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How Social Emotional Development Skills Gained
in High Quality Public School Prekindergarten
Impact Kindergarten Academic Readiness

A dissertation
presented to
the faculty of the
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University

in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by
Gale A. Collett
December 2013

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Dr. Cecil Blankenship
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Keywords: Prekindergarten, Social Emotional Development, Academic Readiness

ABSTRACT

How Social Emotional Development Skills Gained
In High Quality Public School Prekindergarten
Impact Kindergarten Academic Readiness

by

Gale A. Collett

Longitudinal research has demonstrated that children's emotional and social skills are linked to their early academic achievement (Wentzel & Asher, 1995). Children who have difficulty paying attention, following directions, getting along with others, and controlling negative emotions like anger and distress do not do as well in school (Arnokl et al., 1999; McClelland et al., 2000). Academic achievement in the early years of schooling appears to be built on a firm foundation of children's social emotional skills (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997; O'Neil et al., 1997). Higher quality prekindergarten programs are associated with the early years of schooling and more positive academic outcomes in children (Burchinal et al., 2000).

Investments in early childhood programs by state and federal governments have been made with a goal of improving school readiness for low income children. These investments are based on findings that show a link between program quality and children's academic outcomes. Studies of model programs show that intensive early childhood services can improve children's cognitive,

academic, and social skills with gains maintained into adulthood (Burchinal, Kainz, & Cai, in press).

The purpose of this study was to create knowledge that indicates the influence of the social emotional skills children gain by completing prekindergarten. Schools in Sevier County, Tennessee that have prekindergarten classrooms in place were chosen for this study because kindergarten is the next experience children will have after pre-k. Kindergarten teachers in the schools chosen were purposefully selected as participants. Kindergarten teachers have the opportunity to make comparisons of differences in academic readiness of students who have completed prekindergarten and the students who have not been in a school environment. Kindergarten teachers may be able to conclude from classroom observation of the 2 groups if there is a difference in academic readiness.

Home environments with strong parental involvement were most kindergarten teachers' first choice for early learning and kindergarten preparation. Teachers realization that a strong home environment is not available to all children encouraged them to appreciate having a high quality public school prekindergarten as an alternative. Kindergarten teachers overall perceptions about the readiness of children who enter their classroom after completing prekindergarten were positive.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the four great loves of my life, Andy, Sam, Giuli, and Jim Collett. It is a wondrous thing to be your mom. You have always believed in me, encouraged me, and supported me. As with everything else in our lives, we were in this endeavor together and you were, as always, amazing. I love you.

“You’re braver than you believe,

stronger than you seem,

and smarter than you think...”

Christopher Robin

~~~

In memory of my parents

Andrew J. (Gat) and Mary Jane (Jeannie) Garrison

who never let me forget...it’s what you learn after you know it all that counts....

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Prekindergarten is a program specifically designed to prepare 4 year old children for kindergarten. Preschool programs that were begun in the early 1960s and 1970s, The High Scope Preschool Perry Project, the Abecedarian Study, and the Chicago Child Parent Centers, were the pioneers for today's high quality pre-kindergarten programs. The High Scope Perry Preschool Project began in 1962 and followed its students from preschool through age 40. The statistics consistently showed higher gains academically and in life skills for the group of students that completed the preschool program than for the comparison group that did not attend any preschool program (Schweinhart, 2004). The Abecedarian Project that was begun in 1972 followed preschool students in the program through age 21 and showed higher gains academically and in life skills. Outcome data were collected for 94% of the original sample group at age 21 (Campbell, Pungello, Miller-Johnson, Burchinal, & Ramey, 2001). The Chicago Parent Child Centers that were begun in 1968 on Chicago's west side focused on a structured educational program for preschool children with emphasis on language and reading skills, and parent involvement. Longitudinal studies followed students through age 20 and showed more gains academically and in life skills for the students who completed the preschool program than for those students who did not (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann 2001).

Pre-k programs should have three characteristics in common: (1) governed by high program standards, (2) serve 4 year olds, and (3) focus on school readiness. Not all eligible children are required to attend pre-k. Families who meet eligibility criteria can choose to send their 4 year old children to pre-k, use other early childhood education options, or keep their preschoolers at home (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2006). Not all pre-k

programs are state funded but approximately 70% of state funded pre-k programs are administered by public school systems (Gilliam, 2005).

There are stakeholders who place more emphasis on children's academic preparedness and this emphasis continues to overshadow the importance of children's social emotional development for school readiness (Raver & Zigler, 1997). Research indicates that social emotional development is the foundation of how children learn and this development begins in infancy. Children's emotional adjustment matters because children who are emotionally well adjusted have a significantly greater chance of early school success (Thompson, 2008). Substantial research indicates that the brain of a child develops more rapidly than at any other time of their lives and there are implications for not nurturing early neurological development (Diamond & Hopson, 1998; Gunnar & Barr, 1998). Although this brain development includes the ability to read and write, it also includes social emotional development, one of seven domains included in the Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (TNELDS). The TNELDS were adopted in the Tennessee State Department of Education in 2004 and were amended in 2012 to align with the newly adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Kindergarten (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2012). The TNELDS are taught through a curriculum approved by the State Department of Education. All of the TNELDS are important to the academic development of young children and emphasize strong social emotional skills that enable children to enter kindergarten with more confidence, independence, and self-esteem. The ability of children to manage their emotions and behaviors and to make meaningful friendships are important prerequisites for school academic success. Socially competent children are also more academically successful, and poor social skills are a strong predictor of academic failure (Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong, & Gomby, 2005).

Social emotional development is important both in its own right and because aspects of it facilitate cognitive development. The Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) has conducted extensive research that has contributed to a better understanding of the relationship between prekindergarten quality and child outcomes (NICHD, 2001). High quality prekindergarten is organized in ways that allow children to form close, sustained relationships with teachers and encourage positive relationships with peers. Small group sizes and high adult-child ratios, competitive salaries and benefits, professional development, and other aspects of the program are geared toward fostering strong relationships and reducing teacher turnover. These components have been associated with positive social emotional outcomes for children (Voruba-Drzal, Coley, & Chase-Lonsdale, 2004). A program's quality may also be determined by the qualifications required of the teachers and staff. Teachers with 4 year degrees and specialization in early childhood are better prepared to develop meaningful relationships with their students and create safe, nurturing climates that support children's emotional well-being. Children in classroom with teachers who are highly involved and invested during prekindergarten are less likely to display behavior problems in kindergarten and demonstrate increased social skills through elementary school (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001).

The importance of prekindergarten quality in supporting children's readiness is illustrated in longitudinal studies. For example, researchers use Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-K (ECLS-K) data to study the effects of early learning in children from kindergarten through the eighth grade. The ECLS-K was designed to address a vast array of research issues. The first ECLS-K study was begun in the 1998-1999 school year and focused on three broad areas: schooling and performance, status and transition, and the interaction of school, family, and community. ECLS-K collected data on how well children perform in different kinds of

classrooms and schools and on the interaction between children's background and their performance in different learning settings. With the exception of being able to use a pencil or a brush, tasks such as reading and math skills were rated as essential or very important by less than one third of teachers. Conversely, over 75% of the 3,305 kindergarten teachers surveyed in this study agreed that social emotional skills including being able to follow directions and communicate both needs and thoughts, as well as not being disruptive, were more essential or very important to readiness skills (Institute for Education Sciences, 2005). Another ECLS-K study was begun in the 2010-2011 school year to follow a different group (ECLS-K: 2011, Institute for Educational Sciences, 2012).

States implement and deliver pre-k programs in many different ways. As of 2007, 38 of 50 states and the District of Columbia offer some level of pre-k programs (Barnett et al., 2007). The National Institute for Early Education research (NIEER) has developed a 10-point quality standard checklist for evaluating pre-k programs:

1. Comprehensive early learning standards
2. Lead teacher must have a BA degree
3. Lead teacher must have specialization in early childhood education
4. Assistants must have a CDA equivalent
5. Teachers must complete at least 15 hours of in-service training each year
6. Maximum class size of 20
7. Staff-child ratio of 1:10 or better
8. Vision, hearing, and health screening and referral are required, along with at least one family support service
9. At least one meal per day is offered

## 10. Required site visits by state monitors

In 2007 The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) found that the pre-k programs in two states, Alabama and North Carolina, met all 10 quality benchmarks, and the pre-k programs in 8 other states Arkansas, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Washington met 9 of the 10 benchmarks.

### *Significance of the Study*

There are seven key ingredients for school readiness: (1) confidence, (2) curiosity, (3) intentionality, (4) self-control, (5) relatedness, (6) capacity to communicate, (7) cooperativeness (Schiller, 2008). According to the Abbot Preschool Program Implementation Guidelines from the office of Early Childhood Education, New Jersey Department of Education, 2003, high quality prekindergarten programs have been shown to dramatically raise children's abilities at kindergarten entry, increase early and later achievement test scores, reduce grade repetition and placement in special education, and boost graduation rates.

“Whether a child enters kindergarten the first day of school ready to learn depends greatly on his on his or her level of social-emotional maturity” (Goleman & Schiller, 2008). This study may further show how children who attend a high quality prekindergarten program gain the social emotional maturity described as the seven key ingredients for school readiness and how those skills are beneficial to academic readiness.

### *Background of the Study*

Many of the strongest advocates of pre-k cite three major research studies as evidence of quality and effectiveness. These studies began in the 1960s and 1970s but remain relevant in

part because researchers tracked the short and long term progress of the participants, including one study that followed participants and a control group through age 40. As a result, these studies continue to produce findings cited by policymakers nationwide. The projects show a demonstrably positive effect of high quality pre-k on children's futures (High Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2006).

#### *High Scope Perry Preschool Project*

This 1960s study included 123 low-income African-American children who were randomly divided into two groups—one that received a comprehensive prekindergarten program and a second group that received no early childhood program. Those in the intervention program received a high quality pre-k program with well trained and compensated teachers and low child to staff ratios. Researchers then compared the progress of these children over time, assessing issues such as educational progress, delinquency, earnings, and other economic factors. The results were impressive. Approximately two thirds of pre-k children, or 65%, eventually graduated from high school, compared with 45% from the control group. The trend was particularly true among females, as 84% of pre-k girls and only 32% of comparison group females completed high school. Pre-k participants had higher scores on achievement tests between ages 9 and 14 and on literacy tests at ages 9 and 27 (Schweinhart, 2004).

In adulthood, Perry pre-k participants were less likely to be arrested for violent or drug crimes and had significantly fewer arrests than the comparison group. At age 27 participants were less likely to drink or smoke than those in the comparison group. In addition, 76% were employed at age 40 compared with 62% of nonparticipants and averaged \$5,000 a year more in income (Shulman, 2005).

### *Abecedarian Project*

From 1972 to 1985, 111 children and their families participated in an early childhood study at the University of North Carolina that randomly assigned young children to a treatment group or a control group that did not receive these services. Those with the pre-k intervention had a higher IQ at ages 12 and 15 and stronger achievement scores at age 15. By comparison, nonprogram children were more likely to require special education or be retained in grade, two major costs for schools. Overall 67% of Abecedarian children graduated from high school compared with 51% of the control group. Of those receiving pre-k, 36% attended a 4-year college, more than double the rate of nonprogram children (Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, 2006).

### *Chicago Child Parent Centers*

This program, which began in 1967 in low income Chicago neighborhoods and continues to operate today, provides children with high quality pre-k plus follow up services. Parents commit to volunteer time at the center on a regular basis. For its long-term evaluation involving 1,539 children, researchers followed children who participated from 1983 to 1986 and compared them to children who did not participate in the program but who did attend full-day kindergarten. In addition to children in the intervention group were eligible for follow-up services through age 9. Researchers then followed program children and a comparison group for fifteen years following the intervention with the latest updates posted in 2001. The evaluation showed positive impacts for pre-k children on school achievement at age 14 and in high school completion by age 21. Overall, program children had 41% fewer special education placements and 40% fewer grade retentions than nonparticipants (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001).

Although only 10 states had their own pre-k programs in 1980 (Gilliam & Ziegler, 2004), a growing number in the 1980s showed interest as part of a focus on education reform and improvement. The landmark model programs High Scope Perry Preschool Project, Abecedarian Project, and Chicago Child Parent Centers, provided emerging research that helped fuel steady prekindergarten growth in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1991, 28 states had pre-k programs primarily for at-risk children with a total enrollment of approximately 290,000 children. By 2005 the number of states with some type of pre-k program including state funded public school pre-k had increased to 38 (Preschool Yearbook, 2005). By 2009, 52% of 4 year old children in the United States were enrolled in pre-k (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

In addition to producing educational gains, these programs also provided savings or benefits to federal, state, and local governments. Given the high cost to school districts of certain interventions such as special education and grade retention, these cost benefit issues are important to policymakers and provide a strong argument for pre-k intervention (Committee for Economic Development, 2006).

### *Statement of the Problem*

“The foundations of social competence that are developed in the first five years are linked to emotional well-being and affect a child’s later ability to functionally adapt in school and to form successful relationships throughout life” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child). The purpose of this qualitative study is to create knowledge derived from classroom observations and kindergarten teacher’s perceptions of how the social emotional development of their students who have completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program taught by a certified, licensed teacher has affected their academic kindergarten readiness. Information collected from

teacher perceptions through interviews and surveys will also help determine the differences, if any, of the social emotional development in children who have completed a high quality public prekindergarten program compared to the children who have not completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program as it applies to cognitive development.

### *Research Questions*

The perceptions of kindergarten teachers will be gathered from open-ended questions asked during interviews. The questions asked will reflect confidence, curiosity, intentionality, self-control, relatedness, capacity to communicate, and cooperativeness, the seven key ingredients of school readiness (Schiller, 2008).

### *Limitations and Delimitations*

A delimitation of this study was that all the schools in the districts involved in this study do not have prekindergarten programs in place in their schools. This is because the prekindergarten programs in Tennessee's public schools are not available to all schools, just schools that qualify for federal funds assistance under the requirements of the Title I, Part A allocation. Even then, school districts must decide if they want prekindergarten programs in their schools and follow an application process with the state of Tennessee.

This study was conducted in kindergarten classrooms in schools in Sevier County Tennessee that have a voluntary prekindergarten program in place in their school. The Tennessee Voluntary Prekindergarten was begun in 2005 in Tennessee's schools. The longitudinal study results of 2010 is new because of the age of the program which may create a limitation of comparable criteria.

The study was delimited to interview questions of the kindergarten teachers chosen for voluntary participation in the study. The school system chosen was limited to schools in Sevier County in East Tennessee because of the implementation of pre-k programs in schools in this system. The study was delimited by the specific schools that have prekindergarten programs in place in their schools.

### *Definitions of Terms*

The following list of definitions are relevant to the research and data compiled and assist in understanding this study.

1. *Prekindergarten-(Pre-K)* refers to the first formal academic classroom based learning environment that a child customarily attends preceding kindergarten in the United States (Merriam & Webster, 2013).
2. *At-risk* refers to those students who are not progressing at the same rate as their peers. They require more one-on-one instruction to make progress in skill acquisition (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009).
3. *Kindergarten Readiness* refers to attributes and behaviors determined to be necessary for a child to succeed in kindergarten that include (1) social emotional skills, (2) physical skills, and (3) academic skills (West, Haus, & Collins, 1993).
4. *Pre-K Longitudinal Study* is a study whose purpose is to understand how the differences in children's public school pre-k experiences and their experiences during primary school influences their success in school. The study collects data over a predetermined number of years for children enrolled in public school pre-k and follows their progress. This progress is compared to the progress of children who were not enrolled in public school pre-k (Peabody Research Institute, Vanderbilt University, 2011).

5. *Social Emotional Development* is behavior and emotion based on a child's temperament and guided development of those behaviors and emotions at different ages to enable a child's positive progression (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004).
6. *Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (TNELDS)* are the age appropriate learning goals outlined by the State Department of Education that are implemented in a public school prekindergarten program through a developmentally appropriate prekindergarten curriculum (TN Department of Education, 2011).
7. *Universal Pre-K Programs*-Pre-K programs that are available to all 4 year old children regardless of family income or other socioeconomic factors (Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children (MAEYC), 2009).
8. *Disadvantaged Children* is having a background or childhood environment containing factors that would prevent a child from obtaining the necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities to succeed in school or society (Merriam & Webster, 2013).
9. *Self-Regulation* refers to the ability to manage one's own behavior so as to withstand impulses, maintain focus, and undertake tasks even if there are other more enticing alternatives available (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).
10. *Title I* refers to Title I Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It provides financial assistance to local education agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low income families to help ensure that all children meet state academic standards. Federal funds are currently allocated through four statutory formulas that are based primarily on census poverty estimated and the cost of education in each state (U. S. Department of Education, 2010).
11. *Early Childhood Education* is the formal teaching and care of young children by people

other than their family or in settings outside the home. Early Childhood Education begins at birth and continues through age 8 (National Association for the Education of Young Children, (NAEYC), 2010).

12. *Phenomenology* is the clarification and understanding of people's perspectives and especially the meanings they give to events, concepts, and issues (Mabry, 2006).

### *Overview of the Study*

This qualitative study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 contains the introduction to the study, the significance of the study, the historical background, statement of the problem, research questions to be asked, limitations and delimitations of the study, definitions of key terms used, and an overview.

Chapter 2 incorporates a review of literature relevant to prekindergarten historically and currently. It also includes an overview, details of research-based longitudinal studies, professional development of early childhood educators, and a summary specific to prekindergarten.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology used to conduct the study. It contains the research questions, interview questions, participants, as well as the instrument used and the data collection process, actions taken to ensure reliability, data analysis, and a summary.

Chapter 4 details the results of the data collection. The participants are introduced, results of the data analysis performed, participants' response to the interview questions, and a summary.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of the findings through reporting the data results, conclusions of the results, recommendations for implementing prekindergarten in public school, and recommendations for further research and study based on the findings.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *School Readiness*

##### *Definitions of School Readiness*

Definitions of school readiness vary by who is defining readiness and why. The United States Department of Health and Human Services conducted a meeting in 2008 that focused on synthesizing early childhood readiness research. The meeting record included the statement that, “In theory, a definition of school readiness should identify the foundational skills, content knowledge, and concepts children need when they enter school, in order to achieve academic success in early elementary schools and beyond” (National Center for Children in Poverty & Abt Associates, Inc., 2008, p. 6).

School readiness, in the broadest sense, is about children, families, early environments, schools, and communities. Children develop in different ways and at different rates of time. Readiness does not always happen at the same pace at the same level of ability. Children are not innately ready or not ready for school. Their skills and development are strongly influenced by their families and through their interactions with other people and environments before coming to school. Readiness expectations should include areas of physical, cognitive, and social emotional competence as well as positive attitudes toward learning (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004).

##### *Characteristics of School Readiness*

The ability of children to manage their emotions and behaviors and to make meaningful friendships is an important prerequisite for school readiness and academic success. Socially competent children are also more academically successful, and poor social skills are a strong predictor of academic failure (Reid & Webster-Stratton, 2004).

Teachers and parents have differing opinions about which skills are important for school readiness. Parents focus more on cognitive skills, but teachers tend to view social emotional development as equally important for success in kindergarten (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005).

Even though formal assessments to determine readiness are prevalent in many schools, teachers' perceptions of the demands of kindergarten stress nonacademic attributes as readiness indicators. Being able to follow directions, communicate thoughts and needs verbally, enthusiasm, having nondisruptive behavior, being sensitive to others feelings, taking turns, and sharing have been rated as essential readiness qualities. Attention is necessary for a child to learn from teachers and to complete instructional activities. Children's kindergarten attention skills have been shown to predict math and reading achievement at the end of the second grade (Grimm, Steele, Mashburn, Burchinal, & Pianta, 2010; Pagani, Fitzpatrick, Archambault, & Janosz, 2010). Teachers have not rated academic tasks such as using a pencil, recognizing letters and numbers, counting to 20 or more as essential readiness qualities (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005).

Researchers have studied the ways social environment or emotional support influences child outcomes over time (Bub, 2009). The findings were that "a high quality social environment was associated positively with children's academic and literacy skills at the end of the preschool year" (Mashburn 2008, p. 124).

### *Social Emotional Development*

#### *Definition and Early Development Background*

Social Emotional Development (SED) is the integration of the theory of social intelligence (Gardner, 1983; Steinberg, 1985; Thorndike, 1920), emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1988;

Goleman, 1995, 1998; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and competence development (Boyatzes, 1982; Spencer & Spencer, 1993) applied toward educational practice. SED is defined as cooperative and prosocial behavior, initiation and maintenance of peer friendships and adult relationships, management of aggression and conflict, development of a sense of self-worth, and emotional regulation and reactivity (Squires, 2002). Social intelligence may be defined as the ability to understand others, manage people, and act wisely in social contexts (Gardner, 1983; Steinberg, 1985; Thorndike, 1920). Thorndike's article, "Intelligences and its Uses" (Thorndike, 1920), is often credited as the origin of the theory of social intelligence. In the article Thorndike suggested that there were three distinct types of intelligences. Abstract or scholastic intelligence was one type, the second was mechanical or visual spatial intelligence, and the third type of social intelligence was social or practical intelligence (Thorndike, 1920). From the 1920s until the 1980s there was relatively little focus on re-exploring the idea of multiples intelligences and differentiating social from traditional intelligences (Ford & Tisak, 1983; Keating, 1978; Thorndike & Stein, 1937).

*Frames of Mind*, Gardner(1983) proposed a new, detailed model of intelligence along seven distinct constructs:

1. Linguistic-written or verbal comprehension
2. Logical/Mathematical
3. Musical-awareness and discriminating sound
4. Kinesthetic-process of knowledge through bodily sensations
5. Visual/Spatial-conceptual manipulation of objects
6. Interpersonal-leadership
7. Intrapersonal-self-awareness and motivation

Gardner's proposal suggested that an individual may excel at one, two, or even three of the multiple intelligences defined in his book, but that no one is good at all of them. It is the last two constructs, interpersonal and intrapersonal, that are important to social intelligence and social emotional development (Gardner, 1983). Gardner defined interpersonal intelligence as the capacity to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people and to work effectively with others. He defined intrapersonal intelligence as the capacity to understand one's self, to have an effective working model of one's self including one's own desires, fears, and capacities, and to use such information effectively in regulating one's own life (Gardner, 1983, p. 43). The two definitions legitimized the potential theoretical orientations of Thorndike's concept of multiple intelligences. Specifically, Gardner's elaboration of Thorndike's social intelligence theory into two distinct traits, interpersonal and intrapersonal, provides the content domain for emotional intelligence and social emotional development (Gardner, 1983; Thorndike, 1920).

### *Early Theorists of Child Development*

#### *John Bowlby*

John Bowlby, a psychologist, was an attachment theorist and the first to describe attachment as "a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1969; p. 194). He shared the psychoanalytic view that early experiences in childhood have an important influence on development and behavior later in life (Bowlby, 1988).

#### *Albert Bandura*

Albert Bandura developed the Social Learning Theory that states behavior is learned from the environment through the process of watching the behavior of another person, or observational learning (Bandura, 1977). Bandura further stated that from observing others one

forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed and can use that information at a later time as a guide for different classroom actions (Bandura, 1977). Observational behavior is a current practice in pre-k classrooms and is referred to as modeled behavior (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

### *Jean Piaget*

John Piaget is known for the Theory of Cognitive Development. According to Piaget children are born with a very basic mental structure that is genetically inherited and evolved and on which subsequent learning and knowledge is based. Piaget showed that young children think in strikingly different ways than adults (McCleod, 2009). The goal of Piaget's theory was to explain the mechanisms and processes by which the infant and then the child develops into an individual who can reason and think. To Piaget cognitive development was a progressive reorganization of mental processes children construct an understanding of in their environment then build what they discover onto what they already know (McCleod, 2009).

An educational implication of Piaget's theory is adaptation of instruction to the learner's developmental level. The content of instruction needs to be consistent with the developmental level of the learner. The teacher's role is to facilitate discovery learning that provides exploring opportunities, the use of hands on concrete experiences to help children learn (Wood, Smith, & Grossniklaus, 2001).

Piaget's approach is central to the school of cognitive theory known as cognitive constructivism. Other scholars, known as social constructivists, like Lev Vygotsky, placed more emphasis on the part played by language and other people in enabling children to learn (Atherton, 2011).

### *Lev Vygotsky*

Lev Vygotsky's social development theory stressed the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition because of the idea that community plays a central role in the process of meaning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). For Vygotsky, development and learning are not the same. They are dynamic processes that result in the gaps in the developmental level that can be addressed through social cooperation and interaction with more capable peers or adults referred to by Vygotsky as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). According to Vygotsky, this learning occurred in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky defined the ZPD as the distance between a child's ability to perform a task under adult guidance and/or with peer collaboration and the child's ability to solve the problem independently (Vygotsky, 1978).

### *Jean Lave*

Jean Lave developed The Situated Learning Theory and it directly relates to Vygotsky's notion of learning through social development. Lave's theory, called the Situated Learning Theory, states that if you put a learner in a real world situation in contrast with classroom activities involving other people, learning occurs (Lave, 1988). Lave argued that learning is situated, that is, as it normally occurs, learning is embedded within activity, context, and culture. Social interaction and collaboration are essential components of situated learning. It is usually unintentional rather than deliberate, a process referred to as legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

### *Social Emotional Competence*

SED draws from competence development. Social emotional competence is described as cooperative and prosocial behavior, initiation and maintenance of peer friendships and adult relationships, management of aggression and conflict, development of a sense of self-worth, and emotional regulation and reactivity (Squires, 2002).

Competencies involve a set of related behaviors organized around an intent that leads to a successful outcome. In the purest sense competency is defined as a capability or ability that leads to a successful outcome. It is a set of related but distinct sets of behaviors organized around an underlying purpose or goal called the intent. Competencies, therefore, are the result of appropriate behaviors that emerge from the intent that are used effectively in the situation in order to further another purpose. In studies of SED there is growing evidence that demonstrates not only a clear impact of social emotional competencies upon performance outcomes such as academics, but that competencies, by their nature, can be developed (Boyatzis, 1982, 2009).

### *Social Emotional Development and School Readiness*

#### *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*

Learning is a social process (Zins, Weissburg, Walberg, & Wang, 2004). In 1986 a framework was developed that outlined practice to promote children's optimal learning and development. Grounded in research in child development and learning and in the knowledge base regarding educational effectiveness, this framework is known as Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). DAP is not based on what is thought to be true about young children. DAP is informed by what is known from theory and literature about how children develop and learn (Bredekamp, 1987; NAEYC, 1986, 2009).

Children require healthy social emotional development skills for learning when they enter school. Social emotional development and academic achievement are dynamic interrelated areas for children to be successful in school (Klein, 2002). The lack of social skills can result in inappropriate behavior and peer rejection. This rejection can cause children to have poor school performance and negative attitudes toward school that can last throughout their school years. Children who lack sufficient social skills to play with children of the same age may feel frustrated at not being able to keep up with the capabilities of their classmates. This will also influence academics. Play behavior, communication skills, and the ability to interact in play groups can influence children's peer acceptance and academic success (Maxwell & Eller, 1994).

Although academics may be becoming increasingly more important in the early education years, social skills are what most affect school adjustment (Ladd, 1990; Ladd & Price, 1987). Best Practice for prekindergarten teachers suggests not being pressured to teach academics beyond what is developmentally appropriate but to continue to focus on social emotional development (Bredekamp & Kopple, 1997).

### *Reducing Learning Gaps*

Academic readiness includes the prosocial skills that are essential to school success. Programs that focus on social skills have been shown to have improved outcomes related to dropout and attendance, grade retention, and special education referrals. They also have improved grades, test scores, and reading, math, and writing skills (Zins et al., 2004).

Children from families living in poverty or with parents with low educational skills typically enter school with lower levels of foundational skills such as in reading, language, and math (Barbarian et al., 2006; Zill & West, 2001). There is also often a mismatch between the school culture and children's cultural background (Heath, 1983; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1993). On

starting kindergarten, children in the lowest socioeconomic group have shown average cognitive scores that are 60% below those scores of the most affluent group. Because of equity issues present in communities and schools, early achievement gaps such as these have been shown to show an increase over time (Aber et al., 2006; Lee & Burkam, 2002).

In comparison with students of other industrialized countries, American students have not consistently fared well on educational achievement tests that has caused growing concern about persistent achievement gaps and lagging student achievement (Mullins, Martin, & Foy, 2009; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006). As a result of these concerns, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was passed in 2001 that made holding schools accountable for eliminating persistent achievement gaps between different groups of children national policy (U. S. Dept. of Ed., Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2007).

Learning standards and accountability policies have impinged directly on public education from kindergarten through high school grades and are becoming increasingly more relevant to prekindergarten education as well. As of 2007 more than three quarters of the states had implemented early learning standards for the years prior to kindergarten and the remaining states had begun developing them (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2007). National reports and public policy statements have supported the creation of standards based curriculums as part of a broader effort to build children's school readiness by improving learning in the early years (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

### *Connecting Prekindergarten and Elementary Education*

The education system typically has not considered preschool and prekindergarten as an actual grade level in American public education. Preschool and pre-k education have largely remained

separate from elementary education, each having different funding sources, values, and traditions mainly because preschool and pre-k are neither universally funded by the public or mandatory. Many programs came into being because of a need for parents who worked and existed within a patchwork of sponsorship and delivery systems with widely varying teacher credentials. Preschool and prekindergarten purpose and potential toward academic readiness in kindergarten is becoming increasingly recognized giving substantial reason for prekindergarten and elementary education to strive for collaboration (Takanishi & Kaurez, 2008).

Mandated accountability requirements, particularly third grade testing, exert pressures on schools and teachers at K-2. The growth of state funded prekindergarten located in schools or other community settings provide assistance in the early preparation required for proficiency in the third grade (Pedulla, 2003).

Teaching early literacy and mathematics education in the early childhood years is key to increasing children's school readiness and closing the achievement gap (Ginsburg, Lee, & Boyd, 2008; National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2004). Mathematics and literacy concepts and skills, and content across the curriculum, can be taught to young children in ways that are engaging and developmentally appropriate (Duke & Moses, 2005; Ginsburg et al., 2008; Roskos, Christie, & Richgels, 2003; Worth & Grollman, 2003). A number of factors in the social emotional domain, such as independence, responsibility, self-regulation, and cooperation, predict how well children make the transition to school and how they fare in the early grades (McClelland et al., 2007; Snow, 2007).

The early childhood field has emphasized self-regulation as a prime developmental goal for the early years. Helping children from difficult life circumstances develop strong self-regulation is both feasible and influential in preparing them to succeed in school. Self-regulation in

children predicts their later functioning in areas such as problem solving, planning, focused attention, and meta-cognition, factors contributing to their success as learners. (Acock, McClelland, & Morrison, 2006; Blair et al., 2007; Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Bredekamp, 1987; DeLoache & Brown, 1987; Flavell, 1987; Ladd, 1990; Montessori, 1949;).

### *Prekindergarten Programs Past, Present, and Future*

#### *Past*

Young children in America have been provided different opportunities to participate in educational programs. Families as far back as the colonial era, 1620-1750, sent their very young children to school if schools were available, The Puritans wanted their children to learn to read the Bible as soon as possible so children were taught to read when they were 3 or 4 years of age (Spodek, 1988). Young children, most often those from more affluent circumstances, attended dame schools where women would teach reading and writing in their homes. When district schools were established for older children, younger siblings were often sent with them (McGill-Franzen, 1993).

Differences in the education of young children and the education of older children did not exist at this time but were made at the beginning of the 19th century with the development of teaching methods for very young children. Primary, or common, schools were public schools established to provide instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Children learned to read at 3 or 4 and began Latin instruction at 5 or 6. In 1826, 5% of all children enrolled in public schools were below 4 years of age and were typically from more affluent circumstances (Spodek & Saracho, 1994).

In 1828 the Boston Infant School, considered the country's first day care center, was begun. This program was established to enable mothers who worked in factories to provide a more appropriate setting for children other than their home setting while the mother was away with emphasis on the importance of children's early years before age 6. While the mothers were working, the children received moral and literacy instruction (Spodek & Saracho, 1994).

Another type of school for young children was the day nursery. The first day nursery established at New York Hospital opened in 1854 for babies and children of poor women. The focus was hygiene and custodial care for young children and parenting skills for the mothers. This day nursery was the model used for establishing nursery schools (Mitchell, Seligson, & Marx, 1989).

The first kindergarten for English speaking children opened in Boston in 1860. Because the tuition fees were considered to be high, only the children of educated affluent families were able to attend. In 1870 the Boston, Massachusetts school board opened a tuition-free experimental kindergarten for children between 4 and 6 years of age in one of the public schools, and a second opened in Brighton, Massachusetts in 1873 (Mitchell et al., 1989).

In 1896 John Dewey established a Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. The school opened with two instructors and 16 students and a philosophy based on the idea that children learned from their experiences and acquired skills as they were needed. By 1902, 140 students ranging in age from 4 to 14 were enrolled in the program (Parkay & Stanford, 1995).

In 1915 the first nursery school was organized by a group of faculty wives at the University of Chicago to provide socialization and play activities for their children (Mitchell et al., 1989). Children attended nursery schools because experiences were considered beneficial for their social and educational development (Condry, 1983; McGill-Franzen, 1993). The nursery school

movement spread throughout the United States over the next 2 decades. By 1931, 203 nursery schools were in existence and all were concerned with educating children (Spodek & Saracho, 1994).

Development of Montessori schools began in the United States in the 1920s and was based on the works of Dr. Maria Montessori, an Italian physician. Montessori schools were established for children between 3 and 5 years of age and emphasized sensory education. During the 1930s and 1940s, most Montessori schools either closed or became nursery schools (Spodek & Saracho, 1994).

The nursery school movement continued to develop slowly until the early to mid 1960s. The federal government became involved in providing preschool education for children from low income families. Prekindergarten programs for disadvantaged children were funded through the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which were part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty (Spodek & Saracho, 1994).

#### *Early Model Prekindergarten Programs*

The High Scope Perry Preschool Project is a well established early childhood intervention that operated for almost 40 years (Wasserman & Miller, 1998). Begun in 1962 in Ypsilanti, Michigan, it was the focus of a longitudinal study conducted by the High Scope Educational Research Foundation of 123 at-risk African American children. Participants were of low socioeconomic status, had low IQ scores in the range of borderline mental impairment, and were at high risk of failing school. Fifty-eight of the children selected as participants were assigned to the program group the other 65 were assigned to a control group that did not go through the program. There were no differences between the groups with regard to father absence, parent

education level, family size, household density, or birth order. Researchers collected follow up data annually when the children were between ages 4 and 11, and at ages 14, 15, and 19, and collected age 27 data from 1986 to 1991. Children attended the preschool Monday through Friday for over 2 hours per day over a 2-year period. The staff ratio of one adult to every five to six children enabled teacher visits to each child's family home each week for one hour or more. Parents participated in small group meetings with other parents monthly facilitated by program staff. Originally initiated as an educational intervention for at risk children, the High Scope Perry Preschool Projects demonstrated a number of other positive outcomes including a significantly lower rate of crime and delinquency and lower incidence of teenage pregnancy and welfare dependence. Overall, the program group demonstrated significantly higher rates of prosocial behavior, academic achievement, employment, income and family stability as compared to the control group (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1995; Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993).

The study concluded by interviewing 97% of the study participants who were still living at age 40. Additional data were gathered from the subjects' schools, social services, and arrest records. The study found that adults at age 40 who were participants in the program had higher earnings, were more likely to hold a job, had committed fewer crimes and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who were in the control group and did not have preschool (Schweinhart et al., 2005).

Founded in 1967, the Chicago Child Parent Center (CPC) began with four child parent centers on Chicago's west side, each serving about 120 predominantly black children that were 3, 4, and 5 years old. Funded by Title I monies, the prekindergarten and kindergarten students attended half day sessions 5 days a week for 40 weeks during the designated school year and 4 weeks in

the summer. Parents were required to attend at least a half day session once a week. The objectives at the beginning of the program were to provide a highly structured instruction oriented educational program for preschool children with maximum emphasis on language and reading skills. The stated objectives were to involve parents in the initial stages of the education process for their children in order to improve the self-concept and raise the operational and motivational level of both parent and child. Relatively little emphasis was placed on the development of social skills, dramatic play, or outdoor play. (Naisbitt, 1968).

Evaluations of the CPC programs used information from the Chicago Longitudinal Study (CLS). The program first evaluated children who participated in a CPC program during preschool versus all other children who did not attend preschool but may have participated in school age CPC programming that went through third grade. Next, the impact of any participation in the CPC program was assessed (Reynolds, 1995).

Outcomes were examined for children with varying levels of participation. A range of outcomes for the CPC program were compared with children in the group selected for this purpose at various times beginning with prekindergarten, continuing through multiple school age grade levels, and ending when the students were age 24. The children were followed for a total of 19 years with data available for 91% of the original CPC group and 89% of the comparison group which consisted of 389 children who did not receive CPC services and were selected randomly from six schools that were participating in full-day kindergarten for low income students. The impact of any participation in the school age program was studied and compared to no participation in the school age program. The impact of total years of CPC program participation was studied to determine whether or not there could have been a cumulative effect from having additional years of involvement. The last study compared the extended time from 4

to 6 years in the program with children who had only participated in the program for 4 years (Reynolds, 1995).

A variety of measures were used to assess student outcomes that included the Iowa Basic Skills Test (ITBS), school records that contained information concerning grade retention, graduation rates, behavior and special education placements, and arrests and convictions (Reynolds, 1995).

In areas of grade retention, reading, and math scores, graduation rates from high school, and arrests and convictions, the CPC preschool program group overall showed effectiveness at improving the range of child and adolescent outcomes. The largest benefits were found for participation in the CPC preschool program. For the school age participants that had no preschool, the benefits were fewer but still significant when compared to the children who did not participate in either program (Reynolds, 1995).

No significant differences were found in the areas of arrests, convictions, or incarcerations in the 15 to 16 age group but were lower in the 15 year follow-up that included ages 18 to 21 for the preschool program participants (Reynolds, 2000; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002).

In the 19 year follow-up for ages 23 to 24, the CPC preschool program group had significantly better outcomes than the nonpreschool group on high school completion, highest grade completion, 4-year college attendance, rate of felony arrest, conviction and incarceration, number of months having received public aid, rate of health insurance coverage, and depressive symptoms. No significant differences were found between the preschool group and the nonpreschool group for college attendance at any college, full-time employment, teen births, or substance abuse (Reynolds et al., 2002).

The Abecedarian Project operated at a single site in North Carolina. Started in 1972, it was a comprehensive early education program for young children identified as at-risk for developmental delays and school failure. Most of the children, 98% of whom were African American, were being raised in homes by a single mother having less than a high school education and reporting no earned income. Children were referred to the project to be screened as at-risk from sources like hospitals, clinics, and the Department of Social Services. The High Risk Index which included 13 socio-demographic factors associated with poor intellectual and scholastic programs was used for screening. A score of 11 points determined at-risk status and eligibility for the program (Ramey & Campbell, 1984).

There were 111 children included and these children were divided into four groups. The children were randomly assigned to one of the four groups and were all followed from infancy through age 21. Group one included only the age zero to 5 child care and preschool component. The second group included the child care, preschool, and the school grades 1 to 3 school age component. Group three was only the school age group alone, and group four had no involvement in the program but could and often did use other child care and preschool resources available in the community (Frances et al., 2001).

By age 21, the study from the program found that educational outcomes in reading and math achievement and cognitive ability and life outcomes for the children receiving the child care and preschool treatment and the child care, preschool, and school age treatment were much superior to outcomes for the children not receiving the child care and preschool programs. The school age only program group had only a marginal impact for educational and life outcomes (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002).

This emerging research helped fuel steady pre-k growth in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1991, 28 states had pre-k programs primarily for at-risk children with a total enrollment of 290,000. By 2005 the number of states with some type of pre-k program increased to 38 (Preschool Yearbook, 2005).

### *Present*

Oklahoma has offered high-quality public school pre-k on a voluntary basis to all 4 year old children since 1998. The state requires that no more than 20 children are in a class, and that child to staff ratios are no higher than 10 to 1. Teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree and be certified in early childhood education (Gormly, Hill, Adelstein, & Willemin, 2012).

Oklahoma's high quality program enrolls the largest percentage of eligible children in the nation (Barnett, 2011).

Based on the success of the program, Oklahoma established a universal pre-k program for four year olds. Universal pre-k is a pre-k program offered throughout the state to all 4 year olds regardless of family income (Gormley, 2005). Universal pre-k typically includes strong state standards and enrolls a wider variety of students than targeted interventions like Head Start (Fitzpatrick, 2008).

A study conducted by the National Institute for Early Education Research of Rutgers University in 2005 to measure the effects of Oklahoma's universal pre-k program on children entering kindergarten. Receptive vocabulary, early literacy, and early math skills were assessed in a sample of 838 children from across Oklahoma (Barnett, Lamy, & Jung, 2005).

Two groups of children were evaluated. One group was entering kindergarten and had attended the public pre-k program the previous year. This group was labeled the Preschool or Experiment Group. The other group was labeled the No Preschool or Control Group because

even though they were enrolled in the pre-k program, the children were just entering pre-k as the Experiment Group were just entering kindergarten (Barnett et al., 2005).

For evaluation purposes, different measures were used. To measure children's receptive language, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (PPVT-3) (Dunn & Dunn, 1997) was used and for Spanish speaking children, the Test de Vocabulario en Imagenes Peabody (TVIP) (Dunn, Padilla, Lugo, & Dunn, 1986) was used. To measure early math skills, the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001) were used and for Spanish speaking children, the Bateria Woodcock-Munoz Pruebas de Aprovechamiento-Revisado (Woodcock et al., 2001) was used. Early literacy, which included phonological and print awareness skills, were measured using the Blending Subtest of the Preschool Comprehensive Test of Phonological & Print Processing and included a Spanish version (Pre-CTOPPP; Lonigan, Wagner, Torgeson, & Rashotte, n.p.). This was a downsized version of the PCTOPP for elementary school aged children (Wagner, Torgeson, & Rashotte, 1999).

The results of the study found strong evidence that the Oklahoma high quality public prekindergarten program provided a positive impact on children's language in vocabulary, print awareness, and math skills development. Phonologically, the impact was insignificant concluding that more research was needed in this area (Barnett et al., 2005).

This evidence indicated that Oklahoma's program produces the kind of effects that lead to school readiness and later success in reading and math skills (Barnett et al., 2005). For example, children's early print awareness and receptive vocabulary skills have been found to predict later reading abilities in the early elementary grades (Snow, Burns, & Griffen, 1998).

Overall, the effects found in this study are the first link in a chain that produces the long-term school success and economic benefits such as those documented by earlier preschool studies that

followed children into adulthood (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Reynolds et al., 2002; Schweinhart et al., 2005).

Similar studies were conducted in Michigan, South Carolina, New Jersey, and West Virginia using the same assessment measures and methods and assessing in the same areas of vocabulary, literacy, and math skills. Pre-k programs varied slightly in each state but overall outcomes were the same and showed evidence of positive impact on kindergarten readiness for the Preschool or Experiment Group (Barnett et al., 2005).

Other state and national studies found benefits for children who participated in pre-k programs. The National Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) followed 22,000 children from kindergarten entry in the 1998-1999 school year through eighth grade. Students who attended a high quality public school pre-k program scored higher on reading and math tests than children receiving parental care. Students who attended a child care center or other preschool program showed gains, but former pre-k students exhibited the greatest achievement (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2004).

Other studies have documented gains for children within specific state pre-k programs. In Georgia 82% of former participants in the state's universal pre-k program had higher scores on third grade readiness compared to students who did not participate in the program (Henry, Gordon, Mashburn, & Ponder, 2001). A state funded pre-k program in South Carolina has improved rates of school readiness since its launch in 1984. Prior to the inception of the program 60% of children were deemed ready for first grade. By 1998, the figure had reached 81% (Denton, 1999). Maryland's State Extended Elementary Pre-k Program has reduced special education placements and grade retentions in elementary school (Denton, 1999). Longitudinal research was conducted in Sevier County over a 4-year period from 2007-2011 that followed the

progress of prekindergarten students from entry into prekindergarten through the end of the second grade. Those results are featured in Appendix D.

Despite the data that shows gains in children who attend high quality public school prekindergarten programs, there is criticism of pre-k program effects over time. The long-term benefits are questioned particularly whether gains are short-term and fade out after several years, more specifically by the end of the third grade. In a 2006 report analysts from the Reason Foundation addressed this issue directly. While the share of children attending a pre-k or similar program has grown from 16% to 66% during the past 4 decades, there is evidence showing that any gains do not last over time, particularly the lack of meaningful gains among children in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments that many states conduct in the 4th, 8th, and 12th grades (Olsen & Snell, 2006).

Pre-k experts had criticism of their own of the research used to determine this outcome. Using NAEP data for all student assessments was considered an unreliable benchmark because the data collected from all children included children who were eligible but did not participate in pre-k as well as children who did participate in pre-k. Studies that compared pre-k graduates with children who had not received services made the validity of the study questionable (Barnett, 2006).

### *Characteristics of High Quality Prekindergarten Programs*

As of 2011, 42 of 50 states and the District of Columbia have some type of pre-k program (Barnett, 2011). The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has developed a 10-point quality standard checklist for evaluating pre-k programs:

1. Comprehensive early learning standards in place and followed

2. Teachers have a bachelor's degree
3. Teachers have a certification in early childhood education
4. Assistants have a CDA or equivalent
5. Teachers complete at least 15 hours of in-service training each year
6. Class size maximum is 20
7. Staff-child ration of 1:10 or better
8. Vision, hearing, and health screening and referral are required, along with at least one family support service
9. At least one meal per day is offered
10. Site visits are required by state monitor

In 2011, five states, Alabama, Alaska, Georgia, North Carolina, and Rhode Island, were found by NIEER to have met all 10 benchmarks and 10 states, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Washington met 9 out of 10 benchmarks. The rest of the states that have pre-k programs met eight or fewer of the benchmarks. Those included all remaining states except Arizona, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. These states have no state funded pre-k programs in place (Barnett, 2011).

### *Future*

Public schools have become central to the world of early education. Data show that two thirds of all children in publicly funded pre-k are in public school settings (Barnett, 2009).

The reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) offers a unique opportunity to include high quality public school prekindergarten in education reform. From

2001 to 2011 the evidence of the benefits of high quality early childhood programs has been overwhelming as enrollment has grown over 70%. Together, teachers, principals, superintendents, local and state school boards, and chief state school officers call on Congress to reauthorize ESEA with a strong early education component (Barnett, 2010).

The increasing involvement of schools in early childhood helps not only prepare children for learning but also lays the foundation for broader reform. Educator leaders are realizing that in addition to addressing the urgent needs of children in the K-12 system, early intervention is a wise investment that will pay off in the future (Gayl, 2010).

### *Overview*

A hallmark of high quality public school prekindergarten not only focuses on academic skills like literacy and math but also on the skills that are characteristic of active, independent, and engaged learners. These skills include social emotional abilities such as working well with peers and in group settings and negotiating conflicts, approaches to learning such as persisting through challenges and self direction of learning, and executive functions such as focusing on tasks and behavior self control. These skills are not only important in and of themselves but also support early reading and math aptitude (Bish, Shore, & Shue, 2011), predict later academic achievement (Guernsey, 2011), and are associated with adult well being including health and socioeconomic status (Kane et al., 2011).

Providing children with a high quality early education takes the collective commitment of multiple parties including school districts, communities, parents, state education agencies, and the federal government. Reauthorization of ESEA provides the new paradigm of education today that includes the opportunity for laying a firm foundation for early childhood education

through the implementation of high quality public school prekindergarten programs (Gayl, 2010).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of qualitative research is to seek answers to questions about how social experience is created (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The purpose of this study was to examine how the experience of participation in a high quality public school prekindergarten program impacts children's academic readiness in kindergarten. This chapter describes how the research was conducted, methods used, and the data collection process.

A case study strategy is used to “. . . draw the researcher toward understanding of what is important about that case within its own world, not so much the worlds of researchers and theorists, but developing its issues, contexts, and interpretations” (Stake, 1994, p. 99). Stake further suggests that the name case study is emphasized because it draws attention to the question of what specifically can be learned from the single case.

According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison the paradigm that is most suited to case study research is an approach “. . . that seeks to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors and consequently may be described as interpretive and subjective” (Cohen et al., 2000, p.181).

They further suggested that case study can:

- provide a unique example of real people in real situations
- penetrate situations that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis
- establish cause and effect in real situations

This study is a qualitative case study conducted to create a foundation of knowledge through exploration of real people in real situations to identify the impact of the social emotional development of children who completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program on the academic readiness of those children in kindergarten. Teacher interviews were conducted

to identify the cause and effect relationship of the difference being in pre-k prior to kindergarten had on the academic readiness of children.

The review of literature has supported the need to continue gathering information related to the benefits of high quality public school prekindergarten and its effectiveness in academic readiness. Recent studies such as ones conducted by the Peabody Research Institute at Vanderbilt and the Tennessee Department of Education Division of School Readiness and Early Learning have indicated that previous studies using random sampling and numerical data were fundamentally flawed making those results inconclusive.

### *Research Design*

This study was designed and conducted using qualitative methods. According to Creswell (2007) qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a nature setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns and themes.

A distinguishing characteristic of qualitative research is that behavior is studied as it naturally occurs. There is no manipulation or control of behavior or settings, nor are there any externally imposed constraints. Rather, the setting is an actual classroom, school clinic, or neighborhood.

Qualitative research has helped us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible. Phenomenology seeks clarification and understanding of people's perspectives and experiences, especially the meanings they give to events, concepts, and issues (Mabry, 2006). Phenomenological research examines the

experience of each participant and recognizes that these experiences have a relationship with the phenomenon. The researcher investigates to reveal the true meaning of the phenomenon through the experiences of those living it on a daily basis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Merriam, 1998).

This study's purpose was to investigate participants' experiences in how the social emotional development of children who had completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program impacted their academic readiness in kindergarten. It also explored teacher perceptions of the differences in academic readiness of the children who had completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program compared to the children who did not have the same prior experience and reasons to support those perceptions. This study also included longitudinal research conducted in Sevier County Schools over a 4-year period that followed the progress of students selected at random that had completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program from entry into pre-k through the end of their second grade year. This research was included to acknowledge that prekindergarten students are assessed and their progress monitored in Sevier County Schools (See Appendix E).

### *Research Questions*

The following questions focus on the social emotional development of children entering kindergarten and were submitted to kindergarten teachers. Research questions are presented in the form of interview questions to avoid redundancy. Class enrollment includes students who have completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program and students who did not.

### *Interview Questions*

Interview questions were designed from available literature accessible through research conducted to acquire knowledge about the benefits prekindergarten provides, comparisons of previous studies conducted to determine long-term effects of prekindergarten, and previous conversations with kindergarten teachers.

Qualitative data have come from personal interviews with open-ended questions (Merriam, 1998). To guide the study the following open-ended questions were formulated to provide information. The questions garnered teachers' perspectives based on their classroom observation and comparison opportunities that provided a rich description of data that created a "unity of the real and the ideal" (Moustakas, 1994, p.27).

Question 1 serves as an introductory exchange to eliminate awkwardness between the interviewer and the teacher being interviewed. The rationale is that teachers usually enjoy sharing stories from classrooms past and present that provides a common ground for conversation and creating a more comfortable environment for both.

1. During your years of teaching experience and memorable events that occurred that have influenced you during your teaching career, what, in your opinion, would you consider the most valuable criteria for kindergarten readiness in children?

Establishing a comfort zone for discussion serves as a lead in for the next question that requests a specific opinion from the teacher.

2. Starting school is a life changing event and can be an intimidating experience. Do the students who enter your kindergarten class who have completed a high quality public school pre-k program the previous year appear to have more confidence in themselves and a higher level of curiosity in their classroom environment than students who did not complete pre-k?

The next question helps to determine the “unity of the real and the ideal” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27) or the teacher expectation versus the reality of the situation.

3. How well do students who have previously completed a high quality public school pre-k program form representations (intentionality) when presented with information, either new or previously built on during cognitive events such as oral language, literacy, and math, than students who did not complete pre-k, and are the students who did complete pre-k better able to make connections to prior information (relatedness) than students who did not?

The next questions were formulated to encourage the participants to focus on the components of the social emotional developmental aspects prekindergarten provides as preparation for academics in kindergarten and subsequent grades.

4. Social-emotional development is a strong component in early childhood education (Schiller, 2008). Do the students who are entering your kindergarten class who have previously completed a high quality public school pre-k program appear to exhibit more self-control of their emotions, for example, when separating from parents or in conflict situations with peers, than students who are entering kindergarten without a high quality public school pre-k experience?

5. Transitions from one activity to another are important to a daily schedule. What is your perception of the level of cooperativeness of students in your kindergarten class who have previously completed a high quality public school pre-k program and do you think cooperation is an important contribution to a smooth, timely transition?

This question was designed to gather data for comparison to the current guidelines in place that have been established by the Tennessee Department of Education.

6. Children communicate in many different ways. Do the students in your kindergarten class use different methods of communication and do their levels of capacity differ? Would you contribute the capacity to communicate effectively to having completed a high quality public school pre-k program?

The questions asked were designed to reflect seven social emotional development key ingredients of school readiness: confidence, curiosity, intentionality, relatedness, self-control, cooperativeness, and capacity to communicate (Schiller, 2008).

### *Participants*

This qualitative study consisted of voluntary participants in the Sevier County School District in East Tennessee. Schools included were schools with prekindergarten programs in place in their schools. Certified kindergarten teachers were selected in each school as participants. Selection of kindergarten teachers from different schools in the district as participants represented purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). From that sample, five schools from the district that have prekindergarten classrooms in place were selected for teacher interviews.

To support trustworthiness of this study, participants were assured no names were used, no association with schools was used, and labels were assigned to teachers.

Permission to conduct interviews was obtained from the Director of Schools in the Sevier County school district and school principals in the Sevier County school system prior to gathering any data. School principals were mailed or e-mailed a letter stating the purpose and intent of the study and participant criteria. Each participant was given the interview instrument and asked to participate in the interview. The participants selected for this component of the process had the option to determine individually if they would participate in the interview.

Communication was established with the participants via e-mail. To further ensure confidentiality of responses and trustworthiness, if participants agreed to being interviewed, they were allotted the courtesy of determining how the interview would take place, either face-to-face or via e-mail..

### *Instrumentation*

There are many reasons to use interviews for collecting data and using it as research.

Gray (2004, p. 214) has given the following reasons:

- There is a need to obtain highly personalized data
- There are opportunities required for probing

Kvale (1996, p. 14) regarded interviews as “. . . an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data.”

Qualitative inquiry accepts the complex and dynamic quality of the social world. This qualitative study provided the opportunity to combine talking with participants and explore their perspective using a personal interview process.

Open ended questions were designed to reflect teacher comparisons of the social emotional development of the children in their classroom who had completed a high quality public school prekindergarten to the children who had not. The questions included teacher perceptions of the benefits of having a high quality public school prekindergarten program and evaluated students' overall academic success based on the implementation of the program.

Teachers were also invited to share their perceptions on the following topics related to pre-kindergarten:

- Professional development training in early childhood education

- Benefits of having a high quality public school prekindergarten in schools
- Years of teaching experience, particularly in kindergarten
- Suggestions of improvements or additions that could be made to the prekindergarten program

Interviews were conducted at a time convenient for the teachers and their students. Phone calls and e-mail were used as communication for follow-up. The written format of the purpose of the study and the research questions were provided to each teacher prior to the interview. Follow-up interviews were scheduled and held depending on the need for additional information from the initial interview. For those teachers who agreed to be participants but preferred to interview via e-mail because of time constraints or other conflicts, the interview instrument was provided to each teacher with information regarding dates for completion and method of returning the completed questions to the researcher.

### *Participant Selection*

Permission to conduct the study was necessary from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of East Tennessee State University. After receiving approval from the IRB, data collection could begin. Letters were written requesting permission to conduct research at the district level and at the school level. A letter of request was mailed or e-mailed to directors of schools and principals at elementary schools in a selected district explaining the purpose of the research and requesting permission to conduct research in each school. Kindergarten teachers in selected schools were sent a request for participation in the study. Participants were contacted by e-mail or letter to schedule interview appointments.

Participants were informed in writing of the nature of the study prior to interviews and given

a copy of the interview questions. Each participant was assured there would be no names used and each was assigned a letter to distinguish individuality for reporting purposes and also to ensure confidentiality. Participation was completely voluntary.

### *Data Collection*

The interviews took place at the convenience of the participants. They were individually conducted and rapport was established through mutual interest between a researcher who is a prekindergarten teacher and kindergarten teachers in the academic readiness of children who are entering kindergarten. Because no observation or any other contact with children was conducted and the interviews were conducted via e-mail, no informed consent form was necessary. Field notes were recorded journal style following each interview and were used for data analysis. Significant points were summarized and the participants were provided time to clarify their answers to interview questions. Participants were also invited to comment or ask questions they deemed relevant to the study at the conclusion of each interview.

### *Trustworthiness*

Trustworthiness is a general term that refers to the overall reliability and validity of qualitative research.

The aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative study is to support the argument that the study's findings are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). In any qualitative study, four issues of trustworthiness demand attention:

- Credibility (Internal Validity)-An evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a “credible” conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.286)
- Transferability (External Validity)-The degree to which the findings of the study can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project
- Dependability (Reliability)-An assessment of the quality of the integrated process of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation.
- Confirmability (Objectivity)-A measure of how well the study’s findings were supported by the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The processes of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and triangulation were used to establish credibility. Triangulation included artifacts that supported the benefits of pre-kindergarten as well as the information from participants and their observations.

A transcript of each interview was mailed or e-mailed to each participant after each interview allowing the data and interpretations to be reviewed by participants to support confirmability. Dependability was established by creating a written checklist in order to make sure the same procedures were followed at each interview and maintained throughout the study.

It is acknowledged that the scope of this study was limited to kindergarten teachers whose student population included children who had completed a high quality public school pre-kindergarten program prior to entering kindergarten. The perceptions and values of these teachers as participants provide valuable information to linking prior information to the topic of study establishing overall trustworthiness.

A sufficient description of the phenomenon is provided to enable reader transferability. A proper understanding of the information allows the reader to compare the instances described in the research findings with instances they have seen emerge in their own situations.

### *Data Analysis*

The goal of qualitative data analysis is to uncover emerging themes, patterns, concepts, insights, and understandings (Patton, 2002).

The data analysis for this qualitative study began with gathering information from interviews, field notes, and observations. The analysis followed an inductive approach because the data were allowed to “speak for themselves” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by the emergence of conceptual categories and descriptive themes. As themes emerged, they were identified using an open coding process. This process allowed categories to be created in which words, phrases, or events were grouped. Participant quotes were used to illustrate the themes being described giving “voice” to the text.

Categories that were identified in open coding were then compared and combined to build “the big picture” of the overall data, a process referred to as axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process offered the researcher assurance that the initial categories defined contained sufficient data for saturation and emergent themes or notified the researcher that gaps existed and required additional data.

All information was used to represent a research report that will read by others that “closely approximates the reality it represents” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57).

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to create knowledge through exploring kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the influence completing a high quality public school prekindergarten program has on academic readiness. The research involved collecting data through interviews with kindergarten teachers. Purposeful sampling was used in selecting participants who had classroom experience with students who had completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program and students who had not, which gave the teachers the opportunity to compare the two groups.

The following research questions guided the interview:

1. During your years of teaching experience and memorable events that have occurred to influence you during your teaching career, what would you consider the most valuable criteria for kindergarten readiness in children?
2. Starting school is a life changing event and can be an intimidating experience. Do the students that enter your kindergarten class that completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program the previous year appear to have more confidence in themselves and a higher level of curiosity in their classroom environment than the students who did not complete pre-k?
3. How well do students who have previously completed a high quality public school prekindergarten form representations (intentionality) when presented with information, either new or previously built on during cognitive events such as oral language, literacy, and math than students who did not complete pre-k, and are the students who did

complete pre-k better able to make connections to prior information (relatedness) than students who did not?

4. Social emotional development is a strong component in early childhood education (Schiller, 2008). Do the students who are entering your kindergarten class who have previously completed high quality pre-k program appear to exhibit more self-control of their emotions, for example, when separating from parents or in conflict situations with peers, than students who are entering kindergarten without a high quality pre-k experience?
5. Transitions from one activity to another are important to a daily schedule. What do you perceive to be the level of cooperativeness of students in your kindergarten class who have previously completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program and do you think cooperation is important to a smooth, timely transition?
6. Children communicate in many different ways. Do the students in your kindergarten class use different methods of communication and do their levels of capacity differ? Would you contribute the capacity to communicate effectively to having completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program?

All six of the interview questions were designed to reflect the seven social emotional development key ingredients of school readiness (Schiller, 2008):

1. Confidence

2. Curiosity
3. Intentionality
4. Relatedness
5. Self-control
6. Cooperativeness
7. Capacity to communicate

Teachers were also invited to elaborate on the questions asked and to share perceptions on the following topics:

- Professional development training in early childhood education
- The benefits of having high quality prekindergarten programs in place in public schools
- Years of teaching experience, particularly in kindergarten
- Suggestions of improvements or additions that could be made to high quality public school prekindergarten programs that are in place

There is an assumption that the important reality is what people perceive it to be (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of kindergarten teachers of how the completion of a high quality public school prekindergarten program affects the academic readiness of students who enter kindergarten.

### *Introduction of Participants*

The participants comprised six kindergarten teachers in Sevier County. There were five female and one male participant. Their education levels ranged from a bachelor's degree to a doctorate, and their years of classroom experience from 10 years to 32 years. Every participant

was reminded that participation was voluntary and each was assigned a letter code name to ensure anonymity.

*Teacher A*

A kindergarten teacher with over 20 years of elementary education experience, Teacher A has an education specialist degree. She has always taught kindergarten and enjoys teaching and said, “although it can be demanding, I wouldn’t want to do anything else!”

*Teacher B*

A kindergarten teacher with 10 years of teaching experience in elementary education, Teacher B taught first grade for 2 years before making the change to kindergarten. Teacher B enjoys teaching kindergarten stating that “it is a good fit for me. Every day is a new day that is different and exciting.”

*Teacher C*

Teacher C has been a kindergarten teacher for 15 years and has an educational specialist degree. A firm believer in the importance of communication skills for children to succeed in school, Teacher C promotes parent involvement strongly in her classroom and states, “modeling communication to parents may help them have better interaction with their children at home which, in turn, may help children have better communication skills at school.”

*Teacher D*

Teacher D has a bachelor’s degree obtained while working as a paraprofessional teaching assistant and has taught kindergarten for 4 years. Teacher D identifies a language rich home environment as crucial, but, acknowledges that many children come to school lacking this and says, “students who are read to or talked to are more ready for kindergarten than students who

are not, and those students struggle. Students who come out of pre-k seem better prepared to make representations when presented with information.”

#### *Teacher E*

Teacher E has a master’s degree in elementary education, a doctorate in school leadership, and 32 years experience in the kindergarten classroom. “I have been here since kindergarten was not required and have seen it evolve from a social development setting to what some would now call the new first grade because of all the state requirements for students that have evolved as well.”

#### *Teacher F*

Teacher F has an educational specialist degree and has been teaching kindergarten for 16 years.

### *Data Analysis*

Data were gathered compiling teachers’ perceptions of how the social emotional development skills gained by completing a high quality public school prekindergarten program affected their students’ academic readiness upon entering kindergarten. The data for this study were the result of open-ended interviews with six regular education kindergarten teachers. Heterogeneous purposeful sampling (Sadler et al., 2007) consisted of kindergarten teachers who have had the opportunity to observe and compare two different groups of children in the same classroom, those who had completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program and those who had not. These data collected were considered representative of participants’ participation related only to this study.

The interview transcriptions were coded and categorized. Initially, the categories addressed the seven social emotional development key ingredients of school readiness: (1) confidence, (2)

curiosity, (3) intentionality, (4) relatedness, (5) self-control, (6) cooperativeness, and (7) capacity to communicate (Schiller, 2008).

### *Research Question 1*

During your years of teaching experience and memorable events that occurred to influence you during your teaching career, what do you consider the most valuable criteria for kindergarten readiness in children?

Teacher A described the criteria for kindergarten readiness as a combination of characteristics that included patience, self-reliance, responsibility, bonding, and self-control. When asked to select the one that would be considered the most valuable over the others, Teacher A responded:

If I had to select the most valuable, I would have to say self-control or delay of gratification over the others because that characteristic would lead to a student being able to develop the other important characteristics more quickly. A student that has more self-control is also less likely to have difficulty with behaviors that are disruptive to the entire classroom.

Teacher B responded:

Without a doubt, home environment is the most valuable criteria for school readiness. If a student's home environment is lacking in stability for whatever reason, if there are no boundaries, if parents are overly indulgent, and so on, then that inhibits learning. One example of a situation was a bright and capable student whose home environment was not only inconsistent but unpredictable as well. In addition, if an issue had to be discussed with the parent, the parent always took the responsibility for the child's behavior by saying things like, well that was my fault for not... or that was my fault for..., the child never had to face the consequences for his behavior, so it did not change which inhibited his learning potential".

Teacher C defined a large readiness factor as maturity: “If a child is mature, that child transitions well both academically and socially. An immature child struggles in both areas.”

Teacher D stated:

The most valuable criteria for kindergarten readiness is having a language rich home environment. I know so many of our students come to school without this language rich environment. Because of this, they struggle. However, I have students who are poor and otherwise economically disadvantaged, but their parents talk with them and read to them. Those students are more ready for kindergarten than students who are not talked to or read to.

Teacher E also stated:

The home environment is a major factor in kindergarten readiness. Children who have a stable home environment are more secure and more receptive to a learning environment. I have seen differences in family structure and home environment that have evolved. The differences make teaching more challenging because home environments do not seem to be as consistent. We have more situations where children refer to my mom’s house or my dad’s house as home, not as my house or our house. That has to be confusing. Children who come from a home environment that is less than consistent, which is the majority of the enrollment today, have more difficulty adjusting to a routine. It seems that the days of regular bedtimes and family meals is a thing of the past.

Teacher F said:

Home environment can make such a difference in whether a child is interested in learning or not. That’s not to say that a less than desirable home environment always determines if a child will learn or not, just that it does have a big influence. What I am seeing these days is

that the children are more in charge than the parents and parents seem to be afraid to make their children mad by being in charge themselves, so children are making too many of their own decisions.

*Research Question 2*

Starting school is a life changing event and can be an intimidating experience. Do the children who enter your kindergarten class who have completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program the previous year appear to have more confidence in themselves and a higher level of curiosity in their classroom environment than children who are entering kindergarten without prekindergarten experience?

Teacher A responded to this question by saying:

The life skills needed to perform successfully in the job market have their roots in the pre-k classroom: persistence, creativity, cooperation, and communication. When my kindergarten students come to school with the rudiments of such life skills, I have had help in building a foundation of life-long learners rather than simply first grade preparation. Students leave pre-k as eager learners, and I hope to capitalize on this enthusiasm!

Teacher B answered: "For the most part, yes. I wouldn't say that all students that completed pre-k have those qualities but many do. Some children don't adjust as quickly even when they are involved in a program such as pre-k."

Teacher C responded:

Yes! The difference is so obvious from the first day. The children who have completed pre-k are not as apprehensive about coming to school because they are already familiar with a classroom environment. They are shy at first because of new surroundings but are quicker to catch on to the classroom routines because they have familiarity with those, too.

Teacher D stated:

The students who come out of pre-k have a higher level of confidence in themselves but the curiosity seems to be the same as other students. The difference being that children who come out of pre-k have had the advantage of a year of classroom routines and schedules that children who did not go to pre-k did not have but children are naturally curious.

Teacher E had a similar response to Teacher D in stating:

Children have a natural curiosity to their surroundings. The confidence level, however, appears to be much higher in the children that have completed pre-k than the children that have been around just a few people in their life such as their parents, mother, grandmother, or just one caregiver. Even the children who have experienced a day care or mother's day out situation, while having been around more people, the confidence level still is higher than for children who have not experienced such an environment, but, not as high as in the children who have come from prekindergarten.

Teacher F responded:

Children who completed pre-k had far more confidence in themselves than children who did not complete pre-k even on the first day of school. The children who had been through the pre-k program come in on the first day of school looking for their names on things, knowing they will have a certain place to sit and put their backpacks. They are more confident because they are more familiar and that is comforting to them. The curiosity is probably the same for both groups, though, because although the children who have completed pre-k are in an similar setting, they are in a different room with different stuff and a different look than what they are used to. This would be the same curiosity level as children who have not been in any type of situation with other children such as mother's day out or day care or just with their

mom for the first five years of their life because it's new to everyone coming in.

### *Research Question 3*

How well do students who have previously completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program form representations (intentionality) when presented with information, either new or previously built on during cognitive events such as oral language, literacy, and math, than students who did not complete pre-k, and are the students who did complete pre-k better able to make connections to prior information (relatedness) than students who did not?

Teacher A responded to this question as follows:

Children have sets of abilities that are definitively bound by their developmental level, and you cannot push these developmental milestones. Literacy and numeracy should not be the focus. We encounter a slippery slope when addressing the developmental abilities of a child. Concern about academic standards should not crowd out attention to social development. Development is directly related to success at processing information and to performing the tasks asked of them. Therefore, early education must be in the form of providing experiences and explorations rather than learning more earlier. Earlier is not necessarily better. I find myself re-teaching cognitive skills that were introduced but not mastered because they were introduced too early and, I, too, am guilty of pushing a skill which would be so much easier to master nine months from now. My thought pattern was if only I would teach a little harder, a few more times, and a little longer, this student would master the material. But, why, how well, and at what cost? I compared this to teaching a nine month old to eat with a spoon. Yes, it is possible, but, it will be terribly frustrating to me and the child, and if we are unsuccessful, it doesn't mean he will never do it. Doing it early will not bring long-term

rewards, revisiting this task three months later will probably be much more rewarding. So, in answer to this question, those students who were developmentally ready for new information performed well whether they were in a pre-k program or not. The pre-k experience did not aid in connections in which development was not yet appropriate.

Teacher B maintained that the home environment is the best place for influence to take place:

If parents take the time to talk to their children, information presented will cause children to have intentionality because that will create cognitive events such as oral language, literacy, and math. Then, children can connect prior information to current information and relatedness will occur from that connection. The only problem is, not all parents take the time or are able for some other reason to talk to their children in this manner, but that is what should happen.

Teacher C, also an advocate for family structure as the foundation for early learning, stated:

“I have had numerous pre-k students who did not perform as high as I had expected them to due to lack of parent involvement. This is not a reflection on the pre-k program, but parent interaction with their children.”

Teacher D’s reflection on that question was in a different direction with this response:

“The students who come out of pre-k are better prepared to make representations when presented with information. They seem better prepared to write well, dictate information, and speak about many subjects in comparison to students who have not completed pre-k”.

Teacher E responded more like Teacher D stating:

Children who have completed pre-k seem to have better recall abilities for the who, what, when, where, and why questions asked of previously presented information. For example, if we read a story on Monday and on Tuesday we are using that story for a phonological

awareness lesson such as rhyming, and the children are asked what they remember about the story, the children who have completed pre-k are used to relating prior information to present information and can make the connection better.

Teacher F stated:

Kindergarten students that completed pre-k have more relatedness to information that is presented and are better able to connect prior with present because they have done it before. That doesn't mean that children who did not complete pre-k can't respond in the same manner, just that because they have not experienced those types of lessons, they have more to get used to. Pre-k students come to kindergarten with the experience of structured lessons. Some will be better at relatedness than others but that is typical of level of ability. Pre-k doesn't make kids smarter, necessarily, but it allows them more opportunities to experience how learning happens.

#### *Research Question 4*

Social emotional development is a strong component in early childhood education. Do the children who are entering your kindergarten class who have previously completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program appear to exhibit more self-control of their emotions, for example, when separating from parents or in conflict with peers, than children who are entering kindergarten without a high quality pre-k experience?

Teacher A responded:

Yes, the key words being high quality public school pre-k program. The pre-k teachers in our schools are experts in early childhood development and have very real expectations. They (teachers) start off with small delays in gratification to assure success and work up from there. They know that children who are under stress are much less patient than those who are

relaxed, so they work to provide a relaxed environment through a center based arrangement. The teachers are skilled in the art of distraction and children learn this skill by recognizing choices and finding their own ways to take their minds off of frustrations. In pre-k, the children meet a wide range of peers and the teachers are ever present to coach them through confusing social situations. My kindergarten students who spent a number of years in a day care situation did not always exhibit the same degree of self-control and self-confidence that the kindergarten students who spent the previous year in pre-k.

Teacher B had a rather indifferent response of “not necessarily” and did not care to elaborate.

Teacher C stated: “Yes, maturity can develop at this time which will help a student transition into a school environment more easily.”

Teacher D responded:

Yes, the students who were in pre-k do seem to have more control over their emotions. They also seem to get along better with other students. In the years that we’ve had pre-k at our school, I have not had a student cry or throw a tantrum that attended pre-k!

Teacher E reflected:

The children who begin kindergarten that completed the pre-k program have less difficulty adjusting to the school environment. They have already had experience leaving their parents so it is not as difficult. That does not mean that there are not some who still have a few tears but even then, it doesn’t last very long, maybe the first day or so. Also, children who have been in pre-k are better able to handle a peer conflict because they know they have a support system in the teaching staff to help them”.

Teacher F also stated:

Kindergarten students who had completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program were in better control socially and emotionally than peers who did not:

It is so helpful when I don't have to physically detach a crying child from a helpless parent because they have already been through that in pre-k! Children who can happily leave their parents in the morning have a much better day, sooner. Children who cry do get over it eventually but not having that trauma to deal with is better for all. Children who have spent a year in pre-k are better at using their words to show how they feel when there is a conflict. They also know if their words don't work they can get the teacher's help. Both of those emotions are something else kindergarten teachers do not have to spend a large part of the beginning of the school year on.

#### *Research Question 5*

Transitions from one activity to another are important to a daily schedule. What is your perception of the level of cooperativeness of students in your kindergarten class who have previously completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program and do you think cooperation is an important contribution to a smooth, timely transition?

Teacher A stated: "Again, the ability to delay gratification is an important skill nurtured in pre-k. Cooperation is a key element of self-control. Transitioning is definitely easier for my students who have been through pre-k".

Teacher B stated: "It can be, however, the kindergarten teacher plays a huge role in how the classroom is conducted and how well the students respond so cooperation has to still enable a child to feel like part of the group".

Teacher C said:

Children who are used to a more structured environment usually handle transition periods better which would mean their cooperation level is higher than that of children who are not used to a structured environment. Cooperation is important to transition because not only is the transition smoother, the class has more time for whatever activity they are transitioning to.

Teacher D made a different point about cooperation saying:

My students who were in a pre-k do seem to go through the classroom transitions better, however, sometimes these students are notorious for telling me what I'm doing wrong or what we need to do next. I sometimes say that they are getting into teacher business! Cooperation from all students is crucial to transitions.

Teacher E agreed that the children who completed pre-k do transition better and stated:

Because they are used to structure and the routine of having the same schedule and transition every day from which cooperative skills evolve. Structure is important at home and at school. Children who have been involved in pre-k program do have the advantage of the structured environment.

Teacher F responded:

Sometimes, children can be too sure of themselves There are those who want to be in charge of whatever is happening. The children that come to kindergarten from pre-k are really no exception to this. However, those children do cooperate faster when directions are given and transition is necessary. That does make transition smoother because re-direct does not take as long and less time is lost.

*Research Question 6*

Children communicate in many different ways. Do the children in your kindergarten class use different methods of communication and do their levels of capacity differ? Would you contribute the capacity to communicate more effectively to having completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program?

Teacher A said:

There is definitely a wide range of communication skills in any kindergarten class, from inarticulate two and three word phrases to aggressive behaviors. Children in pre-k learn how to better communicate their needs, not only to a sympathetic adult, but to their peers. In return, the peers provide role models as the children develop self-reliance, bonding, and responsibility. Pre-k teaches students to work cooperatively and realize that others may have different points of view. For children learning English, there is not a more powerful way to acquire and develop oral language than in a natural setting”.

Teacher B answered: “Yes, they use different methods but it is hard to say if it is different or if the levels differ. While Teacher B didn’t commit to saying completing a high quality public school prekindergarten program contributed to effective communication, the comment made was “the pre-k program can’t hurt.”

Teacher C attributed communication skills again to the home environment by saying:

Being able to communicate is a trait taught at home. If parents talk with their children, ask questions, and so on, those children will communicate better. Even after being in school, some children struggle with being able to handle a discussion, so yes children do use different methods of communication but completing pre-k does not necessarily create better communicators. Prekindergarten programs can only do so much for kindergarten readiness.

Parents, or the lack of, are the biggest factor of student's success.

Teacher D reasoned: "The ability to communicate effectively seems to solely rely on their home environment. I would not necessarily link effective communication to the pre-k program.

However, I do know that those students do improve somewhat while in the program."

Teacher E shared the same view as Teacher C and D stating:

Children have a different ways of communicating with each other than with adults.

Communicating with peers is easier obviously because they are on the same page. Children don't have much in common with adults so if adults want children to communicate effectively, they have to get on a level that children can understand and relate to. The home environment is the best place for that to be most effective, but that does not always happen.

Children that complete pre-k do get the benefit of someone talking to them so they are able to develop communication skills.

Teacher F again added to the support for home environment first by saying:

Well, parents should talk to their children to build communication skills, and for those skills to be effective. When children go to school, they should then be able to communicate effectively with peers and with adults. However, factors like shyness and English language learners present a whole different set of reasons for not communicating effectively that have nothing to do with the home or school environment. For these reasons, participation in a high quality public school prekindergarten helps children with these issues to develop better communication skills because children communicate in their own way and they learn some things from each other sometimes better than from adults.

### *Emergent Themes*

The research questions used for the interview were based on the seven social emotional development key ingredients of school readiness:

1. Confidence
2. Curiosity
3. Intentionality
4. Relatedness
5. Self-control
6. Cooperativeness
7. Capacity to communicate

As a result of the analysis of the data collected from participants, the following themes for four of the seven key ingredients for school readiness emerged. Three of the seven, confidence, self-control, and cooperativeness, were strongly influenced by the completion of a high quality public school prekindergarten program. For the fourth theme, the home environment emerged as the favored school readiness influence.

1. Most students who have completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program have a higher level of confidence than students who did not.
2. Most students who have completed a high quality public school prekindergarten have more self-control emotionally than students who did not.
3. Most students who have completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program are more cooperative and transition more easily than students who did not.
4. Home environment should be the place where the capacity to communicate is developed.

### *Theme One*

Most students who have completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program have a higher level of confidence than students who did not.

Research question 2 addressed the confidence component of the seven key ingredients of school readiness. All six of the kindergarten teachers interviewed were in agreement that most students who completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program displayed more confidence in the classroom than those students who did not.

Teacher A: “Students leave the pre-k as eager learners and I hope to capitalize on this enthusiasm!”

Teacher B: “For the most part, yes.”

Teacher C: “Yes! The difference is so obvious from the first day!”

Teacher D: “It seems that students who come out of pre-k have a higher level of confidence in themselves.”

Teacher E: “The confidence level appears much higher in the children who have completed pre-k than the children who have only been around a few people in their life.”

### *Theme Two*

Most students who have completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program have more self-control emotionally than students who did not.

Research question 4 addressed the school readiness key ingredient of self-control. Five of six kindergarten teachers interviewed agreed that children who have completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program maintain better self-control than children who did not.

Teacher A: “Yes, the key words being high quality public school pre-k program. The pre-k teachers in our schools are experts in early childhood development and have very real

expectations. They (teachers) start off with small delays in gratification to assure success and work up from there.”

Teacher C: “Yes.”

Teacher D: “Yes. In the years that we’ve had pre-k in our school, I have not had a student cry or throw a tantrum that attended pre-k!”

Teacher E: “Students who completed pre-k seem to have less difficulty adjusting to the school environment. They have already had experience leaving their parents.”

Teacher F: “It is so helpful not to have to physically detach a crying child from a helpless parent because they have already been through that in pre-k!”

### *Theme Three*

Most students who have completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program are more cooperative and transition more easily than students who did not.

The key ingredient for school readiness, cooperativeness, was addressed in research question 5. Again, five of the six teachers interviewed attributed having a high quality public school pre-k experience to the higher level of cooperativeness of students who completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program. The higher level of cooperativeness was also recognized as contributing to easier, more timely classroom transitions.

Teacher A: “Cooperation is a key element of self-control. Transitioning is definitely easier for my students who have been through pre-k.”

Teacher C: “Children who are used to a more structured environment usually handle transition periods better which would mean their cooperation level is higher than that of children who are not used to a structured environment.”

Teacher D: “My students who were in pre-k do seem to go through the classroom transitions better.”

Teacher E: “Children who have been involved in a pre-k program have the advantage of a structured environment from which cooperative skills evolve.”

Teacher F: “Most children who come to kindergarten from pre-k cooperate faster when directions are given and transition is necessary.”

#### *Theme Four*

Home environment is the place where the capacity to communicate should be developed.

Research question 6 addressed the key ingredient for school readiness, the capacity to communicate. Four of six teacher participant answers to this question favored the home environment as the strongest influence for this skill.

Teacher C: “Being able to communicate is a trait taught at home.”

Teacher D: “The ability to communicate effectively seems to solely rely on their home environment.”

Teacher E: “Adults who communicate effectively with children have to get on a level that children understand. The home environment is the best place for that to be the most effective, if it can.”

Teacher F: “Well, parents should talk to their children to build communication skills and for those skills to be effective.”

Two of the seven key ingredients for school readiness, relatedness and intentionality, elicited different interpretations from the participant interview, so no clear theme emerged. The key ingredient for school readiness, curiosity, was either ignored in the question or addressed as having the same social emotional development level for both groups of children, the ones who

had completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program and those who did not so no theme was present.

### *Recommendations*

Teachers who participated in this study made the following recommendations to the researcher deemed necessary as the top readiness skills for kindergarten:

- Promote enthusiastic learning
- Encourage solid oral language skills
- Foster independence
- Develop ability to listen and take directions
- Promote the ability to play well with others (conflict resolution skills)
- Develop strong fine motor skills
- Encourage basic letter and number recognition

### *Summary*

This chapter restated the purpose of this qualitative study and provided a brief description of study's design. This study interviewed six participants to create information by exploring kindergarten teachers' perceptions of how the social emotional development skills gained from completion of a high quality prekindergarten program impact their students' kindergarten academic readiness. The participant introduction included background information of each. The study was conducted with certified teachers validating the study. A summary of the data collection was included and analyzed. Each research question was listed and analyzed. From the

data in the questions, four themes emerged and were described. The information from data collected clarified the themes and teachers made skills recommendations for student readiness.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how the social emotional development skills gained from completion of a high quality public school prekindergarten program impact the academic readiness of students entering kindergarten. This qualitative study was completed by interviewing six kindergarten teachers in Sevier County, Tennessee. There are five prekindergarten programs in place in schools in the Sevier County School System and those schools were chosen to ask for voluntary participants for the study.

Open-ended interview questions were used to focus the study. The individual interviews revealed teacher perceptions related to the seven key ingredients of school readiness, (1) confidence, (2) curiosity, (3) intentionality, (4) relatedness, (5) self-control, (6) cooperativeness, and (7) capacity to communicate. All seven of these key ingredients are social emotional development skills. The interviews also revealed how teachers perceive the importance of the home environment to early learning.

#### *Summary*

Research question 1 was an introductory question asked for general information and to gain insight of what kindergarten teachers considered to be the most valuable criteria for kindergarten readiness. Four of the participants indicated that home environment was the most valuable criteria for social emotional development to prepare children to be ready for school because social emotional development should begin between children and their parents. The other two participants specified self-control and maturity as the most valuable, also social emotional development skills.

Research question 2 addressed the confidence component of the seven key ingredients of school readiness. All six participants perceived their students who had completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program to have higher levels of confidence than students who did not. Curiosity was also addressed in this question. Only two of the participants responded and indicated that both groups of students had the same level of social emotional development in this area.

Research question 3 addressed the key ingredients intentionality and relatedness. Although these two ingredients for school readiness are social emotional development skills because they represent higher order thinking skills in students, they did not appear to be perceived as such. The teacher responses were varied. One participant did not identify relatedness and intentionality as social emotional skills because the response was that social emotional development should not be crowded out, two maintained this was another area to be addressed in the home environment, and one responded that pre-k doesn't make kids smarter but allows them more opportunities. Two of the participants' responses reflected that the recall ability of students who had a pre-k experience was better than the students who had not, which was the closest response that related to what relatedness and intentionality represent.

Research question 4 addressed the social emotional development key ingredient of self-control. All six of the participants stated that students who had completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program maintained better self-control than students who did not.

Research question 5 addressed the level of cooperativeness of students who have completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program. Five of the six participants responded that the social emotional development skill of cooperativeness was higher in the students who had completed pre-k than those students who had not and more apparent during transitions.

Research question 6 addressed the capacity to communicate. A key ingredient for school readiness, this social emotional skill was considered to be better developed in the home environment because parents were considered the best influence for communication

### *Conclusions*

How social emotional development skills gained in high quality public school prekindergarten impact academic kindergarten readiness was perceived by kindergarten teachers to have a positive impact. Kindergarten teachers prefer home environment as the first choice for early learning influence but acknowledge that students who complete high quality pre-k may and do enter kindergarten with better social emotional development skills that affect academics positively. As one participant stated, “It can’t hurt”.

### *Findings*

Information gained from interviews created knowledge of perceptions of kindergarten teachers of how the social emotional development skills gained in a high quality public school prekindergarten impact kindergarten academic readiness. All six participants indicated that their students who had completed pre-k showed higher levels of the seven social emotional development key ingredients of school readiness than their students who did not. One of the participants highly regarded the pre-k influence throughout the interview response, four maintained a steady regard throughout, and the sixth, while the tone was not negative, regard was acceptable. Still, overall, the regard for the benefits of pre-k was positive.

Prekindergarten has been implemented in Tennessee since 1998 when the state began serving 600 at-risk students in its small scale early childhood education pilot program. Legislation was

proposed in 2005 by then Governor Phil Bredesen to expand the existing pilot program. Known as the Voluntary Pre-K Act of 2005, the bill sought to make voluntary pre-k an option for at risk 4 year olds across the state (TN Department of Education, Office of early Learning).

The number of voluntary pre-k classrooms in the 2004-2005 school year were 148 serving 3,000 students. As of June 2013 the number of classrooms totaled 935 and the number of students served totaled over 18,000 (2012-2013 Tennessee Prekindergarten Fact Sheet). These numbers indicate growth in the pre-k program but although all 95 counties in Tennessee have implemented pre-k programs, not all school systems in all counties have pre-k, and those school systems that have pre-k classrooms do not have them in all schools. Because of this, there are more students in public school classrooms who have not completed a high quality public school prekindergarten program than have so the differences in social emotional development skills of those who did are more apparent.

The participants interviewed were from schools that had prekindergarten programs in place and had experience with students who had completed the high quality pre-k program in and students who had not. They were able to answer the interview questions based on their classroom observation and assessment of both groups of students. The findings from this knowledge, based on the data analyzed from teacher participant interviews, indicated that kindergarten teachers perceive that social emotional development skills gained in a high quality public school prekindergarten affect kindergarten academic readiness positively.

The findings from this study may inform and influence the Tennessee Office of Early Learning, School Administrators, Community Pre-K Advisory Council, and others for future prekindergarten growth. Educators may find helpful information as they observe and assess the students in their classroom.

### *Recommendations for Educator Practice*

The researcher made the following recommendations for future prekindergarten practices:

- Stronger, more frequent parent involvement from parents of students who meet impoverished criteria and qualify as students who are at-risk for academic failure
- Professional development for kindergarten teachers to clarify what academic expectations from prekindergarten students should be upon kindergarten entry
- Prekindergarten progress reports provided to kindergarten teachers at the end of the pre-k year that will include academic benchmark assessments, behavior, and social emotional development skills

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

The researcher recommended the following suggestions for future prekindergarten research:

- Increase the number of longitudinal studies of prekindergarten progress beyond student entry through second grade to seek validation of the benefits of having high quality public school prekindergarten
- Consider adding evaluation intervals to longitudinal studies to further compare effects of the study to determine what gains, if any, of students who completed prekindergarten to students who did not in other school areas such as test scores and high school graduation rates and economic benefits such as welfare status, and employment, similar to age group intervals that were compared in the High Scope Perry Pre-school Project. Students from that project were followed from age 4 through age 40 and compared in intervals from pre-k through high school and again at intervals as adults to a control group that did not attend the pre-school but were also followed through age 40.

### *Summary*

This chapter included discussion in the findings, a summary of each research question and conclusions. Recommendations from participants describing the top kindergarten skills necessary for kindergarten readiness were included. Recommendations from the researcher for further prekindergarten study and research were also included.

This qualitative study's findings and conclusions were considered representative of kindergarten teachers' perspectives as it reflected only the views of the six participants in this study. Kindergarten teacher participants in this study conveyed an overall perception that home is where children should gain the most early school readiness skills. Ideally, parents who are involved with their children's early learning have children who are better prepared to enter school ready for academics. Realistically, the kindergarten teacher participants acknowledged that although home is the most desirable environment for early preparation for kindergarten academics, it is not always the best environment. For the children who do not receive a good early learning beginning in their home environment, a high quality public school prekindergarten program is favored as an acceptable substitute.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### Letter to Director of Schools

Ms. Gale Collett  
1781 Douglas Dam Rd  
Sevierville, TN 37876

March 26, 2013

Dear Director of Schools

I am currently a Doctoral student at East Tennessee State University and am beginning the research process of my Dissertation. My career as an educator is focused on early childhood education, specifically prekindergarten. Therefore, I have chosen as a qualitative study to explore kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the impact of student completion of high quality public school prekindergarten has on those students' academic readiness when they enter kindergarten.

Since pre-k is a highly controversial subject as to its effectiveness, I am asking your permission to collect data for this study of kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the differences in kindergarten academic readiness of children who have completed a high quality public school pre-k program compared to children who have not in the Sevier County School System.

Participants in this study are to be certified Kindergarten Teachers with early childhood knowledge and experience and teaching in schools that have a prekindergarten program in place. Participation is on a voluntary basis, no coercion will be used. Written consent will be sought from principals of each school and each participant. Participants will be asked to either participate in a written response interview by writing their answers and returning them by mail or e-mail.

Please find enclosed a copy of the letter that will be sent to principals of each school that has a prekindergarten program in place in their school and informed consent form for participants.

In addition, I have included a copy of the research questions to be used with participants.

I appreciate your time, consideration, and prompt written response in granting permission for data to be collected from participants in Sevier County Schools. Upon completion of the study, the final report will be available for you to review along with ETSU and ELPA studies dissertation committee.

Sincerely,

Ms. Gale Collett, M.Ed., ECE  
Prekindergarten Teacher, Sevierville Primary School @Trula Lawson ECC  
ETSU Doctoral Student

## APPENDIX B

### Letter to Principals

Ms. Gale Collett  
1781 Douglas Dam Road  
Sevierville, TN 37876

March 26, 2013

Dear Principal,

I am currently a Doctoral student at East Tennessee State University and am beginning the research process of my dissertation. My educational career is focused on early childhood education, specifically prekindergarten. Therefore, I have chosen as a qualitative study to explore teachers' perceptions of the impact that student completion of a high quality public school prekindergarten program has on the academic readiness of those students when they enter kindergarten. Since prekindergarten is a source of controversy with state lawmakers as to its effectiveness, I am asking your permission to collect data within your school for my study from kindergarten teachers to gain their perspective on how the academic readiness of children who have completed prekindergarten compares to the academic readiness of children who did not complete prekindergarten in *name of school*.

Criteria for being a participant for this study is to be a certified kindergarten teacher with knowledge and experience of the social emotional development of four and five year old children. Participation is on a voluntary basis, no coercion will be used. Written consent will be sought from each participant. Participants will be asked to participate in a written response interview.

Please find enclosed a copy of the informed consent form for participants and copy of interview questions.

I appreciate your time, consideration and prompt written response in granting permission for data to be collected from teachers in name of school placed here. Upon completion of the study, the final report will be available for you to review along with ETSU, ELPA studies dissertation committee, and Director of Schools.

Sincerely,

Ms. Gale Collett, M.Ed., ECE  
Prekindergarten Teacher, Sevierville Primary School  
ETSU Doctoral Student

Business Phone: 865-428-5793  
Cell Phone: 865-809-4751

E-mail [galecollett@sevier.org](mailto:galecollett@sevier.org)  
E-mail [ecteacher4@att.net](mailto:ecteacher4@att.net)

## APPENDIX C

### Letter to Kindergarten Teachers

Ms. Gale A. Collett  
1781 Douglas Dam Road  
Sevierville, TN 37876

Dear *Kindergarten Teacher*,

I am a Doctoral student at East Tennessee State University and am entering the research phase of my dissertation. I am conducting an interview of kindergarten teachers who have children in their classrooms that have completed a public school prekindergarten program. I have chosen your school because there is a prekindergarten program in place in your school from which children may enter kindergarten classes in the same school. The children who have completed a public school prekindergarten program entering kindergarten and the children who have not completed public school prekindergarten and are entering kindergarten are the comparison groups.

The purpose of my study is to see how the social emotional development of children who have completed public school prekindergarten affects their kindergarten academic readiness, and if there is a significant difference in the social emotional development of the children entering kindergarten who have completed prekindergarten and the children entering kindergarten who have not completed prekindergarten.

I am writing this letter to request your participation in this study because you are a kindergarten teacher in a school that has a public school prekindergarten in place and children from that program may enter your kindergarten classroom. There is a consent form included in with this letter along with a copy of the interview questions that will be asked.

I appreciate you help and ask that you return the enclosed consent form to me as soon as possible at e-mail address [galecollett@sevier.org](mailto:galecollett@sevier.org), or you may fax to 865-428-3594 allowing me to contact you to arrange the interview. As I receive consent forms, I will contact you to set up a

time and location, at your convenience, to conduct the interview. If you are willing to participate in the study but are not able or prefer not to meet for a face to face interview, you may provide the answers in written form and return them to me via e-mail.

Sincerely,

Gale A. Collett  
Sevierville Primary School Prekindergarten Teacher  
Doctoral Student ETSU

## APPENDIX D

### Research Instrument

#### Interview Questions for Kindergarten Teacher Participants

Conducted by Gale Collett

ELPA Doctoral Student ETSU

1. During your years of teaching experience and memorable events that occurred that have influenced you during your teaching career, what, in your opinion, would you consider the most valuable criteria for kindergarten readiness in young children?
2. Starting school is a life changing event and can be an intimidating experience. Do the children that enter your kindergarten class that have attended a high quality public school pre-k program the previous year appear to have more confidence in themselves and a higher level of curiosity in their classroom environment than children who did not attend pre-k?
3. How well do students who have previously attended a high quality public school pre-k program form representations (intentionality) when presented with information, either new or previously built on during cognitive events such as oral language, literacy, and math, than students who did not attend pre-k, and are the students who did attend pre-k better able to make connections to prior information (relatedness) than students who did not?
4. Social-emotional development is a strong component in early childhood education (Schiller, P. 2008). Do the children who are entering your kindergarten class who have previously attended a high quality pre-k program appear to exhibit more self-control of their emotions, for example, when separating from parents or in conflict situations with peers, than children who are entering kindergarten without a high quality public school pre-k experience?

5. Transitions from one activity to another are important to a daily schedule. What, in your opinion, is the level of cooperativeness of children in your kindergarten class who have previously attended a high quality public school pre-k program and do you think cooperation is an important contribution to a smooth, timely transition?

6. Children communicate in many different ways. Do the children in your kindergarten class use different methods of communication and do their levels of capacity differ? Would you contribute the capacity to communicate effectively to having attended a high quality public school pre-k program?

The questions asked were designed to reflect the seven social emotional development key ingredients of school readiness: (1) confidence, (2) curiosity, (3) intentionality, (4) relatedness, (5) self-control, (6) cooperativeness, and (7) capacity to communicate, (Schiller, P, 2008).

## APPENDIX E

### Longitudinal Study Conducted in Sevier County 2007-2011

#### The Effects of a Pre Kindergarten Experience for 3 and 4 Year Old Children in the regular educational progression to Grades 1 and 2.

Information was gleaned from all 5 Pre K Sites in Sevier County as well as with Douglas Dam Head Start Program. All children who are accepted into the program MUST adhere to federal and state guidelines on parental or guardian income levels for their year of entry. These children enter the public school system behind in many facets of the educational process, but with the outstanding leadership at the Pre K sites as well as in the classroom this data shows students who enter behind can progress positively with the a classroom teacher who is focused on the child's development and educational abilities to be successful.

Randall B Kincaid, Instructional Supervisor and Pre K Coordinator for Sevier County Schools

Dr. Debra A. Cline, Director of Curriculum and Instruction for Sevier County Schools

Gale A. Collett, Consulting Prekindergarten Teacher



Research on Pre K Students from entry to Grade 2 Progress

\*\* All students were chosen at random from all 5 Pre K Sites

| <b>Students who attended Pre-K 2007-2008 / K 2008-2009</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                          |                                 |                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Students who attended Pre-K</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                          |                                 |                               |
| Student                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Pre-K Brigance Screening | Kindergarten Brigance Screening | Scored on 100 point checklist |
| Student 1 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 53                       | 87.5                            |                               |
| Student 2 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 65                       | 77                              |                               |
| Student 3 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 44                       | 86                              |                               |
| Student 4 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 64                       | 86                              |                               |
| Student 5 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 57                       | 83.5                            |                               |
| Student 6 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 43.5                     | 66.5                            |                               |
| Student 7 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 65                       | 76.5                            |                               |
| Average                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 56                       | 80                              |                               |
| Average (Male)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 54                       | 84                              |                               |
| Average (Female)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 57                       | 78                              |                               |
| <b>Students who did not attend Pre-K</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                          |                                 |                               |
| Student 8 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                          | 60                              | Scored on 100 point checklist |
| Student 9 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                          | 66                              |                               |
| Student 10 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                          | 71                              |                               |
| Student 11 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                          | 87                              |                               |
| Student 12 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                          | 81.5                            |                               |
| Average                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                          | 73                              |                               |
| Average (Male)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                          | 73                              |                               |
| Average (Female)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                          | 74                              |                               |
| <p>Students who attended Pre-K on average scored 7 points higher on their Kindergarten Brigance Screening than students who did not attend Pre-K. Male students who attended Pre-K scored on average 11 points higher on their Kindergarten Brigance Screening than male students who did not attend Pre-K. Female students who attended Pre-K scored on average 4 points higher on their Kindergarten Brigance Screening than female students who did not attend Pre-K.</p> |                          |                                 |                               |
| <b>Students who attended Pre-K 2008-2009 / K 2009-2010</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                          |                                 |                               |
| <b>Students who attended Pre-K</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                          |                                 |                               |
| Student                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Pre-K Brigance Screening | Kindergarten Brigance Screening | Scored on 100 point checklist |
| Student 1 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 48                       | 82.5                            |                               |
| Student 2 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 63.5                     | 71                              |                               |
| Student 3 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 54                       | 72                              |                               |
| Student 4 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 68                       | 95.5                            |                               |
| Student 5 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 49                       | 49                              |                               |
| Student 6 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 57                       | 80                              |                               |
| Average                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 57                       | 75                              |                               |
| Average (Male)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 61                       | 80                              |                               |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                          |                                 |                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Average (Female)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 49                       | 66                              |                                  |
| <b>Students who did not attend Pre-K</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                          |                                 |                                  |
| Student 7 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                          | 54                              | Scored on 100<br>point checklist |
| Student 8 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                          | 49.5                            |                                  |
| Student 9 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                          | 78.5                            |                                  |
| Student 10 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                          | 86                              |                                  |
| Student 11 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                          | 89.5                            |                                  |
| Student 12 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                          | 49.5                            |                                  |
| Student 13 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                          | 94                              |                                  |
| Average                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                          | 72                              |                                  |
| Average (Male)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                          | 75                              |                                  |
| Average (Female)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                          | 69                              |                                  |
| <p>Students who attended Pre-K on average scored 3 points higher on their Kindergarten Brigance Screening than students who did not attend Pre-K. Male students who attended Pre-K scored on average 5 points higher on their Kindergarten Brigance Screening than male students who did not attend Pre-K. Female students who attended Pre-K scored on average 3 points lower on their Kindergarten Brigance Screening than female students who did not attend Pre-K.</p> |                          |                                 |                                  |
| <b>Students who attended Pre-K 2009-2010 / K 2010-2011</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                          |                                 |                                  |
| <b>Students who attended Pre-K</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                          |                                 |                                  |
| Student                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Pre-K Brigance Screening | Kindergarten Brigance Screening | Scored on 100<br>point checklist |
| Student 1 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 66                       | 93                              |                                  |
| Student 2 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 56                       | 93.5                            |                                  |
| Student 3 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 54.5                     | 87                              |                                  |
| Student 4 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 67                       | 96                              |                                  |
| Student 5 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 52                       | 88                              |                                  |
| Student 6 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 75                       | 78.5                            |                                  |
| Student 7 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 45                       | 65                              |                                  |
| Student 8 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 79                       | 79.5                            |                                  |
| Average                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 62                       | 85                              |                                  |
| Average (Male)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 62                       | 90                              |                                  |
| Average (Female)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 60                       | 72                              |                                  |
| <b>Students who did not attend Pre-K</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                          |                                 |                                  |
| Student 9 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                          | 65                              | Scored on 100<br>point checklist |
| Student 10 (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                          | 68.5                            |                                  |
| Student 11 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                          | 52.5                            |                                  |
| Student 12 (M)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                          | 66.5                            |                                  |
| Average                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                          | 63                              |                                  |
| Average (Male)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                          | 61                              |                                  |
| Average (Female)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                          | 69                              |                                  |
| <p>Students who attended Pre-K on average scored 22 points higher on their Kindergarten Brigance</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                          |                                 |                                  |

Screening than students who did not attend Pre-K. Male students who attended Pre-K scored on average 29 points higher on their Kindergarten Brigance Screening than male students who did not attend Pre-K. Female students who attended Pre-K scored on average 4 points higher on their Kindergarten Brigance Screening than female students who did not attend Pre-K.

Research on Pre K Students from entry to Grade 2 Progress

\*\* All students were chosen at random from all 5 Pre K Sites

| Students who attended Pre-K 2007-2008 / K 2008-2009/1 <sup>st</sup> 2009-2010/2 <sup>nd</sup> 2010-2011 |                          |                                 |                                 |      |                                 |       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------|---------------------------------|-------|
| Students who attended Pre-K                                                                             |                          |                                 |                                 |      |                                 |       |
| Student                                                                                                 | Pre-K Brigance Screening | Kindergarten Brigance Screening | SAT 10<br>1 <sup>st</sup> Grade |      | SAT 10<br>2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade |       |
|                                                                                                         |                          |                                 | Math                            | R/LA | Math                            | R/LA  |
| Student 1 (M)                                                                                           | 53                       | 87.5                            | 72                              | 51   | 71 -1                           | 52 +1 |
| Student 2 (M)                                                                                           | 65                       | 77                              | 75                              | 51   | 76 +1                           | 53 +2 |
| Student 3 (M)                                                                                           | 44                       | 86                              | 74                              | 53   | 75 +1                           | 51 -2 |
| Student 4 (F)                                                                                           | 64                       | 86                              | 80                              | 52   | 79 -1                           | 53 +1 |
| Student 5 (F)                                                                                           | 57                       | 83.5                            | 82                              | 52   | 79 -3                           | 54 +2 |
| Student 6 (F)                                                                                           | 43.5                     | 66.5                            | 72                              | 50   | 70 -2                           | 52 +2 |
| Student 7 (F)                                                                                           | 65                       | 76.5                            | 75                              | 53   | 72 -3                           | 55 +2 |
| Average                                                                                                 | 56                       | 80                              | 76                              | 52   | 74 -2                           | 53 +1 |
| Average (Male)                                                                                          | 54                       | 84                              | 74                              | 52   | 75 -1                           | 52 +0 |
| Average (Female)                                                                                        | 57                       | 78                              | 77                              | 52   | 75 +2                           | 54 +2 |
| Students who did not attend Pre-K                                                                       |                          |                                 |                                 |      |                                 |       |
| Student 8 (F)                                                                                           |                          | 60                              | 65                              | 45   | 66 -1                           | 48 +3 |
| Student 9 (M)                                                                                           |                          | 66                              | 60                              | 42   | 70 +10                          | 46 -4 |
| Student 10 (M)                                                                                          |                          | 71                              | 70                              | 50   | 71 +1                           | 43 -7 |
| Student 11 (F)                                                                                          |                          | 87                              | 71                              | 51   | 70 -1                           | 42 -9 |
| Student 12 (M)                                                                                          |                          | 81.5                            | 69                              | 49   | 71 +2                           | 43 -6 |
| Average                                                                                                 |                          | 73                              | 67                              | 49   | 69 +2                           | 45 -4 |
| Average (Male)                                                                                          |                          | 73                              | 66                              | 47   | 70 +4                           | 44-3  |
| Average (Female)                                                                                        |                          | 74                              | 68                              | 48   | 68 +0                           | 45 -3 |

Students who attended Pre-K on average scored 7 points higher on their Kindergarten Brigance Screening than students who did not attend Pre-K. Male students who attended Pre-K scored on average 11 points higher on their Kindergarten Brigance Screening than Male students who did not attend Pre-K. Female students who attended Pre-K scored on average 4 points higher on their Kindergarten Brigance Screening than Female students who did not attend Pre-K. Those students who attended Pre-K scored higher than the system average in both math and reading/language arts as well as the students who did not attend Pre K . The students who attended Pre K scored at Grade 1 SAT 10 Math 9% higher, and 9% higher in Reading / Language Arts. In Grade 2, students who attended Pre K scored 9.3% higher in mathematics and 8.5% higher in Reading/Language Arts. Males, who attended Pre K scored 3% lower than Female students in mathematics, and the same in Reading/Language Arts in

Grade 1, where as in Grade 2, Males scored the same percentage of growth as Females, but 2% lower in Reading/Language Arts. As for those students who did not attend Pre K, Males scored lower in both categories for SAT 10, Grade 1, but in Grade 2, Males scored 2% higher in math, and 1% lower in Reading/Language Arts. The area of concern for those students who did not attend Pre K is the standards and testing of Reading/Language Arts. According to studies completed by Early Childhood Experts ( Dorothy S. Strickland and Lesley Mandel Marrow) the advantages students gain in having this Early Childhood Experience allows children to participate in activities that guide them to increase oral language including dramatic play in response to life and literature, literature experiences in the classroom, and artistic experiences as well in the classroom. Piaget’s Vygotsky’s 1978 theories seem to be most acceptable for explaining the relationship between the development of thoughts and language. According to Piaget, children acquire language in association with their activities. In the Pre K setting the children have the opportunity to see, hear, touch, taste, and smell objects and events in their worlds in order to learn conceptually about them and the language they represent. Piaget believes that not only language but all activities that involve thought are learned as the result of activity and interactions. The children who do not attend Pre K or have some kind of Early Childhood Educational Experience then they are not exposed to the same amount of language to further their educational and maturity development in language and the world.

**Students who attended Pre-K 2008-2009/ K 2009-2010/ 1st 2010-2011**

| Student          | Pre-K Brigance Screening | Kindergarten Brigance Screening | SAT 10<br>1 <sup>st</sup> Grade |      |
|------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------|
|                  |                          |                                 | Math                            | R/LA |
| Student 1 (F)    | 48                       | 82.5                            | 70                              | 51   |
| Student 2 (M)    | 63.5                     | 71                              | 62                              | 49   |
| Student 3 (M)    | 54                       | 72                              | 59                              | 49   |
| Student 4 (M)    | 68                       | 95.5                            | 72                              | 55   |
| Student 5 (F)    | 49                       | 49                              | 45                              | 36   |
| Student 6 (M)    | 57                       | 80                              | 55                              | 50   |
| Average          | 57                       | 75                              | 61                              | 48   |
| Average (Male)   | 61                       | 80                              | 62                              | 51   |
| Average (Female) | 49                       | 66                              | 58                              | 44   |

**Students who did not attend Pre-K**

|                  |  | Math | R/LA |
|------------------|--|------|------|
| Student 7 (F)    |  | 54   | 42   |
| Student 8 (F)    |  | 49.5 | 38   |
| Student 9 (F)    |  | 78.5 | 55   |
| Student 10 (M)   |  | 86   | 75   |
| Student 11 (M)   |  | 48   | 49   |
| Average          |  | 63   | 52   |
| Average (Male)   |  | 67   | 62   |
| Average (Female) |  | 61   | 45   |

The students who did not attend Pre K scored on the average 12 points lower on the entry level Brigance Screening for Kindergarten than the students who had the Pre K experience. As for the Males

and Females who did not attend Pre K; the Males scored 13 points lower, while the Females scored 5 points lower on the entry level Brigance Screening for Kindergarten. On the SAT 10 Test for 2010-2011, the Males, who attended Pre K, scored on the average 9% lower, and the Females scored only 3% lower.

## VITA

### GALE A. COLLETT

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