child receives a solid foundational education through an early childhood setting. As children enter this phase of developmental (foundational) learning, experiences should include preacademic skills as well as emotional and social skills. These academic skills include early skills in literacy, science, math, and language development. As children are receiving foundational skills, an understanding of how to prepare early learners accurately for kindergarten readiness needs attention.

In order for early learners to experience effective preacademic skills before kindergarten, many early childhood programs are moving towards implementing more highly-skilled practices (Reynolds, Magnuson, & Ou, 2010). According to L. Goldstein (2007), early childhood education has been transformed because of the overall expectations and goals related to preacademic skills. In essence, teachers of early learners are required to not only meet early learners' physical and emotional needs, but

they must also ensure all early learners are equipped with preacademic skills for kindergarten readiness (L. Goldstein, 2007). In addition to learning preacademic skills before entering kindergarten, early learners and their parents are faced with meeting new people from different cultures and backgrounds (Malsch, Green, & Kothari, 2011). To emphasize the importance of the varying values of early learning, many states have taken steps to develop and implement standards for preschool learning (Hatcher, Nuner, & Paulsel, 2012).

The Dallas Independent School District (DISD) recently published a report approved by the Department of Evaluation and Assessment. In this report, Watson, Meharie, and Mickelson (2013) studied the many DISD educational programs and how these programs performed during the 2012-2013 school year. According to the authors, Title 1 School Improvement Programs are implemented when a school fails to meet national standards in mathematics and reading during 2 consecutive school years. After a school has been identified as a Title 1 school, the school has to implement five stages of improvement. As of April 2014, 70 schools located in Dallas, Texas were categorized as Title I School Improvement Programs.

With the current research study, I examined factors that impact kindergarten readiness. By using qualitative case study research, I focused on whether teachers at the school under study understand process quality and structural quality as it relates to curriculum implementation. In addition, I examined if the learning experiences students are receiving are of high-quality and to what level parents understand and support the importance of kindergarten readiness. For this study, high quality was defined as an early

learning program possessing structural and process indicators. In fact, Cassidy, Lower, Kintner, and Hestenes (2009) stated that concerns related to all children having access to high-quality experiences and teacher resources. Cassidy et al. defined a child's school setting and a teacher's skill-sets as structural quality. In addition, what and how children learn and how children and the teacher interact with each other was defined as process quality. In some respects, both of these qualities are codependent, but in reality are greatly reliant on the magnitudes each quality conveys.

### **Definition of the Problem**

The possibility of a high quality early childhood program meeting or exceeding a child's basic needs and achievement towards kindergarten readiness and beyond is plausible. By providing early learners with high-quality learning environments, disparities in academic achievement could be reduced. In addition, preacademic skills taught during early learning results in better educational attainment throughout a child's schooling (Duncan et al., 2007). Of the Dallas public schools listed as Title 1 improvements, 30 are elementary schools whose early learners are not meeting national standards in math and reading. Research findings have shown that children who receive high quality early learning experiences tend to be academically ready for elementary success (Hughes, 2010). Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education (2014) noted that "providing high quality early childhood experiences in structural and process quality can help ensure that children in Title I schools and other school program have the foundation to meet academic standards and experience success throughout elementary and secondary schools" (p. 1).

To address the identified problem of early learners not being academically ready, early childhood educators have explored if these learning environments possess both structural and process learning qualities and if the learning opportunities are preparing preschoolers for kindergarten success. In addition, an examination of parents' understanding of learning experiences and kindergarten readiness was addressed.

Dominguez, Vitiello, Maier, and Greenfield (2010) completed a study to examine the development and growth of Head Start children as it related to performances associated with learning. The study is symbolic of a new cohort of researchers seeking to understand the significance of classroom quality as it relates to the relationship between a teacher and student therefore focusing entirely on "teacher-student ratio or teacher degrees or certifications" (Hughes, 2010, p. 48). In conclusion, the data supported the importance of providing early learners with preacademic skills to ensure school success (Hughes, 2010). This body of research is characteristic of many studies that explain the quality of the classroom environment.

A majority of educational leaders support early childhood education and identify skills necessary for kindergarten readiness. Across the nation, a large number of early childhood learning programs are being recognized as having structural quality, not process quality. An analysis conducted by Rimm-Kaufman, La Paro, Downer, and Pianta (2005) indicated a difference between structural quality (high levels) and process quality (moderate to low levels) in six out of the 11 states studied. The National Institute for Early Education Research (2012) personnel researched state funded early learning programs. Their report showed the state of Texas ranked eighth in the nation for

structural quality as it relates to serving preschool age children. For the past 10 years, early learning programs in the state of Texas have increased access to pre-k programs from 39% in 2002 to 52% in 2011 (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2012). However, little increase has been shown in process quality of service over the past decade (National Institute of Early Education Research, 2012). For instance, in 2002 only three out of the 10 benchmarks for process quality were reached and only four out of the 10 benchmarks for process quality were reached in 2011 (National Institute of Early Education Research, 2012).

While teachers are undoubtedly teaching, a focus on best practices and measures of quality must be accomplished in order to create the types of environments that allow young learners to experience high quality teaching. Learning environments that demonstrate structural quality and process quality promote a child's intellectual ability and social-emotional skills. In fact, these types of learning environments are key components when assessing the quality of early learning programs. For this purpose, it is probable that teachers understand the aspects of both structural quality and process quality. In essence, both measures of quality influence a child's learning experiences in preparation for kindergarten success.

The importance of parental involvement in a child's education is imperative as it relates to their growth and development. In fact, a child's parent should be considered a partner in their child's educational development. Parental involvement can be observed as a parent having a positive connection with their child's school environment and/or promoting enriched learning opportunities at home (Yoder & Lopez, 2013). According



to Harper and Pelletier (2010), a parent's participation in their child's educational progress is very significant. Notably, parents who are active participants in their child's educational endeavors often observe increased motivation, social-emotional skills, and cognitive development.

Therefore, with this research study, I explored teachers' understanding of process quality and structural quality at an early childhood program by conducting semistructured interviews. In addition, an examination of the interviews data determined if preschoolers are receiving learning experiences that prepare them for kindergarten success. Furthermore, interviews with parents were assessed for an understanding of parents' support of kindergarten readiness.

Within the context of Section 1, a discussion of the rationale is provided. In addition, special terms are defined associated with this study. Furthermore, an explanation of the significance of the problem and research questions is specified. In conclusion, a review of literature is provided as well as a discussion of the implications for possible tentative projects.

### **Rationale**

The fundamental purpose for this qualitative case study was to explore teachers' perceptions of what constitutes high-quality learning as it relates to kindergarten readiness and to determine parents' understanding and support of kindergarten readiness. Available literature focused on the importance of having both measures of quality, but many programs have succeeded in providing only structural quality in early childhood programs and not process quality. It is possible for teachers to offer early learners

opportunities to experience positive learning experiences associated with both process quality and structural quality and increase parental support and understanding of early learning programs.

There seems to be a misinterpretation among early childhood teachers on what learning experiences early learners should be receiving before entry into elementary grades. For example, a number of schools in Dallas, Texas are not meeting national standards in reading and mathematics in Grades 3 through 12. Out of the 70 area schools, 30 elementary schools either have not met national standards in reading or math or both (Watson et al., 2013). In an effort to ensure these students meet or exceed national standards through high school, a thorough examination of teachers' understanding of what constitutes high-quality learning and parents' understanding and support of kindergarten readiness in an early childhood setting should be completed to determine if students are ready to move into a kindergarten setting. In so doing, early childhood teachers will become aware of process quality (educational experiences and teacher-student interactions) and structural qualities (teacher-student ratio and student group sizes). There is a lack of data to support the importance of process quality and structural quality as it relates to learning experiences and parental involvement in the Dallas, Texas area early learning programs; a qualitative case study was warranted.

The purpose of this research study was to explore teachers' perceptions of what constitutes high-quality learning as it relates to kindergarten readiness and parents' understanding of kindergarten readiness. In so doing, teachers shared their understanding of process quality and structural quality in an early learning program as it relates to

curriculum implementation. In addition, parents shared their level of understanding as it relates to what their child should be learning in order to be ready for kindergarten and their level of support in the process.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Early childhood education:* Education children receive from ages 0 to 8 from a public school, private school, or early learning center (Morgan, 2011).

*Early childhood programs:* Programs that support a child's growth and development through age-appropriate cognitive skills and social-emotional abilities (Bradley, Chazan-Cohen, & Raikes, 2009).

*High-quality early childhood classrooms:* Structural indicators and process indicators (Dennis & O'Connor, 2013).

*Preacademics:* Skills taught before kindergarten entry (Li, Farkas, Duncan, Burchinal, & Vandell, 2013).

*Process quality:* Indicators including how children spend their time, educational experiences, and teacher-child interactions (Fram & Kim, 2012).

*School readiness:* A child's competences in the areas of cognitive development, social and emotional development, physical development, and preacademic skills (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2001; Snow, 2007).

*Structural quality:* Indicators including teacher credentials, teacher-student ratio, physical space, and student group sizes (Fram & Kim, 2012).

## **Significance**

Reasons for identifying highly effective early programs for early learners are numerous (Williams, Landry, Anthony, Swank, & Crawford, 2012). It is important to note that high-quality experiences from an early learning program have a greater impact on a child's school readiness (Bierman et al., 2008). The result of this qualitative case study led to the creation of a professional development for teachers and teacher assistants. It will provide teachers and teacher assistants with a clear understanding of process quality and structural quality features. Moreover, parents will benefit at the school under study. In doing so, early learners benefit from high-quality instruction and learning opportunities that will better prepare them for kindergarten success. In addition, early childhood teachers and school personnel understanding how to deliver process quality and structural quality features will be valuable. Furthermore, the current study results have the potential of being beneficial to parents as they will gain a better understanding of how to support their children as they transition into kindergarten. In order to ensure teachers are meeting the needs of early learners, a professional development program was created. Effective professional development supports in strengthening teacher's practices while empowering their skills and knowledge in an early childhood environment. In doing so, parents benefit from teachers' understanding of cognitive and social-emotional development in relation to supporting learning opportunities in the home environment. The hope is that the results of the current study will benefit the receiving kindergarten teachers by providing them knowledge concerning a child's kindergarten readiness as it relates to cognitive and social-emotional development.

### **Guiding Questions**

Research conducted by Burger (2010) provided substantial evidence that high quality early learning programs have benefits ranging from short to long term. For example, short-term benefits include early learners entering kindergarten ready to learn and achieve higher cognitive gains across all income and racial groups. Long-term benefits have shown higher earnings, high school graduation, and less delinquency in comparison to children not attending some type of high-quality early learning program (Burger, 2010; Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005).

In alignment with the stated problem, the following research questions were posed:

1. How do teachers describe their understanding of structural quality and process quality?
2. How do teachers describe their understanding of process quality in an early childhood program as it relates to the curriculum implementation?
3. What are teachers' perceptions of the structural quality of early childhood settings and its influence on pre-k student learning?
4. How do parents describe their understanding of kindergarten readiness?
5. What are parents doing to support their child's early learning experiences related to kindergarten readiness?

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Conceptual Framework**

With the conceptual framework, I outlined what and how an early learner should experience during their pre-k years. The concepts that form the foundation for the current research study include structural quality and process quality. Structural quality refers to the program's physical environment and process quality is closely related to a child's learning experiences and environment (Fram & Kim, 2012). These significant concepts have a direct impact on preparing early learners for kindergarten success. In addition, when these concepts are rooted in preparing early learners for kindergarten success, an environment of high-quality learning is experienced. When teachers engage children in stimulating activities, high-quality learning is experienced (Johnson, Martin, & Brooks-Gunn, 2013). In fact, when children receive low-quality experiences on a constant basis, poor academic outcomes will be noticed (Bulotsky-Shearer, Wen, Faria, Hahs-Vaughn, & Korfmacher, 2012).

Integrating both structural quality and process quality in early learning programs are crucial to growth and development among early learners. In order for teachers to engage early learners effectively, teachers need to interact with early learners and provide an environment that encourages learning (H. J. Jeon et al., 2010). Structural quality emphasizes quality in teacher-student ratios, classroom size, and teacher education, practices, and preparation (Howes, 1983; Phillips & Howes, 1987; Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990). Process quality focuses on children's direct learning which includes age-appropriate activities and materials and teacher-student interactions (Howes, Phillips, &

Whitebook, 1992). When both qualities are interconnected and successful in influencing pre-k learners, high-quality learning is achieved (H. J. Jeon et al., 2010). In fact, Zellman, Perlman, Le, and Setodji (2008) stated that when programs implemented a day-to-day caring and learning environment, achievement outcomes towards kindergarten readiness improve.

For this reason, the conceptual framework was conceived in the belief that when early learning programs possess both structural quality and process quality, early learners experience high-quality learning. Features associated with both qualities demonstrate the importance of offering early learners an optimal learning environment that allows them to enter kindergarten ready to build on prior knowledge and experience new knowledge.

## **Introduction**

A search was conducted to locate studies related to kindergarten readiness and the key components associated with achieving kindergarten readiness for early learners. Research studies included an investigation of articles that used quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research approaches. These articles were located in peer-reviewed journals. Databases used for this study included Child Care and Early Education Connections, Education Full Text, Education Research Complete, Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar, and Sage Premier. Search terms included *structural and process quality, classroom quality, quality, teacher-student relationships, kindergarten, kindergarten readiness, school readiness, early childhood education, early childhood development, early academic skills, pre-k learners, preschool, child care, high-quality preschools, preschool curriculum, kindergarten curriculum, curriculum and*

*instruction in early childhood classrooms, academic achievement early childhood teachers, early academic skills, teacher professional development, teacher training, parental involvement in early learning programs, and parent satisfaction with early learning programs.*

### **Kindergarten Readiness**

Kindergarten readiness is associated with pre-k students understanding and being able to demonstrate learned skills during and after their pre-k years. These skills include social-emotional competence and mastery of basic skills. The ability to demonstrate cognitive abilities and social-emotional awareness is important in kindergarten readiness. According to Taleb (2013), early learning programs should focus on encouraging confidence in all early learners.

For several decades, policymakers' agendas in the United States have focused on ensuring all children are school ready (Gormley, Phillips, & Gayer, 2008). For instance, Brown (2013) stated that there has been an increase in money allotted for prekindergarten children, ages 3 to 5. In an effort to support school readiness, The National Center for Research on Early Childhood Education (NCRECE) personnel (2010a) stated that school preparation is of utmost importance. In order to guarantee all early learners are school ready and prepared for school success in later years, early learning programs have increasingly focused their attention on examining the importance of school readiness (Daily, Burkhauser, & Halle, 2011).

Chien et al. (2010) studied child engagement in order to measure its importance in relation to school readiness in early learning classrooms. The investigators recruited



2,751 children from public preschool programs. The programs involved came from two other state studies (Chien et al., 2010). The researchers used four profiles in order to study classroom engagement. These included individual instruction, free play, scaffold learning, and group instruction. In order to demonstrate profiles of classroom engagement, the researchers employed a person-centered analysis (Chien et al., 2010). The team considered whether the assigned profiles had any impact as it relates to school readiness for pre-k students and if poor children benefited from any of the profiles. Three models were used to gauge patterns of classroom engagement. The researchers' first model encouraged child-directed learning that stimulated children to explore activities of their choosing. The researchers' second model consisted of teacher facilitation, children learning from the support and instruction from their teacher. The researchers' third model emphasized critical thinking at a higher level without assistance, scaffolding. In addition, the researchers were interested in the effects of child engagement and poverty status and if there was a significant difference in the amounts of gains between underprivileged children and privileged children (Chien et al., 2010). The results consisted of five categories: descriptive, latent class analysis, predicting academic gains based on profile membership, snapshot profiles as distinct from classroom environmental quality, poverty status, and children's classroom engagement. In conclusion, the study results showed children from underprivileged environments had greater achievements than those children from a more stable background. In comparison, children from a more stable background had greater gains in scaffold learning, free play, and group instruction.

It was also noted there was a substantial difference in letter-word identification and counting (Chien et al., 2010).

A particularly intriguing research study showed children from a disadvantaged background and attend a high quality learning program appear to do well during their kindergarten year (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2011). As early learners begin their schooling, teachers in early learning programs must ensure that skills being taught are effective in preparing children for kindergarten success (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2011).

Early learning is undeniably the foundation towards successful school learning (Armstrong, Missall, Shaffer, & Hojnoski, 2009; Perry & Weinstein, 1998; Pianta, 2007; Ramey & Ramey, 1994). School readiness for early learners should consist of social-emotional and cognitive development (Halle, Hair, Wandner, & Chien, 2012). According to H. J. Jeon et al. (2011), children who receive early foundational skills such as cognitive and social-emotional skills have a better chance of learning more difficult skills as they progress in school. For example, when the child grows and develops in the areas of social, emotional, and academics, school attainment as well as a sense of belonging is achieved (Daniels, 2014). Affording early learners the opportunity to experience well-defined developmental domains during early learning allows for positive growth in cognitive reasoning and future school success (Cunha, Heckman, Lochner, & Masterov, 2006). In a review of early learning guidelines and kindergarten readiness, Daily et al. (2011) noted that children who demonstrated success in kindergarten were exposed to developmental domains during early learning years.

According to Commodari (2013), early learning programs should focus on established skills such as social, cognitive, and behavioral in relation to school readiness. Demonstrated proficiencies in developmental domains in kindergarten are strong indicators of school success (H. J. Jeon et al., 2011). While some children enter school ready to learn, many do not. These children often struggle academically as well as demonstrate behavioral problems. Often these struggles continue throughout their schooling (Duncan et al., 2007; Ladd, 2006). In fact, Halle et al. (2012) stated that school readiness not only takes place in a school setting, but it also entails other settings where social and academic skills are practiced. These other settings include a child's home life and/or community.

According to High (2008), certain developmental skills should be self-regulating as it relates to school readiness. Factors that support school readiness are the child's own readiness, family support, and community resources. Growth and development seem to transpire in children through constant interaction with others. Early learning programs should afford children the opportunity to interact with peers, teachers, and learning resources by ensuring the learning environment is crafted for interactions with others and children learn from associated interactions (NCRECE, 2010a).

### **High-Quality Programs**

Identification as a high-quality early learning program requires certain attributes that should be apparent to the casual observer. These attributes include positive teacher-student and peer interactions, enriching learning experiences, appropriate student-teacher

ratios, suitable curriculum and resources, and a safe and secure environment (Weiland, Ulvestad, Sachs, & Yoshikawa, 2013).

Fuligni, Howes, Lara-Cinisomo, and Lynn (2009) mentioned efforts that contributed to increasing funding towards public pre-k programs. They further explained public policy concerns about accountability for high-quality early learning programs. Cognitive and social-emotional growth has been considered strong conjecturers in categorizing childcare quality (Dowsett, Huston, Imes, & Gennetian, 2008). Consequently, the level of academic success in kindergarten is unknown as it relates to quality indicators (NCRECE, 2010a).

Research supports the need for high quality pre-school programs. According to Gormley et al. (2008), the Georgetown Public Policy Institute and Center for Research on Children in the United States (CROCUS) funded a research project to observe Oklahoma's state pre-k program on how school readiness has enhanced preschool programs. Gormley et al. concluded that Oklahoma's pre-k programs standards compared to other pre-k programs were more advanced. For instance, highly-qualified early learning teachers receive higher pay and better benefits. Participants in this study included Tulsa's pre-k programs, Head Start programs, and kindergartners. Researchers observed short-term test scores gains by using the Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Test. The subtests used consisted of applied problems, letter-word identification, and spelling. The aforementioned subtests were chosen because of their appropriateness for 4 and 5 year olds, their use by other researchers who have studied children who have been characterized as at-risk and from diverse populations, and the predictability for later

academic success. In order to refrain from selection bias, two regression-discontinuities were used. The first treatment group included 1,264 kindergarteners who attended a pre-k program in Tulsa. For comparison, 1,492 pre-k children were selected before their pre-k year. The second treatment group included 327 kindergartners who attended a Head Start program in Tulsa and 483 pre-k students who were about to start a Head Start program for comparison. The authors concluded that cognitive development improved for early learners in the Tulsa pre-k programs while the effects of Head Start programs were also impressive. When associated with early learners in Head Start programs, Tulsa's early learners in public school showed significant results in preacademic subjects (reading, writing, and math). The researchers also argued that risk factors such as family and environment can have an adverse effect on pre-k programs. The Foundation for Child Development and other researchers championed these gains as strengthening and sustaining high-quality early education programs spanning the pre-k to third grade years (Gormley et al., 2008). It should be noted that results from both programs might show differences because of (a) types of children enrolled and (b) purpose of the programs.

Researchers at the NCRECE (2010b) conducted a study to examine the extent an early learning program prepares students for school readiness. The researchers observed families with low-income status to see if their status affected children's social-emotional and preacademics (NCRECE, 2010b). The study's participants included 1,129 children from 671 pre-k classrooms (public, Head Start, and community-based programs) from 11 states. The quality of classroom interaction was measured by using the assessment tool, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Out of the 671 participants, 10

were further evaluated in order to focus on school readiness as it relates to social and academic results (NCRECE, 2010b). The results revealed that children responded better in the areas of social-emotional development and language skills when teachers were caring, receptive, and provided high-quality instruction. In addition, children did not benefit when teachers demonstrated a lack of instructional support. Hence, ensuring low-income early learners receive adequate classroom quality through teacher-student interaction is vital in cultivating preacademics skills as well as social and emotional skills (NCRECE, 2010a). Demanding moderate to high classroom quality develops strong academic and social outcomes for children. These benefits will unmistakably support school readiness.

Early childhood programs are needed to prepare early learners intellectual growth and support the development of social-emotional skills (Bradley et al., 2009). In order for students to perform academically, school readiness needs to be included in the equation of school success. School readiness needs to be understood by all providers in order to ensure all students experience positive outcomes (Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes, & Karoly, 2008).

According to Howes et al. (2008), prior to kindergarten, early learning programs need to adopt a learning environment that enriches preacademic skills and positive behaviors. Research in early childhood programs should emphasize the importance of school readiness. Quality learning environments and teacher views should be evident in early learning settings. According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network (2005), gains in cognitive and

language development appear to be more beneficial for children who are at a disadvantage of not achieving because of socioeconomic factors (as cited by Winter & Kelley, 2008). Recent research in the field of early childhood education has documented proof how early experiences have a deeper impact in the growth and development of young learners' preacademics and social-emotional skills (Daily et al., 2011). By increasing access to high quality programs, young children will benefit from school success.

In order to ensure all early learners have a chance at experiencing educational achievement, it is essential that early care programs are effective. Notably, many states have been very public about supporting early learning programs and increasing accessibility to 4-year-olds and at-risk 3-year-olds (P. Goldstein, Warde, & Peluso, 2013). According to Yamamoto and Li (2012), early entrance into a high-quality early learning program is promising as it relates to later educational success. It demonstrates aptitude in kindergarten math and reading skills as well as low levels of behavioral issues. Equally important, an investigation focused on an assessment of an early childhood program yielded evidence that when programs concentrate on refining kindergarten preparedness, outcomes in the cognitive domain appear to be greater (Burchinal, Vernon-Feagans, Vitiello, Greenberg, & The Family Life Project Key Investigators, 2014).

Differences in the way many early learning programs operate makes it difficult for administrators, educators, and researchers to assess whether an early learning program

is of high-quality (Yamamoto & Li, 2012). A range of these differences includes working environments, staff experiences, or quality resources.

### **Structural Quality and Process Quality**

Recently, researchers have been examining many early learning programs' main features to see if these programs offer effective high-quality experiences. These features include engaging environments, well-being, teacher qualifications, and teacher-student ratio (Barnett & Frede, 2010; Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Sansanelli, & Hustedt, 2009; Vandell et al., 2010). Preacademic skills are critical in the growth and development of a child's preschool years (Vitiello, Booren, Downer, & Williford, 2012). Fuligni et al. (2009) originally stated that an emphasis on structural and process quality contributes to the success of childcare centers and preschool programs. Child care centers and preschool programs should include two types of quality measures: structure and process quality. Structural quality should show a teacher's educational attainment and preparation, ages of children, and teacher-student ratio. Process quality measures how teachers instruct children in their learning environment (Torquati, Raikes, Huddleston-Casas, Bovaird, & Harris, 2011). According to Fuligni et al., many activities and teacher-student interaction experiences are characteristically assessed by using observational methods. Classifications of both structural and process quality are important measures of many child care centers or preschool programs. In fact, Mashburn et al. (2008) explained preschool excellence should demonstrate components that target both aspects of process quality and structural quality. For example, a teacher's understanding of curricula, teacher-student ratio, a teacher's educational attainment and training, group size, and the



availability of additional resources for families and children is vital (Mashburn et al., 2008). In addition, a child's learning experience should be assessed as it relates to process quality. For example, a program should demonstrate the qualities of classroom routines, the implementation of educational experiences, the accessibility to age-appropriate resources, and significant teacher-student interactions (Hamre & Pianta, 2007). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (2005) described these features as effective in providing foundational support to early learners.

Some research has shown that structural quality has little effect on a child's long-term outcomes (Cassidy et al., 2009). With regard to structural features, there are four characteristics that measure school readiness: "(a) classrooms with a small vs. large class size, (b) child-to-teacher ratio, (c) the type of curriculum being used, and (d) teachers with high- vs. low-level credentials" (NCRECE, 2010a, p. 1). Variables measured through structural quality consist of a teacher's educational attainment, teacher-student ratio, and age groups (Hestenes, Cassidy, Shim, & Hegde, 2008). According to Bigras et al. (2010), many variables linked to structural quality have been mistakenly connected to process quality. For this reason, the association between structural quality and process quality are important as it relates to policy decisions. In contrast, Cassidy et al. (2009) stated that structural quality has had an impact in the classroom environment in recent years. For instance, children are impacted indirectly by rules and policies implemented by school leaders but are impacted directly by other variables such as classroom size. Despite the different attributes of structural quality, the effects that it has on children are

undeniable. While some attributes might have little or no impact, others have a greater influence such as the teacher-student ratio (Cassidy et al., 2009).

The important key factors of process quality are what children are being taught and how the teacher and student interact (Cassidy et al., 2009). According to Bigras et al. (2010), how a child interacts with others and the opportunities to learn are process quality. These learning opportunities are experienced through a teacher's love and care, a safe and warm environment to learn in, and a growing relationship with others (Bigras et al., 2010).

Studies have recently shown how process quality is a key factor in a child's growth and development (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006), especially as it relates to teachers creating a warm and positive learning environment. It is important to note that structural quality and process quality are dependent on each other. Each quality is valued as a separate measure which holds importance in ensuring a high-quality early learning program (Cassidy et al., 2009).

### **Curriculum**

The importance in providing school ready skills in preparation for kindergarten readiness has augmented efforts in providing early learners with an age appropriate curriculum. Teachers in these early learning programs are responsible for providing and implementing new curriculum (Lieber et al., 2010). In fact, Spencer (2011) explained many teachers in the United States change curriculum often in order to meet new standards. Decisions about educating young children should include research-based practices. The purpose of an early childhood teacher is to support early learners with new

and exciting experiences while supporting their social interactions with others (Shidler, 2009).

An early childhood curriculum provides an outline of what and how children should learn. An early childhood curriculum, particularly one that is both developmentally appropriate and includes attention to teaching young children important academic competencies, along with ongoing support for teachers through professional development, are promising approaches for influencing excellence in instructional interaction between the child and teacher (Lieber et al., 2009). In addition, Spencer (2011) emphasized early literacy skills that include phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, or both as a priority in early learning programs. Being able to connect major content domains with a research-based curriculum is a starting point in ensuring that early learners experience school success.

As early childhood educators create plans to ensure the educational success for all students, there are two important principles for early childhood teachers to remember: (a) early learners are unique and (b) it is necessary to provide learning, not just enjoyable activities in the curriculum. Horn and Banerjee (2009) stated that providing children with creative learning experiences from a well-defined curriculum will increase learner interest. Furthermore, the early childhood educator's responsibility is to plan according to the uniqueness of each child. In essence, activities need to be flexible, goal oriented, and supportive of all learners.

## **Professional Development**

In an effort to address standards being implemented in early learning programs, focus on practice and development of early childhood education is essential (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009). Sheridan et al. (2009) further explained that early childhood educators should implement best practices when preparing early learners for kindergarten entrance. Teachers who are well-informed and develop professional knowledge are better equipped in meeting all early learners' needs (Han, 2014). In supporting the high demands of ensuring early learners are kindergarten ready, early childhood practices should be understood by the teachers (Sheridan et al., 2009). In essence, teachers should be able to support early learners through educational opportunities regardless of diverse backgrounds and unpredictable skill capabilities (Sheridan et al., 2009). Teachers of early learners should include new and creative strategies to improve the overall effectiveness of their instruction. In reality, early childhood professional development includes teaching practices to enhance the skills and knowledge of early childhood educators (Sheridan et al., 2009).

As early childhood education continues to be important in preparing early learners for school success, implementation of well-defined preschools with skilled teachers are imperative (Lasser & Fite, 2011). In Lasser and Fite's (2011) explanation of the six Cs, they demonstrate the importance of teacher professional development. The six qualities include confidence, collaboration, communication, content, creative innovation, and critical thinking. Additionally, teacher knowledgeable of the six Cs can implement these qualities in their instructional time with children (Lasser & Fite, 2011).

Being able to understand theories related to early childhood education can be a challenge. With this understanding, teachers can distinguish between the process and the effectiveness of professionalism as it relates to children and parents (Sheridan et al., 2009). Regardless of the shortcomings in early childhood professional development, effective teaching practices are imperative. In fact, it is critical to address the concern of some teachers' abilities to adapt to more effective teaching practices (Lieber et al., 2009).

### **Parental Involvement**

It is necessary to determine how early childhood programs involve parents and create a partnership between the school and parent. According to a study conducted in New Zealand, Mahmood (2013) stated that early learners' success is dependent on active participation from both teachers and families. In order for this to occur, communication between early childhood programs' leaders and families has to demonstrate that the program leaders are in the practice of supporting healthy and strong families. In fact, early childhood professionals have always supported families in the growth and development of their young children. By far, this is one of the strengths early childhood educators possess (Olson, 2007).

Becoming familiar with each child's family is critical for teachers. Families are knowledgeable of their child's interest, disposition, and perhaps how they learn. Being able to recognize a family's understanding of kindergarten readiness will aid in their child's growth and development (Belfield & Garcia, 2014). Research has shown that a strong parent-teacher relationship and supporting practices can have a great impact on the way children progress in school (Mahmood, 2013).

In fact, Yamamoto and Li (2012) explained that it is critical to understand parents' views about early childhood education because parents are the decision makers for their children. Teachers of early learners can assist families in supporting their child's growth and development through continued encouragement. Early learners progress mentally and physically when they feel supported and loved (Morrison, Storey, & Zhang, 2011). Even though teacher and parent relationships are a critical and recognized component in sustaining a positive learning environment for young children, there is very little information about how these relationships are established and retained (Baumgartner & McBride, 2009).

Family participation in an early learning environment is valuable to all involved in the education of young children. Interactions between the program staff and families are an important factor related to developmentally appropriate practices (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Parents play a crucial part in the development of their child's growth and development. Parent participation includes activities that take place outside of school. Even though early learning programs play a vital role in school readiness, a parent's involvement also influences school readiness. As stated by Belfield and Garcia (2014), parents are the decision makers when it comes to where their child will attend school. According to Morrison et al. (2011), there are many activities in which families can become involved to support the growth and development in their child's education. These activities might include a two-way communication regarding their child's growth and development with the early learning program staff, continued support as it relates to the child's learning or family participation in the early learning program, and guidance as

it relates to the growth and development of their child. As families continue to be participants in their child's education, Waander, Mendez, and Downer (2007) expressed how continued support aids in attainment of better social-emotional skills as well as academic outcomes. Baumgartner and McBride (2009) contended that a partnership between a child's parents and school staff members was imperative in ensuring positive outcomes related to school readiness.

### **Implications**

Early learning programs exhibiting high quality standards have a powerful and positive influence on young children as it relates to pre-k learners being kindergarten ready. According to The Centre for Community Child Health (2008), children who have been exposed to quality care, early learning, and positive relationships are in a better position to receive continued learning than children who have not received qualities related to kindergarten readiness.

According to the research questions related to this qualitative case study, an examination was completed to explore teachers' perceptions of what constitutes high-quality learning as it relates to kindergarten readiness. In addition, parents' understanding and support of kindergarten readiness were explored. The school under study was given recommendations regarding the data and findings and analysis with specific recommendations in an effort to guide educators and parents in supporting kindergarten readiness. In addition, a professional development program was developed in order to support the findings of this study.

## Summary

Early learners attending an early learning program is an essential step in ensuring future success in school. Providing opportunities for a child to flourish in a high-quality environment is of utmost importance. Children experience socialization in the confinements of an early learning program that places emphasis on early development (Slutsky & Pistorova, 2010). Slutsky and Pistorova (2010) explained that early learners should receive quality care and experiences from caring early childhood teachers. In addition, early childhood programs must focus on encouraging high-quality environments that support young children and their families.

In Section 1, I provided an introduction of the problem. In addition, I included the definition of the problem, the rationale on the local level, and research questions. Lastly, I provided a conceptual framework and a review of literature.

Section 2 provides an explanation of the research methodology for the completion of the study. I included an explanation of the qualitative research design and approach, population, sampling, and ensuring research validity and reliability. Furthermore, I addressed an explanation of potential researcher bias and data collection methods. Finally, data analysis logistics and assurance of an ethical study are detailed.



## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

A qualitative case study was conducted for this research. When using a qualitative research design, the researcher is trying to define, describe, and comprehend a particular phenomenon (Graue & Karabon, 2013). With qualitative research, the investigator attempts to expand on a particular phenomenon providing information towards improvement and meaning. According to Stake (2013), the investigator observes the intricacy of human interaction. These interactions are observed to gain knowledge of human interactions in a particular setting. The general purposes of qualitative research are to support people and organizations in understanding their experiences and building knowledge from these experiences (Merriam, 2009). In order to gain perspectives as to how teachers and parents understand kindergarten readiness, a qualitative case study was conducted at a Dallas, Texas early learning center that provides a pre-k instructional program to 150 early learners. An examination of teachers' understanding of process quality and structural quality and what types of learning experiences pre-k students are experiencing in relation to kindergarten readiness was conducted through semistructured interviews. In addition, what parents are doing to support their child's early learning experiences as it relates to kindergarten readiness was investigated through semistructured interviews.

### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

For this research, a case study design was used. Case studies include a researcher conducting a detailed investigation of a single case phenomenon (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). According to Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), data collected for case studies should be rich in details and contain personal experiences that relate to the phenomenon being studied. Other types of qualitative research include ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology research. There is a similarity between a case study and ethnography research. For example, both rely on key informants, discovery of meaning, and providing detail-rich data. However, the difference between these two types of research is case studies seek to explore and investigate a central phenomenon among groups of people or individuals, while ethnography seeks to discover the principle of cultures and their intricacies (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Therefore, ethnography research was not suitable for this study. Grounded theory seeks to build theory and is not particularly concerned with providing detailed-rich descriptions (Merriam, 2009). In view of this study, grounded theory research was not appropriate since seeking to build or develop theory is not of interest. Phenomenological research seems to be comparable with case studies as it relates to understanding participant interpretation of experiences, but several differences exist. One difference is how the researcher interacts with participants of the study. Researchers who employ a phenomenological design must first spend time interacting and observing participants to gain a better understanding of their language and how they interact as it relates to their

life experiences (Lodico et al., 2010). As with case studies, first, the problem must be identified and then a rationale is developed (Lodico et al., 2010).

In addition, three special features can characterize case studies. These include descriptive, heuristic, and particularistic. Descriptive is showing a detailed, rich description of the final product under study (Merriam, 2009). Heuristic is the understanding and awareness of the phenomenon and particularistic is focusing on a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). For this study, all three features became evident. Furthermore, qualitative case studies consist of three types: instrumental, collective, and intrinsic. With an instrumental case study, the researcher investigates a particular topic and provides an understanding to a particular issue (Merriam, 2009). Even though this type of a case study allows the author to provide insight into the issues studied, kindergarten readiness is not of secondary interest. Using a collective case study, the investigator studies several cases (Glesne, 2011). For this study, only one case was studied. Therefore, an intrinsic case study was appropriate for this qualitative case study. Intrinsic case study involves the researcher having an interest in a specific group of people or organization as it relates to the phenomenon being studied (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). By using this type of case study, an in-depth discussion and suggestions for furthering positive outcomes for pre-k students in the Dallas area early learning program took place.

A qualitative case study at the school under study in Dallas, Texas was conducted in order to assess whether the school under study was effectively preparing early learners for kindergarten success. This case study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do teachers describe their understanding of structural quality and process quality?
2. How do teachers describe their understanding of process quality in an early childhood program as it relates to the curriculum implementation?
3. What are teachers' perceptions of the structural quality of early childhood settings and its influence on pre-k student learning?
4. How do parents describe their understanding of kindergarten readiness?
5. What are parents doing to support their child's early learning experiences related to kindergarten readiness?

### **Population**

The targeted population for this qualitative case study consisted of the entire population of teachers and parents. Population can be defined as an entire group of people with similar characteristics (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). Identifying the targeted population is imperative in qualitative case studies. Teachers were selected because of certain knowledge and skill sets required to answer research questions pertaining to this qualitative case study. In addition, parents were designated because they are the decision makers in their child's education. A researcher needs to establish a population in order to select a sample.

The site under study was chosen because of the target population of teachers and parents. Since the qualitative case study requires examining teachers' understanding of structural quality and process quality and parents' understanding and support of kindergarten readiness, the site under study was an appropriate fit. Early learners at the

school under study were in the process of being prepared for kindergarten success. The teachers at the chosen site have been teaching early learners for at least 1 year.

I was granted permission to conduct research at a particular site. This permission is usually granted by the board of directors or by individuals with administrative responsibilities (Creswell, 2012). The director of the early learning program, who was also identified as the gatekeeper, gave me access to the site as well as the teachers and parents purposely selected for this study.

### **Sampling**

The sample for this qualitative case study derived from the targeted population. A sample is a group of people selected from a targeted population (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). Purposeful sampling was the method used in this qualitative case study. Purposeful sampling is a selection of individuals who can bring ideas and knowledge to the issues being examined (Lodico et al., 2010). The purposeful sampling for this qualitative case study included all 16 early childhood teachers and 17 parents of the early learners at the school under study. Advantages of using this type of sampling allowed for accurate results and precise sampling of targeted population and was less time consuming. The criteria teachers met were working as an early childhood educator at the school under study and having at least 1 year of teaching experience in the field of early childhood education. The criterion for parents included legal guardians who make educational decisions for their child(ren).

The school under study has eight classrooms with two teachers each. In each of the classrooms, two parents were purposefully selected to participate in the study. To aid

in selecting parents, I used the pulling out of a hat technique. I obtained a list of all parents from each classroom. I cut and placed each parent's name in a hat and pulled out the first two names. If by chance the parent decided not to participate, the next parent was selected. This continued until there were two parents from each classroom. Employing this type of method supported in eliminating bias as it relates to selecting parents for the research study. In selecting fewer participants, saturation and redundancy through a comprehensive knowledge base of the similarity between the participants was obtained. It is common to investigate a small number of individuals in qualitative case studies. This allows the researcher to provide a detail-rich picture of the case being studied (Creswell, 2012).

In establishing a researcher-participant working relationship, respect is a key factor and an integral component in qualitative research. My ethical responsibilities were to respect all participants associated with this study. As a researcher employed at Southern Methodist University and an early childhood trainer for the state of Texas, I have conducted research and training at the school under study. I had not had any prior interaction with the parents at the school under study. As a researcher, my personal attitudes and experience can perhaps produce bias when reporting findings in qualitative research. In order to avoid this type of bias, I was disciplined in collecting data and strived to be objective.

The researcher should be cautious in how the study might impact the participant's life (Demirdirek, 2011). In order to maintain a respectful working relationship with participants, I explained the rule of confidentiality prior to interviewing the participants.

This included nonjudgment of participants and maintaining confidential records.

According to Demirdirek (2011), participants are active participants in the study.

Steps were in place to safeguard participants' privacy and protect them from harm. First, I asked the administrator at the selected site to sign a letter of participation. This letter included the purpose of the study, the responsibilities of the participants, and consent in asking for participation. In addition, the letter stated that participation was voluntary and participants can end their participation at any time. Second, the letter was submitted as an attachment with the IRB application to Walden University for approval; and third, after approval (# 04-27-15-0154176), consent forms were signed and returned prior to collecting data at the school under study. As noted in the consent forms, participants were made aware of the voluntary participation and the option to withdraw at any time. Preparing for unexpected issues was crucial in completing this qualitative research. In order to protect participants' privacy, all participants were assigned a letter. Information collected is stored in a secure Dropbox system. All data will be saved for 5 years. After the 5 year period, all data will be destroyed.

### **Ensuring Research Validity and Reliability**

Qualitative researchers use various validation strategies to ensure their research study demonstrates validity and reliability. Validity as it relates to qualitative research is ensuring the findings are reflective of the phenomenon that is being studied. In addition, these findings are supported by evidence (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011). Reliability refers to the replication of research findings (Merriam, 2009). Validity consists of internal and external validity. Internal validity attempts to observe congruency between

research findings and reality (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) provided eight types of strategies to use when striving for validity. Internal validity consists of triangulation, member checks, adequate engagement in data collection, reflexivity, peer review, and audit trail. External validity consists of providing comprehensive descriptions and maximum variation.

Triangulation is used to create and check validity in research by using multiple sources of data (Guion et al., 2011). In this qualitative case study, I employed this strategy by using multiple sources of data collection. Data were collected, observed, and compared during different times. In addition, I interviewed participants with different levels of understanding and perspectives.

Member checking is the second most common method used when ensuring accuracy and credibility of findings. The process of member checking involves the researcher asking some participants to review the data and asking for their feedback as well as reviewing the preliminary analysis. In this qualitative case study, I employed this strategy by asking all participants to review their transcribed interview to check for accuracy. This process supported the research as it relates to quality and accuracy of the researcher's work (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). By using this process of member checking for credibility, I eliminated any risk of misunderstanding about what was said during the interview sessions (Maxwell, 2005). In addition, participants who reviewed data were able to identify their interpretive experiences or support the researcher in suggesting any modification of their views (Merriam, 2009).



A third approach to support internal validity is adequate engagement in data collection. In this qualitative case study, I employed this strategy by getting close and personal with the participants in order to judge their understanding of the phenomenon and observe if saturation has been reached (Merriam, 2009). Saturation was reached once I heard the same information over and over.

Reflexivity and peer review are the last strategies in ensuring validity. Reflexivity takes place when the researcher critically reflects on their position as an investigator and how their values and experience might or might not impact the final results of the research study (Merriam, 2009). Peer review is the process of allowing peers to review your manuscript in order to make suggestions. In this qualitative case study, I employed these strategies by reflecting on my biases as a researcher in order to understand my ethics and influences in the conclusion of this research study. In addition, I asked my mentor to review transcribed data in order to assess if data were adequate.

External validity is to what degree results can be generalized or used in other situations. Strategies for supporting external validity include providing comprehensive descriptions and maximum variation (Merriam, 2009). In this qualitative case study, I provided comprehensive descriptions of context that can assist readers in acknowledging if their situation is comparable to the study. In addition, maximum variation is often associated with purposeful sampling. This type of sampling allowed me to select a diverse group of people in order to observe different perspectives.

Reliability is concerned with repeated results. This means if the study is repeated over and over again, the same results will appear (Merriam, 2009). A strategy associated

with reliability is an audit trail. In this qualitative case study, I maintained a running record of how the study was conducted. The record included data collection, data analysis process, and any changes made throughout the study (Merriam, 2009).

### **Data Collection**

The process of gathering information from participants in order to understand the central phenomenon took place through collecting data. Qualitative research is collected through analyzing participants' words. For this study, data were collected through face to face semistructured interviews with teachers and parents. These interviews consisted of asking teachers and parents semistructured questions. One limitation when conducting interviews is researcher bias. Researchers' personal attitudes and experience can sometimes produce bias when reporting findings in qualitative research. This type of bias was avoided by being disciplined and striving to be objective. Furthermore, interviews can be time sensitive and some probing questions are asked of participants to clarify or expound on their responses.

### **Interviews**

Semistructured interviews consisted of preplanned questions which allowed for accurate data from participants (Glesne, 2011). The types of semistructured questions included knowledge questions and experience and behavior questions. Knowledge questions consisted of asking participants about a certain knowledge base or skill set. Experience and behavior questions involved questions related to what a participant has experienced and their behavior towards that experience and activities (Merriam, 2009). The advantages in conducting semistructured interviews are that data received were

detailed and rich in words as well as providing possible replication of data while asking spontaneous questions in order to gain as much information as possible. In order to collect rich detailed data, face to face semistructured interviews with teachers and parents were conducted. Interviews were ideal with teachers because of their longevity at the site and not being hesitant in sharing ideas and information. During the interviews, an audio recorder was used to record important information so that no data were overlooked during the interviews. Interview questions can be found in Appendixes B and C. The individual interviews lasted no more than 40 minutes. Teachers were given the option of meeting either in the morning, during student nap time, or after school during a given week. Parents were given the option to meet throughout the day in the parent resource room. Prior to starting interviews, research questions, interview process, and space to take notes were neatly outlined on an interview protocol.

The director of the early learning program granted access to participants and to the site. The director ensured entrance to rooms in order to conduct interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

During the data analysis process, I was able to organize and understand information that had been observed, perceived, and spoken (Glesne, 2011). In this research study, I employed an inductive process called thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is a method used in identifying, examining, and reporting themes found in data (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). During this process, I gathered detailed information and used this information to formulate themes and overlapping themes, categories, and coding.

Analyzing data involves several steps. These steps included category construction, sorting categories and data, and naming categories. In order to begin the steps, audio was transcribed into text. Reading the first interview transcript and setting field notes is known as category construction (Merriam, 2009). It is during this process I took notes in the margin which included comments, observation, or any other pertinent information. Effective implementation of note taking by using descriptive words or symbols is identified as coding. Coding is established after reading transcripts (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Constructing categories were completed when assigning codes to data (Merriam, 2009).

In order for me to create a guide for subsequent data, the first sets of coding were used. It is important to note that when establishing the analysis I was open to all possibilities and making note of all possible answers that were relevant to the stated research questions. This type of coding is open coding (Merriam, 2009). Through this process, I started seeing categories or themes as patterns appeared. Thereafter, another type of coding became essential. Axial coding, sometimes referred to as analytical coding, is the process of grouping established codes. This type of coding appeared through participants understanding and thinking of the questions (Merriam, 2009).

The next step in analyzing data is sorting categories and data. In order to assign codes, themes, or categories to data, I organized and separated my collection of notes by similarity (Merriam, 2009). After sorting categories, I created folders for each named category. Afterwards, I assigned each piece of coinciding data to a category and placed it

in a folder. After placing data in folders, I identified individual information by codes in order to help when reviewing documented information.

The last step in analyzing data is naming categories. Naming categories is the understanding of explicit information and summarizing information. I completed this process by observing what was seen during examination of data.

In order to improve credibility of findings, I followed a number of approaches (Merriam, 2009). Validating accuracy and credibility of findings is important. The approach used for increasing the accuracy and credibility for this research study was triangulation. Triangulation can be defined as using several types of data collection and sources to increase credibility of results (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). There are four types of triangulation known. These include using multiple investigators, the use of multiple methods, using multiple theories to confirm developing findings, and multiple sources of data. For this qualitative case study, I employed multiple sources of data. For the purposes of this study, multiple sources of data were collected, observed, and compared during different times. In addition, interviewing participants with various levels of understanding and perspectives as it relates to this qualitative case study was examined. I collected data from teachers and parents at the school under study through individual semistructured interviews. After data collection, I coded and categorized information into themes.

When analyzing data and some parts cannot be interpreted, data must not be ignored, but be reexamined by comparing notes from member checking and using preliminary analysis. During this process, I looked for supporting data and interpreted

data thoroughly. If the interpretation was in doubt, I made the decision to either retain the information or modify the interpretation.

### **Qualitative Results**

The purpose of this research study was to explore teachers' perceptions of what constitutes high-quality learning as it relates to kindergarten readiness and parents' understanding and support of kindergarten readiness. Participants in the study included 16 teachers and teacher assistants who had been working in early childhood education for at least 1 year and 17 parents. Teachers considered lead teachers were assigned a "T" followed by a capital letter and teachers who were considered teacher assistants were assigned "TA" and followed by a capital letter. All teachers consented to participate in the study. The target number of parent participation was 16; however, one parent wanted to participate even though she was not selected. Each parent was given a "P" followed by a capital letter.

### **Participant Selection**

Participants for this study were selected using a purposeful sampling technique. Teachers were chosen because of their unique skills and knowledge sets. Parents were chosen because they are the decision makers for their child(ren) educational experiences. A letter of invitation was distributed to teachers and parents at different times explaining the study and expectations. Teachers received an invitation letter during a meeting conducted by me. During this time, I explained the study and answered any questions about benefits and risk associated with conducting the interviews. Teachers were given the choice to either call or email within seven days to inform me if they were interested in

participating. After doing so, consent forms were signed by teachers and collected.

Parents were given a letter of invitation to participate after conducting the pulling of the hat technique. This technique was used twice for three of the classrooms because some parents declined to participate. After distribution of the letters, a meeting was held for parents to explain the scope of the study. Parents were given the opportunity to either call or email within seven days to inform me if they were interested in participating.

After doing so, consent forms were signed by parents and collected.

### **Participant Background**

The teacher participants consisted of eight teachers (T) and eight teacher assistants (TA). Each of the eight classrooms had one teacher and one teacher assistant. Of the 16 teachers, one was male. Participants' teaching experience ranged from 1 to 8 years. There was a range of educational attainment among the teachers and teacher assistants. Eight of the teachers held BA degrees and five held AA degrees. Two of the teachers who attained AA degrees were in the process of completing their BA degrees. Three of the teacher assistants had a high school diploma. It is worth noting that all teachers are required to have at least a BA or BS degree and teacher assistants are required to have at least a high school diploma.

Parent participants consisted of 17 parents. Of the 17 parents, two were males. Three of the participants held a bachelors' degree, six held an associates' degree, six held a high school diploma, and one a 10<sup>th</sup>-grade education. Nine of the parents interviewed, had male students and eight of the parents had female students at the school under study.

Students had attended the school under study between 1 to 2 years with one student being in attendance for 1 month.

### **Data Collection Process**

Data were collected over a 3-week period in May 2015. Face-to-face semistructured interviews lasted no more than 40 minutes and were audio recorded for accuracy. All interviews were conducted in a quiet conference room located in the back of the school. During the interviews, I took notes in the space provided for each question asked. The margin was also used to note any pertinent information, comments, or observation. After I transcribed the interviews, each participant was emailed their interview to check for accuracy. Hand analysis was used to search and color code pertinent information from the interviews. An additional 4 weeks were required to reread and review all transcribed interviews and coding.

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How do teachers describe their understanding of structural quality and process quality?
2. How do teachers describe their understanding of process quality in an early childhood program as it relates to the curriculum implementation?
3. What are teachers' perceptions of the structural quality of early childhood settings and its influence on pre-k student learning?
4. How do parents describe their understanding of kindergarten readiness?
5. What are parents doing to support their child's early learning experiences related to kindergarten readiness?



## **Findings**

Research Question 1: How do teachers describe their understanding of structural quality and process quality?

In reference to the first question, all teachers described their understanding of structural quality and process quality. The most recurrent themes that emerged from data analysis were (a) features that influence operational quality and (b) elements that promote high-quality learning.

### **Features That Influence Operational Quality**

The extent to which teacher and teacher assistants understand the features of structure quality were questioned. When asked to express their understanding, a small number of teachers and teacher assistants were able to provide characteristics related to teacher-child ratio, teacher expertise, director expertise, and management of the center. Some teachers mentioned having the appropriate group size and teacher-child ratio. For example, TA believed group size and teacher-child ratio were critical factors in providing students a positive learning environment. She continued,

My classroom consists of 18 students. I am responsible for nine students; while my assistant is in-charge of the other nine. These groups are called constant care groups. During this time, we work with our groups on skills or concepts that were introduced during large group discussions taught by me.

Many teachers and teacher assistants noted other key factors that impact student learning. TAL believed teachers and teacher assistants should demonstrate appropriate

teacher expertise in order to reach all learners. TAL explained the importance of teacher expertise,

A classroom should have enough space to carry out age-appropriate activities.

Each teacher should have the right teacher expertise in working with young children and the administrator needs to make sure that the center is meeting all licensing obligations.

A teacher assistant added both teacher expertise and director expertise are essential qualities. TAP expressed,

Without the right structure, you cannot build on quality. Quality must be seen from the top (administration) down. There is a trickle-down effect. It affects morale and engagement. A person can have a highly structured facility with poor quality teaching and in turn have a high turnover rate.

Five teacher and teacher assistants expressed the importance of structural quality as it relates to center management. For example, TO explained structural quality is the providing of adequate training for teachers and administrators. She continued to explain the importance of the administrator being able to manage the center adequately; as this is a crucial component of structural quality.

Another teacher, TM noted the importance of the center being managed effectively and how the director is a direct reflection of what learning experiences early learners are receiving. TM stated,

I do not necessarily know the importance, but evidence gathered over the years probably shows support that there are aspects that are important in an early

childhood educational setting. And I think from my 13 years of experiences, I would say that the evidence must be right. I have worked at some centers that were of poor quality and I typically have to say that it is reflective of the administration. The director was not aware of what works best in an early childhood setting.

The overall sentiment of some teachers and teacher assistants identified structural quality as being a strong indicator toward demonstrating high-quality learning in an early learning program.

### **Elements That Promote High-Quality Learning**

In response to a description of their understanding of process quality, some teachers stressed that giving a child a positive educational experience and maintaining a well-equipped stimulating environment are a top priority. Other teachers felt that an environment should consist of age-appropriate materials and a curriculum that not only provides learning activities, but learning activities that support children in enhancing a deeper understanding of all basic skills and concepts.

Some teachers and teacher assistants believed that a child's learning environment and educational experiences are very important in preparing them for kindergarten. TD believed that learning centers are key to a child's learning environment as well as interactions between teachers and students. She added, "Activities in each center, especially the home center, reading center, and art center allow students to express themselves." In addition, TAK commented,

Allowing children to interact and be engaged in their learning environment supports kindergarten readiness. Teachers are to set the foundation for learning that helps children grow and become familiar with their immediate surroundings.

Other teachers and teacher assistants expressed how a well-equipped classroom with materials and manipulatives support early learners in building knowledge and skills. TAF stated, “Having the necessary materials for students is necessary towards success; for instance, manipulatives. Manipulatives are necessary in order to elaborate your lesson.” Another teacher expressed her responsibility as a teacher. TA stated,

My job as the lead teacher is to interact with all students in my class. I need to make sure that I have tangible materials to use with my students. Not only do I need to be able to interact with my students, but I also need to be able to communicate with parents and share any concerns I might have.

A common fact with a majority of the teachers and teacher assistants is that having age-appropriate materials and a curriculum that supports early learners is essential when developing children’s cognitive and social-emotional development. TH expressed,

Students learn information from the curriculum. The curriculum should be able to give students different learning experiences. Also, feeling safe in my classroom environment is important. Students in my class need to feel safe in their environment for them to learn.

In addition, TI discussed the impact in having an age-appropriate curriculum. TI stated,

A teacher’s constant utilization of the curriculum and expectations that are set forth by the teacher are important in preschool success. I would like to believe

that what my students are learning can be applied towards kindergarten and everyday life.

Still another teacher shared what an environment looks like when a teacher brings in age-appropriate materials. TM was knowledgeable of what a teacher needs to do in order to create an engaging environment. She expressed that a teacher needs to be aware of how to expand on the subject matter in order for children to experience learning at a higher level. In addition, she felt that bringing in additional age-appropriate materials is crucial in creating an engaging environment.

Research Question 2: How do teachers describe their understanding of process quality in an early childhood program as it relates to the curriculum implementation?

An analysis was completed on how teachers describe their understanding of process quality as it relates to curriculum. The themes that emerged were (a) teachers' experiences with the school curriculum and (b) supplemental approaches in supporting student learning.

### **Teachers' Experiences With the School Curriculum**

In reference to teacher experiences with school curriculum, teachers and teacher assistants all felt a school curriculum should include age-appropriate activities and opportunities for student learning. The school under study uses two types of curriculum: Big Day Scholastic and Scholastic Early Childhood. The Big Day Scholastic is used for the older preschoolers while the Scholastic Early Childhood is used for the younger preschoolers. Both curricula have been used at the study site for more than seven years without adding additional up-to-date resources. When asked about the proficiency of

both curricula, six out of the 16 teachers felt that both curricula were easy to follow and offered good lessons, while the other 10 teachers felt both curricula were outdated and seemed to have limitations related to student growth and development.

TAN described the simplicity of using the curriculum in her classroom. She states, “The Big Day curriculum is full of different experiences. I believe the curriculum is self-sufficient, has good ideas, and easy to follow directions.” TM described the importance in the curriculum providing lessons that are easy to follow and have meaningful connections. These meaningful lessons consist of lessons that are integrated across subject matter. She stated,

I think a good curriculum should be age-appropriate, provide good meaningful lessons, and provide easy to follows lessons and directions. As a teacher, I want to make sure my students are provided with great hands-on lessons that are relevant to their learning experiences.

Yet another teacher expressed her fondness of the curriculum. TG stated, “The curriculum is simple and easy to follow. Children seem to catch on to activities and remember activities from week to week.” TAN also expressed, “I love the curriculum. It provides my students with wonderful learning experiences. It easy to follow and teach.”

Although some teachers and teacher assistants expressed their experiences of both curricula, other teachers and teacher assistants felt that both curricula were outdated and had limitations related to growth and development. Although TA supported the Big Day curriculum, TA commented, “Most of the times, I tend to bring in more materials and

resources to compliment my lessons.” Another teacher described her experiences with the curriculum. TE stated the following experience:

The Scholastic Early Childhood curriculum is okay. I have seen other curriculums that are much more engaging, for instance, the OWL. It has more learning activities. Our curriculum lacks everyday basic life learning skills. It is very random. The lessons just touch on something one week and move on. Scholastic does not stay on a subject matter long enough for retention.

In some cases, participants expressed how both curricula were not meeting the needs of their students and limits learning experiences that support growth and development because some lessons are introduced multiple times. TC expressed her concerns:

My concerns with both curriculums, especially the Scholastic Early Childhood are that sometimes students see the same lessons twice. When they leave one classroom, they might go to another class or stay in the same class with the same curriculum that they were exposed to the year before. To me, this is a big problem. It is okay to use the same concepts, but introduce new activities along with concepts that were learned the previous year; upgrade activities.

Yet other teachers expressed their concerns with the curriculum not meeting the needs of learners. As TAF described, “Scholastic Early Childhood is limited in what it teaches. It does not give the necessary tools for students to be successful.” TH expressed, “The Big Day curriculum is really old. Students are not getting what they need. It is not beneficial.” TM supported TH comments, “It is outdated. We need

assessments that are appropriate for what children are learning today.” TAL expressed, “I love the Scholastic Early Childhood, but I think we need to move to the Big Day curriculum because our kids are more advanced.” From TAF’s perspective, a curriculum should be priority and offer children unlimited learning opportunities while giving them the necessary skills to be successful.

### **Supplemental Approaches to Student Learning**

To make an impact on student learning through the use of a curriculum that makes meaningful connections is important. Most teachers and assistant teachers believed the curriculum should focus on all developmental skills and learning centers while challenging students academically. The reported experiences related to student learning as it relates to developmental skills and learning centers were identified.

A majority of teachers and teacher assistants expressed that students should experience learning through four types of developmental skills. These are physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and language development. TAP expressed, “Creating and exposing children to all developmental skills is important to kindergarten readiness.” In addition, TAL discussed how teaching students from all developmental skills assist in supporting the development of the whole child verses focusing just on cognitive and/or language development. TD also noted that she believes the curriculum should place emphasis on the four learning domains to ensure the whole child is being developed. Overall, all teachers and teacher assistants expressed the importance in incorporating and making sure that all students are developing and learning through identifiable developmental skills. One particular teacher assistant was very vocal in expressing her



concerns with making sure that all students experience all four developmental skills. TO discussed the significance in teachers becoming knowledgeable of all four developmental skills and using that knowledge to teach early learners towards kindergarten readiness.

All teachers and teacher assistants in the study reported feeling that learning centers contribute to the overall learning of students. They explained that learning centers offer students the opportunities to work independently, express themselves, encourages students to make choices, and to work cooperatively with other students. TAB stated, “A well-planned curriculum should include opportunities for children to express themselves through learning centers.” As stated by TC, “Learning centers should be about students learning to share and being together.” In addition, TD expressed how teachers should be engaged with students in learning centers, especially those that allow students to express themselves through art and the home centers.

Research Question 3: What are teachers’ perceptions of the structural quality of early childhood settings and its influence on pre-k student learning?

Several themes were apparent in response to teacher’s perceptions of structural quality of early childhood settings and its influence on pre-k learning. The themes that emerged were (a) having adequate classroom space, (b) staff qualifications, and (c) group size.

### **Having Adequate Classroom Space**

An exploration on how classroom space and organization can influence pre-k learning was viewed. A well-organized classroom space enables students to manage their learning and experience opportunities to explore their learning environment freely. Most

teachers believed a child's learning environment should include enough space for learning and organization of the classroom.

Often, early learning programs follow certain guidelines about having enough space for each child. TAB shared, "Having enough space in your classroom for all students I believe is important." Both teachers and teacher assistants described the importance in having enough space for each child. From TH's perspective, having enough space for each student influences a child's behavior. He continued to describe how good behavior effects a positive learning environment. TH stated, "When a teacher has enough room for students to walk around and explore, student behavior is easier to manage." TO supported TH comments, "Students need space to carry out activities. Having enough space supports student developmental skills and demonstrates a highly-functional environment."

In addition to having sufficient space for all students, classroom organization was also seen as an important component of high-quality learning. TA shared,

The way a room is organized; meaning space in your classroom needs to be ready for children to learn. With that being said, the room set-up should allow students to move around the classroom with ease and socialize with their friends in the classroom. For me, I wish I had more space so that I can be a more effective teacher.

In addition, TD stated, "Without a structure, you cannot have one-on-one interaction with the students in your class. For children to learn, your classroom must be organized." Another teacher shared a similar experience regarding classroom

organization and how structural quality is key. TAG explained the following, “When you have structure in the classroom, it gives students opportunity to learn without chaos. Also, the fact that we have different centers; it gives students a chance to develop their skills in different areas of learning.” According to TO, having a well-organized classroom and adequate space for learning is essential. TO described the following:

If your classroom is not of structural quality, you probably will not have accurate space for student learning. You will not have space to organize materials and we both know that you need organization for children to function from day to day.

Similar to other teachers, TE explained, “If you do not have structure, students can become off- task, the focus is not going to be there, and their learning is going to decrease basically.” TM explained the following, “Having enough space to create learning centers and being able to organize these learning centers, will allow more room for materials such as manipulatives and books for children to learn.” In addition, TM expressed the importance in having a well-equipped playground and how this improves children’s gross motor skills.

### **Staff Qualifications**

All teachers and teacher assistants believed a director’s skills and a teacher’s expertise play a significant role in ensuring all students learn. A director’s skills and teacher’s expertise both should demonstrate a clear understanding of instructional practices and child development. With this understanding, both the director and teachers should regularly engage students in meaningful learning experiences.

One participant expressed the importance of teachers and school administration receiving training. TAL commented,

In order for a center to show high structural quality and being reflective of student learning, the center should focus on adequate training for teachers and administrators, making sure that the center is meeting all licensing requirements, and teachers and administrator should have suitable credentials.

Another teacher described her thoughts about a director's management of the program. TAJ shared, "When a director can manage a center and make sure all licensing requirements are met, it seems to have a tremendous effect on student learning." TM shared, "A teacher should have certain expertise when teaching children." TAK added, "A teacher should know how children learn and develop." TAP expressed concerns about high turnover rates and how it affects student learning. TAP stated, "High turnover is the most impactful factor in structural quality. The high turnover creates low morale. You have to come in and build knowledge for children." TI explained, "You can look at structure as being the foundation. If the foundation is faulty, the process of teaching children will be hard." TC shared, "I believe that children learn best when everything is in place. She continued to express how it is the responsibility of the staff to make sure that all students are learning; the program is being managed adequately; and the building is following licensing requirements.

### **Group Size**

An important component in ensuring that students develop necessary skills for kindergarten readiness is having appropriate group size. Group size is referred to as the

number of students in a group. Usually this number is determined by the number of students and teachers in a classroom as well as licensing requirements.

A majority of teachers and teacher assistants agreed that group size was more important than student-teacher ratio and staff qualifications. TO stated, “Not only will students receive the attention and supervision they need, but having small group sizes supports the overall quality of the school program.” Working with young children and having the appropriate group size is crucial in ensuring that all children receive adequate attention and care. TAK stated, “The impact of having adequate teacher-student ratio is important. I believe you should have two teachers in the classroom at all times. By having two teachers in the room, children can experience small group learning.” TAF also expressed the outcomes of using small groups. She described how students have the opportunities to develop social-emotional skills by interacting with other classmates in small groups.

Teachers and teacher assistants realized the importance in grouping children in small groups in order for them to understand and comprehend newly acquired knowledge. Many believed that students learn better when they receive more attention from the teacher in an environment that is safe. TH commented, “To me, having the right group size is a no-brainer. When children are comfortable in their learning environment, they learn.” TD discussed how having small groups gives her students what they need academically as well as socially. She continued to explain that having 19 students can be difficult to teach in a whole group setting and having one teacher and a teacher assistant in a classroom is essential.

In addition to group size, one teacher and one teacher assistant believed that behavioral problems can occur if groups or ratio of student-teacher are not appropriate. They described how supervising students in smaller groups supports with eliminating potential behavioral problems. TAB mentioned, “When your classroom’s ratio is not correct, you might encounter many problems; mainly classroom management.” TC described that structure is needed in any learning environment. She continued to explain that having class rules and routines are important in managing a classroom environment. She believed this is needed in order to be successful in teaching early learners in smaller groups.

Research Question 4: How do parents describe their understanding of kindergarten readiness?

In response to the research question regarding how parents describe their understanding of kindergarten readiness, two themes emerged: preschoolers being academically prepared and preschoolers being responsive to social-emotional development.

### **Preschoolers Being Academically Prepared**

A majority of parents believed their child(ren) should at least possess basic preacademic skills before entering kindergarten. Each of the parents expressed the significance in their child(ren) knowing preacademic skills such as recognizing their name, numbers, letters, shapes, and colors. They believed these skills are necessary in order for their child(ren) to be kindergarten ready.

Participants noted the importance of preacademic skills in relation to school success. PB explained, “It is important for my daughter to be ready for kindergarten. For example, if she cannot recognize her letters and sounds, she will not be able to read, and if she cannot read, she will fall behind.” PJ believed that her son should learn preacademic skills such as letter recognition, numbers, and some key words before entering kindergarten. Parents believed children have a better chance of success when preacademic skills are developed. PO shared,

Having my daughter ready for kindergarten is very important. She should be able to recognize her name and write it whenever she is asked. Knowing the alphabet is a must. How will she be able to read if she does not know them? Counting and knowing her numbers from 1 to 100 is important for math. And last, recognizing colors and shapes.

A general sentiment that parents continued to identify as their understanding of kindergarten readiness was their child(ren) developing and understanding preacademic skills. For instance, PF expressed the following, “To me kindergarten ready means that he can write his name, identify letters, and numbers. Being on the first level of reading, and knowing all his patterns as well as knowing basic addition problems are important.”

Another parent commented on the same principle that preschoolers be prepared before entering kindergarten. PH stated,

My understanding of kindergarten readiness is preparing them for the experience of school. Teaching them how to read and write and expectations of school.

They should receive a better understanding of school. For example, transitioning from home and being around different people.

Two participants discussed their understanding of kindergarten readiness. PA stated, “I believe kindergarten readiness is preparing my child for kindergarten and them receiving a head start.” PM believed that knowing the beginning stages of what they need to know is kindergarten ready, for example, recognizing their name, numbers, and letters.

### **Preschoolers Being Responsive to Social-Emotional Development**

Although all parents viewed knowledge of preacademic skills as being significant to their understanding of kindergarten readiness, a few shared that social and emotional preparation is also important. Preparing students to follow rules, listen to directions, and socializing with other students was identified by parents when asked about their understanding of kindergarten readiness.

Few parents recognized social-emotional development as a key feature in preparing early learners for kindergarten success. Two participants in particular were able to recognize how early learners need social-emotional abilities in order to be kindergarten ready. For instance, PA shared, “Not only does kindergarten readiness means to know letters and numbers, but being able to listen, follow directions, and socialize with other children are just as important.” PB described her understanding of kindergarten readiness as early learners possessing social-emotional skills. She continued by stating her child needed to be responsive to his teachers and regulate his emotions.



In addition, other parents shared their perspectives regarding the importance of their understanding of social-emotional development and how it should be included in an early childhood environment. Two examples were that early learners began to routinely use positive emotions when being active in their learning environment. As parent PD described, “If my child starts kindergarten paying attention, following directions, and listening to her teacher, she will be ready to learn.” Similarly, PC described his understanding as his child having a smooth transition to kindergarten. He believed this can be accomplished if her child begins following classroom rules before entering kindergarten.

One parent observed that it was important that preschoolers acquire new social-emotional and cognitive skills and use these skills as building blocks in kindergarten. According to PS, “Kindergarten readiness would be my child learning skills and concepts that were taught in preschool and being able to translate those skills to his kindergarten environment.” She continued by saying that in order for her child to comprehend new skills, he must pay attention.

Research Question 5: What are parents doing to support their child’s early learning experiences related to kindergarten readiness?

Parents’ responses concerning the extent to which they support their child’s learning experiences related to kindergarten readiness generated a major theme of fostering learning and development. Parents mentioned several ways that they supported their child(ren) during their early learning experiences. These include, reviewing letters

and numbers, reading, building on prior knowledge, creating hands-on activities, going to the library, and volunteering in the classroom.

### **Fostering Learning and Development**

Parents were very forthcoming when explaining their involvement in preparing their child(ren) for kindergarten readiness. PJ shared, “When I am driving or in the grocery store with her, I ask her to tell me letters or numbers for certain items.” Another parent expressed the same sentiment as it relates to reviewing preacademic skills with her child. She also described reading to her child before bedtime and how this routine supports early literacy. PA stated,

I really want my child to be ready for kindergarten. Before bedtime, I read to him maybe two or three books until he falls asleep. I make sure when he comes home from school, I review his letters, sounds, numbers, colors, and shapes.

The experience of knowing what her child will need to accomplish during his kindergarten year and the importance of paying attention and speaking in complete sentences were described by one parent. PN explained how her two older children attend the same elementary school her son will be attending and is aware what will be expected of him in kindergarten. She stated, “I have started using flashcards and reading to him. I also make him pay attention to words and have him speak in complete sentences.”

Two parents described how they created extra homework to build on prior knowledge and/or close any learning gaps that their child might be experiencing. PO expressed her willingness to do what it takes to get her child kindergarten ready. She explained that she has extra “homework” for her child to complete during the weekends.

“I have an agenda where I set reading time for him and have him participate in different types of games with different skills to complete.” PC stated a similar experience. He explained how after his child completes her homework, she is given hands-on enrichment activities. He continued to explain that this supports in “bridging the gap between what she might not have understood during the school day.”

In addition, two parents described using unique hands-on activities that seem to foster growth and development. They believed these activities support their child in learning preacademics skills. PF shared,

I love coming up with hand-on activities for my child that will help him learn better. In his room, we have posters (ABC, days of the week, and months) that we go over randomly. We have books that he practices writing his numbers and letters. We put words on the back of objects so he can start recognizing and reading words. We also help he identify objects when we are out, for example, letters and/or shapes.

PM described creating songs to help her child learn the spelling of her name and other skills that were taught at school. She reported that creating songs with a beat made it easier for her child to remember important skills as well as learning the spelling of her name.

One parent described how going to the library provided learning experiences that support her learning in the classroom. PD described how she observed her child’s teacher during reading time. PD shared, “Often we go to the library and read books.

During our reading, I would stop and ask her questions about what I read; I am trying to build her vocabulary. This is something I saw her teacher doing in class.”

Several parents observed that the school under study regularly encouraged parents serving as volunteers in their child’s classroom as well as promoting healthy parent-teacher relationships. PS stated, “Sometimes when I am off, I do come in and volunteer in the classroom. I want him to see that I care, and I want him to do well.” Another parent described the ease of being able to communicate with her child’s teacher. PG noted that when she had questions or concerns about her child, she was able to speak with the teacher about her concerns.

### **Summary of Findings**

The data analysis from this study allowed me to investigate teachers’ perceptions of what constitutes high-quality learning as it relates to kindergarten readiness and parents’ understanding and support of kindergarten readiness. With these results, I was able to answer the research questions and address the identified problem.

High-quality learning opportunities have been limited at the school under study possibly by teachers’ lack of knowledge as it relates to structural quality and process quality. Concerning high-quality learning, Bulotsky-Shearer et al. (2012) found that when children are not given the opportunity to participate in enriching activities on a daily basis, results of poor academics are evident. In addition, the curricula used by the school under study seemed to be outdated and not reaching the needs of all students. According to Shidler (2009), a curriculum needs to support all learners by providing new and exciting learning opportunities. Moreover, the findings indicated that parents lacked

understanding as to the importance of social-emotional skills as it relates to kindergarten readiness. This finding is consistent with a report by Waander et al., (2007) in which authors stated that families should continue their understanding of social-emotional skills and how these skills aid in the overall readiness of school.

The conceptual framework for this study was based on evidence that for early learners to experience high-quality learning, an early learning program must possess both structural quality and process quality (H.J. Jeon et al., 2010). Not only should an early learning program possess these two indicators of quality, but teachers would benefit from a clear understanding of both qualities as well. According to Mashburn et al. (2008), an excellent preschool should incorporate both qualities of measurement. The school under study can improve their early childhood program by employing the following strategies: (a) more interaction between teachers and early learners, (b) exhibit a high-quality early learning program, and (c) provide an environment that encourages learning, which is consistent with the recommendations of H.J. Jeon et al., (2010).

Research Question 1 pertained to teachers describing their understanding of structural quality and process quality. Out of the 16 teachers and teacher assistants, only three teachers were able to describe both indicators of quality. In addition, one teacher and two teacher assistants were able to describe only structural quality, but not process quality. In relation to process quality, only four teachers and teacher assistants were able to describe process quality. Of those four, two were teachers, and the other two were assistant teachers. The teachers and teacher assistants who understood the differences described structural quality as having the correct teacher-child ratio and teacher and

director expertise. These teachers also believed structural quality entails management of the center as well as following state licensing requirements. Those teachers and teacher assistants who had a harder time understanding the term structural quality believed structural quality consisted of daily routines of the classroom, having a lesson plan with appropriate supplies and materials, organization of the classroom, and how children interact with one another. It is worth noting that those teachers and teacher assistants who had difficulty describing both indicators of quality had less than 3 years of teaching experience. A majority of teachers related their understanding of structural quality to the term structure. Some teachers had an easier time describing process quality. Many believed process quality included everything that makes up a student's learning environment, for example, educational experiences, materials and supplies, and age-appropriate curriculum. These findings were consistent with a report by Hamre and Pianta (2007) in which the authors identified structural quality and process quality as being significant in a child's learning environment. Early learners will likely benefit from an enriching environment if teachers and teacher assistants have a clearer understanding of both measures of qualities and how these qualities support in providing early learners high-quality learning experiences.

Research Question 2 pertained to teachers describing their understanding of process quality as it relates to their school curriculum. Out of the 16 teachers and teacher assistants, six teachers and four teacher assistants believed that both curricula used at the school were outdated. Lessons presented in both curricula seem not to be beneficial for students. Three teachers and three teacher assistants believed that both curricula offered

easy to follow lessons. However, a majority of teachers and teacher assistants believed that the school needs to invest in a curriculum for each grade level that will reach all students' needs and provide them with more opportunities to develop fully in all areas of learning. These findings were consistent with a report by Spencer (2011) in which the author identified the importance of changing curriculum in order to meet the needs of all students. I found that all teachers and teacher assistants believed that a good curriculum should enable all students to receive a deeper understanding of subjects being taught as well as being able to make meaningful connections. In addition, teachers and teacher assistants felt that an early childhood curriculum should provide a framework of what and how children should learn. According to Lieber et al., (2009), an early childhood curriculum should offer early learners developmentally appropriate activities in all academic areas while guiding teachers in using sound instructional practices.

Research Question 3 pertained to teachers explaining their perception of structural quality and how it influences pre-k learning in their school environment. A majority of teachers were able to describe important features that can impact student learning but were not able to relate those features to structural quality when asked in questions number one and three. I would attribute this to teachers and teacher assistants knowing what a classroom environment should include in order to have an impact on student learning, which is consistent with findings reported by Bigras et al. (2010). Some teachers believed their classroom should be organized and have adequate space for all students to feel safe in their environment. Having adequate space and an organized classroom was viewed as supporting and influencing student learning. Teachers and

teacher assistants believed this enables students to explore freely their learning environment. According to Cassidy et al. (2009), an important feature of structural quality is having adequate space in the classroom environment in order to make an impact on student learning. Others felt that staff qualifications and group size lead to high-quality learning and more individualized care and instruction. Teacher and teacher assistants believed that all teachers, teacher assistants, and director qualifications were important components in ensuring students receive learning opportunities that will support in growth and development. Group size in the classroom was observed as being very crucial. In fact, a majority of teachers and teacher assistants saw this as being more important than student-teacher ratio and staff qualifications. These findings were consistent with a report by Mashburn et al. (2008) in which authors identified structural features such as group size, student-teacher ratio, staff qualifications as being important in providing early learners with a quality education.

Research Question 4 pertained to parents expressing their understanding of kindergarten readiness. I found that all parents felt their child should be well equipped with preacademic skills before transitioning into kindergarten. This finding is consistent with a report by Belfield and Garcia (2014) in which both authors identified the importance of families understanding kindergarten readiness. They believed that when families have a better understanding of kindergarten readiness, this supports a child's growth and development. Parents believed that being able to recognize numbers, letters, colors, shapes, and their name are very important when transitioning to kindergarten. Although these skills are important, being able to demonstrate social and emotional skills



were seen as being just as important by only five of the 17 parents and one parent being a father. Daniels (2014) reported that when children develop social-emotional and academic skills early in their schooling, educational attainment is achieved. In addition, H. J. Jeon et al. (2011) stated that children who receive preacademic skills and social-emotional skills are better prepared for school as it relates to learning more difficult skills. It is worth noting, these parents who believed social-emotional development plays a key role in kindergarten readiness were parents with a bachelor's degree.

Research Question 5 pertained to parents sharing how they support their child's learning in relation to kindergarten readiness. I found that all parents were very open and enthused about sharing their strategies and experiences in ensuring their child is kindergarten ready. Many believed by reviewing preacademic skills is important. Some parents believed that building on prior knowledge by completing homework and/or creating additional homework supported their child with kindergarten readiness in their home environment. Others believed that reading, creating hands on activities, going to the library, volunteering in the classroom and having open communication with their child's teacher is crucial in the development and growth of their child's learning. Parents viewed kindergarten readiness as being impactful towards a smooth transition to kindergarten. According to Baumgartner and McBride (2009), parental involvement influences school readiness. They report that activities that take place outside of school are important in the growth and development of a child.

### **Specific Limitations**

There were inevitable limitations. First, the teachers' understanding of the difference between structural quality and process quality was assumed. To some extent, this perhaps affected the results as it relates to how a teacher creates an adequate learning environment for students and optimally having an impact on student learning. Second, since this research study was specific to a small group of teachers and parents, this study cannot be generalized to other schools. The questions used were specific to the purposeful selection; there is room for various interpretations. I believe if the study was opened to a larger sample meaning more teachers and parents, the results might have been different.

This research study provided an indication of the importance of teachers' understanding of both structural quality and process quality. In addition, it demonstrated how parents play a crucial role in providing their children with resources to prepare them for kindergarten. Therefore, this study has the possibility to be beneficial to both teachers and parents.

### **Conclusion**

This section provided a description of the research methods for this qualitative case study. Data were collected by conducting face-to-face semistructured interviews with teachers and parents. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of what constitutes high-quality learning as it relates to kindergarten readiness and parents' understanding and support of kindergarten readiness. According to the results of this study, a professional development (PD) program was created to address teachers and

teacher assistants' lack of understanding as it relates structural quality and process quality. In addition, the PD program focused on supporting teachers and teacher assistants with using additional resources to support student learning. Furthermore, a module was created to support teachers in addressing the topic of social-emotional development with parents.

Section 3 will include an introduction to the project study, as well as descriptions and goals, and rationale for choosing my project study. In addition, a review of literature relating to my project will be discussed. Furthermore, project implementation, project evaluation, and implications including social change will be included.

## Section 3: The Project

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project was to address findings compiled from analyzed data. A PD project was designed to support teachers in preparing early learners for kindergarten success. The overall goal of this project is to support teachers as they continue to provide high-quality learning experiences to children in a classroom setting and assist parents in their home environment with the social-emotional development of their child(ren). This section consists of project goals, the rationale for the project as well as a literature review and project description. The project evaluation and implementation of change are included. Appendix A shows the components of the project.

### **Brief Description of the Project**

A well-developed professional development for early childhood teachers was created to enhance an understanding of kindergarten readiness. Teachers' engagement in this PD is meant to increase their knowledge base and enrich their developmental learning process. Furthermore, teachers should receive current strategies in their field of expertise (Vu, Cao, Vu, & Cepero, 2014). This PD approach includes both a traditional and experiential approach. The traditional framework includes the trainer providing objectives, assignments, and motivational opportunities. The experiential framework includes the trainer taking on more of a facilitator's role while teachers became more active and involved in their learning environment. The 3-day teacher PD includes a total of three modules. Each module focuses on one aspect of kindergarten readiness.

## **Project Goals**

Many early learning programs face challenges in meeting the diverse needs of all students; therefore, having teachers equipped with necessary skills to meet these challenges is important. One of the most efficient ways for teachers to enhance their skills and build on prior knowledge is by attending on-going PDs (Vu et al., 2014). According to Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2012), by using PD, teachers can collaborate and expand on their current understanding and reflect and evaluate their practices. The goals of the project study were to increase a teacher's knowledge and understanding of structural quality and process quality, improve and strengthen a teacher's abilities to incorporate additional resources to the school curriculum to enhance student learning, and assist teachers in providing parents strategies to strengthen social-emotional skills of their children in their home environment.

## **Rationale for Project Study**

The research questions posed allowed for gaining a better understanding of the participants' knowledge of kindergarten readiness. This knowledge included being able to understand the meaning and importance of structural quality and process quality in their instructional practice. However, a majority of teachers were not able to identify the differences between the two indicators and, therefore, could not adequately demonstrate how these indicators have a direct impact on high-quality learning and kindergarten readiness. In conclusion, some teachers also expressed concerns about the school's curriculum. They felt the curriculum was outdated and did not meet student's cognitive and social-emotional needs. In addition, a majority of parents believed that cognitive

ability was a stronger and sometimes the only indicator of kindergarten readiness. A small number of parents mentioned social-emotional development as being important in kindergarten readiness. Parents also shared the importance in exposing their child(ren) with learning experiences in their home environment.

Professional development is an effective method of ensuring that teachers continue to receive up-to-date instructional practices to improve student learning in cognitive and social-emotional domains (Snyder, Hemmeter, & McLaughlin, 2011). Given the fact that children flourish in an environment that provides high-quality learning, this PD is focused on teachers gaining an understanding of structural quality and process quality, being able to use additional resources to supplement the school curriculum, and assisting parents in supporting their child's social-emotional development. In addition, given the importance of providing early learners with opportunities to enhance kindergarten readiness, a review of a teacher's role and how the teacher is an active learner and reflective practitioner is discussed. This project will encourage teachers to use training information to support fostering a high-quality learning environment for their early learners. Likewise, this project will encourage teachers to continue to engage in life-long learning while supporting evidence-based teaching (Diamond & Powell, 2011).

### **Review of the Literature**

The literature review was conducted using Walden University's library databases. Databases included Education Research, ERIC, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and Teacher Reference Center. The overall category researched was *early childhood education* while

the subcategories were *professional development, the importance of structural quality and process quality, assisting parents in early learner's developmental skills, early childhood curriculum, resources to supplement curriculum, roles of a teacher, adult and active learner, and reflective practice.*

This literature review includes evidence supporting professional development as the framework for this project. I also provide a rationale as to why early childhood teachers must understand the differences between the two quality indicators, be provided with strategies that will enhance their school curriculum, and assist parents in all early developmental skills. In addition, a review of the importance of the role of an early childhood teacher as an adult learner, active learner, and reflective practitioner is detailed.

In the earlier literature review, I studied the impact of structural quality and process quality and how these two indicators have a direct impact on kindergarten readiness. Moreover, I examined parents' understanding of kindergarten readiness. The design of the conceptual framework of the study is specific to the belief that if early learning programs include features associated with structural quality and process quality, early learners will experience high-quality learning. Based on the results of the study, a professional development program will be used to support teacher understanding and skills. In doing so, parents will receive additional support from teachers that will enhance early learners' social-emotional development in their home environment.

## **Professional Development**

To prepare teachers to work adequately with early learners towards kindergarten readiness, PD would be beneficial. PD provides teachers with the ability to sustain, understand, and improve teaching practices in order to increase student attainment (Snyder, Hemmeter et al., 2011). In supporting teachers' classroom improvement, the facilitator of such programs needs to consider a teacher's expertise and experience (Hall-Kenyon, Bullough, Mackay, & Marshall, 2014). In recent years, PD has received a substantial amount of attention from policy makers and researchers. This attention has been warranted due to the high demands for early childhood teachers to prepare children effectively for kindergarten. Having early childhood teachers successfully increase their knowledge base and effectively observe desired outcomes for early learners is significant (Snyder, Denney, Pasia, Rakap, & Crowe, 2011). Professional development has been identified as a major tool in supporting early childhood teachers as they continue to implement evidence-based practices (Snyder, Denney et al., 2011). There are many structures associated with PD. These include "(a) sustained over time, (b) grounded in practice (job-embedded), (c) linked to curriculum and instructional goals, (d) collaborative, (e) interactive, and (f) the provision of implementation supports and feedback in practice settings" (Snyder, Denney et al., 2011, p. 362-363).

**Teacher understanding of structural quality and process quality.** Given the prevalence of high-quality early learning programs, it is important that teachers and administrators understand the differences between structural quality and process quality. It is a means for improving kindergarten readiness (Keys et al., 2013). One of the many



challenges early childhood educators face is distinguishing the different meanings of what constitutes a high-quality early childhood program and how quality is measured (Raikes, Devercelli, & Kutaka, 2015). Research has shown that children who receive high-quality learning experiences associated with structural qualities and process qualities are successful (L. Jeon, Buettner, & Hur, 2014). Conducting a PD, which emphasizes establishing a clear understanding of both qualities, will in some ways support and encourage higher quality learning experiences and opportunities for early learners.

A high-quality early childhood program encompasses both features of structural quality and process quality. Structural quality emphasizes group size, teacher-to-student ratio, safe and adequate facility, teacher credentials/experience, and director credentials and expertise. A learning environment that is structurally sound is effective in an early childhood setting. Indicators linked to structural quality remain easily measurable and observable (Tekmen, 2014). Process quality pertains to a teacher's interactions with children, experiences of developmentally appropriate activities, and meeting children's cognitive and social-emotional needs (Romano, Kohen, & Findlay, 2010). A teacher's ability to distinguish between the two variables is imperative. Collectively, they influence a child's learning experiences cognitively and emotionally (Ishimine & Tayler, 2014). Students who experience quality learning demonstrate strong social-emotional and cognitive development (Mia, Shen, & Kavanaugh, 2011).

Higher-quality learning is experienced when children are engaged in educational activities and experiencing a warm and supportive interaction between the teacher and

child. It is important that teachers can recognize the features that drive early learning development (Slot, Leserman, Verhagen, & Mulder, 2015). Knowing the difference between each quality indicator supports the quality of care and social interaction between the teacher and child. It is imperative for teachers to know the differences between these two qualities to have a positive effect on student learning. By promoting an environment that demonstrates both qualities, social success and present and future achievement will benefit all children (Slutsky & Pistorova, 2010).

**Supplemental resources to enhance school curriculum.** Given the importance of providing an enriching curriculum for early learners, early childhood teachers should be guided in how to incorporate additional resources into a curriculum. With any early childhood program, the curriculum should be the driving force that brings a wealth of knowledge and experiences to young learners and guides the teacher in instructing children. Research conducted by Denny, Hallam, and Homer (2012) indicated that most teachers used a structured curriculum, but that it was inadequate, and that many school programs had no means in providing age appropriate instruction. As teachers and administrators continue their effort in finding a curriculum that best meets the needs of their students, they must also supplement their curriculum in order to enhance their learning environment. These supplementary materials should include resources that not only increase cognitive development but also aid in supporting children with decision-making skills, socialization, and problem-solving. A surplus of resources for children will aid in increasing their developmental growth in addition to learning how to investigate and manipulate certain materials (Palmer, 2015). For children to experience

life-long learning, a well-developed, age appropriate curriculum must be built around meaningful lessons and positive interactions with teachers.

**Assisting parents in social-emotional developmental skills.** To assist parents in improving their understanding and knowledge of kindergarten readiness, a PD should focus on teachers working successfully with parents by providing them with strategies for supporting their children's social-emotional developmental skills. Parent involvement includes parents and teachers working together to strengthen a child's school and home environments (DeMeulenaere, 2015). The relationship between a teacher and family consists of participation and communication from both parties. It is through this relationship that children experience and meet required developmental skills, most importantly, cognitive and social-emotional developmental skills.

Children's success lies in the partnership between the teacher and parents. Both parties are required to be willing and active participation. Parental involvement is extremely critical in assuring school success (McCamey, 2015). For parents to feel they are a positive influence in their child's education, they must believe that their active involvement is necessary (Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalbe, & Henderson, 2013).

### **Teacher's Role**

Early childhood teachers play a significant role in the overall success of early learners preparing for kindergarten. Even though school district policy and administrators dictate classroom practices, it is the teacher who is the key person (Riojas-Cortez, Alanís, & Flores, 2013). In many early childhood settings, teachers are observed and evaluated on the effectiveness of their teaching style and how this affects them

personally (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014). Not only are teachers a child's primary educator but also their supporter (Roberts, Crawford, & Hickman, 2010). With this understanding, teachers need to take advantage of opportunities in improving their practices through PD. Through the process of PD, teachers will gain knowledge and take on the role as the learner. More importantly, teachers will improve their skills that will subsequently allow early learners to experience developmentally appropriate learning opportunities (Korth & Baum, 2011).

The expectations for early childhood teachers to know how and what children learn are essential (Riojas-Cortez et al., 2013). It is imperative that teachers in the field of early childhood education seek to engage with others for the purpose of expanding their knowledge in the field by collaborating with other teachers, administrators, and specialists (Korth & Baum, 2011). Early childhood educators are encouraged to use what was learned and reflect on practices during and after a professional development.

**Reflective practice.** As early childhood teachers continue engagement in PD, it is important that they reflect on the experiences gained from this experience. Involvement in professional development allows early childhood teachers to engage in critical reflection of their practices (Riojas-Cortez et al., 2013). Avalos (2011) found that when teachers engage in critical reflection of their practices, they cannot only see situations differently but can review and interpret for best teaching practices. The purpose of a reflective practitioner is to reflect on teaching practices and make necessary changes (Lemon & Garvis, 2014). Through this process, it is the facilitator's expectation that teachers gain self-confidence and reflect on their teaching practice (Roberts et al.,

2010). A reflective teacher starts to think critically about ideas and how these ideas affect the bigger picture (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, & Farmer, 2012). During this process, the teacher comes to an understanding of his/her skills and knowledge. Avalos explained the multifaceted process of teachers being able to transform cognitively learned information (theory) and apply (practice) knowledge to students' growth and development. Teachers should seek to find answers to questions about their teaching practices. Reflection is a tool of change (Avalos, 2011) and the possibility of gaining a deeper understanding of teaching practices (Lemon & Garvis, 2014).

Reflection requires a teacher to have intellectual engagement, determination, and practice with their peers. Self-motivated reflective practice occurs when teachers see themselves as both the learner and teacher (Roberts et al., 2010). Teachers can think thoughtfully about their teaching practices, reflect on principal ideals, and make plans towards refining instruction.

**Adult learner.** When creating a learning environment for adults, objective/goals must be associated with instructional practices. Learning objectives or goals should support the assessment of the effectiveness of student achievement (Merli, 2011). Hoare (2009) stated that not only does the adult learner gain knowledge beyond social change, but also an awareness of growth in self-knowledge and other unique skills. The adult learner can embrace the theory of informal teaching and how this approach to learning is effective in building on learned skills (Sandlin, Wright & Clark, 2011). The notion of informal learning taking place anytime and anywhere is of particular interest for educators. Informal learning can be characterized by three types: tacit learning,

incidental learning, and self-directed learning (Peeters et al., 2014). For this particular project, teachers will be introduced to all three types. Tacit learning refers to teacher awareness of their attitudes, values, and behaviors concerning received knowledge. Second, incidental learning denotes learning engaged unintentionally. Teachers are unaware of learned activities. Lastly, self-directed learning signifies a teacher's willingness to learn. Frequently, teachers value other individuals as an important resource for knowledge (Peeters et al., 2014). Although all three informal learning types are important, it is vital that informal learning consist of awareness, reflection, and accessibility. Teacher exposure to both tacit learning and incidental learning is imperative in a shift to more self-directed learning.

Adult learners thrive in learning environments that are supportive. It is imperative that early childhood teachers have the tools necessary to meet the needs of all learners. Wynne (2012) highlighted several characteristics that are present in an adult learning environment. These include knowledge and experiences; principles, views, and ideals; motivation; differences; self-direction; and problem-solving skills of adult learners. Educators of teachers must keep them motivated and engaged. As part of a learning environment, adults should experience meaningful and positive learning experiences as well as beneficial learning opportunities (Falasca, 2011).

**Active learning.** Active learning during PD involves teachers sharing experiences and ideas with other teachers (Avalos, 2011). Active learning occurs when learners are involved and thinking intellectually about what needs to be learned and completed. Teachers are encouraged to become active learners by sharing their questions

and concerns so that their teaching approaches can be thoroughly examined (Roberts et al., 2010). Teacher practice and knowledge are enhanced when teachers become involved in active dialogue (Simoncini, Lasen, & Rocco, 2014). Within an active PD learning environment, teachers are encouraged to listen; develop skills; explore their values, beliefs, and attitudes; and use higher order thinking.

### **Implementation**

#### **Needed Resources, Existing Supports, and Potential Barriers**

**Needed resources.** Resources needed to implement the 3-day PD are a room suitable to accommodate 16 to 20 teacher and teacher assistants with at least four to five round tables and a projector for presenting videos, cartoons, and presentation slides. Round tables will be used to facilitate small and large group discussions, hands on activities, and the distribution of printed materials for learning activities. For this PD to be successful, approval by the director is required.

**Existing support.** The facility must be available to conduct the 3-day PD. The room will include required tables and space for teacher collaboration.

**Potential barriers.** Money would be one potential barrier to implementing a successful PD. It would be the responsibility of the school's director to secure substitute teachers for the 3-day PD.

**Potential solutions to barriers.** Many times parents are willing to volunteer in their child's classroom. The school director can solicit volunteers by sending a letter explaining the importance of the PD as well as the days and times involved.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

Implementation of the PD will take place in the spring of 2016 school year.

Detailed description of the projected timetable includes the following:

1. The director of the early learning program will receive a presentation of the findings from the study and PD. During this time, I will schedule a 3-day training for the school's teachers and teacher assistants. (March 2016)
2. A room will be secured by the director. The room will have sufficient physical space and a projector. (March 2016)
3. I will provide the director with a short description of the PD for teachers and teacher assistants. (March 2016)
4. All hand-outs will be printed. (April 2016)
5. I will conduct a 3-day PD. (April 2016)
6. After conducting each module of the professional development program, I will ask all participants to complete an evaluation after each module in order to enhance and improve future training. (April 2016)

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Researcher and Others**

**The researcher.** My responsibility as a researcher was to design and develop the PD based on the findings specific to the 16 teachers and teacher assistants and 17 parents. As the facilitator and the person with the most knowledge about the subject of kindergarten readiness, I will accomplish the goals set forth and create a learning environment where teachers will be active participants in their learning and achieve the necessary skills to enhance their classroom environment as well as support parents in



their understanding of social-emotional development. For this PD to be effective, I must be cognizant of teachers' skills and abilities.

**Early childhood teacher.** The early childhood teachers are responsible for being active listeners and learners. During this process of learning, teachers are to take information and transform it to understanding (Du Plessis, Marais, Van Schalkwyk, & Weeks, 2011). Therefore, a teacher's obligation in implementing scientific information is crucial to the success of creating high-quality learning environments where all students can learn.

**School director.** Support from the school director is critical towards the success of the PD. The director's responsibility is to make sure all required resources are in place. In addition, the director can encourage the staff to be active learners and advocate towards the implementation of the PD.

**Others.** Although teachers, the school director, and the researcher are the main stakeholders in the PD, other people will be impacted by the implementation of this PD. Parents of the children that attend the early learning program will be impacted by the information that will be provided by their child's teacher.

## **Project Evaluation**

### **Description of the Type of Evaluation**

To rate the effectiveness of the PD, an evaluation plan was created. Therefore, I will employ a three-strand evaluation approach. These include teachers and teacher assistants being involved participants, meeting or exceeding learner outcomes, and providing feedback (Purcell, 2014).

The overall evaluation will include a formative evaluation. Formative evaluations are used to assess effectiveness and accuracy of a program. Formative evaluations will take place at the conclusion of each module. A formative evaluation can be considered a process instead of a test (Bennett, 2011). Teachers and teacher assistants will be asked to complete a short survey that will consist of five multiple choice items and three open-ended questions. The survey will be composed of two levels: reaction and learner outcomes. This evaluation will assess satisfactory and content/skills. Answers to the survey will be analyzed and reported to enhance optimal learning experiences for early learners.

### **Justification for Type of Evaluation**

By completing a formative evaluation, the effectiveness of the PD can be assessed. According to Purcell (2014), formative evaluation is a necessary instrument that advises the facilitator of participant's learning and the effectiveness of lessons being taught. In addition, it informs the facilitator if changes are necessary either with the content and/or with the delivery of information. On-going feedback from participants will support the facilitator in making necessary adjustments to their delivery style and instruction (Bennett, 2011). For this PD, formative evaluations will deliver instant responses on presentation and content/skills as it relates to participant's understanding and any suggestions during PD training.

### **Overall Goals of the Project**

The PD was created and developed to enhance early childhood teachers' effectiveness and understanding in preparing early learners for kindergarten success. A

PD emphasizes consistency with activities associated with PD, active learning opportunities, and content and skills (Lauer, Christopher, Firpo-Triplett, & Buchting, 2014). The project goals for the 16 teachers and teacher assistants include increasing teachers' knowledge and understanding of structural quality and process quality, improving and strengthening teachers' abilities to incorporate additional resources to the school curriculum in order to enhance student learning, and assisting teachers in providing parents with strategies to support kindergarten readiness in the home environment.

### **Overall Evaluation Goals**

The purpose of an evaluation is to gather information to improve PD outcomes. The overall evaluation goal is to record early childhood teachers' learning experiences during the PD.

### **Key Stakeholders**

Stakeholders are defined as individuals or groups who have a particular interest in the experiences that take place at a particular establishment (Mokoena, 2012). Given the increase in accountability, having strong leadership is necessary. The key stakeholders include early childhood teachers, parents, and early childhood director. Being deemed trustworthy by stakeholders is important as it relates to the progress and effectiveness of the program. As a facilitator, I will need to gain the trust of all teachers and the early childhood director. Gaining the confidence of parents is not necessary because I will not have contact with them during the PD process. My role as a facilitator will allow me to bring a different viewpoint about the program being assessed (Picciotto, 2013).

## **Project Implications**

### **Social Change Implications**

**Local community.** The implications of this project for the local community concerning early learner's needs are crucial. Early childhood teachers at the school under study will gain the necessary tools to help ensure that early learners are receiving learning opportunities that will increase their readiness for kindergarten.

The importance of this project is exceptional for early childhood teachers, parents, and students. Early childhood teachers will gain self-confidence and assurance in knowing they can provide an environment that includes features associated with structural quality and process quality. In addition, teachers will discover other resources to supplement their school curriculum that is feasible and practicable, and will provide parents with strategies to ensure that their child is kindergarten ready in all domains of learning. In addition, through teacher support, parents will feel welcomed as a partner in their child's education. Most importantly, early learners will be participants in a high-quality learning environment that encourage exploration, cognitive and social-emotional development, and provide opportunities to assure kindergarten readiness.

**Far-reaching.** Nationally, there is an increased interest in the subject of programs that prepare early learners for kindergarten. Policy makers and other advocates for education are noting how an effective early learning program increases children's chances of being kindergarten ready. Given the fact that there is a focus on providing early childhood teachers with tools to enhance their classroom environment, and practices are on the rise, this project can support efforts to ensure that teachers and children receive

the tools necessary to be successful. This project has features that will serve all stakeholders involved in ensuring students are kindergarten ready. In addition, this project can guide educators in understanding the differences in structural quality and process quality and how these indicators are critical in modeling an effective early learning program.

**Larger context.** This project supports the objectives and goals of the school under study. The school under study encourages their early childhood teachers to provide a learning environment that is of high-quality. The early childhood teachers will gain knowledge in implementing strategies and practices to support early learners towards kindergarten readiness. This project will promote an awareness of early childhood teachers in maintaining a high-quality environment and meeting the needs of all learners through cognitive and social-emotional learning experiences.

### **Conclusion**

This study was conducted in order to provide early childhood teachers the necessary tools in preparing early learners for kindergarten readiness as well as gaining a better understanding of structural quality and process quality. In addition, teacher and teacher assistants were given strategies to support parents with social-emotional development in their home environment. Even though I found some early childhood teachers somewhat prepared, a majority of early childhood teachers needed support in all areas of preparedness. Hence, I proposed a PD designed to assist early childhood teachers in preparing high-quality environments for early learners as well as assisting

parents with social-emotional develop in their home environment. Therefore, the PD program will aid teachers as they continue to improve their teaching practices.

In Section 3, I presented a brief description of the project, project goals, rationale, and a review of the literature pertaining to my proposed project. In addition, a description of the project, an evaluation plan, and project implications were discussed.

In Section 4, I will provide an explanation of the project strengths and limitations and recommendations for alternative approaches. I will also address scholarship, project development, leadership, and change. Furthermore, a reflection on the importance of the work and implications will be addressed. Finally, application and directions for future research will be described.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

In this qualitative case study, I examined teachers' preparedness in providing early learners kindergarten readiness skills. In addition, I explored parents' support in their child's early learning experiences in relationship to kindergarten readiness. Based on the findings, I created a PD program to address and improve instructional practices in the area of kindergarten readiness as well as increase a teacher's understanding of structural quality and progress quality. Furthermore, teachers received additional information to share with parents in the area of early childhood students' social and emotional development. In Section 4, I focus on the projects' strengths and limitations, recommendations for alternative approaches, and the overall development of the project. Additionally, my thoughts on the future direction of kindergarten readiness are included.

### **Project Strengths**

The project had three exceptional strengths. The detailed literature review was very valuable in deciding to employ a PD as a framework for my project. According to Synder, Hemmeter et al. (2011), having teachers participate in a PD not only supports in sustaining and understanding instructional practices, but it aids in increasing student attainment through improved teacher practices. Implementation of this project will be inexpensive. Resources required for the success of this project are minimal. This project's specification of kindergarten readiness in regards to the understanding of structural quality and process quality, utilization of additional resources to enhance the school curriculum, and the importance of social-emotional development were grounded

in the review of the literature. According to Vernon-Dotson and Floyd (2012), by participating in a PD, teachers can gain a clearer understanding of expectations and reflect on the importance in providing teaching opportunities for learners. In addition, the PD includes instructional strategies that teachers and teacher assistants can immediately implement in their learning environment. According to Korth and Baum (2011) instructional practices that are introduced during a PD will support teachers and assist learners in receiving developmentally appropriate learning experiences.

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

For this project, several limitations were evident. My inexperience as a researcher in conducting this qualitative study and data collection was apparent. The project was created according to my analysis and interpretation of the data. Ellis and Levy (2010) stated that many novice researchers face encounters when trying to implement original scholarly research to an already accomplished body of knowledge. The problem of inconsistency as it relates to the importance of the project's implementation might lead to other types of understandings.

Using only one site to interview participants could be considered a limitation of this project study. I further limited the potential of this project study by only gathering data from one population of teachers and parents. Data gathered could have been more detail-rich if more than one site was used. Including a population of participants with higher levels of understanding, educational attainment, and expertise could be considered in the future.



This project study did not include the director's responsibilities in ensuring early learners are receiving high-quality learning opportunities. In addition, an examination of the director's commitment to establishing a high-quality learning environment could have been examined. Brown and Pickard (2014) stated that directors play a role in making sure that early learners are provided with high-quality learning opportunities through developmentally appropriate practices.

The PD only addressed detailed information associated with the data and findings. Teachers could have benefited from additional components related to kindergarten readiness. For example, the inclusion of the dynamics of child development, societal changes and how these changes affect teaching approaches and practices, and creating and implementing a balanced kindergarten readiness framework could have supported early learners as they transition into kindergarten (Brown & Pickard, 2014).

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

Even though a PD was created to address the problem, a white paper could have been developed as well. A white paper would have given early childhood educators research-based instructional strategies and support in grasping a better understanding of kindergarten readiness.

In creating the PD program, two of the three modules were dedicated to teachers and teacher assistants. The last module focused on teachers providing parents with additional resources to support social-emotional development in the home environment. An alternative approach would be that of parents receiving a different training on ways to promote social-emotional development in the home environment.

Another alternative way to address the problem concerning kindergarten readiness would be to design a teacher-parent kindergarten readiness framework. This framework would address the importance of parents and teachers working together towards kindergarten readiness. Collaboration between the key stakeholders can strengthen relationships and improve educational outcomes.

### **Scholarship**

Challenges in completing this project study were evident. This project study required me to become more of a critical thinker and acquire additional knowledge to successfully define and describe a problem, create research questions, and conduct an adequate literature review to the significance in the field of early childhood education. Flores, Matkin, Burbach, Quinn, and Harding (2012) stated that for an individual to be successful in his or her chosen field, an educational system must support the development of critical thinking skills. Furthermore, not having the ability to think critically may influence a person's capability to lead.

While creating this project, I had to examine recent research based literature and consider my skills as a trainer and educator. Not only did I gain knowledge as a researcher and educator, but I also viewed this process as an opportunity to contribute to the field of early childhood education and provide a professional voice in the field of early childhood education. The actual meaning of what an agent of change is all about became apparent.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

Developing a project was an essential component in addressing the identified problem. The importance of developing this project lies in the understanding of the intended population. After identifying the problem, creating research questions, collecting data, and analyzing results, I had to make a decision on what type of project would be most effective. My objective was to create a PD that would support teachers and parents in promoting kindergarten readiness. When developing the PD program, I had to reflect on what useful resources could be easily tailored to a teacher's classroom environment and the effectiveness of teachers training parents on social-emotional development.

The development of this PD included researching the importance of structural and process quality, the significance of age-appropriate curricula that uses additional resources to enhance student learning, and supporting parents in developing social-emotional skills for their child(ren). As a result, Key Factors in Preparing Early Learners for Kindergarten was created for teachers and parents at the school under study. In order to rate the effectiveness of each module of this program, an evaluation is required at the conclusion of each training module.

Supporting teachers in substantiating effective teaching practices and learning are critical components in ensuring kindergarten readiness. In doing so, providing parents with resources to encourage their child(ren) in the domain of social-emotional development in the home environment is very crucial. Teaching practices reinforced by

on-going PD supports teachers in implementing necessary changes that lead to a deeper understanding of overall professional learning (Stewart, 2014).

### **Leadership and Change**

Upon completion of this study, several lessons were learned about leadership and change. As a leader in the educational field, I learned that an individual's wealth of knowledge, values, core beliefs, and sound principles can bring about change (Gialamas, Pelonis, & Medeiros, 2014). It is through this understanding that I have been able to build actively on my knowledge and articulate my vision in improving teacher effectiveness in the field of early childhood education.

In becoming a competent leader in the field of education, one must have support and guidance. Through my journey towards completion, I have encountered a very supportive faculty at Walden University. Walden faculty exhibited a desire to support and foster student achievement. It is through these actions that I feel confident my abilities as an educator and researcher will contribute to the local community and society as a whole.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

Initially, I found it difficult to narrow down the exact problem as to why some children were leaving early childhood settings not being ready for kindergarten. I just assumed teachers were not effectively preparing early learners for kindergarten. Through my initial research, I discovered the problem is much deeper. Accordingly, I established an interest in what constitutes a high-quality early learning environment. I actively researched the area of structural quality and process quality and the importance of these

two features in an early childhood setting. I found myself sharing resources with colleagues, participating in panel discussions on the effectiveness of an early childhood environment, and implementing newly acquired knowledge during training sessions. Through this journey of becoming a scholar, I learned it is imperative to be an active listener as well as an active learner.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

Given the fact that I have experience in the field of early childhood education, it was rewarding to hear others' perspectives about kindergarten readiness. As a practitioner, it was my goal to learn from my research and implement into my practices as an educator and trainer. During the interviews, I gained insight into others' thought process while remaining nonjudgmental. My experiences through data collection and analysis allowed me to evaluate my professional practices. In addition, exploring relevant research-based practices and strategies helped shape my ideas and beliefs as a practitioner in the field of education.

Engaging in the reflective assessment was very beneficial. Not only is this a valuable component in my professional career, but it allowed me to refine my practices as an educator and trainer. Equally, areas of improvement related to teaching future educators and conducting trainings were identified. Consequently, I created a 3-day PD for teachers and teacher assistants that will prepare them for creating an environment where early learners can flourish both academically and socially.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

The development of this project was a result of data collected and analyzed. The results demonstrated teachers and teacher assistants needing support to ensure early learners are experiencing a high-quality learning environment in addition to parents needing assistance in understanding their child's social-emotional development. As an educator, I have developed training modules and presented at teacher professional development for several years. During those times, I rarely used a slideshow presentation. After creating slides for my project, I found this process to be a valuable tool for teachers to understand and grasp intended information. A slideshow presentation allows a facilitator to highlight intended information and supports in an enjoyable learning environment for all participants.

### **Overall Potential Impact on Social Change**

The discussion in preparing early learners for kindergarten readiness is a subject that is well-intended because of the overall significance of early learners' cognitive and social-emotional development. The topic of kindergarten readiness and how structural quality and process quality has a direct impact on the developmental growth of early learners is noteworthy. Even though some teachers and teacher assistants shared their understanding of the two types of quality and how features associated with these qualities have an impact on kindergarten readiness, they still felt as though more can be implemented to enhance their classroom environment. In addition, parents' belief that cognitive abilities outweigh social-emotional development was also noteworthy. A strong indication for the need of a professional development program was evident after

teachers' concerns about the possibility of their classroom environment not meeting students' cognitive and social-emotional needs and parents not being knowledgeable of the significance of children developing social-emotional skills. This project is one of many platforms that can be used to improve teachers' understanding of what is involved in ensuring a high-quality learning environment and parents' understanding of social-emotional development.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

#### **Implications**

During this process, I examined the problem of early learners being ill-prepared for kindergarten. I conducted a qualitative study and found that a majority of teachers and teacher assistants did not understand the difference in structural quality and process quality. In addition, many teachers and teacher assistants had concerns with their current curriculum. Furthermore, my research uncovered a lack of parental knowledge as it relates to the impact of their child being social-emotionally ready for kindergarten. Therefore, additional support was needed to expand their knowledge on this topic. A PD was created to better assist teachers and teacher assistants in ensuring early learners are receiving instruction that entails high-quality learning experiences. The implications for this project included teachers and teacher assistants gaining a better understanding of structural quality and process quality, supplementing the school curriculum with additional resources, and supporting parents in assisting their child with understanding and developing social-emotional skills. On a larger scale, I believe this work is vital in

early learning programs for beginning and well-seasoned teachers and teacher assistants in other school districts.

### **Applications**

Several components of this project study and PD are relevant to the educational field. Teachers and teacher assistants are held accountable for attending and gaining knowledge from professional development training. A teacher's perceptions, understanding, and beliefs should be incorporated into the development of their learning environment. Furthermore, implementing new strategies and approaches are crucial in enhancing a learning environment. For example, many teachers who were a part of this study acknowledged their displeasure of the school's curriculum and how it does not meet the needs of their learners. In an attempt to reach academic achievement goals for students, teachers' concerns need to be regarded in making possible improvements in a child's learning environment.

### **Directions for Future Research**

The opportunities for future research in preparing early learners for kindergarten are significant. Although I focused on components associated with early learners receiving high-quality learning, teachers received additional support in instructional practices as well as strategies to share with parents in assisting them in social-emotional development for their child(ren). Insights from teachers and parents could be the incentive for implementing an intervention program that supports teachers and parents in preparing children for kindergarten readiness.



## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the development of this project was a direct response from data collected using semistructured interview questions. It is my hope to present the school under study detailed results of my study. Although the resulting project was created for the school under study, it is the responsibility of teachers and parents to use the information and resources presented in this project. This qualitative case study should be viewed as a positive step towards increasing teachers' awareness of structural quality and process quality and parents' understanding of the social-emotional development of their children. Throughout the project study, I have become a better researcher, practitioner, and advocate for early childhood education. Completing this project study has provided me with the experience and opportunity to have a direct impact on social change by supporting teachers and parents in advancing their knowledge of kindergarten readiness.

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## Appendix A: Key Factors in Preparing Early Learners for Kindergarten

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## **Background**

A qualitative case study was conducted to assess whether the school under study is effectively preparing early learners for kindergarten success. The findings suggested that a small number of early childhood teachers understood the differences between structural quality and process quality and perceived that a school should be structural for student learning to take place. In addition, early childhood teachers believed that the current curriculum is outdated and not effective in student learning. Likewise, the parents perceived that knowledge of core competencies is far more important than social and emotional skills and believed that giving their child adequate learning experiences outside of school is preparing them for kindergarten. Given that a majority of the early childhood teachers require support in ensuring early learners are kindergarten ready, this PD was created to assist them in their understanding of structural quality and process quality, support them in researching additional activities to enhance their school curriculum, and provide parents support in developing social-emotional skills in their home environment.

## **Framework**

The creation of this PD was created with the participants in mind. The researcher is considered the facilitator; one that facilitates the participants learning and aids them in taking ownership of their learning.

## **Target Audience**

This training is for early childhood teachers and teacher assistants at the school under study. While the PD will focus on teachers' understanding of structural quality and

process quality, incorporating additional activities to the school curriculum in order to enhance student learning, and providing parent support in the area of social-emotional development, it will also provide teachers and teacher assistants with techniques and instructional strategies to improve their classroom learning environment. The target audience will consist of 16 participants.

### **Rationale for Professional Development**

Early childhood teachers and teacher assistants require training in preparing early learners for kindergarten success. The early childhood teachers and teacher assistants need additional support in understanding structural quality and process quality, supplementing their classroom curriculum and providing parents support in the area of social-emotional development. Thus, this PD will provide teachers and teacher assistants with necessary approaches to enhance their environments in promoting high-quality learning environments. In addition, this PD will provide teachers and teacher assistants with strategies to aid parents in supporting their child(ren) in social-emotional development in the home environment.

### **Goals and Objectives of Professional Development**

A 3-day training is planned. Each day participants will meet for a six hours. On day 1, participants will complete module 1, day 2 participants will complete module 2, and on day 3, participants will complete module 3. PD will take place in a room provided by the director of the school. The room will be set-up with four to five round tables for participants to facilitate small group work.

## Learning Outcomes

In the conclusion of the PD, participants will:

- Become knowledgeable of critical indicators associated with a high-quality early learning environment.
- Become knowledgeable about the differences in structural quality and process quality.
- Examine strategies and tools to enhance an early childhood curriculum.
- Develop activities to supplement classroom curriculum.
- Become knowledgeable in supporting parents with social-emotional skills.
- Explore skills in presenting parents with social-emotional skills.

## Modules and Activities

The following describes objectives, each module, and required activity worksheets.

**Module 1.** Teachers' understanding of structural quality and process quality in an early childhood environment.

Objectives:

- Recognize critical indicators for a high-quality early learning environment.
- Distinguish the differences in structural quality and process quality.
- Identify factors associated with structural quality and process quality.

Activities:

- M1-A1—Ice-Breaker (Cartoon Discussion). We will have a group discussion about the cartoon that will be displayed on the projector. Participants will share their thoughts. (30 minutes)
- M1-A2—Group Discussion (Indicators associated with structural quality and process quality). After being engaged in a discussion of structural quality and process quality, participants will have further discussion of the two qualities while reviewing a hand-out. (45 minutes)
- M1-A3—Small Group Discussion (“Flip” the Room with Brainstorming). Participants will be divided into small groups. Four questions will be written on a separate sheet of flip chart paper and placed around the room. Each group will start answering one of the questions and rotate until each group has answered all four questions. Each group will discuss and give their top 4 answers. A discussion will follow. (1 hour)
- M1-A4—Video Viewing (Indicators of a Quality Early Learning Environment). Participants will view a video, and a group discussion will take place. A worksheet will be provided. (30 minutes)
- M1-A5—Buzz Groups (Process Quality). Participants will form eight groups. Two participants in each group. Participants will exchange ideas about what a process quality early learning classrooms should exhibit. Pairs will discuss their ideas with the entire group of participants. A worksheet will be provided. (45minutes)

- M1-A6—Fishbowl-Empty Chair (Structural Quality). Five chairs will be setup in front of the room. Each participant will discuss the importance of structural quality in less than 3 minutes while sitting in one of the chairs. Once a person has contributed to the conversation, they will leave, and another person must come up and take their seat. This will continue until each person has had the opportunity to be in the “fishbowl”. (1 hour)
- M1-A7—Show-N-Tell (Structural Quality and Process Quality). Participants will be provided with teacher magazines, glue, scissors, and newsprint paper. Participants will cut out pictures depicting a structural quality and process quality environment. Participants will share their results with the group. (1 hour)
- M1-A8—Reflective Practice. Participants will reflect on their learning process. A worksheet will be provided. (15 minutes)
- Complete evaluation. (10 minutes)
- Participants will be required to bring school issued laptops and classroom curriculum for module 2.

**M1-A1**

**Cartoon Discussion  
Whole Group Discussion**

**Team Rockville (2013). Retrieved from  
[http://www.rockvillenights.com/2013\\_11\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.rockvillenights.com/2013_11_01_archive.html)**



**M1-A2**  
**Structural Quality and Process Quality**  
**Whole Group Discussion**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

<b>Structural Quality</b>	<b>Process Quality</b>
<b>Adult-child Ratios</b>	<b>Adult-Child Interactions</b>
<b>Square Footage</b>	<b>Classroom Environments</b>
<b>Student Group Size</b>	<b>Curriculum</b>
<b>Qualifications of Teachers and Staff</b>	<b>Educational Experiences</b>
<b>State Licensing Requirements</b>	<b>Professional Development</b>
<b>Leadership Supervision</b>	<b>Family Involvement</b>
	<b>Class Materials</b>

**M1-A3**  
**“Flip” the Room with Brainstorming**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Participants will be divided into groups of fours.
2. Four questions will be written on four separate sheets of flip chart paper located around the room.
3. Each group will start answering one of the questions and rotate until each group has answered all four questions.
4. Each group will discuss and give their top 4 answers. A discussion will follow.

**Questions**

1. Which of the structural indicators do you observe in your teaching environment on a daily basis?
  
2. Which of the process indicators do you observe in your teaching environment on a daily basis?
  
3. Why is it important to possess both qualities in an early childhood environment?
  
4. What do you feel needs to be implemented to make sure your school has both structural quality and process quality?

**M1-A4**  
**Video Viewing**  
**Whole Group Discussion**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Complete the worksheet.
2. Share information

1. List three facts you learned from the video.

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---

2. What was the most interesting part of the video?

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---

---

3. Do you think the video was worth viewing? Why or Why not?

---

---

---

4. In one statement, what was the main idea?

---

---

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**M1-A5**  
**Buzz Groups**  
**Process Quality**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Participants will form eight groups. Two participants in each group.
2. Participants will exchange ideas about what a process quality early learning classrooms should exhibit.
3. Pairs will discuss their ideas with the entire group of participants.

**Process Quality Early Learning Environment**

**M1-A8**  
**Reflective Practice**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Think about the training that was presented.
2. Share five thoughts about your learning process.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Evaluation Survey**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

Key Factors in Preparing Early Learners for Kindergarten

Evaluation Survey

**Module1: Teacher's understanding of structural quality and process quality in an early childhood environment.**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete the survey by circling what best describes the training you received.

0=N/A    1=Strongly disagree    2=Disagree    3=Agree    4=Strongly agree

Objectives were clear. 4    3    2    1    0

Handouts supported the presentation.

Content will be easily applied to everyday practice.

The presenter was knowledgeable.

The presenter was engaging.

1. What did you enjoy most about today's training?
  
2. What did you learn today that you will incorporate immediately into your teaching practices?
  
3. Any suggestions?

**Module 2.** Utilizing additional resources to enhance student learning.

## Objectives:

- Discuss the purpose of an early childhood curriculum.
- Examine strategies and tools to enhance an early childhood curriculum.
- Identify activities that can be incorporated into an early childhood curriculum.

## Activities:

- M2-A1—Ice-Breaker (Cartoon Discussion). We will have a group discussion about the cartoon that will be displayed on the projector. Participants will share their thoughts. (30 minutes)
- M2-A2—Small Group Discussion (Early Childhood Curriculum). In a small group of 4 participants, the following questions will be answered:
  - What is an early childhood curriculum?
  - List the ten developmental domains that should be emphasized in an early childhood curriculum.
  - What types of activities would you like to see added to the current curriculum?A worksheet will be provided. (45 minutes)
- M2-A3—Partner Discussion (Purpose of an Early Childhood Curriculum). Choose a partner. Complete the provided worksheet on pros and cons of an early childhood curriculum. (20 minutes)

- M2-A4—Video Viewing (Using Math Talk to Support Learning).  
Participants will view a video, and a group discussion will take place. A worksheet will be provided. (50 minutes)
- M2-A5—Group Discussion and Partner Discussion (Five Most Important Developmental Domains). As a whole group, participants will use a handout to discuss developmental domains. After discussion, participants will choose a partner to discuss strategies that can be used to make sure that developmental domains are implemented in their classroom environment. (30 minutes)
- M2-A6—Web-Search (Five Developmental Domains). Participants will work in groups of fives. Each group will conduct a web search with laptops with provided worksheet. (1 hour)
- M2-A7—Curriculum Switch-A-Roo (Classroom Curriculum). Teacher and teacher assistants from the same classroom will work together in groups. Each group will pick three different lessons from their curriculum and use the worksheet provided to critique. Participants will answer the following questions:
  - Do you feel there is sufficient content for learning? Why or why not?
  - Do you feel that the processes are efficient enough for learners to reach lesson objectives? Why or Why not?



- Do you feel there is enough teacher-student interaction? Why or Why not?
- Does the lesson pay attention to social-emotional skills? Why or Why not?
- Does this lesson require additional resources to enhance the learning environment? If so, what types of resources would you implement? (1 ½ hours)
- M2-A8—Say It! (Enhancing Classroom Curriculum). Participants will complete each statement as it relates to using additional resources to enhance classroom curriculum.
  - As a teacher, I  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - As a professional, I  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - As a life-longer learner, I  
\_\_\_\_\_

A worksheet will be provided. (30 minutes)

- M2-A9—Reflective Practice. Participants will reflect on their learning process. A worksheet will be provided. (15 minutes)
- Complete evaluation. (10 minutes)

**M2-A1**  
**Cartoon Discussion**  
**Whole Group Discussion**

<http://scienceblogs.com/startswithabang/files/2012/03/preschool-cartoon.jpeg>

**M2-A2**  
**Early Childhood Curriculum**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Participants will group themselves into four groups and complete worksheet.
2. Groups will share their answers with all participants.

1. What is an early childhood curriculum?

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2. List the 10 developmental domains that should be emphasized in an early childhood curriculum.


3. What types of activities would you like to see added to the current curriculum?

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**M2-A3**  
**Purpose of an Early Childhood Curriculum**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Choose a partner.
2. Complete worksheet on pros and cons of an early childhood curriculum.

**Pros**

**Cons**

**M2-A4**  
**Video Viewing**  
**Whole Group Discussion**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Complete the worksheet.
2. Share information

1. List three facts you learned from the video.

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2. What was the most interesting part of the video?

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3. Do you think the video was worth viewing? Why or Why not?

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4. In one statement, what was the main idea?

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**M2-A5**  
**Five Most Important Developmental Domains**  
**by Becky L. Spivey**

**<http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdf/358%20Developmental%20Domains.pdf>**

**M2-A6**  
**Super Duper Activity**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

Name of Activity \_\_\_\_\_

Age Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials: \_\_\_\_\_  
                  \_\_\_\_\_

What can children learn from this activity?

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Which of the following Developmental Domain(s) did the activity support? Please circle.

- Cognitive Development
- Language Development
- Social Development
- Physical Development
- Gross Motor Development

Why?

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What can you change to make it challenging for older children and age-appropriate for younger children?

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**M2-A7**  
**Curriculum Switch-A-Roo**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

Name of Activity \_\_\_\_\_

Age Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do you feel there is sufficient content for learning? Why or why not?

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Do you feel that the processes are efficient enough for learners to reach lesson objectives? Why or Why not?

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Do you feel there is enough teacher-student interaction? Why or Why not?

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Does the lesson pay attention to social-emotional skills? Why or Why not?

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Does this lesson require additional resources in order to enhance the learning environment? If so, what types of resources would you implement?

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**M2-A8**  
**Say It!**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

Participants will complete each statement as it relates to using additional resources to enhance classroom curriculum.

As a teacher, I

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As a professional, I

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As a life-longer learner, I

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**M2-A9**  
**Reflective Practice**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Think about the training that was presented.
2. Share five thoughts about your learning process.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Evaluation Survey**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

Key Factors in Preparing Early Learners for Kindergarten

Evaluation Survey

Module 2: **Utilizing additional resources to enhance student learning.**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete the survey by circling what best describes the training you received.

0=N/A    1=Strongly disagree    2=Disagree    3=Agree    4=Strongly agree

Objectives were clear. 4    3    2    1    0

Handouts supported the presentation.

Content will be easily applied to everyday practice.

The presenter was knowledgeable.

The presenter was engaging.

1. What did you enjoy most about today's training?

2. What did you learn today that you will incorporate immediately into your teaching practices?

3. Any suggestions?

**Module 3.** Supporting parents in developing social-emotional skills.

## Objectives:

- Examine strategies to support social-emotional learning in a home environment.
- Discuss ways to support parents in developing social-emotional skills.
- Learn how to present parents with information on social-emotional skills.

## Activities:

- M3-A1—Ice-Breaker (Cartoon Discussion). We will have a group discussion about the cartoon that will be displayed on the projector. Participants will share their thoughts. (30 minutes)
- M3-A2—Video Viewing (Social-Emotional Competence). Participants will view a video, and a group discussion will take place. The following questions will be answered:
  - List three facts you learned from the video.
  - What was the most interesting part of the video?
  - Do you think the video was worth viewing? Why or Why not?
  - In one statement, what was the main idea?

A worksheet will be provided. (45 minutes)

- M3-A3—Group Discussion (Resource Strategies for Parents). Participants will discuss the importance of strategies to support parents in incorporating social-emotional development in their home environment.

A worksheet will be provided. (20 minutes)

- M3-A4— Video Viewing (Social-Emotional Competence). Participants will view a video, and a group discussion will take place. The following questions will be answered:
  - What was the most interesting part of the video?
  - Do you think the video was worth viewing? Why or Why not?
  - In one statement, what was the main idea?

A worksheet will be provided. (30 minutes)

- M3-A5— Video Viewing 2 (Social-Emotional Competence). Participants will view a video, and a group discussion will take place. The following questions will be answered:
  - List what you know about social-emotional development.
  - List the importance of the video.
  - State a brief summary of the video.
  - List three questions you would ask this mother.
  - List three strategies you would give this mother.

A worksheet will be provided. (30 minutes)

- M3-A6— Video Viewing 6(Social-Emotional Competence). Participants will view a video, and a group discussion will take place. The following questions will be answered:
  - List what you know about social-emotional development.
  - List the importance of the video.
  - State a brief summary of the video.

- List three questions you would ask this couple.

A worksheet will be provided. (30 minutes)

- M3-A7—Cartoon Discussion. We will have a group discussion about the cartoon that will be displayed on the projector. Participants will share their thoughts. (30 minutes)
- M3-A8—Group Discussion and Partner Discussion (Review Parent Booklet on Social-emotional strategies.) Participants will receive a copy of Positive Solutions for Families written by the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning. The following topics will be discussed:
  - Making a Connection
  - Making It Happen
  - Why Do Children Do What They Do?
  - Teach Me What to Do?
  - Facing the Challenge, Parts 1 and 2 (2 hours)
- M3-A9—Reflective Practice. Participants will reflect on their learning process. A worksheet will be provided. (15 minutes)
- Complete evaluation. (10 minutes)

**M3-A1**  
**Cartoon Discussion**  
**Whole Group Discussion**

**<http://www.theguardian.com/profile/ros-asquith?page=3>**

**M3-A2**  
**Social-Emotional Competence**  
**Video Viewing**  
**Whole Group Discussion**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Complete the worksheet.
2. Share information

1. List three facts you learned from the video.

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2. What was the most interesting part of the video?

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3. Do you think the video was worth viewing? Why or Why not?

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4. In one statement, what was the main idea?

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**M3-A3**  
**Strategies for Home Support**  
**Whole Group Discussion**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Participants will discuss the strategies.
2. Discuss the importance of each strategy.

**Strategies for Home Support**

Respect Your Child's Difference

Be a Good Listener

Model Good Behavior

Support Your Child's Self-Esteem

Ask for Support

**M3-A4**  
**Social-Emotional Competence**  
**Video Viewing**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Participants will complete the worksheet.

**Before Viewing**  
List what you know about  
social-emotional  
development.

**During Viewing**  
List the importance of the  
video.

**After Viewing**  
State a brief summary of  
the video.

List three questions you would ask this mother.

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List three questions you would give this mother.

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**M3-A5**  
**Video 2 Viewing**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Participants will complete the worksheet.

**Before Viewing**  
List what you know about  
social-emotional  
development.

**During Viewing**  
List the importance of the  
video.

**After Viewing**  
State a brief summary of  
the video.

List three questions you would ask this couple.

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List three strategies you would give this couple.

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**M3-A6**  
**Social-Emotional Competence**  
**Video 6 Viewing**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Participants will complete the worksheet.

Before Viewing

List what you know about social-emotional development.

During Viewing

List the importance of the video.

After Viewing

State a brief summary of the video.

List three questions you would ask this mother.

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List three strategies you would give this mother.

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**M3-A7**  
**Cartoon Discussion**  
**Whole Group Discussion**

**<http://www.cribsters.com/blog/daycare-separation-anxiety/>**

**M3-A8**  
**Review Parent Booklet**

Participants will receive a copy of Positive Solutions for Families written by the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning.

[http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/trainings/positive\\_solutions\\_workbook.pdf](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/trainings/positive_solutions_workbook.pdf)

**M3-A9**  
**Reflective Practice**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

1. Think about the training that was presented.
2. Share five thoughts about your learning process.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Evaluation Survey**  
**Created by Deidre Stewart**

Key Factors in Preparing Early Learners for Kindergarten

Evaluation Survey

**Module 3: Supporting parents in developing social-emotional skills.**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete the survey by circling what best describes the training you received.

0=N/A    1=Strongly disagree    2=Disagree    3=Agree    4=Strongly agree

Objectives were clear. 4    3    2    1    0

Handouts supported the presentation.

Content will be easily applied to everyday  
practice.

The presenter was knowledgeable.

The presenter was engaging.

1. What did you enjoy most about today's training?
  
  
  
2. What did you learn today that you will incorporate immediately into your teaching practices?
  
  
  
3. Any suggestions?





## Multimedia Presentation

The 3-day PD will be presented with a multimedia presentation.

Multimedia Presentation (40 slides)

### KEY FACTORS IN PREPARING EARLY LEARNERS FOR KINDERGARTEN



Presented by  
Deidre J. Stewart  
Walden University Doctoral Candidate

## Purpose

A professional development (PD) was designed to support teachers in preparing early learners for kindergarten success.



## Training Overview

- ✓ Module 1: Teacher's understanding of structural quality and process quality in an early childhood environment.
- ✓ Module 2: Utilizing additional resources to enhance student learning.
- ✓ Module 3: Supporting parents in developing social-emotional skills.



## Training Objectives

Participants will:

- ✓ Assess understanding of quality indicators associated with high-quality learning.
- ✓ Explore effective instructional strategies to enhance student learning.
- ✓ Identify learning strategies to support parents in social-emotional development.

## Module 1

Teacher's understanding of structural quality and process quality in an early childhood environment.

M1

## Module 1 Objectives

- Participants will:
  - ✓ Recognize critical indicators towards a high-quality early learning environment.
  - ✓ Distinguish differences in structural quality and process quality.
  - ✓ Identify factors associated with structural quality and process quality.

M1

### Activity 1 Cartoon Discussion



<http://www.rockvillenights.com/2013/11/01/archive.html>

M1

## Structural Quality and Process Quality

**Structural quality** are “features including low ratios of staff to children and small group sizes plus higher levels of caregivers’ training, education, and experience” (Sosinsky & Kim, 2013, p. 40).

**Process quality** are features that “includes high levels of warmth and positive expression, awareness of and responsiveness to children’s needs, and verbal and nonverbal cognitive stimulation during interactions between caregivers and children” (Sosinsky & Kim, 2013, p. 40).

M1

### Activity 2 Group Discussion

Structural Quality	Process Quality
Adult-child Ratios	Adult-Child Interactions
Square Footage	Classroom Environments
Student Group Size	Curriculum
Qualifications of Teachers and Staff	Educational Experiences
State Licensing Requirements	Professional Development
Leadership Supervision	Family Involvement
	Class Materials

M1



## Activity 3

### “Flip” the Room with Brainstorming

- o G1. Which of the structural indicators do you observe in your teaching environment on a daily basis?
- o G2. Which of the process indicators do you observe in your teaching environment on a daily basis?
- o G3. Why is it important to possess both qualities in an early childhood environment?
- o G4. What do you feel needs to be implemented in order to make sure your school has both structural quality and process quality?

M1

## Activity 4

### Video Viewing

M1-04  
Video Viewing  
Whole Group Discussion  
Created by Deidre Stewart

1. Complete the worksheet.

2. Share information.

1. List three facts you learned from the video.

2. What was the most interesting part of the video?

3. Do you think the video was worth viewing? Why or Why not?

4. In one statement what was the main idea?

#### Indicators of a Quality Early Learning Environment



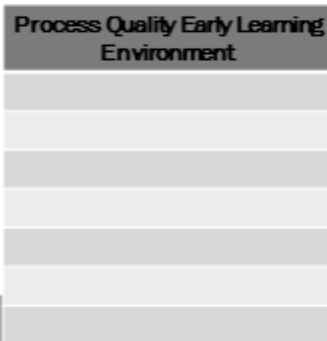
<https://youtu.be/fm7h1wLXuTU>

M1



## Activity 5 Buzz Groups Process Quality

- ✓ Participants will form eight groups. Two participants in each group.
- ✓ Participants will exchange ideas about what a process quality early learning classrooms should exhibit.



- ✓ Pairs will discuss their ideas to the entire group of participants.

M1

## Activity 6 Fishbowl-Empty Chair Structural Quality

- ✓ Five chairs will be set-up in front of the room. Each chair will be occupied by a participant.
- ✓ Each participant will discuss the importance of structural quality in less than 3 minutes.
- ✓ Once a person has contributed to the conversation, they will leave and another person must come up and take their seat.
- ✓ This will continue until each person has had the opportunity to be in the "fishbowl".



M1



## Activity 7 Show-n-Tell



Materials: Teacher magazines, glue, scissors, and newsprint paper

Participants will cut out pictures depicting a structural quality and process quality environment.

M1

## Activity 8 Reflective Practice

- ✓ Have participants reflect on their learning process and complete provided worksheet.
- ✓ Invite participants to share what they learned and what contributions they made during the PD.
- ✓ Complete evaluation survey.

### Activity 8-Reflective Practices

Think about 5 thoughts you would like to share about your learning process.


M1

## Homework

Each participant will need to bring their school issued laptop and teacher manual for tomorrow's training.



M1

## Module 2

Utilizing additional resources to enhance student learning.



M2



## Activity 2 Early Childhood Curriculum

In a group of 4 teachers, complete the worksheet provided.

What is an early childhood curriculum?


List the 10 developmental domains that should be emphasized in an early childhood curriculum.


What types of activities would you like to see added to the current curriculum?


M2

## Activity 3 Purpose of a Curriculum

- Choose a partner. Complete the provided worksheet on pros and cons of an early childhood curriculum.

Pros and Cons of an Early Childhood Curriculum

Pros	Cons

M2

## Activity 4 Video Viewing

### Using Math Talk to Support Learning

ME-44

Video Viewing

Whole Group Discussion

Created by Deidre Stewart

1. Complete the worksheet.
2. Share information.

1. List three facts you learned from the video.

2. What was the most interesting part of the video?

3. Do you think the video was worth viewing? Why or why not?

4. In one statement, what was the main idea?



Using Math Talk to Support Learning

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLmm3U0eYX4>

M2

## Activity 5 Five Most Important Developmental Domains



- As a whole group, participants will use a handout to discuss developmental domains.
- After discussion, participants will choose a partner to discuss strategies that can be utilized to make sure that domains are implemented in their classroom environment.
- Participants will share their strategies.



M2

## Activity 6 Web Search

M1  
Super Duper Activity  
Created by Delire Stewart

Name of Activity: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Age Group: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Materials: \_\_\_\_\_  
 What can children learn from this activity? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Which of the following Developmental Domain(s) did the activity support? Please check:  
 Cognitive Development  
 Language Development  
 Social Development  
 Physical Development  
 Gross Motor Development  
 Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

- Participants will work in groups of fives.
- Each group will conduct a web search with laptops and complete the handout provided.
- Each group will search for five activities according to the developmental domains that were discussed.

M2

## Activity 7 Curriculum Switch-A-Roo

M1  
Curriculum Switch-A-Roo  
Created by Delire Stewart

Name of Activity: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Age Group: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Materials: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Do you feel there is sufficient content for learning? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Do you feel that the processes are efficient enough for learners to reach lesson objectives? Why or Why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Do you feel there is enough teacher-student interaction? Why or Why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Does the lesson pay attention to social-emotional skills? Why or Why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Does this lesson require additional resources in order to enhance the learning environment? If so, what type of resources would you implement? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

- Teacher and teacher assistants from the same classroom will work together in groups.
- Each group will pick three different lessons from their curriculum and use the worksheet provided to critique.
- Each group will share.

M2

## Activity 8 Say It!

M2  
Say It!  
Created by Deidre Stewart

Participants will complete each statement as it relates to utilizing additional resources to enhance classroom curriculum.

As a teacher, I \_\_\_\_\_

As a professional, I \_\_\_\_\_

As a life-long learner, I \_\_\_\_\_

- Participants will complete the worksheet titled Say It.
- Participants will share.

M2

## Activity 9 Reflective Practice

- ✓ Have participants reflect on their learning process and complete provided worksheet.
- ✓ Invite participants to share what they learned and what contributions they made during the PD.
- ✓ Complete evaluation survey.

### Activity 9-Reflective Practices

Think about 5 thoughts you would like to share about your learning process.


M2

## Module 3

Supporting parents in developing social-emotional skills.

M3

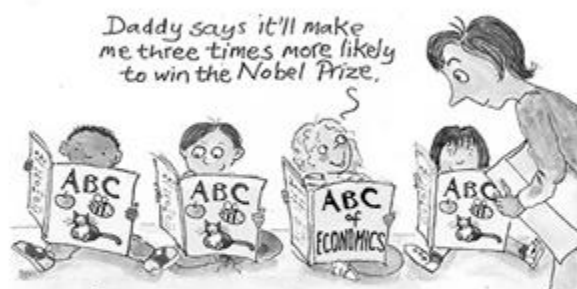
## Module 3 Objectives

- Participants will:
  - ✓ Examine strategies to support social-emotional learning in a home environment.
  - ✓ Discuss ways to support parents in developing social-emotional skills.
  - ✓ Learn how to present parents with information on social-emotional skills.

M3



## Activity 1 Cartoon Discussion



<http://www.theguardian.com/profile/ros-asquith?page=3>

M3

## Activity 2 Video Viewing

MS-4  
Video Viewing  
Whole Group Discussion  
Created by Deidre Stewart

1. Complete the worksheet.
2. Share information.
  1. List three facts you learned from the video.
  2. What was the most interesting part of the video?
  3. Do you think the video was worth viewing? Why or why not?
  4. In one statement, what was the main idea?



[http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/social\\_emotional\\_competence.html](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/social_emotional_competence.html)

M3

## Activity 3

### Resource Strategies for Parents

#### Strategies for Home Support

Respect Your Child's Difference  
 Be a Good Listener  
 Model Good Behavior  
 Support your Child's Self-Esteem  
 Ask for Support

M3

## Activity 4

### Video 2 Viewing

Video 1 Viewing  
 Created by Deidre Stewart  
 1. Participants will complete the worksheet

Before Viewing	During Viewing	After Viewing
List what you know about social-emotional development.	Use the importance of the video.	State a brief summary of the video.

List three questions you would ask the mother.  
 List three strategies you would give the mother.



[http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training\\_parent.html](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training_parent.html)

M3

## Activity 5 Video 6 Viewing

Video 2 Viewing  
Created by Deidre Stewart  
1. Participants will complete the worksheet

Before Viewing	During Viewing	After Viewing
List what you know about social-emotional development.	List the importance of the video.	State a brief summary of the video.



List three questions you would ask this couple.  
List three strategies you would give this couple.


[http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training\\_parent.html](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training_parent.html)

M3

## Activity 6 Video 5 Viewing

Video 5 Viewing  
Created by Deidre Stewart  
1. Participants will complete the worksheet

Before Viewing	During Viewing	After Viewing
List what you know about social-emotional development.	List the importance of the video.	State a brief summary of the video.



List three questions you would ask the mother.  
List three strategies you would give this mother.

[http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training\\_parent.html](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training_parent.html)

M3

## Activity 7 Cartoon Discussion



<http://www.cribsters.com/blog/daycare-separation-anxiety/>

M3

## Activity 8 Review Parent Booklet

- ✓ Participants will receive a copy of Positive Solutions for Families written by the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning.
- ✓ We will discuss the following topics:
  - Making a Connection
  - Making It Happen
  - Why Do Children Do What They Do?
  - Teach Me What to Do
  - Facing the Challenge, Parts 1 and 2
- ✓ [http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training\\_parent.html#workbook](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training_parent.html#workbook)

M3

## Activity 9 Reflective Practice

- ✓ Have participants reflect on their learning process and complete provided worksheet.
- ✓ Invite participants to share what they learned and what contributions they made during the PD.
- ✓ Complete evaluation survey.

### Activity 9-Reflective Practices

Think about 5 thoughts you would like to share about your learning process.


M3

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## Appendix B: Teacher Interview Questions

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Letter Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Letter Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

## Greetings

State the Purpose of the Research Study: The purpose of this research study is to examine whether the school under study is providing their students with the necessary skills to be successful in kindergarten.

## Warm-up Questions:

How long have you worked at the school under study?

What do you enjoy most about working for the school under study?

What do you enjoy most about your class?

## Questions:

1. Discuss your understanding of structural quality and process quality.
2. Why do you believe structural quality and process quality are important in an early learning setting?
3. What features do you categorize as structural quality? Please elaborate.
4. What features do you categorize as process quality? Please elaborate.
5. Do you feel that one quality can be successful without the other? Please elaborate.
6. What current curriculum do you use in your classroom? Do you feel this curriculum is sufficient in meeting student learning needs? Please elaborate.
7. How do you think structural quality impacts student learning?
8. Identify changes as it relates to structural qualities and process qualities you feel are necessary in order for all children at the school under study to be kindergarten ready.

**Thank your participant!**

## Appendix C: Parent Interview Questions

## Parent Interview

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Letter Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Greetings

State the Purpose of the Research Study: The purpose of this research study is to examine whether the school under study is providing their students with the necessary skills to be successful in kindergarten.

## Warm-up Questions:

Are you pleased with the educational experiences your child is receiving?

Number of Years at the school under study: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest Educational Level: \_\_\_\_\_

## Questions:

**Please answer the following questions.**

1. What does “kindergarten ready” mean to you? Please elaborate.
2. What do you feel your child needs to know in order to be kindergarten ready?
3. Why do you think it is important for your child to receive an early start to education?
4. What involvement do you have in your child’s educational endeavors?
5. What types of assistance do you provide your child while completing homework?
6. What kinds of learning experiences have you given your child that support kindergarten readiness?
7. What skills has your child demonstrated to show kindergarten readiness?
8. What do you feel are the three most important qualities your child should possess in order to be kindergarten ready? Please elaborate.

**Thank your Participant!**