Social-Emotional and Approaches to Learning Skill Development

In the lens of School Readiness

by

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ABSTRACT

This small case study reviewed research literature and Arizona standards and assessments utilized in the early learning continuum, with a focus on holistic development, specifically in the areas of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development. This conversation has become especially prevalent in the state of Arizona in light of initiatives around school readiness, and policy changes reflected within the state. Much has yet to be determined concerning how the systems approach works in Arizona local education agencies, specifically the depth, consistency, and approach in which nonacademic areas of social- emotional development and approaches to learning skills are addressed in the Arizona standards, local practices and classrooms, and preschool and kindergarten assessments. The study included a content analysis, conducted as a word count, of standards and assessments, as well as a small case study of including high academic achieving district (including semi-structured interviews and classroom observations). Through the data analysis, it was affirmed a culture of learning, reflecting social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development was created within this Local Education Agency. Three categories (environment, individual, and decision making) emerged as a way to describe this culture through a theoretical perspective of sociocultural theory. a The study offers an opportunity for discussion of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development, connecting to a high academically achieving district, and makes recommendations for policy, practice and further research.

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INTRODUCTION

In light of the emphasis on high-stakes testing and other accountability demands on children and educators, as well as research showing the impact of early learning, policymakers are focusing on the early childhood years as a crucial step in developing the competencies that form the basis of future academic success. In particular, there has been increased attention on ensuring that children enter school *ready to learn*. "According to several recent national and international reports, improving children's "readiness" to enter kindergarten and first grade is now one of the most pressing issues around the globe just as in the US early childhood policy and practice (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; OECD, 2006). As cited in Iorio and Parnell (2015), "According to a recent UNICEF (2012) report, the term "school readiness" has been variously theorized and discussed in three dimensions: children's readiness for school; schools' readiness for children; and the readiness of families and communities to help children make the transition to school" (p.1).

Inequality in school readiness is a subject of great importance and remains a topic of discussion at the national level –from Presidential addresses to state and local initiatives. While there is debate about what constitute readiness, the prevailing argument is that, in order to best prepare children for their education, predictors need to be established that will guide success in the early elementary years. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) frames this interest, stating that "[t]he issue first gained national prominence with the adoption of the National Education Goals including as Goal 1, 'by the year 2000, all children will start school

ready to learn" (1992, p.3). The NAEYC continues by identifying school readiness as involving more than just children, but rather, in the broadest sense, is about children, families, early environments, schools, and communities. NAEYC recognizes that 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 (NAEYC, 2004). Traditionally, the construct of school readiness has been based on the assumption that there is a predetermined set of capabilities that all children need before entering school. However, the National Education Goals Panel (1992) also recognized children's development as being multidimensional, complex, and influenced by individual, cultural, and contextual variations. As a result, they have determined that any discussion of school readiness must consider at minimum three critical factors: the diversity of children's early life experiences as well as inequity in experiences, the wide variation in young children's development and learning, and the degree to which school expectations of children entering kindergarten are reasonable, appropriate, and supportive of individual differences.

In addition, the reauthorization of Head Start as the School Readiness Act of 2007 provided a more concrete definition of school readiness as, "the expectations of children's status and progress across domains for language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social-emotional development that will improve their readiness for kindergarten" (p. 5). Shortly after, the US Department of Education outlined the

expectations of kindergarten readiness through the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Fund.

As children enter kindergarten, they experience many first-time expectations (such as independent work, small group collaborations, schedules, discipline, and teacher-lead instruction). This can be an extremely difficult and intimidating transition, especially when it is in stark contrast to the child's previous setting (including home-based care). "Meeting these expectations depends on children's approaches to learning (ATL), defined as characteristics and behaviors that children show while engaging in learning activities" (Li-Grining and Haas, 2010, p. 13). Approaches to learning refer to observable behaviors that indicate ways children become engaged in social interactions and learning experiences. Children's approaches to learning contribute to their success in school and influence their development and learning in other domains. In addition, children learn and thrive within relationships in which they feel emotionally secure and physically safe. These relationships promote feelings of competence and pride in their accomplishments. Children need to develop the capacity to experience, express, and gain self-control over their emotions and social interactions in order to mature socially and emotionally. A consistent and predictable environment strengthens a child's confidence in approaching new challenges. Social-emotional development and approaches to learning skills are the foundation to children's cognitive development and life-long learning. "More specifically, executive function [approaches to learning] refers to cognitive memory, the appropriate shifting and sustaining of attention among goal-relevant aspects of a given task or problem, and the inhibition of prpotnt or extraneous information and responding within a given task context" (Miyake et al., 2000, p. 151).

This becomes the foundation for helping children understand themselves, form positive constructive social relationships and relate to the larger world, thus successfully starting the journey to becoming kindergarten ready. "Although executive function [approaches to learning] is only one aspect of readiness, close examination can provide a valuable perspective on the systems approach to readiness and early programs in school…that is, if the cognitive control processes that characterize executive function support knowledge acquisition, then the promotion of executive function is an important, although not exclusive, focus for research on school readiness. Thus executive function might underlie the development of readiness to learn" (Pianta et al, 2007, p. 152).

Arizona Department of Education and Researcher Connection

The state of Arizona is comprised of over 2000 public schools, 500 charter schools, and over one million students, The Arizona Department of Education and its chief position, a publicly elected state Superintendent of Public Instruction, were created upon the ratification of the Arizona Constitution. The job of the state superintendent is to "superintend" the K-12 public education system in Arizona through the state department of education. As stated in the state constitution, this involves providing for the students of Arizona a uniform public school system including kindergarten schools, common schools, high schools and normal schools (www.azed.gov). The units and associating functions of this state's department of education are unique and critical to the empowerment of the state's academic achievement. Early Childhood Education (viewed in Arizona as birth through third grade) is overseen by the Arizona Department of Education Early Childhood Education (ECE) Unit. Arizona's ECE unit recognizes that a

focused attention must be shed on what happens in the birth to five years' experience in order to create a strong foundation for all future learning. Since it's fruition in 2001, collaborative efforts have led to the creation of a foundational continuum for Arizona's children, illustrated in a series of guiding documents that include the *Arizona's Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines,* the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd edition* for children ages three to kindergarten entry and the *Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Education: Birth through Kindergarten*. Most recently, the ECE unit has also begun work on bridging the gap between preschool and kindergarten by creating a state wide school readiness definition, as well as joining a ten state consortium to identify a kindergarten readiness assessment.

The Early Childhood Education unit consists of fifteen employees who help oversee and facilitate the learning continuum of Arizona's youngest children. The goal of these employees is to help reinforce, interpret, and educate the field on research, policy, and best practices in the area of early childhood education. This is achieved through monitoring, professional development, site visits, and collaborating work among the communities.

Although I enter this study as a researcher, I also hold the unique position of being employed in the very area I am studying. As a Program Specialist and the Coordinator of Professional Development for the Arizona Department of Education, I have had the opportunity to observe preschool and kindergarten classrooms across the state, take part in the creation and revision process of state policy documents (i.e. Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition, Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines, and Arizona's School Readiness Framework), as well as facilitate

conversations with educators around policy and developmentally appropriate practices. This dissertation is meant to focus on data derived from the case study, however, my connection and experiences to the material and field will also guide my observations and generalizations.

Background: Arizona Context

Although the term "readiness" is posed as the answer in early childhood education, there is still a great deal of confusion about the terms and/or domains this answer should contain. Graue (2006) states, "The readiness checklist is typically a developmental buffet, representing many types of skills that children develop as they enter kindergarten. They are often school specific in that they are foundational for basic literacy, numeracy, or just being a student. They are inherently normative as they are posed to support comparisons with a typical 5-year-old." There has been an increased focus on school readiness of children entering kindergarten, where school readiness is broadly defined to encompass both academic aspects of development, such as literacy and cognitive skills, as well as nonacademic aspects such as social, emotional, and physical health. While formal definitions of readiness have not been established in every state, a number of states conduct statewide readiness screenings, and many more states are part of a consortium to develop readiness indicators. Building on the work of NAEYC and Head Start, Arizona (*Arizona's School Readiness Framework*, 2015, p. 5) defines school readiness as:

> Arizona's young children will demonstrate school readiness through the Essential Domains of Language and Literacy development, Cognition and General

> Knowledge (including early mathematics and early scientific development), Approaches to Learning (curiosity, initiative, persistence, creativity, problem-solving and confidence), Physical Well-Being and Motor Development and Self-Regulation of attention and emotion. Intentional development of skills and knowledge in these domains establishes a critical foundation for children to engage in and benefit from opportunities to learn. (p.6).

Arizona has adopted a comprehensive approach to describing what readiness looks like for young children entering kindergarten, emphasizing both the knowledge (academic) and attributes (non-academic) children need in order to attend to challenging curriculum presented in the kindergarten classroom.

> Arizona's School Readiness Framework provides the groundwork needed to design and develop Arizona's Kindergarten Developmental Inventory (KDI). The purpose of the KDI is to provide a tool that allows parents, teachers and administrators to understand the extent of a child's learning and development at the beginning of kindergarten to develop instruction that will lead to the child's academic success. The tool that is developed or adopted will align with the *Arizona Early Learning Standards* and *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards* for kindergarten, cover all essential domains of school readiness (Physical & Motor Development, Social & Emotional Development, Approaches To Learning, Language Development, and Cognitive Development), and will be reliable and valid for its intended use. Knowing the attributes and expectations for children's entry to school through the use of the Arizona School Readiness Framework allows for the creation of an assessment mechanism that provides a

> valid measure of children's readiness at school entry. To date, predicting children's academic success through measurement of readiness indicators has been difficult.[i] But aligning readiness concepts with the assessment to reliably measure those concepts is a first step in designing a more effective achievement predictor (*Arizona's School Readiness Framework*, 2015, p. 10).

Public investments in early childhood education and kindergarten readiness are increasing with the intentions of reducing achievement disparities in children. National, local, and state efforts on education reform continue to raise concerns on "children's readiness" for kindergarten. The state of Arizona is in the forefront of these educational reforms. With the adoption of the initiative *Move on When Reading* (2012), students who are not at grade level benchmark in reading achievement in the third grade will no longer be advanced to the next grade level. In addition, *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards* (previously known as the *K-12 Common Core Standards*) have been adopted and implemented in Arizona, resulting in a more rigorous and demanding curriculum. Arizona joined with 46 other states to create the next generation of K-12 standards in English language arts and mathematics. These standards provide a consistent framework to prepare students for success in college and/or the 21st century workplace. The standards were developed in collaboration with teachers, education leaders, and experts, to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce. This state-led effort was coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The standards are informed by the highest, most effective models from states

across the country and countries around the world, and provide teachers and parents with a common understanding of what students are expected to learn.

Arizona's College and Career Ready standards define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so they will graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs. The standards align with college and work expectations; are clear, understandable and consistent; include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills; build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards; informed by other top performing countries to prepare all students to succeed in our global economy and society; and are evidence-based.

In an ongoing effort to build a comprehensive and coordinated early childhood system that ensures all of Arizona's young children are ready for school and set for life, the Arizona Department of Education, along with First Things First (Arizona Early Childhood Development and Health Board), and key partners and stakeholders recognized the need to ensure the support and scaffolding of learning and development in Arizona's children begins at birth. Thus three documents of guiding principles and standards were created: *Arizona's Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines*, the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* (for ages 3-5), and the *Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Education: Birth through Kindergarten.*

Arizona's Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines (2013) addresses the continuum of development, stating:

> Thriving, productive and healthy adults contribute to strong communities, a vibrant economy and are more apt to be successful parents of future generations.

> As neuroscience has clearly shown, the brain grows and develops rapidly in the first years, and young children need stimulation and interaction throughout their lives. Stress, trauma, negative interactions and harmful environments can be most damaging in the very early years. Connections in the brain become stronger when they are used often, and connections that are not used die away in childhood and early adolescence. Babies and young children need stimulation to develop socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually. Learning begins at birth and early experiences in the first three years of a child's life promote positive future learning. The surge of research and knowledge over the past few decades has given us all a better understanding of how vital the first years are-and how to maximize a child's potential for the betterment of all society. The early childhood years are the essential foundation for later achievement in school and life (p.1).

The document recognizes the importance of shared responsibility and accountability to achieve positive outcomes for all children. These guidelines are part of a continuum of early learning guidelines which provide a framework for understanding and communicating a common set of developmentally appropriate expectations for young children. Specifically, they describe expectations about what infants and toddlers should know and do across multiple domains of development (social-emotional, approaches to learning, language development and communication, cognitive development, and physical and motor development). With this information, the intended use of this document is to serve as a resource to support the learning and development of Arizona's infants and toddlers, while promoting high quality early childhood education and health programs.

> The Arizona Early Learning Standards have been developed to provide a framework for the planning of quality learning experiences for all children three to five years of age. The standards cover a broad range of skills development [social-emotional, approaches to learning, language and literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, physical development/health and safety, and fine arts] and provide a useful instructional foundation for children from diverse backgrounds and with diverse abilities. The standards are intended for use by all those who work with young children in any early care and education setting in urban, rural and tribal communities (Arizona Early Learning Standards, 2013, p. 4).

Stipek, (2006) states that most early childhood experts endorse instruction that is adapted to children's individual skills and interests, but the initiatives need to be careful to not create a laundry-list of tasks for students, but rather have a greater emphasis on a holistic approach: developing academic and non-academic dimensions of development (social competence, behavioral self-regulation, and physical and emotional well-being). In response, the Arizona Early Learning Standards includes guiding principles that state:

> Although the Early Learning Standards document is separated into specific domains of learning, the intent is not to suggest that children's skills develop separately or apart from each other. Nor is it the intent that isolated skill instruction be used as an appropriate way to support learning during the preschool years. The standards document is based on the premises that learning occurs on a continuum and that developmental domains are highly interrelated. Children succeed to their highest potential in nurturing environments that support their learning across domains (2013, p. 4).

To further align with the changes in policy and education reform, the Early Learning Standards also include an alignment section within each standard domain that provides a matrix demonstrating how the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* align with the Infant and Toddler Guidelines and *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards*. *The Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Education: Birth through Kindergarten* (2011) are not a list of requirements, but rather a set of recommended practices for programs to use as they strive for excellence in the care and education of young children in Arizona (www.azed.gov). The document provides guidance by delineating quality and providing a set of indicators that concretely describe what a program will look like when providing high quality early care and education for children birth through age six. In 2002, the National Education Goals Panel identified three components of school readiness: 1) readiness in the child; 2) the school's readiness for children; and 3) family and community supports and services that contribute to children's readiness. As stated in the guidelines, "This document addresses all three readiness components in a comprehensive and integrated manner". Children are born ready to learn, and research indicates that children are better prepared for school and life success when supported in the following areas: physical well-being, motor development, social-emotional development, language development, and cognition and general knowledge (Child Trends Research Brief, 2001).

Taking into consideration the need for comprehensive service delivery, the guidelines address eight areas that contribute to program quality: program administration and personnel qualifications, daily routines and schedules, program practices and child assessments, linguistic and cultural integration, family engagement and support, health

and nutrition, community outreach and collaboration, and program evaluation. By incorporating the guidelines, programs can ensure that children have access to the opportunities that promote school success, participate in programs that recognize and support individual differences, and experience reasonable and appropriate expectations of their capabilities. The guidelines also include guidance for schools and programs to be ready for children.

Problem Statement

As the above mentioned initiatives and state documents detail, development of children in all domains is crucial to their school success. It is generally agreed that it is important to promote a strong foundation of academic and nonacademic skills in children to allow for their success in school and life. Federal and state early childhood programs and initiatives, including the federal Head Start program and Arizona's First Things First, along with the work being done by the Arizona Department of Education, contribute to this goal of addressing all the needs of the child and viewing the developing child through a holistic lens. As research suggests, one of the most important areas of development is in the child's social-emotional and approaches to learning skills. "Nonetheless, in the majority of the archival writings reviewed, it was children's social and moral conduct and behavior, their ability to play, and to learn proper physical and moral habits, language, and social behavior/conduct through play with others that appeared most important in most school programs; it was also clear that learning to follow orders, to be quiet and obedient, played an increasingly important role in teachers and other educators' perspectives by the end of the nineteenth century" (Iorio & Parnell,

2015, p. 4). Furthermore, the National Association for the Education of Young Children includes within their School Readiness position statement, "Expectations of the skills and abilities that young children bring to school must be based on knowledge of child development and how children learn. A basic principle of child development is that normal variability includes a wide range of competence within an age group. Children's social skills, physical development, intellectual abilities, and emotional adjustment are equally important areas of development, and each contributes to a child's adaptation to school life" (NAEYC, 1995, p. 1).

The Center for Young Children with Challenging Behavior further supports these non-academic skills by including in their brief *Recommended Practices,* "Social and behavioral competence in young children predicts their academic performance in the first grade over and above their cognitive skills and family backgrounds" (Raver & Knitzer, 2002, p.1). Science has established a compelling link between social-emotional development and behavior and school success (Raver, 2002; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). "Indeed, longitudinal studies suggest that the link may be causal….academic achievement in the first few years of schooling appears to be built on a foundation of children's emotional and social skills" (Raver, 2002, p.3). Young children cannot learn to read if they have problems that distract them from educational activities, problems following directions, problems getting along with others and controlling negative emotions, and problems that interfere with relationships with peers, teachers, and parents. "Specific social competencies linked empirically with school success include prosocial behaviors that foster positive peer and teacher relationships (e.g., helping, sharing, taking turns), and self-regulation skills that support the inhibitory control of

aggression and effective prosocial engagement and self-regulation, in turn, appear closely linked with emotional" (Denham, 2003, p. 2).

"Learning is a social process" (Zins et al., 2004, p. 9). In 1996 The National Education Goals Panel recognized that a "young child must be ready to learn, e.g., possess the pre-requisite skills for learning in order to meet the vision and accountability mandates of academic achievement and school success" (p. 2).

The current research is supporting the reason for this dissertation problem statement. It is becoming more evident that the scaffolding and development of non-academic skills such as social and emotional development fosters the development of all other academic domains, and allow the child to succeed in kindergarten. "Programs that have a focus on social skills have been shown to have improved outcomes related to drop out 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, p.9).

However, in *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards* there is little discussion of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skills. Still, literature is prevalent that explains children need to develop the capacity to experience, express, and gain self-control over their emotions and social interactions in order to mature socially and emotionally (Denham, 2003). Social-emotional development is the foundation of children's cognitive development and life-long learning. These skills become the foundation for helping children understand themselves, form positive constructive social relationships and relate to the larger world. "The social-emotional and self-regulation competencies that support effective learning engagement are

important for school success. These include the capacity to participate cooperatively in classroom activities, and to control attention and sustain task involvement. Children who can organize their behavior in a manner consistent with classroom expectations and engage with persistence on learning tasks exhibit higher levels of achievement in school" (McClelland et al., 2006, p. 365). In 2006, The WestEd Center for Prevention and Early Intervention released their report titled Social and Emotional Well-Being: The Foundation for School Readiness, in which they state: "We know that when children show up at kindergarten they are expected to be ready to learn, to sit still and focus, to express their own feelings and to get along with others. These tasks have less to do with their ability to recite the alphabet than they do with their ability to negotiate their emotions and relationships" (p. 14).

The conversation around school readiness is also encompassing of a multitude of contested definitions. Even though the goal, or conversation, of having children start school with a solid foundation of skills and ready to learn is commendable, the statement is highly disputed. Lewit and Baker (2005) sate, "The concept of "readiness" is poorly defined and is interpreted differently in different contexts. Even the basic assumptions of the goal statement have been contested: is it the children who should be ready for school or the schools that should be ready for the children, or the society that should provide appropriate support for the children and the schools?" (p.1) Lewit and Baker continue discussing the multiple definitions of readiness by explaining, "The statement that all children "start school ready to learn" combines in a single goal statement two historically different concepts—readiness for learning and readiness for school" (2005, p. 2). As the National Association for the Education of Young Children has pointed out, "Every child,

except in extreme instances of abuse, neglect, or disability, enters school ready to learn" (1990, p.21). This is further addressed within a chapter of *Rethinking Readiness in Early Childhood Education: Implications for Policy and Practic,e* in which Recchia and Bentley discuss:

Kagan (1990) refers to the latter [skills preparation masquerading as readiness] as the conception of "readiness for school", which is a construct built on children's acquisition of skills or basic concepts such as letters or numbers. This "readiness for school" does not represent actual preparedness to fully enter into and succeed in learning in the kindergarten classroom; rather it is indicative of a child's basic acquisition of certain skills that are not entirely essential to successfully navigate the kindergarten environment (Graue, 1993, 2009). Kindergarten teachers report that "readiness for school" (Kagan, 1990), as in children's rote memorization of numbers, letters, colors, and so on, are not the skills that make students successful in the kindergarten environment (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Graue, 1993) (p.146).

In contesting this traditional notion of what it means to be school ready, researchers such as Graue (1993) incorporate the concept of ready to learn into the conversation. "Far from parroting rote and transitory memorization of skill sets, these children demonstrated a genuine readiness to learn, using tools that allowed them to access and make meaning across the social, structural, and academic components of the kindergarten environments" (Becchia &Bentley, 2015, p. 162). "As Graue's (2006, 1993, 1992) research illustrated, readiness is almost always portrayed as a child's characteristic" (Peters et. Al, 2015, p. 36). In addition, Peters, Ortiz, & Swadener state, "Whereas there is a proliferation of research on this subject over the last two plus

decades, few studies have systemically examined beliefs regarding the multiple dimensions of children's school readiness, relying instead on lists of readiness characteristics" (2015, p. 36). They go on to describe:

> Educators, stakeholders, and policymakers would generally agree that school readiness encompasses the beliefs, understandings, policies, practices, assessments, and campaigns addressing the preparation of a child and the skills a child should possess to enter kindergarten. Continued research ranges from describing school readiness as merely having knowledge of numbers and letters, to examining social and emotional characteristics as critical components (Peters, et al., 2015, p. 37).

In lieu of the purpose of this research project, conversations around what it means to be *kindergarten ready* and *succeed in kindergarten* in Arizona policy, I contend that for the purpose of the discussion within this research project, the term school readiness will be based on Graue's (1993) construct of "readiness of learning", which includes the notions of non-academic skill development to help the child be successful in the learning processes of the kindergarten classroom.

Fewer than 1 in 3 of Arizona's children attend a formalized preschool setting, of which *Child Care Aware of America* acknowledges in their 2012 report, Arizona had 464,019 children under the age of four, but 318,060 children were not participating in child care or a preschool program. Layered upon the problems of access and cost to formalized preschool settings, are challenges to prepare children in the areas of social, emotional, and approaches to learning development in the lens of school readiness. While there have been strides to include these areas of development in the *Arizona Early*

Learning Standards, issues still arrange for children who do not gain access to these standards via a preschool setting.

Research Questions

This dissertation addresses the following three questions:

1. How are early childhood social-emotional development and approaches to learning framed in Arizona policies, standards, and assessments?

   This question seeks to understand:

   a) Are the policies and standards consistent with classroom practices and assessments in regards to the Local Education Agency utilized for this case study?

   b) In particular, how are early childhood social-emotional development and approaches to learning addressed in:

   -*Arizona Early Learning Standards*

   -*Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards*

   -Preschool and kindergarten classroom practices (in a limited local setting)

   -Classroom and district assessments (in a limited local setting)

2. What are academic leaders' (superintendent and principal) perceptions of social-emotional development and approaches to learning in preschool and kindergarten instruction?

   a) How consistent are these perceptions with state policies and standards?

   b) In what ways do these perceptions reflect and influence practices and assessments?

In this question, the interpretation and assumptions by district personel in regards to the Arizona standards as well as social-emotional and approaches to learning skills will be examined in order to identify learning strategies and child development beliefs and what messages and support are given to teachers.

3. What are kindergarten and preschool teachers' perceptions of their abilities to support, teach and assess social-emotional and approaches to learning development in the classroom?
    a) How do teachers' perceptions reflect state policies and standards?
    b) How consistent are teachers' perceptions with the perceptions of academic leaders?
    c) How do teachers' perceptions reflect and shape the district curriculum and assessments?

This question seeks to uncover the messages, material, and support provided to classroom teachers in both kindergarten and preschool regarding support of children's social-emotional development and approaches to learning skills, in an exploratory way as the study was primarily focused on document analysis and not classroom observations or related interviews. In addition, this question will also help to determine if these nonacademic skills are addressed in the classroom through an explicit or assumed curriculum.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose and significance of this dissertation is twofold. First, it provides an opportunity to discuss the content within Arizona policy documents adopted for early

learning (preschool and kindergarten). Secondly, it provides the opportunity to uncover classroom practices of an early learning environment in the highest academically achieving district in Arizona. This is especially critical in Arizona, which is often referred to as a "local control state," allowing individual districts and charter schools to choose and implement their choice of curriculum, teaching materials, and practices. In addition, the insights gained from the classroom observations will be compared to the content analysis, comparing practice to policy. It is critical to note here within the study, that although the information discussed is significant to children's development, the goal, findings, and therefore discussion are centered around a case study of one Local Education Agency in the state of Arizona, and thus information is described in a limited and exploratory fashion.

Social-emotional development includes the child's experience, expression, and management of emotions and the ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others (Cohen et al, 2005). This complex domain encompasses both intra- and interpersonal processes. Young children who exhibit healthy social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment are more likely to have good academic performance in elementary school (Cohen et al, 2005; Zero to Three, 2004). Thus, understanding the view that early childhood programs support later positive learning outcomes in all domains by maintaining a focus on the promotion of healthy social-emotional development is a critical step to supporting children's school readiness (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2004; Raver 2002; Shonkoff, 2004).

Overview of Theoretical Framework and Research Design

This study employed a mixed methods approach with an overall phenomenology approach to uncover the developmental progression and interpretation of nonacademic skill development in Arizona's standards, as well as the perception held in Arizona local education agencies. The theoretical framework compliments the methodical structure to allow for a complex analysis of the information.

The lenses that were used to examine the information can be found in human learning and developmental perspectives. Human learning, as seen through a Vygotskian and sociocultural perspective, as well as a grounded theory, as explained through Strauss and Corbin's original work, and even further connected through Charmaz's constructivist approach. Combined, these theories provide multiple layers to view the data.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized multiple theories to inform the research questions and overall study. Understanding how children learn, viewing mainstream ideas with a critical lens, in lieu of multiple perspectives of development. A grounded theory approach served as the guide to establishing my methodology and exploring my questions. On the other hand, sociocultural theory guides my analysis and discussion of the findings. Each section will describe the concept and then explain how I applied it to my findings.

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory grounds my work at the Arizona Department of Education. (ADE). The position I hold at ADE requires me to conduct visits to various preschool and kindergarten programs around the state to assess and improve the quality of their programs. Three of the most significant areas in which I review are: environment/materials that are accessible, teacher-child interactions, and the overall climate of the classroom (social-emotional experiences). In conducting these assessments, and building within my job, I have become even more aware that learning in the early childhood classroom is a very social behavior. When children engage in conversations and interactions with the adults and their peers, they become more vested in their experiences. Therefore sociocultural theory also grounds my way of viewing human learning. This theory explains how and what learning and development occur as a mutually constituted relationship during participation in sociocultural activities, such as quality interactions and conversations with children. This theory also claims that cognitive, social, motivational, physical, and emotional processes are all aspects of sociocultural activity. Therefore, children develop during activities and interactions, and share learning across multiple domains.

Current conceptualizations of sociocultural theory draws heavily on the work of Lev Vygotsky. According to Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p.9), "This view [the sociocultural perspective] has profound implications for teaching, schooling, and education. A key feature of this emergent view of human development is that higher order functions develop out of social interaction. Vygotsky argues that a child's development cannot be understood by a study of the individual. We must also examine

the external social world in which that individual life has developed. Through participation in activities that require cognitive and communicative functions, children are drawn into the use of these functions in ways that nurture and 'scaffold' them." Kublin et al (1998, p. 14) state that "Vygotsky described learning as being embedded within social events and occurring as a child interacts with people, objects, and events in the environment."

In relation to his views on social interactions and human development, Vygotsky claimed that play is necessary to build a foundation of child development while also serving to guide the child to learn about life experiences. According to Fox (2008), Vygotsky described play as an important role in the development of executive function or approaches to learning skills, and therefore a significant contributor to a child's development. He found that children need to talk [usually during play] about problems in order to solve them and talk about concepts in order to understand and apply them. As children play, they make rules, use symbols, and create narratives. Vygotsky thought that adults and more knowledgeable peers enhance a child's ability to learn through play by modeling and encouraging more advanced skills. He found that children talk to each other during social play about what they want to do and how they are going to play. In his theory, thought and language are intertwined. As explained in Vygotsky' theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the child is in a zone where learning is occurring through guidance and the use of language (see figure 1). Vygotsky defined the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in

collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, p. 86). Within this zone of proximal development a child is learning through observing peers and adults and participating in an exchange of ideas and information. This process is also known as cooperative learning as students learn from both teachers and peers (Powell, 2009). Vygotsky suggests that "teachers use cooperative learning exercises where less competent children develop with help from more skillful peers - within the zone of proximal development. When a student is in the ZPD for a particular task, providing the appropriate assistance will give the student enough of a "boost" to achieve the task" (1978, p. 87).

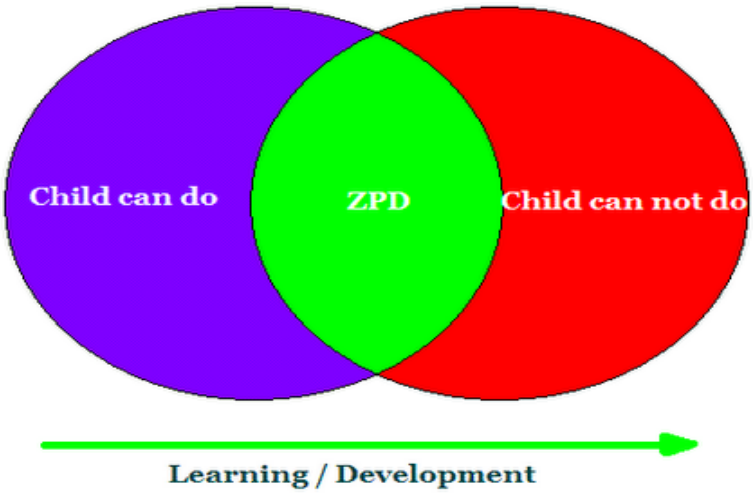


Figure 1: Vygotsky Zone Proximal Development.

"The key concepts in Vygotsky's ZPD theory are 'assistance' and 'experience' [scaffolding] at the level a student can handle so that he or she can learn" (Powell, 2009). Through play, children are given a context to practice their skills in a variety of roles while solving problems with the assistance of a teacher and/or adult figure. The process

of helping a child build this knowledge and understanding is called scaffolding, or helping a child perform skills at a higher level than he or she could by working independently. Relating back to figure 1, this process of scaffolding is about moving the child from the purple area of *can do*, to the red area of *cannot* do. Teachers' verbal directions, physical assistance, and probing questioning help children figure out how to approach learning tasks, improve skills, and acquire knowledge. As a child discusses a problem or task with an adult, the adult supplies language to assist the child, in which the child gradually internalizes and more mature thinking develops.

I am entering into this study with a foundation of social dynamics in learning as described by Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (mentioned above). Vygotsky proposed we learn through social interaction, not just about each other, but content as well (Mooney, 2000, p. 83). The ZPD is important in that it recognizes that to overcome hurdles in learning, we need others. Vygotsky's notion of learning at the "upper end" of the ZPD happening because of social interaction shows that content learning happens from the ability of people to communicate, interact, and share. With this perspective, it can be said that effective school readiness is directly related to the social interactions provided within the classroom. With improved understanding of the interpersonal social dynamics we may improve the flow of content information from one person to another.

In addition, Bronfenbrenner will be referenced to connect the multiple systems that affect a child's learning experience. Bronfenbrenner argues that in order to understand human development, one must consider the entire ecological system in which growth occurs. This system is composed of five socially organized subsystems that help

support and guide human growth. They range from the microsystem, which refers to the relationship between a developing person and the immediate environment, such as school and family, to the macrosystem, which refers to institutional patterns of culture, such as the economy, customs, and bodies of knowledge" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 37). According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, children's development is determined by both immediate and distant systems that typically influence each other. He proposed five systems in a child's development: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Onchwari et al, 2008).

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory originated with the publication *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (1967) by A.L. Strauss and B.G. Glaser. This book formed the basis of thought for the methodology known as grounded theory. However, Glaser's book *Theoretical Sensitivity* (1978) created what some perceive as a theoretical rift between Glaser and Strauss's work. From this point on, Glaser and Strauss developed their own individual variations of grounded theory and inspired various sub-categories with their varying perspectives.

The methodology is now moving beyond the originators, and the next generation of researchers is contending with how it may be used and applied (Morse et al., 2009). For example, Kathy Charmaz describes a category called "constructivist grounded theory," which is neither fully in the Glaserian or Straussian view, but calls for a reduction in the prescribed methodology of grounded theory and a more open and researcher based interpretation of data (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Charmaz wrote, "The constructivist approach emphasizes the studied phenomenon rather than the methods of studying it" (2006, p. 15). For descriptive purposes, this project most closely aligns with Strauss and Corbin's subsequent refinement and ideas of the original works, but takes a more constructivist grounded theory methodology upon interpretation and analysis of data. I essentially used Strauss and Corbin's framework during data collection and Charmaz's perspectives for interpretation and analysis.

The processes were imparted in which there is an understanding that people act toward other people, objects, and actions based on the meaning they have for them, and these meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation (Blumer, 1969). Erving Goffman's interpretations of symbolic interactionism involving the dynamic connection of the person to the setting and the idea of roles and role play in interaction are considered as well (Goffman, 1959). These concepts are important in relationship to the study because they recognize that the process of data collection is not a superficial description of actions or words; rather, it is an interpretation of the meanings of those actions and words from the individuals' perspective in the framework of a larger context (in this case, the teachers' perspectives and actions on the inclusion of nonacademic skills).

In reviewing this approach, and the theory behind it, I felt this would serve as strong foundation for my research and capture participants' perceptions and interpretations of the standards, developmentally appropriate practices, child development, and teaching materials. To best accomplish this, multiple methods were combined in the research design: a content analysis of multiple documents, interviews of superintendents, principals, preschool teachers, and kindergarten teachers, as well as

observations of the preschool and kindergarten classrooms. The content analysis helped gain an understanding of the interplay among state standards, local curriculum, and local kindergarten and preschool assessments, and a comparison of the inclusion of social-emotional development for children. Specifically the analysis compared the extent (if any) that social-emotional skills were mentioned and/or incorporated in the documents. Since prior experience already provided the knowledge that these skills are identified in the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition*, this served as the list of skills to search for in the content analysis.

Data gathering was also informed by a semi-structured interview process and observation method. "Combining the flexibility of the unstructured, open-ended interview with the directionality and agenda of the survey instrument to produce focused, qualitative, textual data at the factor level" (Schensul et al, 1999). The interview process engaged participants (superintendents, principals, and teachers) in describing their interpretation of the state standards, local curriculum and assessments, and how the social-emotional needs of children are being met, thus achieving a hermeneutic phenomenology method. The observation process included three separate visits during various times of the school day, in order to best gain an understanding of the social-emotional atmosphere of the classrooms. These methods, along with the connection to grounded theory, will be described in more detail in the Research Methods section of this paper.

Organization

The organization of the remainder of this dissertation is presented in six chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on school readiness, social-emotional development, approaches to learning, and specifics regarding early childhood policy in Arizona. Chapter 3 describes the research design, methods, and sample utilized for the study. Data findings as a result of the content analysis portion are discussed and illustrated in chapter 4. The qualitative findings from the field work are discussed separately in chapter 5, to allow for a clearer illustration of the information pertaining to the classroom experience and environment. Within the sixth and final chapter, the data are used to draw conclusions and describe recommendations for the field of early childhood education.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early childhood development is influenced by characteristics of the child, the family, and the broader social environment. Physical health, cognition, language, and social-emotional development underpin school readiness. The interaction of biology and the social environment exerts a powerful influence on a child's readiness to learn and on success in school, both precursors to health outcomes in later life. Comprehensive early childhood development programs are designed to improve the cognitive and social-emotional functioning of preschool children, which, in turn, influences readiness to learn in the school setting. "There is a tremendous unmet need for high-quality early learning throughout the country. Across the country, fewer than three in ten 4-year-olds are enrolled in a high-quality preschool program. Yet, the importance of early learning is clear. Studies prove that children who have rich early learning experiences are better prepared to thrive in kindergarten and beyond" (US Department of Education, 2014). School readiness, may help prevent the cascade of consequences of early academic failure and school behavioral problems: dropping out of high school, delinquency, unemployment, and psychological and physical morbidity in young adulthood. "If we make high-quality preschool available to every child, not only will we give our kids a safe place to learn and grow while their parents go to work; we'll give them the start that they need to succeed in school, and earn higher wages, and form more stable families of their own" (President Barack Obama, 2014).

In this literature review I have attempted to provide access to the significance of social-emotional and approaches to learning development in children, relative to their

school readiness. First, I discuss the academic skills "traditionally" related to school readiness. Then, I look at the social-emotional skills, followed by approaches to learning/executive function. In each group of relevant literature I examine data and studies that illustrate the link that the skill provides to children's readiness. In addition, I include a critique of the data in the hopes of showing how all precursors to school readiness relate to a child's social-emotional development. Finally, it is followed by the conceptual framework that grounds this study.

Sociocultural Theory

The history of sociocultural theory itself provides an interesting example of intellectual development through collaboration in ways that illustrate the theory of development. Sociocultural approaches emphasize the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge. Sociocultural approaches to learning and development were first systematized and applied Vygotsky and his colleagues (John-Steiner & Mahn, 2007, p.2). Vygotsky's emphasis on the interrelated roles of the individual and the social world in microgenetic, ontogenetic, sociocultural, and phylogenetic development (Scribner, 1985; Wertsch, 1985) includes the individual and the environment together in successively broader time frames. They are based on the concept that human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbol systems, and can be best understood when investigated in their historical development (as explained in further detail below). Sociocultural theory further claims that development processes take place through participation in cultural, linguistic, and historically formed settings such as family life, peer group interaction, and

institutional contexts like schooling, organized social activities, and workplaces. "Sociocultural theory argues that while human neurobiology is a necessary condition for higher mental processes, the most important forms of human cognitive activity develop through interaction within social and material environments, including conditions found in instructional settings" (Engestrom, 1987, p.7).

Developmental research has commonly limited attention to either the individual or the environment - for example, examining how adults teach children or how children construct reality, with an emphasis on either separate individuals or independent environmental elements as the basic units of analysis. Even when both the individual and the environment are considered, they are often regarded as separate entities rather than being mutually defined and interdependent in ways that preclude their separation as units or elements (Rogoff, 1992, p. 1). The roots of sociocultural theories extend back to the 18th and 19th century German philosophy (particularly Hegel and Spinoza), the sociological and economic writings of Marx and Engels, and most directly to the research of Vygotsky and his colleagues. Vygotsky's emphasis on the interrelated roles of the individual and the social world in microgenetic, ontogenetic, sociocultural, and phylogenetic development (Scribner, 1985; Wertsch, 1985) includes the individual and the environment together in successively broader time frames. Likewise, Vygotsky's interest in the mutuality of the individual and the sociocultural environment is apparent in his concern with finding a unit of analysis that preserves the essence of the events of interest rather than separating an event into elements that no longer function as does the whole. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) has had a substantial impact on developmental psychology, education, and applied studies. The most frequently

referenced definition of the ZPD is “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Vygotsky's theory focus on children participating with other people in a social order with a seamless involvement of individuals in sociocultural activity. For Vygotsky (1978, 1987), children's cognitive development had to be understood as taking place through their interaction with other members of the society who are more conversant with the society's intellectual practices and tools (especially language) for mediating intellectual activity. Without an understanding of such mutually constituting processes, a sociocultural approach is at times assimilated to other approaches that examine only part of the package. For example, it is incomplete to focus only on the relationship of individual development and social interaction without concern for the cultural activity in which personal and interpersonal actions take place. And it is incomplete to assume that development occurs in one plane and not in others (e.g., that children develop but that their partners or their cultural communities do not) or that influence can be ascribed in one direction or another or that relative contributions can be counted (e.g., parent to child, child to parent, culture to individual). For the purpose of this study, and the related findings and discussion, the literature around sociocultural theory will be expanded from Vygotsky, and include the work of Bronfenbrenner and Rogoff (as discussed further in this chapter).

In addition to Vygotsky, the first view of sociocultural theory, detailed by Barbara Rogoff, frames my observations, findings, and discussion around the practices in place in

the preschool and kindergarten classrooms at Daisy School District. Rogoff's research is inclusive of the concept that development is a process that includes more than just the solo individual, and explains, "The use of 'activity' or 'event' as the unit of analysis - with active and dynamic contributions from individuals, their social partners, and historical traditions and materials and their transformations - allows a reformulation of the relation between the individual and the social and cultural environments in which each is inherently involved in the others' definition. None exists separately" (1992, p.3). Rogoff continues this concept of learning through interaction by developing the theory of cognitive apprenticeships, where children learn through partaking in activities in their culture group. She writes that in many cultures children work with adults to learn and complete tasks. "Children are gradually exposed to more complicated tasks and with time, children become more confident to complete tasks independently. This process is called "guided participation" (Rogoff, 1992, p. 7). Under this theory, listening and learning are emphasized ways of learning and student's don't need to learn through explicit teaching. She furthers this theory by explaining the premise that the individual, interpersonal, and cultural processes are not independent. Analysis may focus primarily on one of them, but not without reference to the others as if they could exist in isolation from each other (Rogoff, 1995). As Bakhurst states, "the study of mind, of culture, and of language are internally related: that is, it will be impossible to render any of these domains intelligible without essential reference to the others" (1988, p. 39). With the view that individual, social, and cultural processes constitute each other, it is essential to note that individuals transform culture as they participate in its practices. "Individuals develop as they participate with others in shared endeavors that both constitute and are

derived from community traditions" (Rogoff, 1990, p.15). For example, children's play occurs in organized social institutions that predate the children's involvement, but the children also elaborate the possibilities available to them (Parker & Scott, 1992). Therefore, Rogoff (1995) suggests that the examination of the individual, interpersonal, and community/institutional developmental processes involves differing planes of observation and analysis, with any one plane being the focus, but with the others necessarily being observed in the background.

Since a major portion of this study also encompasses the review of Arizona policy documents, the systems of education in which the child is part of, and affect the child's experiences must also be incorporated in the literature and discussion. Therefore the sociocultural theory discussion is expanded to also include Urie Bronfenbrenner. Bronfenbrenner argues that in order to understand human development, one must consider the entire ecological system in which growth occurs. This system is composed of five socially organized subsystems that help support and guide human growth. They range from the microsystem, which refers to the relationship between a developing person and the immediate environment, such as school and family, to the macrosystem, which refers to institutional patterns of culture, such as the economy, customs, and bodies of knowledge" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 37). According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, children's development is determined by both immediate and distant systems that typically influence each other. He proposed five systems (see figure 2 below) in a child's development: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Onchwari et al, 2008).

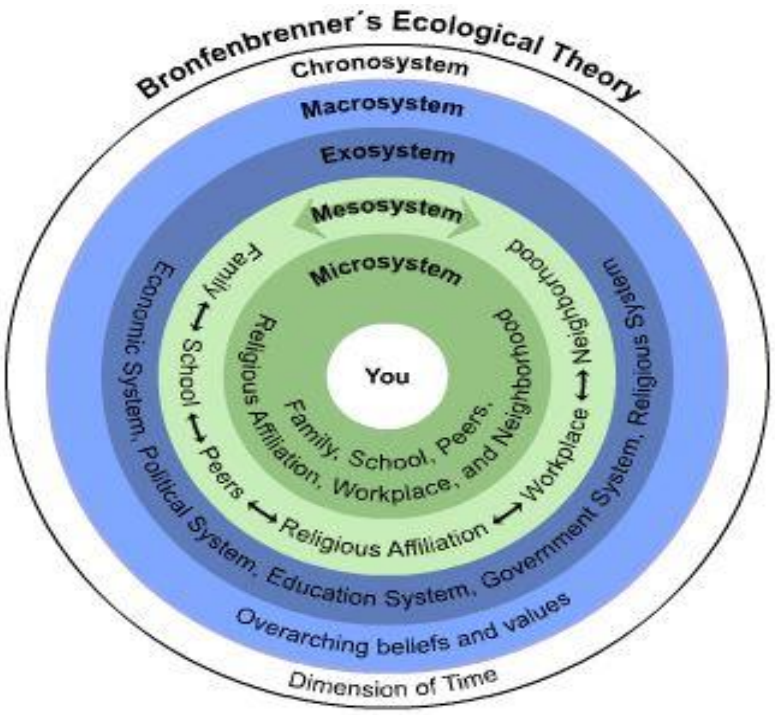


Figure 2: Visual Representation of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory

The microsystem of the child is their immediate environment (family, school, religious groups, etc.). In the context of school, the mesosystem is explained by the sudden change of cultural experiences and expectations in which children need to quickly understand and adjust to meet the demands. Bronfenbrenner's third level, the exosystem embraces other contexts and community factors that influence child development indirectly even though these settings do not necessarily contain the child (parent's place of work for example). Macrosystems are the larger context in which all the other systems operate. Often these are defined not by physical environments but by the values, belief, policies, laws, and traditions shared among people and groups of people (Kostelnik et al, 2006). Such an example is the education policy titled the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2000) is the most recent re-authorization of the *Elementary*

and Secondary Education Act. It is designed to create a stronger, more accountable education system, seeks to change the culture of education, and means to use evidence based strategies found to be effective through rigorous research. *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) holds students accountable to high educational outcomes and standards by requiring each state to set clear and high expectations and to put an assessment system in place to measure student progress. The last theory in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory is the chronosystem, which refers to events that occur within the life of the child. The process of transitioning to kindergarten is a prime example of a readjustment process that can have major repercussions in the development of the child. I regard these systems defined by Bronfenbrenner as inseparable concepts in relation to this study and it's findings. These systems of education (policy, decision making, environments, individuals, etc.) are what guide the discussion around the observations and documents utilized within this context.

Social-emotional Skills in Child Development

In order to successfully prepare a child for the rigorous requirements of a kindergarten classroom, enrichment should be addressed through a holistic lens, including not only academic proficiencies, but also the underlying skills of social-emotional (self-awareness, expression, self-regulation, social interactions) and approaches to learning (initiative, curiosity, attentiveness, persistence, confidence, creativity, reasoning, and problem –solving). "Academic skills are only one facet of educational success, and improvements in problem behavior or social skills may better predict other important school outcomes, such as a child's engagement in school and

motivation for learning, relationships with peers and teachers, and overall self-concept and school adjustment" (Duncan et al, 2007, p.12). In addition, Burchinal et al. (2000, p. 305) explains that, "children viewed as [having more social skills] acquired reading and math skills more rapidly in elementary school is consistent with reports that social competencies and academic skills are not functionally independent in the early elementary years." The research suggests that social skill development involved in relationships encountered in a preschool program are an important aspect of classroom experiences related to children's acquisition of academic skills.

A fundamental principle of early childhood education (birth through grade 3) is the concept of addressing the "whole child." This premise is considered an important tool in creating developmentally as well as culturally appropriate practices. "A holistic approach to early childhood education requires attention not only to what we know about child development and its implications for how to teach, but also to the content of the curriculum-what to teach and when, how to assess what children have learned, and how to adapt curriculum and instruction to children's individual strengths, needs, and interests" (Charlesworth, 1997, p. 23).

In advocating the importance of developing the child in a holistic view, one should reference Vygotsky's belief that in the preschool years, children need to acquire a set of fundamental cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional competencies that shape their minds for further learning—not just academic learning, but all learning. "These skills include oral language, deliberate memory, focused attention, and self-regulation" (Bodrova & Leong, 2005). Many teachers and researchers believe that a child's ultimate success in school does not depend primarily on the knowledge and academic skills that

the child brings to the classroom (West, Germino-Hausken and Collins, 1993). Rather, they view nonacademic aspects of school readiness—such as a child's physical health and motor coordination, emotional well-being and ability to cooperate with other children, and curiosity and eagerness to learn—as being equally or more important for school success (National Association for the Education of Young Children 1990; Kagan 1990; Kagan, Moore, and Bredekamp 1995). For example, the ECLS-K adopted this "whole child" view of school readiness. The direct child assessment in the fall of the kindergarten year included measures of physical growth and fine and gross motor development. The assessment collected reports about children's health, social skills, problem behavior, and approaches to learning from parents and teachers.

Basic understandings of emotions are among the first skills to emerge during the early childhood years. "Children's knowledge and understanding of emotion is an important aspect of social awareness which is one of several skills that reflect social-emotional competence (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning; CASEL, 2003)" (Rhoades et al., 2011). Children's knowledge and understanding of their emotions serves as an important core of social awareness, thus allowing them to interact with their environment and develop academic skills. Children need to develop the capacity to experience, express, and gain self-control over their emotions and social interactions in order to mature socially and emotionally. This development is enhanced through nurturing relationships and positive early learning experiences. A consistent and predictable environment strengthens a child's confidence in approaching new tasks. Confident children approach new tasks and situations enthusiastically. They recognize and express emotions appropriately as well as share information about themselves and

others. Social-emotional development is the foundation of children's cognitive development and life-long learning. Bronson (2000) reports educators and caregivers must realize an integrated approach and address the "whole child," thus realizing children cannot separate feelings, thoughts, and actions. "The quality of children's experiences within preschool programs plays an important role in their development of academic, language, literacy and social-emotional competencies that help prepare them to enter school ready to learn" (Mashburn, 2008, p. 735). Further research (Burchinal et al, 2000, p. 14) describes the quality, holistic experiences with the teacher predicted better language and reading skills for children in preschool programs. The research described in the following excerpt:

> The quality of center-based child care relates to early cognitive and language development was examined longitudinally from 6 to 36 months of age in a sample of 89 African American children. Both structural and process measures of quality of child care were collected through observation of the infant classroom. Results indicated that higher quality child care was related to higher measures of cognitive development (Bayley Scales of Infant Development), language development (Sequenced Inventory of Communication Development), and communication skills (Communication and Symbolic Behavior Scales) across time, even after adjusting for selected child and family characteristics. In addition, classrooms that met professional recommendations regarding child: adult ratios tended to have children with better language skills. Classrooms that met recommendations regarding teacher education tended to have children with better cognitive and receptive language skills.

These language skills become the foundation for helping children understand themselves, form positive constructive social relationships and relate to the larger world. Rhoades et al. (2011) also states, "Given this established association between emotion knowledge and prosocial behavior, it is likely that children with greater understanding of their own and others emotions may also have greater academic success within the socially complex context of elementary school classroom."

The early childhood period is critical in terms of the development of social skills. "Experiences gained in the early years of life have an important role in the social development of a child, as in other areas of development" (Arslan et al., 2011). The preschool environment is a valuable opportunity for children to develop their social skills. Through interactions with peers and adults, utilization of play and manipulatives, and exposure to new environments, children will be challenged to learn new information and skills. "The preschool period is the most appropriate and important time for learning appropriate social skills because this is the time when the child is developing most rapidly, is most affected by his/her environment, and is open to learning all kinds of information (Zembat & Unutkan, 2001). By first building student confidence in social skills children can then develop a deeper understanding of academic skills. Research by Li-Grining and colleagues (2010) claims that children's social competence and executive functioning skills were positively linked to better language, literacy, and math scores. In additional research surrounding social skills and children's development by Mashburn (2008) finds:

> Specifically, children who attended preschool programs characterized by high-quality social environments had significantly higher academic skills at the end of

preschool compared to children who attended programs with medium-quality social environments. In addition, children who attended preschool programs with high-quality social environments had higher literacy skills at the end of preschool compared to children who attended preschool programs characterized by low- and medium-quality social environments.

Approaches toward Learning and Executive Function Skills in Child Development

Executive functions (approaches to learning) skills, which emerge during the preschool years and don't fully mature until early adulthood, appear to have a bearing on school success too. "If you look at what predicts how well children will do later in school, more and more evidence is showing that executive functions—working memory and inhibition—actually predict success better than IQ tests" (Galinsky, 2010). "Studies of young children indicate that attention skills, in general, are positively related to both social-emotional competence and academic skills" (Rhoades et al, 2011). Blair (2002) states that the approaches to learning skills underlie many of the behaviors and attributes associated with successful school adjustment. In particular, regulation and emotion are appropriate social interactions and goal-directed behaviors, as well as the regulation of attention and the use of strategies in the execution of cognitive tasks. All of which are important for successful adjustment to school. As noted by Kelly, et.al (2009), four foundations for young children's development appear to underlie children's competence and predict success in the kindergarten and primary years –self-regulation, representation, memory, and attachment,. Pointz, et.al (2008) also reports, in early educational settings, strong self-regulation has been linked with effective classroom behavior and high

achievement, whereas poor self-regulation forecasts future problems in school. During these years, children are making great steps to expanding their problem solving skills, emotional and social capabilities, and understanding of respect and ownership. Thomason & Paro (2009) report childhood is marked by a number of milestones including the emergence of language and self-concept; and the increased complexity of emotional, behavioral, and physiological self-regulation. In fact, it has been shown that behavioral aspects of self-regulation, including controlling and directing actions, paying attention, and remembering instructions, are critical for successful functioning in preschool and elementary school, as noted by Ponitz, et al. (2008). Children who learn the executive function skills have a greater success in developing social skills, and therefore a desire to learn and ability to achieve academically. Approaches to learning skills are essential to understanding the world. Not only is it the ability to regulate emotions and behavior, is also serves as the basis of decision making, planning, engagement, curiosity, creativity, confidence, and progress.

Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition (2013) explain approaches to learning as referring to observable behaviors that indicate ways children become engaged in social interactions and learning experiences. The approaches to learning standard includes: initiative and curiosity, attentiveness and persistence, confidence, creativity, and reasoning and problem solving. Children's approaches to learning contribute to their success in school and influence their development and learning in other domains. For example, curiosity is a prerequisite of the scientist, and reasoning and problem solving are as necessary for social relationships as they are for mathematics. Children's ability to stay focused, interested, and engaged in activities supports a range of positive outcomes,

including cognitive, language, and social-emotional development. It allows children to acquire new knowledge, learn new skills, and set and achieve goals for themselves. "When children have a positive approach to learning, they are likely to want to learn more" (Dodge et al, 2011, p. 7). "Approaches to learning are interrelated with executive function skills, an umbrella term for a set of neurologically-based processes that involve managing one's self and one's resources in order to achieve a goal" (Cooper-Kahn and Dietzel, 2008, p. 19). These include the ability to remember and follow multi-step instructions, avoid distractions, control response, adjust to changes, and persist at problem solving.

Ellen Galinsky's book, *Mind in the Making (2010),* provides further discussion of executive function, "Some people don't like the word executive because it conjures up an image of a boss in your brain ordering you around. Instead, think of executive brain functions as managing, not ordering. We use them to manage our attention, our emotions, and our behavior in order to reach our goals. Nor are they just intellectual skills—they involve weaving together our social, emotional, and intellectual capacities. They begin to emerge during the preschool years and don't mature until young adulthood". She details the seven essential life skills as: focus and self-control, perspective taking, communicating, making connections, critical thinking, taking on challenges, and self-directed and engaged learning.

Early childhood is understood to be a period of pronounced developmental improvements in executive function abilities (Anderson et al., 2008; Carlson, 2005). Although a number of studies have examined task conditions under which children will or will not exhibit executive cognitive abilities (Diamond, Carlson, & Beck, 2005;

Zelazo, Muller, Frye, & Marcovitch, 2002), measures of executive functions/approaches to learning abilities in young children have for the most part been appropriate for use only at single time points, demonstrating sufficient variability in performance at relatively narrow age ranges.

Jeanne Brooks-Gunn (2007) conducted a longitudinal study that offered a rare opportunity to evaluate what kinds of skills or knowledge acquired early in life matter most to children's later success. She compared children's school achievement in math and reading between the ages of eight and thirteen to assessments of these same children when they were between the ages of four and six. Through the multitude of analysis, three skills that children had when they entered school were strongly related to their later success in reading and math. Two skills correlated with other studies in school readiness: children who had good math and reading skills when they entered school had good math and reading skills years later. The third skill was an attention skill---the more penetrating the attention, the richer and deeper the child's learning. As Brooks-Gunn says, "Attention skills allow children to focus on something in a way that maximizes the information they get out of it."

Hughes, Ensor and colleagues (2011, 2010) were the first, and only group to investigate developmental changes in executive function abilities among typically developing preschool-aged children using a within subjects, prospective longitudinal design. The advantages of using prospective longitudinal designs to inform developmental changes in executive function ability are numerous. Foremost is the ability to partition between and within sources of variance in executive function scores (i.e., consideration of inter-individual differences in intra-individual change), the ability to

more confidently delineate the functional form of change (particularly if the form is nonlinear), and the ability to use growth parameters (e.g., intercepts, slopes) as both independent and dependent variables. One of the strengths of the Hughes and Ensor's (2010) work was the establishment of the longitudinal measurement invariance of their three-task battery across time (i.e., at ages 4 and 6 years). They demonstrated that executive function tasks worked, in a psychometric sense, equally well at age 4 and 6 year assessments. Unfortunately, their results did not inform questions about the magnitude of changes in executive function abilities that occurred between ages 4 and 6 years.

To address this aspect of executive function measurement and to facilitate the investigation of the development of executive function across the early childhood period, a study conducted by Michael T. Willoughby, R.J. Wirth, and Clancy B. Blair (2011) was developed, in which a set of executive function tasks were created for use in large-scale longitudinal studies. Specifically, they set out to develop a study that was highly portable, that presented a variety of tasks in a uniform format, that was easily administered by staff, that elicited individual differences in ability level, and that resulted in scores that were scalable across the preschool period (age 3-5 years), thereby permitting the analysis of longitudinal (within-person) change. The study focused on developmental changes in executive function abilities in children age 3-5 years.

The results of the study showed, given the relation of executive functions to a number of aspects of child development—including self-regulation, mental development, school readiness, and risk for psychopathology—research on the measurement of executive function in young children is a scientific priority. Increased precision in the

measurement of early executive function will facilitate an improved understanding of the developmental course of executive function in early childhood, including factors that promote competence in children at risk for school failure and early developing psychopathology (Blair, Zelazo, & Greenberg, 2005).

Although a great deal of effort and progress has been made in researching approaches to learning skills in children, there are still concerns in the appropriateness and validity. A growing number of studies are identifying risk factors for preschool executive functions, attempting to enhance and/or remediate preschool executive functions, and/or using performance on preschool tasks to predict later developmental outcomes. A central challenge shared by many such studies is the selection of tasks that are "easy" enough for the reliable measurement of emerging abilities in the early years, but complex enough to define individual differences in rapidly developing abilities across the preschool period (and into kindergarten). The summary provided by Willoughby and colleagues (2011), states, "In the absence of individual tasks that evince good reliability, strong construct and predictive validity, that are developmentally scalable, and that are equally amenable for use with 3 through 5 year-old children, we believe that efforts to utilize task batteries represent a good alternative. That is, given the apparent flaws inherent in most individual executive function tasks (ours included) that are used with preschool children, we advocate for the broader use of task batteries and especially the aggregation of children's performance across tasks for purposes of inference". This differs substantially from current practice where researchers typically select tasks perceived of as 'best' based on individual and distinctive criteria and thus focus on task-specific results.

In fact, recently released data (meta-analysis published in *Review of Educational Research*) finds that there is little evidence to be claimed that executive function interventions boost student achievement. "Despite growing enthusiasm among educators and scholars about the potential of school-based executive function interventions to significantly increase student achievement, a federally funded meta-analysis of 25 years' worth of research finds no conclusive evidence that developing students' executive function skills leads to better academic performance" (Jacob & Parkinson, 2015, p.1). They analyzed 67 studies published over the past 25 years on the link between executive function and achievement, and critically assessed whether improvements in executive function skills lead to increases in reading and math achievement (as measured by standardized test scores, among school-age children from preschool through high school). More than half of the studies identified by the authors were published after 2010, reflecting the rapid increase in interest in the topic in recent years. While Jacob and Parkinson found that previous research indicated a strong correlation between executive function and achievement, they found surprisingly little evidence that the two are causally related. "There's a lot of evidence that executive function and achievement are highly correlated with one another, but there is not yet a resounding body of evidence that indicates that if you changed executive functioning skills by intervening in schools, that it would then lead to an improvement in achievement in children," (Jacob & Parkinson, 2015, p. 10). This than raises the question, why the disparity or lack of validation through research? Teachers are expressing that these approaches to learning [executive function] skills are what allow children to be successful in a classroom, yet research doesn't mirror the same response. Is it because these skills are naturally embedded in the

classroom curriculum? Or is it because they are difficult to measure? The discussion chapter of this document will expand on this area in more detail.

Early Childhood Education and Policy

As a result of the large proportion of children in early childhood settings, policy makers and the public have a strong interest in ensuring that early childhood programs are built on a "results-based accountability" paradigm that not only mandates that intervention programs be successful, but cost-effective. Because of this, most research studies of early childhood intervention programs have focused on clearly identifiable outcomes such as language development, pre-reading skills, letter knowledge, and numeracy (Reynolds, 2000; Schultz, 2000). Policy makers and practitioners alike have used this child-focused research base as their primary source of evidence for assessing the efficacy of early childhood programs (Niles, Reynolds, Ou, & Lee, 2003; Niles, 2004; Schultz, 2000). This is true despite the fact that early childhood intervention programs also can contribute in important ways to the mental health of children by enhancing the social-emotional development of the child (Niles, Reynolds, Ou, & Lee, 2003; Niles, 2004; Reynolds, 2000; Schultz, 2000). The limited research on early childhood programs takes on additional importance because it has been suggested that 10% to 13% of preschoolers (ages 1 to 6 years old) have diagnosed emotional or behavioral disorders (Institute of Medicine, 2001).

Although research is limited on the influence that early childhood programs have on the social-emotional development of preschool-age children, an important exception is the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) study that is currently being

conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in conjunction with the Head Start Association. This report provides a portrait of children who entered Head Start for the first time in fall 2009 and completed a year in the program in spring 2010, in a periodic, longitudinal study of program performance. In both fall 2009 and spring 2010, children in the study were administered a set of direct child assessments, and their parents and teachers were interviewed. In spring 2010, observations were conducted in 370 Head Start classrooms. Data were used from the parent interviews to describe children's backgrounds and home environments, as well as data from the direct child assessments to report on children's cognitive and physical outcomes at the beginning and end of their first year in Head Start. Parent and teacher ratings provide information about children's social skills, approaches to learning, problem behaviors, and academic and nonacademic accomplishments during the Head Start year. Teacher interview data was used to describe children's first classroom experiences in Head Start and classroom observation data to describe classroom quality.

FACES uses measures from a variety of sources—teacher, parent, assessor, and direct assessment—to provide multiple perspectives on children's positive and challenging behaviors that may affect their ability to learn and interact with peers and adults. Using items taken from the Behavior Problems Index (Peterson and Zill, 1986), Personal Maturity Scale (Entwisle et al., 1997), and Social Skills Rating System (Gresham and Elliott, 1990), it presents teacher reports of children's cooperative classroom behavior, such as making friends easily and waiting their turn in games or other activities, as well as problem behaviors in the classroom, such as being very restless and unable to sit still or disrupting ongoing activities. The study also presents teachers'

ratings of children's approaches to learning, using the ECLS– K Approaches to Learning scale (noted in the *Research Review of Academic Skills* section of this document). "Using the Leiter International Performance Scale-Revised Examiner Rating Scale (Roid and Miller, 1997), FACES assessors rated children's behaviors during the assessment situation in such areas as attention, organization and impulse control, activity level, and sociability. Finally, for FACES 2009, a pencil tapping task (Blair 2002; Diamond and Taylor 1996; Smith-Donald et al., 2007) was added to capture 4-year-old children's executive functioning. As with cognitive measures, we describe the skills and behaviors of all children, and then of important groups of children (that is, by children's age at program entry, gender, race/ethnicity, and number of family risks)" (Moiduddin et al., 2012).

The results of the FACES study report on children's social-emotional outcomes and approaches to learning on criterion-referenced measures using raw scores (standard scores are not available). Raw scores allow for measurement of change or growth in performance over time. They are an indicator of absolute, rather than relative, performance. It also reports on children's executive functioning using the percentage of correct responses on a pencil-tapping task. According to the results, children show growth in their social skills during their first Head Start year. Based on teacher reports, children's positive social skills scores increase from 15 to 17 points (on a scale of 0 to 24) from fall to spring. Teachers also rated children as having fewer problem behaviors by the spring, including hyperactive behaviors, with scores decreasing from 4.7 in the fall to 4.4 in the spring (on a scale of 0 to 36, with lower scores indicating fewer behavior problems). Finally, teachers reported more positive approaches to learning; children's

scores increase from 1.6 to 1.9 (on a scale of 0 to 3). Children are also able to control their first impulse and follow directions on a pencil-tapping task more consistently by spring, suggesting an improvement of executive functioning; on this direct assessment completed by children entering Head Start as 4-yearolds, children responded correctly 43 percent of the time in the fall and 61 percent of the time in the spring.

Another study conducted by Niles, Reynolds, and Nagasawa (2006) focuses on the impact of early childhood intervention on children's social-emotional development. While the outcome measures were not identical, the constructs of social-emotional development in this study are consistent with the social-emotional domains measured in the FACES study. These include early social skills, shyness, aggressiveness, and hyperactive behaviors, among others (Zill et al., 2003). The sample description is as follows, "Data were drawn from the Chicago Longitudinal Study (Chicago Longitudinal Study, 1999; Reynolds, 1991, 1998, 2000). The original sample of 1,539 in the CLS included the entire cohort of 989 children who attended the 20 Child-Parent Centers in preschool and kindergarten in 1985-1986 and 550 children of the same age who participated in an alternative all-day kindergarten program in 5 different Chicago public schools in similar neighborhoods. These schools were randomly selected from 27 sites participating in the Chicago Effective Schools Project (CESP—an intervention that offered all-day kindergarten among other services)" (Niles et al., 2006). In conclusion, by considering children's social-emotional development between the ages of 7 and 12, this study adds to existing literature by suggesting that early childhood programs can, in addition to cognitive advantages, provide a positive social-emotional benefit to participants.

However beneficial these studies may sound, and the contributions they may make to literature, the findings from large-scale programs, such as Head Start, have been inconsistent] (McKey, Condelli, & Ganson, 1985; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1997), and the quality of most studies has not been sufficient to make findings meaningful. In addition, these studies assessed only some social-emotional indicators that are related to children's mental health. It would be more beneficial to have a study assess a broader range of social-emotional skills (to include approaches to learning skills) to better evaluate the level of which the child is ready for school. It continues to appear that many longitudinal studies in the literature reviewed assess in only one or two cognitive or developmental domains, rather than offering a holistic picture of the child in all domains of development.

Assessment and Evaluation

While we know that much attention is paid to ensuring the quality of early childhood programs and development, it is exciting to report that there is now an increased focus on the role of assessment within early childhood systems…and not just on the use of assessment by programs for improving teacher strategies and services in the classroom. While there is broad consensus that early childhood assessment can play a vital role in improving instructional strategies within the classroom, how assessment of young children can and should be used to scaffold development is more argumentative. NAEYC believes that "there is an appropriate role for information from child assessment in large-scale system efforts when attention is also given to research on child development; other indicators that impact children's development and learning; and, best

practices in the field as well as assessment science to guide the development, implementation, and use of assessment systems" (1997, p.4).

Assessment in early childhood is not a recent concern. In his research, Meisels explains, "Politicians, policymakers, journalists, and scholars want to know that taxpayer-supported programs for young children work. Indeed, accountability has become the centerpiece of federal education policy, and states have been quick to follow suit. Yet increasingly, the measure of accountability—whether or not a particular program works—has been reduced to how well a young child performs on a mandated test. High-stakes decisions, including continued program funding, employment and pay of teachers, and student retention, are being made on the basis of this single data point" (2007, p. 3). In the face of this near-obsession with accountability, educators and policymakers have sought expedient solutions to the complex problems of determining who has learned what, how much they learned, and how well they learned it. Conventional norm-referenced tests enable us to rank and order individuals according to a single, easily understandable metric. But their closed-ended questions do not measure children's natural curiosity, problem solving skills, creativity, or executive function skills. They are unable to describe individual patterns of learning and teaching; they do not give voice to cultural and ethnic differences that may depart from the mainstream; and they have become vested by our educational system with disproportionate power over teachers' decisions regarding curriculum and the utilization of instructional time. Despite the fact that it is well-known that important educational decisions should be based on multiple sources of information (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). Because of the limited range of information commonly sampled by high-stakes tests and their closed-ended questions and

responses, they can distort the educational process by suggesting that one indicator of learning can stand for the whole of learning (Corbett & Wilson, 1991). These standardized, common set of skill tests can be rendered misleading at best, because they do not take into account children's differing early experiences, cultural and family environments, approaches to learning skills, executive function, or social-emotional skills… just to name a few.

Over the past few decades, assessment of young children has been attempted, often with unintended negative consequences due to the themes in which standardized tests were utilized…developmental screeners and pre-academic skills test. Early efforts saw kindergarten readiness screening as a means of identifying children deemed ready for school and tracking those not ready into alternative programs, or denying access altogether. "Two different kinds of tests are used: developmental screening measures, originally intended as the first step in the evaluation of children for potential handicaps; and pre-academic skills tests, intended for use in planning classroom instruction. The technical and conceptual problems with these tests are numerous. Tests are being used for purposes for which they were never designed or validated. Waiting a year or being placed in a two-year program represents a dramatic disruption in a child's life, yet not one of the existing readiness measures has sufficient reliability or predictive validity to warrant making such decisions" (Shepard, 2000, p.3).

However, there could be a benefit in the use of assessments. Recent advances in theory have connected assessment with child learning, making assessment part of the "learning culture" (Shepard 2000). Shepard claims, "The content of assessments should reflect and model progress toward important learning goals. Conceptions of what is

important to learn should take into account both physical and social/emotional development as well as cognitive learning. For most assessment purposes in the cognitive domain, content should be congruent with subject matter in emergent literacy and numeracy" (2000, p. 4). It is evident some changes need to be made in finding the most developmentally appropriate assessment of the tasks asked of children. As stated earlier, approaches to learning skills are what allow children to become engaged in social interactions and learning experiences, thus becoming successful in their academic requirements. They key maybe to develop an assessment that addresses these executive function skills and the "how" children are learning, rather than a specific standardized skill.

A critical component of this literature is the notion of social-emotional development as a component of school readiness. There is not a complete understanding of the developmental perspectives of young children and how they change regarding the interpretation of social interactions and emotional stability, as there are multiple cognitive and environmental developmental factors that influence their ideas. How early childhood teachers present and structure understanding of social-emotional skills and approaches to learning skill development is not universally agreed upon, and more research is needed to better understand the capabilities and perspectives of young children toward preparing them to be school ready, and how to teach accordingly. This project will look to addressing these perspectives, teaching strategies, and policy content through the theoretical framework of grounded theory for data collection and sociocultural theory for a foundation in explanation and findings.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Within the research design and methodology of this study, a grounded theory approach was utilized to acknowledge the dynamic nature of early childhood education and social-emotional interactions. The multiple method study incorporated a content analysis of state standards (*Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* and *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards*), local classroom curriculums, and assessments to understand how policy is appropriated through practice. Additionally, interviews and classroom observations to gain an understanding of how social-emotional and approaches to learning development is viewed in importance, incorporated, and ultimately affecting the classroom culture (in both preschool and kindergarten). This chapter begins with an explanation of grounded theory, a review of my role as the researcher, an explanation of the timeline of research, and then proceeds to setting and sample, methods, and finally a review on how the data were analyzed.

Grounded Theory

Grbich (2013, p. 80) describes grounded theory as, "[t]he investigation of the context of the setting within which the day-to-day lives of people were occurring-their interactions, their behaviors, and their constructions of reality, which were further reconstructed through researchers' frames of reference." Grounded theory was chosen as the methodology for this study for multiple reasons. As stated in *Developing Grounded Theory*, "If you really want to know what is going on, you have to feel it; you have to be affected by it; you have to let it move you. Objectivity has no place in qualitative

research" (Stern, 2009, p. 57). There isn't a way for me to remain objective with this subject, and in fact it is this very connectedness I have to the topic that allows for such a deep understanding and representation. To attempt to eliminate this would diminish the understandings I found not only within the research, but within my role at the Arizona Department of Education.

Grounded theory is also recognized as having the potential for motivating social change in connection to critical theory (Clarke, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Kushner & Morrow, 2003; Morse, et al., 2009). Non-academic skill development and early childhood are two areas of education in need of a deeper understanding, and grounded theory is an effective tool to explore and communicate these issues. Grounded theory was also chosen as an appropriate methodology because it fits well with the stakeholders of the field of early childhood (my participants). The methodology stresses listening to the subjects, finding their perspectives, and giving them a voice (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Morse, et al., 2009). The ability for the researcher to see through the participant's eye and understand their perspective was key to this study in order to answer the last two research questions.

By allowing myself as the researcher to not only share the perspectives of a small number of teachers and administrators in a high performing district, but also to incorporate my personal experiences, I can move the discussion beyond just participants' perceptions, and incorporate a larger reflection to the field. While teacher perception is important, both theory and theoretical models are lacking in a reflection and discussion on how to develop these skills, which, in my opinion, has limited the perspectives and ideas regarding the nature of nonacademic skill development in all grade levels. With the

selection of grounded theory methodology, and the focus of this case study, I hoped to construct theoretical results that not only described the situation of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development, but also illuminated connections and relationships not evident in a descriptive study by looking at the "supporting spaces" of the policy documents in addition to the participants' views and behaviors.

To gain an understanding of the relative depth and context in which nonacademic skills of social-emotional and approaches to learning are addressed in local education agencies' system of instruction, to include: the Arizona standards, curriculum, and assessments. Additionally, a qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews and observations were utilized to understand two areas: the interpretation and perceptions of nonacademic skill development in preschool and kindergarten instruction held by the district academic leaders (district superintendent and elementary principal), as well as the perceptions held by preschool and kindergarten teachers on the importance of social-emotional and approaches to learning development in the classroom, resulting in their systematic approach of including these skills in every day instruction.

Researcher Role

As stated earlier in Chapter 1, although I enter this study as a researcher, I also hold the unique position of being employed in the very area I am studying. As a Program Specialist and the Coordinator of Professional Development for the Arizona Department of Education, I have had the opportunity to observe preschool and kindergarten classrooms across the state, take part in the creation and revision process of state policy

documents (i.e. Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition, Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines, and Arizona's School Readiness Framework), as well as facilitate conversations with educators around policy and developmentally appropriate practices. I find it necessary to bring this into discussion again prior to methods being addressed, because it is my very connection to this material that shaped the methods, process, and decisions for data collection. My day to day work at the Arizona Department of Education requires me to frequently refer to, and therefore hold a content understanding, of *Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition,* as well as *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards*. I entered this study already knowing what the content analysis would produce. However, to provide discussion to the observations and interviews, and connect the findings in a meaningful way to sociocultural theory, I needed the opportunity to show the extent, if any, in which social emotional development and approaches to learning skill development are included in Arizona policy documents. This will be further explained in the findings portion of this dissertation.

Timeline of Research

The following methods of research collection and data analysis consisted of roughly three months during the Fall term of the 2014-2015 academic school year. The content analysis portion of the study was completed in the early Fall term, taking a week to fully complete. The observations consisted of three separate blocks, each of which was comprised of two weeks of data collection, followed by a week of analysis. Once all the data was collected, a deeper analysis, where the three main categories were identified, as well as reflection and writing was conducted.

Setting and Sample

In the beginning stages of formulating my research questions and purpose, I had many conversations with colleagues at both Arizona State University and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), all of whom suggested that my dissertation work should focus strongly around my work at ADE, specifically my kindergarten readiness project, and the districts we focus heavily on at the Department of Education. Therefore, based on the data and dialogue within the Department of Education, it was decided to conduct a case study on one local education agency. Yin (1984) defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. "Case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research. Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships" (Yin, 1984, p.23).

The exploratory fieldwork portion of this study was conducted in a rural southern Arizona community. As an Arizona Department of Education Program Specialist I have worked with Local Education Agencies(LEAs) across the state and have access to their test scores and success rate. The Daisy School District (a pseudonym) rose above all others this 2013-2014 academic school year, ranking first in the state. I was able to secure access to the following participants in the Daisy school district: a preschool classroom (lead preschool teacher), kindergarten classroom (kindergarten teacher),

elementary school principal, and district superintendent. The total number of participants is explained in further detail below.

Daisy School District. The Daisy District earned the top spot in student achievement in the state of Arizona with a score of 161 points out of a possible 200, giving the school an A. The point system is part of the A to F rating system that began in Arizona in 2011. The grading system is based on student achievement measured by AIMS (Arizona's Instrument for Measure Standards) test scores, academic growth from one year to the next and reductions in dropout rates. Every school and district across the state receives a report card with a grade that reflects annual academic profiles. Student performances on state achievement tests showed every school in the district — including the alternative high school —achieved an "A" score from the Arizona Department of Education. The effort pushed Daisy ahead of the next top-ranked district who had enjoyed the number one spot last year.

In addition, Daisy Primary School (where the preschool and kindergarten classes are housed), has been recognized for the third year in a row with an accountability grade of "A" by the Arizona Department of Education on their new A-F scale. Daisy Primary School is one of few schools in the entire county to have earned this "A" grade.

Through the creation of this research project, the ultimate goal of school readiness was maintained. I entered into this project with the subjective thought that social-emotional development and executive function skill development was important and imperative to a child's success. In addition, through my experiences at the Arizona Department of Education, I have had the opportunity to see firsthand how beneficial scaffolding these nonacademic skills are for children. However, through these same

experiences, I have realized that when it comes to policy implications, encouraging change, and altering perceptions (especially at an administrator level), the dialogue must center on test scores and academic achievement. Throughout the state of Arizona, when discussing education, and implementing a change or shift in practice, administrators look to academic achievement scores as the validation to enact. Therefore, rather than choose a random sampling or "typical" school district within Arizona, I looked at the state reporting of academic achievement (AIMS scores) to determine the highest achieving school in the state. The hope for the results of this research project is to help start the conversation to increase positive perceptions of social-emotional skill development and approaches to learning development, as well as to help enact the possibility of fostering these skills for children across the state, through methods/information uncovered in this study. By utilizing a school district that is already respected for their academic achievement, I felt that the findings around social-emotional development and approaches to learning development from this study, would be valued more by the field and hold a stronger presence in future conversations. In addition, due to the state rating of this Local Education Agency, by conducting a case study on their classrooms, this research project can also serve to provide reasoning that academic achievement is best accomplished when social-emotional skill development is fostered in the learning environment.

Daisy Primary is a pre-k through fourth grade school, housing 26 teachers and 450 students (with four kindergarten classrooms). The community preschool located on the Daisy Primary campus includes one classroom and serves both typically developing children, as well as children with special needs (1 lead teacher, 1 assistant teacher). In

addition to the community preschool, the Daisy District welcomes a Head Start program that resides on the Daisy Primary School campus as well. This program serves children ages 4-5, and feeds directly into the Daisy kindergarten classrooms. However, due to the nature of this study, and the utilization/ reference to *Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition*, the decision was made to not utilize the Head Start as part of my sample. Head Start Association has created, adopted, and utilizes their own set of standards, termed *Head Start Child Outcomes*. Since this research project centers around the Arizona standards for early learning, the Head Start program was not a good fit for comparison. Therefore, in regards to conducting the research in the Daisy School district, I have the following to utilize for data collection: District Superintendent, Principal at Daisy Primary, three kindergarten teachers, two preschool teachers.

After approaching the educators at Daisy School District, the following individuals gave their consent to participate in this study: District Superintendent, Principal at Daisy Primary School, one kindergarten teacher, and one (lead) preschool teacher.

Research Methods

Once permission was secured, the following research methods were conducted: content analysis on the following documents: 1) the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* and *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards* 2) main assessments utilized in the preschool and the kindergarten classroom. In order to increase trustworthiness, understanding, and triangulation of findings, within the grounded theory framework, and additional method to data collection, fieldwork, was incorporated

(including interviews, observations, notes, and memos). The following are detailed descriptions of the methods of research Included in this study.

Content Analysis. In addition to the fieldwork, content analysis was also conducted for this study. As Green and colleagues (2006) state, while interpretive modes of analysis attempt to increase the meaning of texts, content analysis treats the meaning as unproblematic and directly revealed through the words. Content analysis provides a quantitative view of what a text talks about. In its most simple form content analysis identifies the different people, things, or actions a text reports and counts the instances of each.

Figure 3: Overview of Content used for Analysis. This table includes all documents that were part of the content analysis portion.

For the purpose of my study, I will rely on content analysis to identify the components each of the standards documents include, as well as the frequency. This concept aligns directly with Green and his colleagues (2006), "Thus a content analysis of a set of standards in language arts might examine how many times particular topics or skills might be mentioned" (p. 266). However, it must be noted that the strategy of *content analysis* is completed in this study by conducting a word count and the

incorporation of some contextual analysis (phrases pulled from standards). Entering into this study with the prior knowledge that the Arizona policy documents around early learning are drastically different from each other in content, as well as wanting to relate to existing efforts being completed in the state, I felt that a content analysis in the form of a word count (accompanied with a narrative explanation and sociocultural theory connection to the classroom practices) would lend for a greater presence in conversations among the field. Green (2006) goes on to state, the analysis of intertextuality identifies those points of connections with other texts and considers how the new text uses them, responds to them, positions itself in relation to them, or draws on them as resources to make a new argument. In comparing the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition*, as well as *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards*, I looked to complete the word count (and when needed contextual analysis) on the social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development constructs.

In addition to analyzing the two sets of state standards, I also reviewed the main assessments) adopted for the preschool and kindergarten classroom and utilized throughout the school year. The analysis of the assessments provided the opportunity to incorporate in the discussion if instruction in these non-academic skills is incorporated in the classrooms. Generally, what is found in the field of education is that if it is assessed, it is taught. This analysis of the assessments will therefore provide additional dialogue around the classroom experience for this particular case study. This will be further explained in the following chapters.

Fieldwork Methods.

Interviews. The fieldwork portion of the research consisted of interviewing academic leaders (superintendent and site principal), along with preschool and kindergarten teachers, as well as conducting observations in each classroom. The core method of the interview process was based on semi-structured process. Semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail. The flexibility of this approach, particularly compared to structured interviews, also allows for the discovery or elaboration of information that is important to participants but may not have been previously been thought of as pertinent (Gill 2008). In addition, interviews sought to "attain a first-person description of some specified domain of experience" (Thompson et al., 1989, p. 12). It is recognized that although this provides a sample of academic leaders, preschool, and kindergarten staff, it still represents a small sample size. After multiple conversations with colleagues across the state, it was validated that conducting a case study centered on social-emotional development would be best received by leaders in the field, when inclusive of a Local Education Agency with the highest academic achievement. Therefore, while the sample size may be small, it is a favorable representation in looking to show that academic achievement is best accomplished when social-emotional skill development is fostered in the learning environment. This will be addressed further in the final chapter, along with recommendations for future research and larger sample sizes.

The initial interview questions served to focus the participant on a single experience and will enable the participant to take the interview in the direction they want

as it relates to the experience of the district, school, or classroom. As the interviewer, I was able to use follow-up questions to keep the conversation focused on concrete descriptions of the particular experience rather than on abstract discussions about the experience. This allowed each participant to describe in great detail what they have experienced, how they feel, and how they perceive the experience (Kvale, 1996). The overall purpose of the interview was to obtain rich descriptions of an experience. As suggested by Thompson et al. (1989), as the researcher, I assumed the role of a nondirective listener and ask short, descriptive questions to lead participants to respond in long, detailed descriptions of the experience. This method allowed the questions and discussion to be centered on participants' perceptions of social-emotional and approaches to learning development, but also enabled the participants to express their way of knowing about the standards, their experiences, support, and overall understanding of the social-emotional and approaches to learning skills in children.

The interview process consisted of a single semi-structured session, lasting approximately one hour. The interview focused on questions that outline the participants' depth of understanding of the standards, what constitutes developmentally appropriate practices in both preschool and kindergarten, their belief of what a "school ready" child is, their interpretation of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development in children, and how/if these skills are incorporated into the curriculum and assessed. In addition, the academic leaders (principal and superintendent) were asked how they interpret key pieces of *the Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* and *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards*, and how this relates to the reasoning of their choice of curriculum, as well as how successful their curriculum and teacher's

strategies are at delivering the content of the standards and meeting all the needs of children. A copy of these interview questions is included in the appendices section. The preschool and kindergarten teachers were asked how they perceive their ability to support social-emotional and approaches to learning development in their students, and how in a systematic way these skills are incorporated in their everyday teaching.

***Recording Observations*.** In an attempt to gain a thorough understanding of perceptions and behaviors of educators, observations were included in this study. A choice was made for the observation data to be collected focusing on teachers' interactions and demeanors with children and for those observations to be recorded in field notes. I rejected the use of video and audio recordings for the data collection because the equipment would likely have been intrusive and impede the natural flow to the classrooms. The use of observations served to witness the incorporation of social-emotional skill development in a natural way, while videotaping would like have made it seem less natural and potentially uncomfortable.

In addition, relying too heavily on recordings, as compared to notes taken in the moment, would have caused me to miss many of the small, important human gestures, facial expressions, eye contacts, and gut feelings that arise from the researcher being in the moment. Young children are very perceptive and largely depend on non-verbal cues for communication. The distance (physical and emotional) of a recording for data collection would have removed a very valuable and delicate layer of information which is critical in qualitative research. Because I am familiar to the children and because young children are used to adults being nearby all the time, preschool and kindergarten aged children are much less reserved around adults than older children. The students were

quickly and easily able to adapt to my presence and did not seem to be affected by it. Phyllis Noerager Stern addressed this exact issue of observation notes in her chapter in *Developing Grounded Theory* (2009). Stern also decided that recording devices would have been distracting and did not use them in her study. She dismissed the concern that every word is not recorded in written observational notes and she says, "If I didn't record each word exactly, did it damage the final outcome of the study? I truly believe it did not. Why? Because a grounded theory is a theoretical interpretation of a conglomerate of data rather than a case report of a series of incidents. I was the instrument, and my worldview went into the mix" (p. 58). The same is true of my study. Therefore, I attempted to position myself naturally in a comfortable proximity to children and teachers, and attempted to listen, watch, and record actions that connected them to other children and in those interactions, to learning. Please note, a sample of the notes from these observations is included in the appendices section.

Theoretical Sampling with Memos and Constant Comparison Analysis to Saturation

In grounded theory, data collection begins with observations or interviews without a predetermined end point. Theoretical sampling is the idea that data sets, participants, observations, interviews, and other ways of collecting data are natural extensions of following the analytic ideas constructed from the data and analysis before it reaches a point of "saturation." Saturation is when the researcher has come to a point when he or she feels the data have become complete in reference to the idea being followed and the fulfillment of connections in analysis and theory building (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Theoretical sampling is the process of allowing the ideas that emerge

from the data to guide the next steps in the study until saturation. As Juliet Corbin explains in *Developing Grounded Theory* (2009), the force behind the development of ideas that weave through the theoretical sampling is "what I perceived to be significant guided me to the next phase of research" (p. 45). Stern speaks of the foundations of grounded theory in using the data to draw ideas and allowing those ideas to develop and guide the understandings that result from the study. How these ideas emerge or are constructed, how one decides what is important, and how the analysis happens is, "beyond the ability of a person to articulate or explain" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.9). It is the process of feeling and knowing importance when it happens and having the freedom and confidence to follow it. Although the idea of "saturation" can be difficult to establish with such a small sample size, I utilize it here in this explanation relative to the school district within itself. By conducting a case study, I am looking to determine if the early learning environments provide social-emotional development and approaches to learning development. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, saturation will be achieved when the data is completed from both the preschool and kindergarten classroom in reference to social-emotional skill development, since these two environments constitute the early learning setting at Daisy School District.

Multiple research projects in early childhood provide support to this process. The NAEYC includes multiple literature inclusive of research projects incorporating this type of data collection. In an article by Colbert (2014), "The roots of current beliefs about relationships between individuals and early childhood environments lie in the work of Parten (1993), as well as Sybil and Prescott (1969), who all led to important observations of the influence of classroom design on the behavior of both children and teachers. Based

on their work, it was shown how teachers can alter the environment to achieve new goals or solve existing problems. [They] also highlight the importance of tailoring the child care setting to fit the needs and experiences of the children who spend time there" (p.2). In referencing the very beginning, Parten (1993) showed through quantitative measures of validity that one-minute observation periods of preschool children while looking for specific actions was enough to align perceptions of the researchers and the teachers in regards to behavior. Parten used 60 one-minute sessions to form ideas relating to her participants (and in the case of her study, the aspects of leadership). Although Parten's categorizations and values are given to leadership behaviors, and thus slightly differ from mine, her observation schedule was shown to be effective in seeing leadership, and it appears that the observation schedule can function independently of her categories. The short but frequent observations could be strung together to create a story of many scenes, environments and relationships. Based on Parten's recommendations, and a lack of information and saturation through interviews alone, I decided to add to this study a schedule of 60 observation periods. Unlike Parten's one-minute sessions, I lengthened mine to five minutes, to provide an opportunity to see the children and teachers' interactions with each other in the most diverse settings. By adding four minutes to each session, I could see more sophisticated and involved approaches to social and emotional development.

Although this literature example from Parten is inclusive of systematic observation, including having predetermined codes, which is not a part of my observation plan, I felt it was still useful in including and strengthening the reason behind utilizing observations. As stated by Christine Delli (2010):

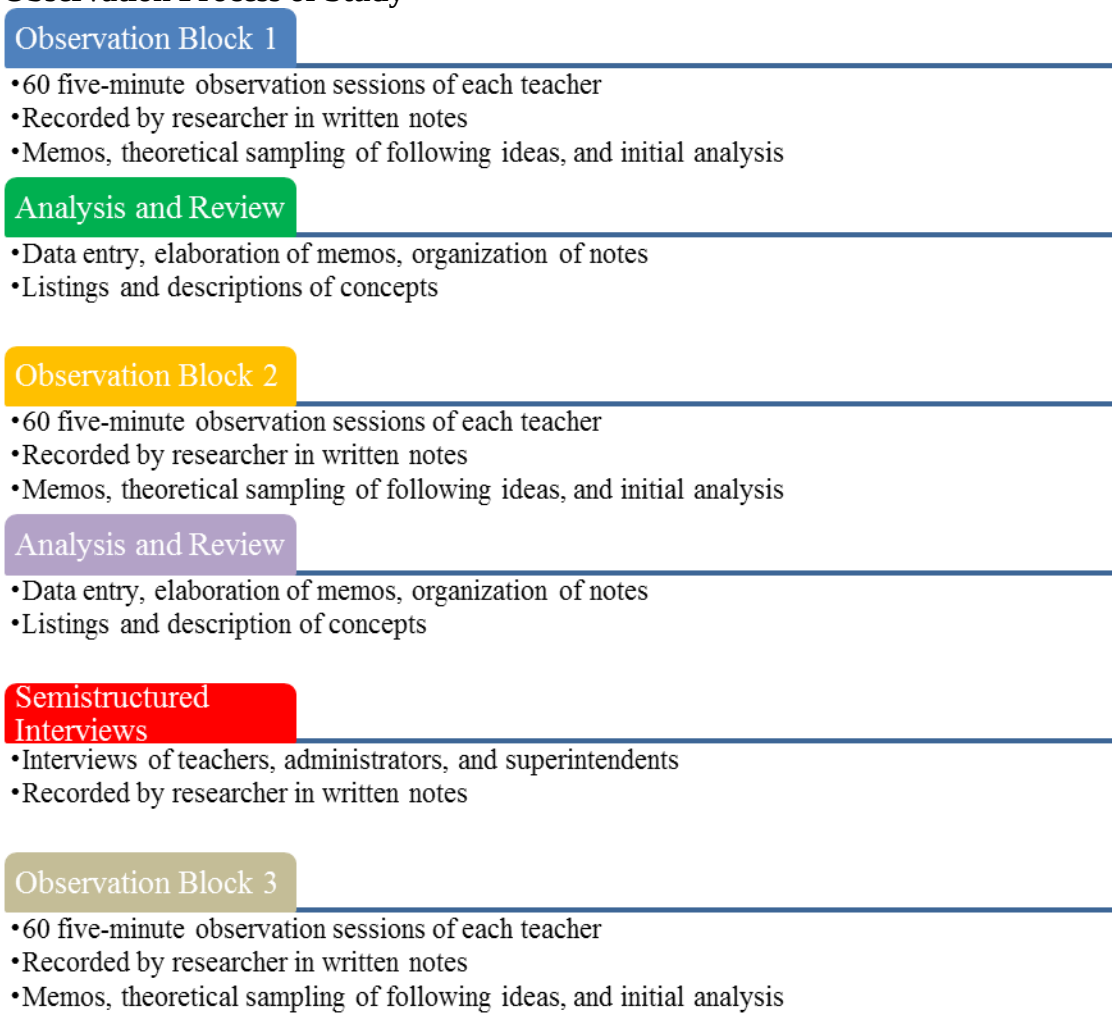
> The scientific study of child development started in the middle of the 18th century, an era characterized by an increase in scientific research and especially the development of biology, which posed new questions regarding the developmental process of organisms. According to Jean Jacques Rousseau, childhood has its own position in the human development and consequently we should judge the behavior of a child with different criteria to that which we judge the behavior of an adult. Respect towards childhood and the individuality of each child and generally respect towards a distinguished, liberal and democratic discipline springs from this perception. This perception was continued by Werner in USA and Piaget in Europe, the result was the beginnings of systematic observation and research in relation to the motor, sensory, cognitive, emotional and social development of children (Haralampopoulos, 1993). The Industrial Revolution gave a great boost to the progress of developmental psychology as a science (p.2).

Even though Parten's work is not the most recent, I reference it in this section to show the concept and importance of observations has been utilized in early childhood education for an extremely long time, and continues to be utilized today. In my practice at the Arizona Department of Education, one of our quality assurance assessments supports this idea of determining and improving practice through observation. The CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) tool utilizes classroom observations in order to assess the quality of teacher-child interactions and the learning environment. In reviewing the CLAS tool, Sabel explains, "Early childhood education programs [e.g., prekindergarten (pre-K)]—characterized by stimulating and supportive teacher-child

interactions in enriched classroom settings—promote children's learning and school readiness. But in the United States, most children, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, attend programs that may not be of sufficient quality to improve readiness for school success. States are adopting Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRISs) as a market-based approach for improving early education" (2013, p.1). In lieu of my position at the Arizona Department of Education, I recognize the CLASS tool has been adopted to assess quality of any preschool program receiving state funds. Since observations have been proven to be useful in the field of early childhood education for such a significant time, along with it corresponding to my work at the Arizona Department of Education, I chose to implement a very similar process in this study.

In line with grounded theory, I used open observation exclusively, in which there were no categories, tests, or scores applied to the children's behavior. In order to obtain 60, five-minute observation sessions, for each teacher, I conducted three rotating blocks (each taking about two weeks to complete). Between these blocks, I took approximately one week to further the analysis and return to the next block of observations with core concepts relating to the developing grounded theory. In between blocks two and three, I conducted the interview process, further validating the need to continue gathering data through observations in the classrooms.

Table 1
Observation Process of Study



Constant Comparison, Questioning and Coding. In grounded theory, analysis should begin after the first session of data collection and occur concurrently with data collection in order to most closely reflect the emerging concepts. The concepts are then aligned with the observations and interviews, following where they seem to lead and making connections that drive the theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Constant comparison is the act of comparing data from one source to other data and then comparing data to emerging concepts and core theory. It is through constant comparison that the researcher interacts with and analyzes the data in an engaged and on-going way.

This process enables the analysis to progress concurrently with data collection. Comparing different sources of data to each other serves to clarify similarities, differences, key concepts, degrees of importance, repetition, overlay of emotions, disconnects, et cetera, that are all important in finding concepts that will eventually connect into theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this study, a round of observations was conducted, and then the data (in the form of field notes) was analyzed to uncover repeating concepts. Specifically, after the completion of the first round of observations, I reviewed the field notes for broad categories/topics that were noted. In doing so, the following topics were first identified: environment/learning centers, free choice play, teacher-child conversations, children as peer models/support to each other, behavior management, child-child interactions, and mood/climate of the classroom. Upon closer analysis and grouping of categories, three main categories were formed: environment, individual, and decision making. These then served as my focus on what to observe for in the second round of visits. By having a more specific focus, I was able to capture behaviors and examples that led to a deeper understanding of the climate and atmosphere of the classroom. After this round of observations was concluded, an interview process followed, as well as another coding process. After the completion of the third round of observations, enough data was gathered to identify repeating components in each of the three main categories.

In this study, constant comparisons were made between teachers' actions at different time points, their interactions with children, their environments, and against concepts that began to emerge from the data collected earlier. This comparison was performed in the perspective of the grounded theory interpretation of comparison. This

does not include placing value judgments on the actions of the children; the comparison is used instead as a basis for further understanding by finding dynamic areas of difference and change. Therefore, the comparisons sought to find variables in teachers' perspectives of social emotional development, and the impact on children's success. The comparisons were frequently recorded as memos. As the comparisons became more significant, they were included in codes and concepts.

Questioning is the idea of constant comparison on a higher plane. As we compare bits of data, questions arise. Why is this case different? Why did this happen? Why is this important? These queries highlight important words or actions in patterns or groups (codes). The codes are then connected and organized, and the researcher begins building and reinforcing concepts. Concepts are the ideas that begin to describe the data and people we are studying and interacting with in a thematic way. From these concepts, a core concept (or concepts) begins to form as particularly important and/or connected idea to many other concepts. From a core concept(s), a theory is developed. This is more than a description of the data; it is a fundamental understanding that the data illuminates. Central to grounded theory is the idea that the theory can be traced back to the data but has become an idea that can stand alone (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

As part of the constant comparison process, substantive (open) coding was conducted concurrently with the data collection experience. After each day of observation and memos, I transcribed the data from my handwritten notes. During this process, I coded for various categories and ideas that appeared to me as significant. Substantive coding showed a range of concepts, which then served as a background for constant comparison for incoming, new data and as a guide for theoretical sampling. These codes

began to organize into core concepts/components. As I became aware of important ideas that came from the data (the three main categories: environment, individual, and decision making), I consulted with others (peer debriefing) who were helped me organize and challenge my thoughts without attempting to change, alter, or influence the ideas or concepts. I then revisited the literature specific to ideas that I had as a result of the data and concepts. Questioning, comparison, and theoretical sampling occurred throughout the process.

Memos. Memos, in essence, serve as mini-analysis of each data collection session in which the researcher records ideas, emotions, relationships, reflections, and over-arching influences that are not immediately present in the raw observational notes/recordings or interviews. It is in the memos that constant comparison has a place for immediate expression. In grounded theory, the researcher is the "instrument," a member of the human community, and as data are received and recorded, the researcher is interpreting it (Charmaz, 2006; Morse, et al., 2009). Memos are where the researcher develops the story that surrounds the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Memos are important as an additional component to raw data and should be continued through the entire study analysis. Ideas and gut level connections that researchers have during or shortly after data collection sessions are soon lost if they are not recorded (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Morse, et al., 2009). The feeling of the mood, gestures, facial expressions, or word emphasis, can be vitally important to understanding, and may quickly be lost. Ideas that came about during the observation can all quickly evaporate, and the researcher is left with words on a page without the story around them to give them life. Memos provide a record of the path used to follow our own thought

processes and feelings from data collection through consultations, reviews of literature, and finally, theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Most of my data consisted of memos, in an attempt to capture as much information as I could in the classrooms. Memos ranged from full sentences to one word explanations of children and teacher's moods, behaviors, attitudes, and responses.

In addition, direct observational notes were taken in the field. Some ideas and concepts were recorded directly during observations, but many were scratched out as quick memos and were developed as full, separate memos when I transcribed my handwritten notes. Concepts in the form of ideas and connections were constructed from memos and constant comparison. These were written out as a list, which facilitated a manageable, visual organization of data derived concepts for peer debriefing and concept mapping. I continued to use memos throughout the entire research experience as separate writings in conjunction with analysis as a result of consultations, readings, and individual reflection. By utilizing a mix of memos and observational notes, I was able to easily conduct a comparative analysis. The mixture of length of notes provided an easier organization into the main categories because I could more easily group key words.

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Combined Data Analysis

Data collected from interviews and document analysis findings were analyzed with methods selected for their ability to expose perceptions, policy appropriation, and a systematic approach that is undertaken to address nonacademic skills in classrooms. To address the first research question, through content analyses, I attempted to identify and understand the learning system established within our state to determine how

interpretations and messages are formed, received, and conveyed across the system of learning. To answer the second and third research question focused on interpretations and assumptions, I looked to identify strategies and beliefs held by academic personal in the area of child development, as well as what curriculum and assessments are utilized, and how, if at all, nonacademic skills are incorporated.

An important component of grounded theory is the inclusion of multiple perspectives to better understand the phenomena at hand (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was important in a methodological sense due the variety of individuals and therefore perspectives that would be included within this research. In addition, my work at the Department of Education naturally includes additional perspectives and dialogue around similar, if not the same, topics. Grounded theory accepts and honors the process of discussing ideas with other people to better understand observational data and to refine conclusions. Because so many of the understandings from this study are relative to the work being done at ADE, this showed to be an applicable analysis process.

The on-going analysis from the beginning of the observation is an important strength of the methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Morse, et al., 2009). I also chose grounded theory because it works with the inclinations of researchers as thinking people, not against them or in an attempt to constrain them. The flexibility to follow those ideas as it pertains to the natural development of my position was very appealing in making the continuous connections between my work at ADE and this study. The process of taking notes was very natural, as it is inevitable that questions,

ideas, and other significant events such as observations, cannot be completely removed from my bias as a researcher.

In grounded theory, analysis should begin after the first session of data collection and occur concurrently with data collection in order to most closely reflect the emerging concepts. The concepts are then aligned with the observations and interviews, following where they seem to lead and making connections that drive the theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Constant comparison is the act of comparing data to other data and then comparing data to emerging concepts and core theory. It is through constant comparison that the researcher interacts with and analyzes the data in an engaged and on-going way. For the content analyses, the process was divided into three steps for each: (1) coding indicators from the *Arizona Early Learning Standards* and *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards*; (2) and using the codes to quantify what the standards do and do not cover, utilizing the process of a word count (determining how often the indicators were mentioned in the document, divided by the total number of indicators).

To allow for this comparison of the content of the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* and *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards* I followed two steps. The first was to follow a similar process being taken by the North Carolina EAG Consortium in which Arizona has elected to be a part of. This step includes, detailing the five Essential Domains of School Readiness (as identified in the Head Start Child Outcomes, NAEYC, and the Kindergarten EAG Consortium (KEAG)). They are: Physical Development & Motor Skills; Social & Emotional Development; Approaches Toward Play & Learning; Language & Communication Development; and Cognitive Development & General Knowledge. This was decided to be the first step in the content

analysis of the standards because it addresses at the most basic level the question of whether the two sets of standards share any similar content. Using these domains and the constructs within each (outlined in chapter 4), I assigned each concept within the Arizona Early Learning Standards, and each standard in Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards to a construct in the analysis. This was based on the operational definition for the construct (gained through the work of the KEAG), that most closely fits the wording of the concept/standard (utilizing the supporting indicators and examples). An important note to make is that analysis/connections were done through this process, more so than looking at the specific domain that the concepts/standards were included within their own text. Therefore, the assignment (where placed in the analysis) of each piece of the documents may or may not match the domain or area within which they are located in the standards themselves.

In completing this initial analysis, I realized it was very sparse in terms of the connection between the two documents within the categories of social-emotional and approaches to learning. Since the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* have multiple areas in which they connect these nonacademic skill areas to Language and Literacy development, and *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards* consist 50% of English Language Arts, I decided it would be useful to augment the primary analysis with a secondary process in the Language and Literacy area to see if any additional connections around social-emotional and approaches to learning skills could be identified. The curriculum and assessments were then coded using the same domains/skills and compared against the information found in the standards analysis.

As stated earlier, these content analyses provided a strong support to the fieldwork portion of the research. Again, stated well by Green, "It helps to see the ideas and sources people draw on, how they advance their own positions in relation to other positions or otherwise act within a field of claims, counterclaims, research, evidence, ideas, and political commitments" (2006, p. 270).

Trustworthiness and Generalizability

It is important for qualitative researchers to address trustworthiness, and generalizability to enhance the research. Although the qualitative portion of this study is specific to a Local Education Agency, and inclusive of a very small sample size, a case study in fact, the hope is that the components uncovered can form the foundation that allows research and discussion to continue in this area and influence the field. Therefore, the areas of trustworthiness and generalizability will be addressed briefly.

Trustworthiness indicates that a researcher has provided enough information to enable the reader to examine the research and determine that the results are believable and valuable (Bailey, 2007, p. 181). Seidman (2006) claims that inherent in the three part interview process is a structure that augment validity of the research (p. 24). Therefore, for this study, I will utilize the same constructs already in place in state efforts and policy for the content analysis. In addition, I will also incorporate multiple statements and quotes from the observations and interviews, in an attempt to allow readers a detailed explanation of the data.

Bailey (2007) indicates that the second component used to evaluate research is credibility. Credibility "implies believability, authenticity, and plausibility of results"

(Bailey, 2007, p. 182). In addition to this is the component of dependability, which "requires internal consistency among the core elements of the research, research questions, data collections, analysis, and conceptual understandings" (Bailey, 2007, p. 184). As with many research projects in this area, it is not to confuse dependability as reliability, especially since this project is designed as a case study, it is only vital to note that my methods are consistent to ensure the data collection was trustworthy. The final component is generalizability. As a case study, this research did not utilize a random sample, therefore does not signify to have external validity and generalizability. However, due to the subject matter of the research, I substitute the notion of transferability (the ability to apply the findings outside of this specific research context). Bailey (2007) describes this as naturalistic generalizability, or the idea that a researcher can read the study and determine if the findings can be utilized within other contexts. Since this is a case study, the idea of generalizability is exceptionally important. Therefore, the findings and associated discussions will be phrased in such a way that readers can utilize to initiate dialogue amongst other early learning programs in the state of Arizona.

Researcher Bias. Like all researchers, I carry my own perspectives, values, and lenses that shape my interpretations. While many researchers create lists to enumerate and expose these ideas, I have attempted to integrate this personal understanding and exposition of my personal perspectives throughout the process and associated writings, specifically in the last chapter of this work. I believe this is a more honest and meaningful approach than attempting to summarize them in a single paragraph. The ideas that shape our perspectives consist of things we know and understand about our own thought

processes. Not all values and biases can be forced into a list. "Attempting to define all of the researcher's perspectives and values can lead to a false sense of empowerment of the readers to be able to somehow remove these perspectives from the research and view it through their own lenses. Consequently, grounded theory is inherently structured upon the researcher's navigation through the process and is based upon his or her perceptions as the study moves from one step to another" (Soffler, 2011, p. 68).

In addition, as Glaser recognized, this leaves the reader in a fundamentally different position than with other research methodologies. Since the researcher's personal positions are integrated into the research structure, the reader is left to evaluate the resonance and transferability of the theory as it is presented (Glaser, 2004).

Summary and Introduction of Sociocultural Theory

The focus of this study has been described in this chapter through the methods and sample population utilized. The following two chapters will discuss the findings obtained as a result of these components. Chapter four will discuss the findings from the content analysis of the standards and assessments of the Daisy preschool and kindergarten. Following that discussion, chapter five will address the observations and coding by describing in detail the three main categories and components of each that emerged. As this dissertation emerges from the method of collecting data, to the discussion on findings and implications, it will also merge from being based on grounded theory to being based and founded in sociocultural theory. This study does not seek to find new data, but rather seeks to uncover perceptions and the learning experience (culture) that is created in the early learning classrooms, and relating the findings to the

policies in Arizona. While grounded theory allowed the opportunity for myself as the researcher to incorporate my connection and closeness to the material, sociocultural theory will now allow the discussion to be framed on the social experiences and components of learning.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: CONTENT ANALYSIS

The original intent of this study was to determine how social-emotional development and approaches to learning skills were identified within Arizona early learning documents, as well as to uncover the interpretations and perceptions of these skills held by local educational agencies. To allow for a deeper exploration of both areas, content analysis and field work data, the findings are separated into two distinct chapters. The content analysis portion of the study, discussed in this chapter, allowed for an understanding of how Arizona documents and the Daisy School District (through curriculum and assessments) incorporate social-emotional and approaches to learning skills, by addressing the following research question:

> How are early childhood social-emotional development and approaches to learning framed in Arizona policies, standards, and assessments?

In particular, the content analysis looked at the two sets of Arizona standards utilized for early learning: *Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition,* and *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards* by completing a word analysis and contextual analysis of the documents. This chapter will also discuss an analysis of the assessments utilized in the preschool and kindergarten classrooms to determine the extent in which social-emotional and approaches to learning skills are addressed. By doing so, this chapter of findings, will detail the answer to the project's first research question (stated above), showing that social-emotional and approaches to learning skills are heavily included in the standards and assessment utilized in preschool, and unmistakably missing in the kindergarten documents. To further support these findings, and address the

remaining two research questions, field work was also completed in the form of observations and interviews. This portion of the findings, along with the remaining two research questions will be presented and discussed in the next chapter.

Outline of the Goals and Parameters of the Analysis and Results

In accordance with the nature of grounded theory as a process of the researcher as he or she interacts with the data to build the theory, there is an organic flow between interpretation, ideas and data supporting the theoretical framework when describing the results (Glaser, 1993). In reviewing the collected data, repeated ideas, concepts, or elements become apparent. However, the basis of grounded theory is to develop a theory that does not currently exist in the field. This is not the case with this study; rather I am looking to build a conversation around the non-academic skills of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development within the early learning environments. More specifically, a goal of my research was to complete a case study focused on early childhood programs in a high achieving school district within Arizona to uncover what type of learning environment is established in their preschool and kindergarten classrooms. A related goal was to make connections to the information contained within the Arizona policy documents and how/if at all this affects the classroom practices. Therefore, rather than continue with grounded theory as my theoretical framework, I will transition at this point in the study to sociocultural theory, as it will help to describe the interactions, culture of learning, and systems of practice within the early learning classrooms.

The basis of sociocultural theory of human learning describes learning as a social process and the origination of human intelligence in society or culture. The major theme of this framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Moving forward in this study and progressing into the discussion and findings sections, three main researchers within sociocultural theory will serve as the foundation and support to my discussion: Vygotsky, Rogoff, and Bronfenbrenner. Educators have an integral role to play in scaffolding children's learning. It is the responsibility of the teacher to provide students with tasks and experiences that are within a student's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky). The way teachers can achieve this is through engaging and interacting with children (Rogoff). This interaction will also allow teachers to adjust tasks according to children's abilities. Rogoff continues this concept of learning through interaction by developing the theory of cognitive apprenticeships, where children learn through partaking in activities in their culture group. Bronfenbrenner's perspective on development looks at the child's learning/development within the context of the system of relationships that form her environment, such as the system of family, school, decision making. Together, these researchers will provide information in the context of sociocultural theory and guide the findings and implications discussion starting in this chapter, and moving forward to the end of this dissertation. The description of the results will focus on the development of the theory from the supporting data, as well as the ideas that contributed to the construction of this theoretical framework. Ideas external to the theory, but related to the larger understanding of school readiness within the field of early learning, such as connections made with existing ideas and applications, are addressed in Chapter 6.

The data examples are provided to illustrate the ideas and show how the findings are related to the theory of sociocultural development. The examples in this section are not intended to list all experiences or be a complete exposition of data. Due to the nature of this study, which combined document analysis with a limited case study, the presented findings do not represent a comprehensive examination of all possible contributing influences on teachers' perceptions and inclusive practices of social and emotional development and approaches to learning skill development, rather they are meant to guide the reader to see how a high academic achieving school integrates a culture of learning that fosters non-academic skills, and how this is relative to Arizona policy, as well as fitting to the theoretical framework of sociocultural theory and addressing the research questions.

Content Analysis: Standards and Assessment

This chapter provides the findings based on the content analysis of the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition*, *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards*, as well as the preschool and kindergarten classroom assessments used by the Daisy district. Again, in an effort to align to current efforts by the Arizona Department of Education, as well as provide information that will be acknowledged by the field, the content analysis of the standards is performed through the strategy of a word count. This chapter will begin with a brief historical context of the sets of standards, followed by an explanation of the findings within the documents, based on the analysis of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development indicators in the state standards.

Standards. In June 2010, the *K-12 Common Core Standards* were adopted and implemented in Arizona, resulting in a more rigorous and demanding curriculum. Arizona joined with 46 other states to create the next generation of K-12 standards in English language arts and mathematics. These standards provide a consistent framework to prepare students for success in college and/or the 21st century workplace. The standards were developed in collaboration with teachers, education leaders, and experts, to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce. This state-led effort was coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The standards are informed by the highest, most effective models from states across the country and countries around the world, and provide teachers and parents with a common understanding of what students are expected to learn. These standards represent the state's attempt to define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so they will graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs. The standards align with college and work expectations; are clear, understandable and consistent; include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills; build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards; informed by other top performing countries to prepare all students to succeed in our global economy and society; and are evidence-based (http://www.azed.gov/azcommoncore/).

After further review, in 2011 the *Common Core Standards* were revised to include additional verbiage and resources to better reflect the unique needs and characteristics of the state of Arizona and the children within its boundaries. To

represent this work and the deeper connection to the children within Arizona, the *Common Core Standards* were renamed *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards.* The document maintains the focus in the two domain areas of language and literacy (English Language Arts), and cognition and general knowledge (Mathematics). This revision process engaged not only K-3 content experts, but also EC educators and specialists from the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) Office of Early Childhood Education. ADE contributed to the revision of the standards by providing evidence for and ensuring bidirectional vertical alignment of K-3 revised standards to the ELDS.

In the last year (2014), the *Common Core Standards* have served as a political issue across the country as opponents criticize them as driven by the federal government (Associated Press, 2015). Many organizations have formed within Arizona to support both sides of the issue. The group titled, Arizonans against Common Core, released the following statement outlining their distaste for the standards: "Common Core state standards are NOT state standards in the first place, and are nothing more than further federalization of our state education system" (Arizonans Against Common Core, 2013). The Arizona Republic details the other side's position stating, "Supporters, who include many educators and the business community, say the goals outlined under the national Common Core initiative will help American students develop critical-thinking skills and prepare them not only for college, but also for competing in a global economy" (Faller, 2014, p. 1).

The *Common Core Standards* also served as campaign platform in Arizona's 2014 state Governor and Superintendent of Public Instruction office elections. In addition, House Bill 2190 was posed in the beginning of 2015 that, if passed, would drop

these standards in the state of Arizona. Although similar efforts have failed in Arizona legislature before, proponents are concerned of the possibilities this new bill holds. "Arizona House is set to debate a proposal that would ditch the state's new Common Core school standards and strip the Board of Education's power to adopt new standards" (Associated Press, 2015). Although the future of the K-12 Standards in Arizona is uncertain, they will continue to be utilized and referenced in this project. The conclusion chapter will reaffirm the importance of skills such as social-emotional and approaches to learning, in order to best support student's school readiness regardless of the academic standards assigned to them.

"The development process of the *Arizona Early Childhood Education Standards* began in February of 2001, through an Even Start Family Literacy Statewide Initiative Grant, which was housed in the Department of Education's Adult Education Section" (AZELS, 2013, p.6). The Arizona State Board of Education approved these original standards in May 2003. Responding to new research, focus, and attention to the field of early childhood education, in January 2004 the Early Childhood Education unit was created at the Department of Education, under which the revision process of the *Arizona Early Childhood Education Standards* began. The document was revised to include a more holistic view of education, and included seven standards: Social Emotional Development, Language and Literacy, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Physical Development/Health/and Safety, and Fine Arts. These standards were retitled, *Arizona's Early Learning Standards 2nd Edition* and adopted by the state board in September 2005. Due to new research in the field of early childhood education and brain research, in January 2012, a new revision process was initiated to review the standards once again.

The *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* (AZELS) offer a comprehensive framework in all Essential Domains of School Readiness that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for planning high-quality early learning experiences (Arizona Department of Education, 2013).

> *The Arizona Early Learning Standards* have been developed to provide a framework for the planning of quality learning experiences for all children three to five years of age. The standards cover a broad range of skills development [social-emotional, approaches to learning, language and literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, physical development/health and safety, and fine arts] and provide a useful instructional foundation for children from diverse backgrounds and with diverse abilities. The standards are intended for use by all those who work with young children in any early care and education setting in urban, rural and tribal communities" (Arizona Early Learning Standards, 2013). Stipek, 2006 states that most early childhood experts endorse instruction that is adapted to children's individual skills and interests, but the initiatives need to be careful to not create a laundry-list of tasks for students, but rather have a greater emphasis on a holistic approach: developing academic and non-academic dimensions of development (social competence, behavioral self-regulation, and physical and emotional well-being). Although the Early Learning Standards document is separated into specific domains of learning, the intent is not to suggest that children's skills develop separately or apart from each other. Nor is it the intent that isolated skill instruction be used as an appropriate way to support learning during the preschool years. The standards document is based on the premises that

> learning occurs on a continuum and that developmental domains are highly interrelated. Children succeed to their highest potential in nurturing environments that support their learning across domains (p. 8).

To further align with the changes in policy and education reform, the AZELS also include an alignment section within each standard domain that provides a matrix demonstrating how the standards align with the *Infant and Toddler Guidelines* and *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards*. As a result, the *Arizona Early Learning Standards* are considered at the forefront among states in being culturally and linguistically responsive and reflecting different cultural and linguistic approaches to learning and development.

In an effort to continue to provide children with a smooth continuum of learning, in 2014 Arizona entered into a ten state consortium to support kindergarten readiness. The consortium's work is to enhance a formative assessment system to address the Essential Domains of School Readiness that begins with a kindergarten entry assessment (KEAG) and continues into third grade. "To support assessment development efforts, the U.S. Department of Education has funded a competitive grant program designed to advance the development and effective use of kindergarten entry assessments (KEA). Called the Enhanced Assessment Grants (EAG) program, several efforts are underway. Among them, eight states (Arizona, Delaware, Iowa, Maine, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina) and the District of Columbia have joined with North Carolina to form the K-3 Formative Assessment Consortium" (Little, 2014, p. 8). The process for determining the validity of the assessment system requires examination of the five Essential Domains of School Readiness and their associated progressions based on

the sets of standards in the domains. The KEAG is essential for examining differences in what children know and can do by different background characteristics (e.g. race, ethnicity, culture, language, identified disabilities or special needs, geographic location, parental education, participation in different early learning programs and services) in order to determine where there is a particular need for additional attention in the early learning years, particularly in closing gaps for children with high needs.

This KEAG is also intended to inform instruction and activities in the early elementary years, providing teachers and schools with a more holistic look at children and their development across the five domains of learning. The Arizona State Board of Education adopted *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards* (2011) and together with standards in other content areas, they comprise the *Arizona K-12 Academic Standards*. In previous years, students in grades 3 through 8, and 10 took the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS), a criterion-referenced assessment designed to determine how well students' are meeting the Arizona Academic Standards. Arizona has been integrally involved in the development of a common grades 3-12 assessment.

The Arizona State Board of Education is currently in the process of reviewing and determining the assessment in place of AIMS. The KEAG itself will provide additional information for determining how students with different experiences and skills at the time of school entry can progress to be successful on these academic measures.

Therefore, the works of the KEAG significantly lead the direction and the process in which to conduct the analysis of all documents for this research. "In order to develop [the assessment system], which includes a common assessment that is aligned with participating states' early learning standards, the Consortium needs to have a thorough

understanding of the content of participating sates' early learning standards. To that end, this work was undertaken. As a separate project funded through non-federal sources, this effort analyzes the Consortium sates' early learning standards and provides data that can be used by the Consortium in the development of a solid and effective KEA" (Little, 2014, p. 8).

This analysis was not meant to rank states or judge their standards, but instead served as the focus to guide conversations around the creation of the KEA. One of the major goals of this analysis was to determine "how participating states' early learning standards compare with the *Common Core State Standards* for kindergarten" (Little, 2014, p. 8).

As mentioned earlier, to provide a direction in which to conduct the content analysis, the work performed by the Consortium is utilized. In attempting to identify constructs or skills to utilize for my word count/content analysis, the research in the areas of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development yielded an extensive amount of possibilities. Thus, as a researcher, I decided to mirror the work already being conducted within the state and through this Consortium.

As stated in the recommendation of the Consortium, "Although the primary purpose of the Project is to inform the work of the EAG Consortium, results from the CSA Project can also be useful for additional purposes. First, Consortium states can use results from the analyses and the recommendations to examine and make recommendations to their own [standards]" (Little, 2014, p. 9). The work conducted by the Consortium included an analysis of the states' standards in each of the *Five Essential Domains of School Readiness* (Physical Development & Motor Skills Social &

Emotional Development, Approaches to Play & Learning, Language & Communication Development, and Cognitive Development & General Knowledge). Within each domain is a set of constructs. These constructs were utilized as the list of skills to identify within the sets of standards to complete the content analysis.

In comparing these identified constructs to existing research, specifically literature included in my review for this study, I agreed with the identified list, and felt for the purpose of this study, it represented a comprehensive reflection of each of the domains. The constructs of Social & Emotional Development and Approaches to Play & Learning are identified in Table 2.

Table 2
Social & Emotional/ Approaches To Learning Constructs

Social & Emotional Development	Approaches To Play & Learning
Feelings and Knowledge Related to Self (emotional expression, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-concept)	*Interest and Exploration*
Self-regulation (emotional regulation, behavioral regulation, moral/character development)	*Initiative*
Relationships (attachment with primary caregiver, relationships with familiar adults, relationships with peers)	*Persistence and Mastery Motivation*
Social Skills (social skills with adults, social skills with peers, recognition of others' feelings, social conventions)	*Concentration/attention control*
	Cooperative approach to learning
	Problem solving
	Invention and creativity
	Willingness to try
	Play (shared peer activities and social play, exploratory/functional play, pretend or symbolic play)

Once these constructs were identified, the content analysis was conducted, beginning with the analysis of the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* in the area of Social & Emotional Development domain, followed by Approaches to Play & Learning. In order to do so, the document was reviewed for number of times each indicator appeared in the overall document (word count). The *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* are meant to be utilized by practitioners in the field, and therefore does not contain any front loading information or explanation in the beginning. Thus, the word count that was conducted on this set of standards is a true representation of the content within the actual standards themselves. To obtain the percentage for each domain, the number of indicators was divided by the total number of indicators (identified in all five learning domains) reviewed from the document as a whole (This total number was 124. Each percentage thus represents the portion of the standards that addresses that particular construct.

Below are the figures (Figure 4 and Figure 5) that represent the content/balance analysis of the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition*. It is also important, and interesting, to note that the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* are an interrelated set of standards. Again, making note that my position at the Arizona Department of Education allots for an existing understanding of the content analyzed in this portion of the study, I knew prior to beginning the word count that the skills identified within social and emotional development and approaches to learning skill development are described and referenced in all standard areas.

Therefore, when reading these tables, the percentages noted in the findings should be read as the percentage in which those constructs appear in the Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition in its entirety. For example, noted below, the construct of "Recognition of others' feelings" is evident in 6.5% of the entire standards document.

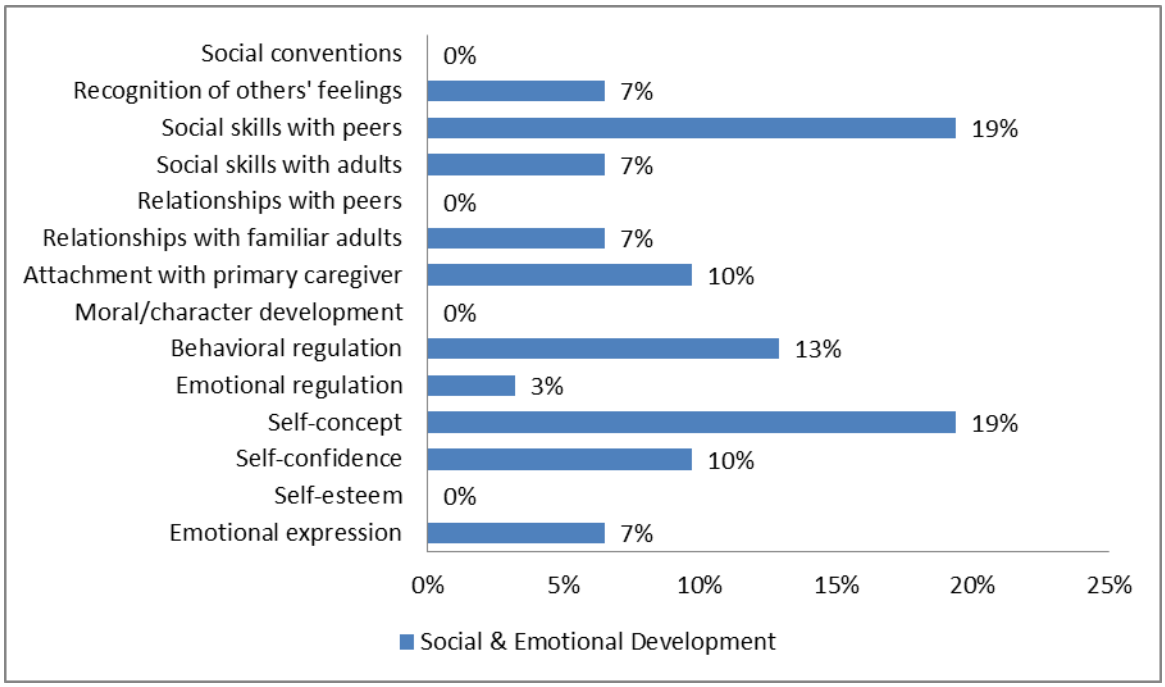

Figure 4: Content Analysis of Social & Emotional Development Domain within Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition

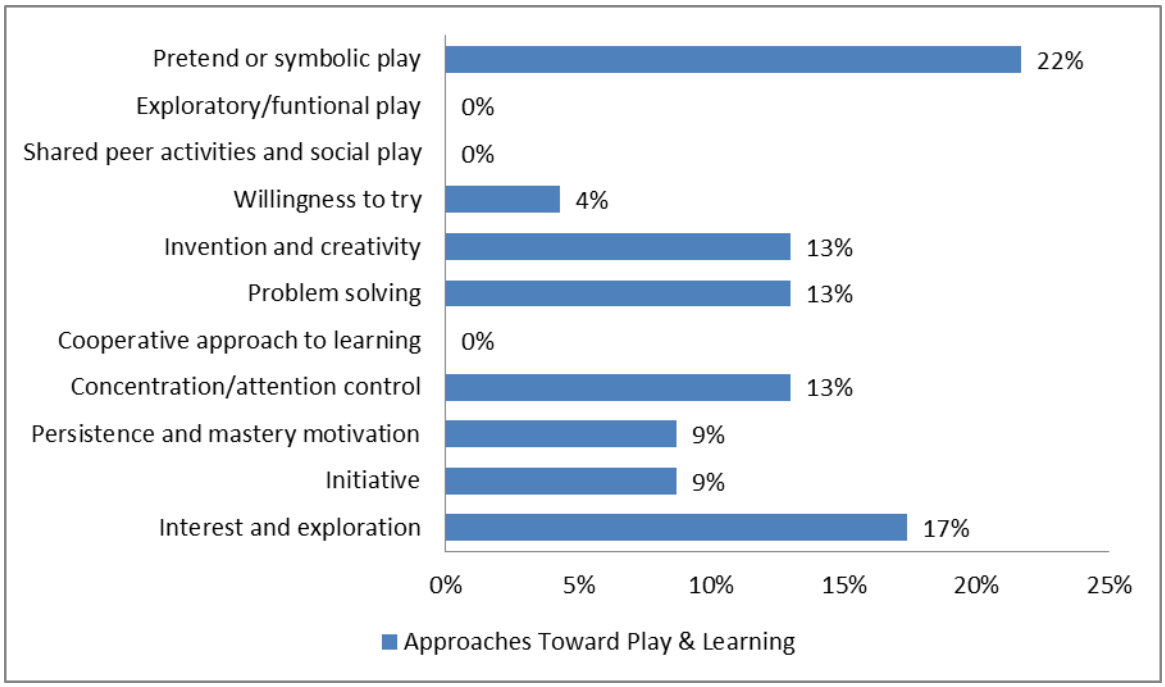

Figure 5: Content Analysis of Approaches to Play & Learning Development Domain within Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition

The conclusion from these two tables displays the following information: in regards to social emotional development, the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* was word counted against fourteen constructs (previously identified through the North Carolina ten-state consortium). Through this word count, it was found that social-emotional development skills counted for an average of 20.11% or 20% of the entire document's content, ranging on an individual basis for 5% to 23%. In other words, 1/5 of the standards adopted for Arizona's children ages three to kindergarten entry promote social-emotional development. In regards to approaches to learning skill development, the standards were word counted against eleven constructs, finding that this domain of learning accounted for 23% of the entire document, individual constructs ranging from 4% to 20%. In addition, it is also important to note there are some constructs within each

domain that represent 0% (four within social-emotional development and three within approaches to learning). Again brining my prior knowledge of my position at the Arizona Department of Education, I can provide the insight into why these constructs appear as zero. These constructs within each learning domain were identified according to major themes within early childhood development, they were meant to serve as a lengthy list for analysis, not to imply that all sets of standards had to reference development according to these terms. Thus allowing multiple states to utilize the same list of constructs. In the development of the Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition, a committee of representatives of the field were identified to review each standard, research around the area of development, and make revision suggestions. Through this process, certain components and concepts were chosen to be represented in a very explicit way (i.e. "social skills with peers"), while others were left to be implicitly implied (i.e. social conventions) through the examples and strategies within the document. Since the method chosen to complete this content analysis was a word count of the explicit words within this list, the skills that are implicitly applied through reading and interpretation of the examples and strategies were not captured in this data, and thus represented by the 0%.

The original intent of this analysis, was to perform the same word count on both sets of standards. When reviewing *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards*, there are only two areas of development that have been adopted by the state: English Language Arts and Mathematics. To account for the other content areas not being adopted yet, within the English Language Arts standards, it details to teachers and practitioners that it is encouraged to create a curriculum that is inclusive of other areas of development (see

reference below). Since this thought (and non-academic areas of development are mentioned within the same comment), I decided to only analyze the English Language Arts standard. In comparing the construct information used above with the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition*, to *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards: English Language Arts (ACCRS:ELA)*, it was found to be a much more difficult process to perform a word count with the constructs. As mentioned earlier, in addressing the domain of social-emotional development, *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards: English Language Arts* state, "While the ELA and content area literacy components described herein are critical to college and career readiness, they do not define the whole of such readiness. Students require a wide-ranging, rigorous academic preparation and, particularly in the early grades, attention to such matters as social, emotional, and physical development and approaches to learning. Similarly, the standards define literacy expectations in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects, but literacy standards in other areas, such as mathematics and health education, modeled on those in this document are strongly encouraged to facilitate a comprehensive, school wide literacy program" (2013, p. vii). Due to this fact that the ACCRS are not inclusive of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development standards, the word count utilizing the same constructs as the early learning standards was not possible (the same verbiage did not appear anywhere within the AZCCRS document). Therefore, in an attempt to gain some information, an analysis was conducted utilizing broader key terminology and concepts found within this area of development. In an effort to find terminology that would provide a similar opportunity for support and alignment to the state's efforts, I again looked to the KEA ten-state consortium. Their

work suggested utilizing terminology and phrasing from Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge (Little, 2014). As stated above, within the content of the *ACCRS: ELA*, there is no portion related to social-emotional development, but some key terminology hints at the inclusion of these skills. In addition, when completing an analysis of the standards through the lens of Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge, there are multiple areas within each standard that, for the purpose of this study, will be considered executive function/ approaches to learning skills. Even with this alteration to the process of the analysis, there was little data that was produced. As a result, it was decided that the content/data within the *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards: English Language Arts* is better depicted through a narrative, because data was not frequent enough to yield a percentage.

Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards: English Language Arts standards include six main "standards" or areas of interest: Reading Literature, Reading Informational Text, Reading Foundational Skills, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. The following tables (Table 3) show each of these standards and the key phrases/terminology according to Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge found within the standards that depict first social-emotional skills, and secondly (Table 4) approaches to learning skills. Since these standards are still fairly new to the field, there is a great deal of front loading of information in the beginning of the document. For the purposes of this study, and to keep validity to this data, only the pages of the actual learning standards (outcomes) were reviewed for the key terminology.

Table 3
Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards Social-Emotional Skills

English Language Arts Standard Area	Depth of Knowledge Phrases Within the Standard
Reading Literature	"actively engage in group reading activities"
Reading Informational Text	"actively engage in group reading activities"
Reading Foundational Skills	None
Writing	"dictate" "collaboration with peers" "participate in shared research"
Speaking and Listening	"participate in collaborative conversations" "continue a conversation"
Language	"produce and expand complete sentences in shared language activities"

Table 4
Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards Approaches to Learning Skills

English Language Arts Standard Area	Depth of Knowledge Phrases Within the Standard
Reading Literature	"role of each in retelling the story"
Reading Informational Text	"determining and naming the author and illustrator", "actively engage in in group reading activities", "actively engage in in group reading"
Reading Foundational Skills	None
Writing	"tell events in the order in which they occurred", "development and organization", "collaboration with peers", "recall information"
Speaking and Listening	None
Language	"drawing on", "sort common objectives into categories", "distinguish shades of meaning"

In reviewing these tables, it is found that *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards: English Language Arts* only contained eight phrases applicable to social-emotional development, and eleven phrases detailing approaches to learning skill development. Although the use of Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge provided the opportunity to identify key terminology, the analysis (word count of this terminology), still yielded very slim results. As a researcher, I entered this content analysis with the prior knowledge that these standards reflected non-academic skills in this way. Making

reference back to my goals of the study, I wanted to perform this quantitative method to allow for discussion to be connected to state policy and how this affects the learning environment. This will be further discussed and referenced in chapters five and six.

Assessment. In regards to the formative assessment utilized in the preschool classroom, the program has elected to utilize Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG). This tool is an authentic, ongoing observational system for assessing children from birth through kindergarten. It help teachers observe children in the context of everyday experiences, which is an effective way to get to know them well and find out what they know and can do. In the state of Arizona, TSG is an optional ongoing progress monitoring tool promoted for preschool (age three to kindergarten entry). However, many preschool programs are realizing the value in the TSG tool, along with the continuum of support and learning offered, and thus adopting for their classrooms.

> Teaching Strategies GOLD is a seamless system for assessing children from birth through kindergarten. Extensive field tests have shown it to be both valid and reliable. Available online and in print, the system can be used with any developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum. Grounded in 38 research-based objectives that include predictors of school success and are aligned with the *Common Core State Standards (Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards),* state early learning guidelines (*Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition*), and the *Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework*, helps teachers focus on what matters most for children's success" (TSG Touring Guide, 2011, p. 3).

As mentioned above, TSG is grounded in 38 objectives that guide teachers throughout the assessment cycle. The objectives are organized into 10 areas of development and learning, including broad development areas, content areas, and English language acquisition. These areas are: Social-Emotional, Physical, Language, Cognitive, Literacy, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Social Studies, The Arts, and English Language Acquisition. All of these objectives have been directly aligned to the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition*.

In an effort to help make the assessment user friendly for teachers, Teaching Strategies GOLD has aligned their 38 learning objectives to state's early learning standards/guidelines, Arizona being one of these states. Therefore TSG is completely inclusive of all social-emotional and approaches to learning skills identified in the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition*. Table 5 below identifies these objectives in Teaching Strategies GOLD, showing that the ongoing progress monitoring assessment support the early learning standards, and children's development in social-emotional development (through three objectives), and approaches to learning skill development (through the inclusion of four objectives). Note they are numbered according to the list of objectives within the Teaching Strategies GOLD ongoing progress monitoring tool (social-emotional skills account for objectives 1-3, and approaches to learning skills account for objectives 11-14).

Table 5
Learning Objectives within Teaching Strategies GOLD

Social-Emotional Skills	*Approaches to Learning Skills*
1. Regulates own emotions and behaviors	11. Demonstrates positive approaches to learning.
2. Establishes and sustains positive relationships	12. Remembers and connects experiences
3. Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations	13. Uses classification skills
	14. Uses symbols and images to represent something not present

In the kindergarten classroom, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) is utilized as their assessment. DIBELS is "comprised of six measures that function as indicators of the essential skills that every child must master to become a proficient reader. The DIBELS® measures are brief (most take one minute to administer), and are used to regularly monitor the development of early literacy and early reading skills. DIBELS was designed for use in identifying children experiencing difficulty in the acquisition of basic early literacy skills, in order to provide support early and prevent the occurrence of later reading difficulties" (https://dibels.org). The DIBELS measures were developed to be indicators of the essential early literacy skills that a child must master to become a good reader. These measures include: Phonemic Awareness, Alphabetic Principle and Phonics, Accurate and Fluent Reading, Vocabulary, and Comprehension. Within the DIBELS website, the goal or purpose of the assessment is identified as "By

testing your students on DIBELS three times per year, at the beginning, middle, and end of the year, you can identify children who are "on track" for learning to read, and also identify children who may need additional instructional support to meet reading goals". Although this is a very effective assessment for its purpose, it does not measure any skills in regards to social-emotional development or approaches to learning skill development, therefore not providing any content to analyze for this research project. However, in understanding the very basis of these skills, we can assume the DIBELS assessment does incorporate these skills in an implicit way. In order to succeed at a standardized assessment, children must have skills such as the comfort level, confidence, ability to regulate their behavior, attend to the task, persist at the question, short term and long term memory, etc. These skills all fall into the areas of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development.

This chapter looked to summarize the findings detailing the extent in which social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development are framed in Arizona early learning polices, with regards to the standards and assessments utilized in the preschool and kindergarten classrooms at Daisy School District. The content analysis was guided by the work performed by the ten-state KEA Consortium, and continued by incorporating an analysis of the assessment processes utilized by Daisy preschool and kindergarten classrooms. By conducting the analysis of the documents, it was reaffirmed that the preschool standards (*Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition*) included skills of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development in great detail. The social-emotional domain included fourteen constructs which accounted for an average of 20.11% (ranging from 5% to 23%) of the entire early

learning standards document. The approaches to learning domain consisted of eleven constructs, accounting for an average of 8.9% (ranging from 4% to 20%) of the early learning standards document. However, *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards* for kindergarten did not address these areas of development. As a result, the word count had to be performed utilizing Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge, to allow for a lens in which key phrases/terminology could be identified. Still, within the entire kindergarten standards, only eight phrases were found to relate to social-emotional development, and eleven relating to approaches to learning skill development. In correlation to these findings, the occurrence of non-academic skills within the assessments utilized by each grade level reflected the occurrence within each set of standards. The preschool assessment, Teaching Strategies GOLD, included objectives around the non-academic areas of development (three in social-emotional and four in approaches to learning), whereas the kindergarten assessment, DIBELS, only reviewed academic literacy skills. Through the finding of these analysis, the initial research question posed by this study, regarding how early childhood social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development are included in Arizona policy documents (in regards to the standards for early learning- *Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* and *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards*- and the assessments-Teaching Strategies GOLD and DIBELS) was answered. Although these findings are useful in beginning to identify the early childhood learning system within Daisy School District in regards to the content covered in the state standards and assessments adopted, more needed to be uncovered to allow for a greater understanding of the overall education experience provided to children and to build upon the theoretical framework of sociocultural theory. To accomplish this,

the study looked at educator interpretations and perceptions of social- emotional development and approaches to learning skill development, as well as the environment that is created for learning. In doing so, the last two research questions of the study were addressed:

What are academic leaders' (superintendent and principal) perceptions of social-emotional development and approaches to learning in preschool and kindergarten instruction?

What are kindergarten and preschool teachers' perceptions of their abilities to support, teach and assess social-emotional and approaches to learning development in the classroom?

The following chapter will discuss the findings of the field research portion of this study, including a discussion of data more relevant to these two questions, and connect to the information presented in this chapter to build an understanding of the early learning environment and system that is created and fostered in this high academic achieving district of this case study The information found in this chapter, in regards to the frequency of nonacademic skills in the state standards and assessments utilized will serve as a support to the qualitative data described in the next chapter through a sociocultural perspective.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEWS

This chapter addresses the findings derived from preschool and kindergarten classroom observations in a high-achieving rural school district, accompanied by interviews with teachers and administrators, serving as a small case study of the concepts analyzed in this dissertation. It complements the content analysis findings discussed in the previous chapter and addresses the research following research questions:

- What are academic leaders' (superintendent and principal) perceptions of social-emotional development and approaches to learning in preschool and kindergarten instruction?
- What are kindergarten and preschool teachers' perceptions of their abilities to support, teach, and assess social-emotional and approaches to learning development in the classroom?

In order to achieve this, qualitative data were collected within one preschool and one kindergarten classroom within the Daisy school district. The observations were conducted in each of these classrooms (the preschool and one kindergarten, for a total of two classrooms), and the full-time teacher in each room was interviewed, along with the principal where the classrooms are located, and the superintendent from the district. The original intent of this study was to determine how social-emotional development and approaches to learning skills were identified within Arizona documents, as well as to uncover the interpretations and perceptions of these skills held by the local educational agency. However, through the data analysis, it started to become evident that teachers did not just perceive social-emotional and approaches to learning skills as important, they

believed in these skills so deeply that they created a culture that naturally and inherently supports these skills within their classrooms, aligning with the sociocultural theoretical framework detailed by Vygotsky, Rogoff, and Bronfenbrenner. This chapter attempts to detail this inference by organizing the findings based on observations and interviews into three main categories: the environment established for learning, the individual, and the decision making process demonstrated by teachers.

Three Main Categories: Environment, Individual, and Decision Making

The process of gathering data was an important aspect to aligning a meaning to the discussion and findings, and therefore I felt deserved an explanation to the reasoning behind adding an additional strategy of observation. The original method of data collection was to conduct a content analysis, and compliments those data with interviews from academic leaders and teachers, in the hopes of determining the system of learning that is created and implemented by the highly achieving school of this case study However, as the interviews were conducted, the answers/data gathered were extremely thin. As a researcher, I found that teachers could not describe the reason behind their classroom practices and strategies. It appeared through the interviews that their beliefs and practices had become such a natural part of their process, they found it difficult to separate themselves from the classroom and explain the thought process. These responses did not truly provide additional information that supported the content analysis in the goal of trying to establish an understanding of the learning environment and connection to Arizona policy documents created within the highly achieving Daisy district of this case study.. In an effort to describe and connect the learning environment

with the content analysis information, the goal moving forward is to interpret the data through the theoretical framework of sociocultural theory. The work of sociocultural theory is to explain how individual mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional, and historical context. Hence the focus of the sociocultural perspective is on the roles that participation in social interactions and culturally organized activities play in influencing development. Since the teachers found it difficult to explain what had become so natural to them, I wasn't able to gain the data needed to relate children's development (mental functioning) to the cultural or institutional context (as stated in the explanation of sociocultural theory above). To gain a better understanding of the social interactions and organized activities within the early learning environment at Daisy school district, I decided during this study to slightly alter my methods, and add classroom observations. Although this was a decision made during the study, these methods were explained in detail in chapter three. These observations, while limited in scope, provided data necessary to identify repeated ideas and elements regarding ways in which educators and administrators within this case study at Daisy school district viewed social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development, and how this connects to the theoretical framework of sociocultural theory (allowing the opportunity for explanation in the cultural context of the classroom and connection within the systems of learning)..

Utilizing this framework of sociocultural theory, the data were reviewed multiple times, grouped into concepts, and then into categories (Figure 6). Through the collection and organization of the qualitative data (memos from observations, and key phrases within interview responses) of this study, three main categories emerged (environment,

individual, and decision making). The purpose of the qualitative data was to address the last two research questions of the study, which looked to expand beyond what is/is not included within the Arizona policy documents, and to look at the culture of learning that is established by the educators within the early learning environment. Vygotsky, argued: "The social dimension of consciousness is primary in time and in fact. The individual dimension of consciousness is derivative and secondary" (Vygotsky, 1979, p. 30, cited in Wertsch & Bivens, 1992). From this perspective, mental functioning of the individual is not simply derived from social interaction; rather, the specific structures and processes revealed by individuals can be traced to their interactions with others. From this perspective, as learners participate in a broad range of joint activities and internalize the effects of working together, they acquire new strategies and knowledge of the world and culture. Typically this has been illustrated by examining the interactions between individuals with disparate knowledge levels; for example, children and their caregivers, or experts and novices. However, as Tudge and Scrimsher (2003) note, Vygotsky was not only interested in what more knowledgeable others brought to the interaction, but also in what the child himself or herself brought to the interaction, as well as how the broader cultural and historical setting shaped the interaction (p. 21).

In contrast to prevailing views of his time, in which learning was regarded as an external process and development an internal process, Vygotsky was concerned with the unity and interdependence of learning and development. For example, he was critical of Piaget's theory in which "maturation is viewed as a precondition of learning but never the result of it" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 80). In contrast, Vygotsky proposed:

> Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and with his peers…. learning is not development; however, properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning. Thus learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions. (p. 90)

In support of this perspective, Vygotsky (1978) introduced the construct of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) as a fundamentally new approach to the problem that learning should be matched in some manner with the child's level of development. He argued that to understand the relationship between development and learning, two developmental levels must be distinguished: the actual and the potential levels of development. The actual refers to those accomplishments a child can demonstrate alone or perform independently; in contrast to potential levels of development as suggested by the ZPD—what children can do with assistance: "The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 85). The ZPD was regarded as a better, more dynamic and relative indicator of cognitive development than what children accomplished alone. In summary, productive interactions are those which orient instruction toward the ZPD; otherwise, instruction lags behind the development of the child. "The only good learning is that which is in advance of development." (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89). Hence, from a Vygotskian perspective, cognitive development is studied by

examining the processes that one participates in when engaged in shared endeavors and how this engagement influences engagement in other activities. Development occurs as children learn general concepts and principles that can be applied to new tasks and problems; whereas from a Piagetian perspective, learning is constrained by development.

In addition to viewing sociocultural theory through the lens of Vygotsky and his concept of learning is a social event, and the Zone of Proximal development, moving forward in this study, I will also utilize Bronfenbrenner's view on sociocultural theory to integrate the Arizona political pieces. This theory looks at a child's development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment. Bronfenbrenner's theory defines complex "layers" or "systems" of environment, each having an effect on a child's development. "This theory has recently been renamed "*bioecological* systems theory" to emphasize that a child's own biology is a primary environment fueling her development. The interaction between factors in the child's maturing biology, his immediate family/community environment, and the societal landscape fuels and steers his development" (Paquette & Ryan, 2001, p. 1). Changes or conflict in any one layer will ripple throughout other layers. To study a child's development then, we must look not only at the child and her immediate environment, but also at the interaction of the larger environment as well.

In specific relation to this study, the microsystem will be referred to most often. This is the layer closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact. The microsystem encompasses the relationships and interactions a child has with her immediate surroundings (Berk, 2000, p.12). Structures in the microsystem include family, school, neighborhood, or childcare environments. At this level,

relationships have impact in two directions - both away from the child and toward the child. For example, a child's parents may affect his beliefs and behavior; however, the child also affects the behavior and beliefs of the parent. Bronfenbrenner calls these *bi-directional influences,* and he shows how they occur among all levels of environment. The interaction of structures within a layer and interactions of structures between layers is key to this theory. At the microsystem level, bi-directional influences are strongest and have the greatest impact on the child. However, interactions at outer levels can still impact the inner structures.

Utilizing these views on sociocultural theory, transitioning into the findings of the qualitative data, and then into further discussion, rather than simply detailing the perceptions educators held, and the strategies, activities, climate, etc. observed within the classroom, I sought to construct understanding of the qualitative data c by adopting a theoretical framework of sociocultural theory, allowing me to describe the culture of learning that was observed in this case study

As mentioned above, through the collection and organization of the qualitative data of this study, three main categories emerged. In this chapter, I seek to not just identify and explain these three main categories, but to also discuss the concepts that lead to developing each category. This allows for a more detailed explanation of the data uncovered, specifically what is meant by the idea that a *culture of learning was established*. The following sections will discuss these three main categories, along with the associated concepts, by detailing related literature, processes of data collection, and when applicable, direct quotes and observation notes.

When appropriate, additional figures are included in this chapter to provide further explanation of the qualitative data. Teachers and children have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

The concepts that are listed to support the three main categories are not meant to be comprehensive of all the data collected, but simply to represent what repeatedly appeared in the data, and therefore became influential in leading to the creation of the categories. To build a deeper understanding of the message uncovered through this data, each one of these concepts will be discussed throughout this chapter. The following figure (Figure 6) was created as a key and representation of the three main categories and concepts within each that emerged from the observations and interviews conducted within this case study at Daisy school district..

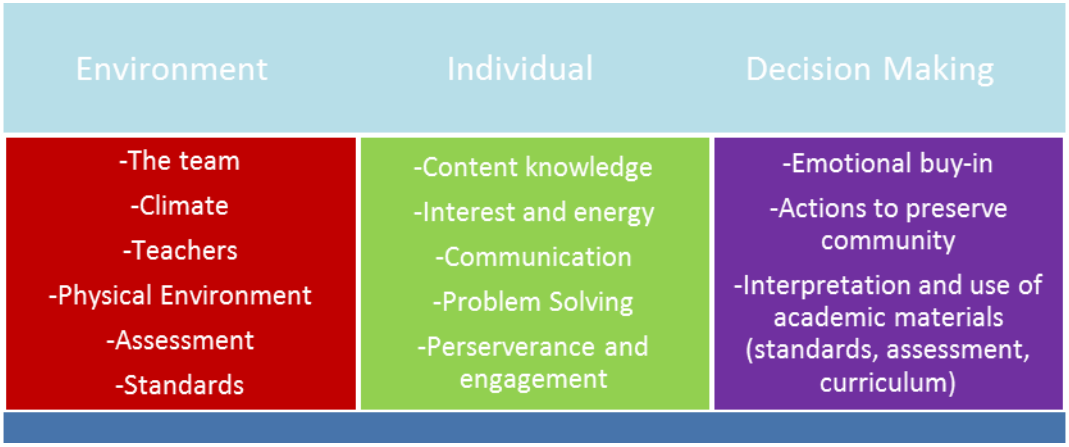

Figure 6: Three Main Categories.

Metaphoric Representation of the Relationships among the Environment, the Individual and Decision Making

When attempting to explain and apply sociocultural theory, it becomes challenging in some ways to express through the written word, because the basis of this

theory is interaction and social experiences. In lieu of this, I have provided multiple figures to help supplement a visual explanation/relationship. Figure 7 is a graphic model that will be described in further detail, but may stand as a representation of the connectedness of the main ideas (environment, individual, and decision making) from reviewing the data through the lens of sociocultural theory. It serves to provide a visual representation of the discussion of the theory and components, in hopes that introducing this image may help in conceptual organization of the ideas and provide a vocabulary for discussion.

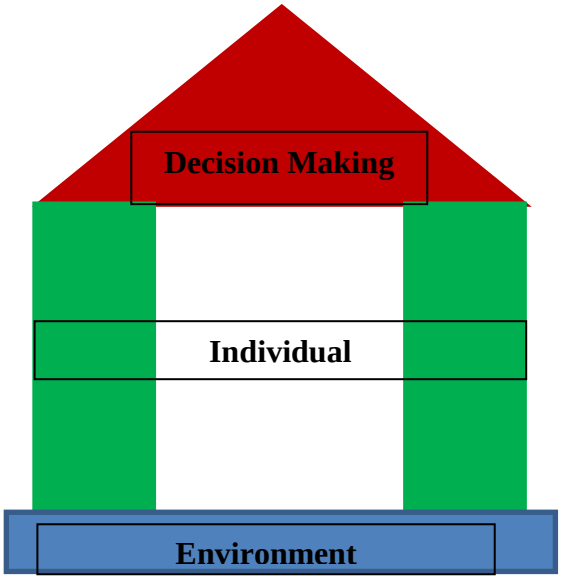

Figure 7: Metaphoric Visual Representation of Relationship and Connection of Main Ideas

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The blue *foundation*, indicating the "environment," represents people as well as the physical environment, ideas, values, and the climate that is created as a result. The green pieces, showing the *supporting architecture* are representing the "individual", which symbolize the roles, engagement, and communication the individual teacher provides to build upon the foundation. Finally, the red piece, the *roof*, represents

"decision making." In other words, the components of the environment and how they fit together through interpretation and inclusion, which informs and "covers" all components within the classroom. All of which are required for effective teaching and interactions. The following sections further clarify how this model was derived from the data analysis.

The Environment. The environment in which social emotional development arises is the foundation of the dynamic. In Figure 7, the environment is represented by the blue foundational rectangle. The environment that supports social- emotional development and approaches to learning skill development includes physical properties, people, curriculum and standards, but there may be other environmental puzzle pieces that contribute to the influences on the inclusion and specific focused attention on this domain, including ideas, images, values, and so on. The environment includes and determines the space, materials, opportunities, skills, styles, beliefs and traits unique to every early childhood space that are needed for effective development of the child.

The most powerful data for the importance of the environment to be depicted as the foundation of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development stems from the idea that children who are not comfortable in the classroom rarely engage with others or in the learning experiences. As noted by the National Head Start Association:

> Social emotional development is a fundamental part of a child's overall health and well-being, as it both reflects and impacts upon the developing brain's wiring and function, and is sometimes called early childhood mental health. It spans from how children interact with others to how they manage or cope with adversity and stress. Social emotional development within the early years of life sets a

> precedent and prepares children to be self-confident, trusting, empathic, intellectually inquisitive, competent in using language to communicate, and capable of relating well to others (NHSA, 2005, p. 1).

While the standards and the curriculum are part of the environment, teachers interviewed understood the environment to affect a child's non-academic skills. Both the preschool and the kindergarten teachers described the standards as their roadmap of what needs to be incorporated/taught, however, they also both expressed the environment and materials they introduce is how they get children interested and engaged in social interactions. The kindergarten teacher stated in her interview, "Children's personality, values, interests, and motivators remain the same, the only thing that changes are aspects of the environment. With this change, a child who was not interested, motivated, or did not feel comfortable may now become a significant participant." The change in environmental components creates a change in what is required to facilitate the foundation for children's social- emotional development and approaches to learning skill development.

The Physical Environment. The physical environment gives actual structure to social- emotional and approaches to learning skill development dynamics. It was observed in this case study that teachers provided spaces where groups may work comfortably, or it may impose isolation by lacking these spaces. Other more subtle aspects of the physical environment of the Daisy school district preschool and kindergarten classrooms also sent messages of the meaning of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development, such as the preschool teacher wearing a smock for messy work.

Both the preschool and kindergarten are arranged so that work materials are placed on low shelves where they are accessible to children, and the children are instructed on how to care for them. This generally enables children to be self-sufficient in accomplishing their tasks and supports a deep sense of independence (Turner, 1999). Children within the Daisy classrooms are largely free to choose their own activities and materials, with free choice time allocated as a majority of the daily schedule in the preschool classroom, and evident as a significant amount of time in the kindergarten classroom. "The physical environment sets the stage and creates the context for everything that happens in any setting—a classroom, a play yard, a multipurpose room. A high-quality environment welcomes children; engages children in a variety of activities; and provides space for individual, small-group, and large-group activities" (Ritchie & Willer, 2008, p.2).

In one situation in the preschool classroom at Daisy School District's primary [elementary] school, Emma, a 4-year-old girl, was making a special art project for her father who was home sick that day. She was unable to find the materials she wanted (his favorite color was green, and she felt there were not enough "green things" to use in her art). The reserve art materials were in storage spaces in high cabinets. Emma knew that she would not be able to acquire the green things she wanted from her classroom physical environment by herself, but it was evident in observing how comfortable she was, that she felt safe and independent within her environment that she had the ability and the right to access what she needed to create and learn, as these are some of the predominant messages of this preschool environment in this case study. Emma sought out Kristen, the teaching assistant, and told her she "needed more green." Emma easily directed Kristen

throughout the classroom, in and out of cabinets, exploring different green media, telling Kristen what she wanted and leading her throughout the experience. Kristen listened to Emma and went around gathering green art supplies. Emma was clearly in a position of feeling socially and emotionally strong, taking ownership of her experience and classroom, not only calmly and pleasantly leading the teacher, but deftly negotiating the physical environment to achieve her vision.

Emma appeared to be familiar, comfortable, and confident in her classroom. Because not all of the materials were available, Emma knew how to designate the task of retrieval to a teacher. In a democratic classroom environment, this dynamic is accepted and valued and indeed, the interaction was calm and pleasant, with Kristen enjoying helping and Emma appreciating the help. In this example, the physical environment sends persistent messages of independence and freedom in creativity, and when the child was not able to accomplish this, she used her social skills to work with a teacher to realign the supplies to support the original objectives of the physical arrangements.

The Team. The foundational piece that represents the environment stands for many roles and factors. Some pieces are the roles and personalities of the children and the teachers, who are all very active participants in the accomplishment of all children's development, and highly influential to the shaping of each other's social and emotional development. Tichy and Bennis (2007) call these individuals "the team" as compared to "followers," which linguistically positions the participants on the same level and encourages us to think of them all as contributory to the group outcome. Since this reflects the results of the research and aligns to sociocultural theory, I will adopt their term and refer to the children who are involved as "the team."

One example that was noted during my observations took place in the preschool classroom. A four year old boy, Jason, appeared very shy and timid during whole group time. He rarely spoke to the teacher, or interacted with a peer, and appeared very disjointed in his connection to the group. In interviewing the teacher, I made a point to mention Jason and how the teacher views/addresses his engagement. During our conversation, the teacher explained that this was Jason's first week in her classroom and she has observed Jason's difficulty engaging in certain aspects of the daily routine/schedule and thus different settings of the environment. She explained her philosophy in which social and emotional development is the core and foundation in all experiences for children. In addition, detailing her plan for Jason (one that she has utilized with multiple children for individualized support, focusing on peer modeling or the buddy system. Glen Dunlap and Diane Powell (2009) explain this process, "Several variations of procedures involving peer-mediated interventions have been shown to be effective. An example is "buddy skills training" (e.g., English, Goldstein, Shafer, & Kaczmarek, 1997) which involves teaching socially competent children (peers) to interact and engage with children who have developmental challenges and difficulties with peer interactions. "The preparation involves teaching the peers to stay in physical proximity to the focus children, say their names, and continue to attempt to play and talk with their "buddies." Results from the buddy training studies have shown improvements in social-communicative interactions for all participants" (p. 2).

During another observations I was able to note that Jason's demeanor and engagement had changed, the environment of the classroom appeared to be a place he was excited and eager to interact with. The dynamics with the other children

(particularly with his buddy), knowledge base, materials, the physical space of the classroom, teacher, and pedagogy all changed within a week. Jason had started engaging in free choice play activities in multiple different center areas, took on leadership roles in some of the dramatic play experiences, he spoke up and offered ideas during whole group time, and generally had a positive, smiling attitude throughout the day. In addition, I could observe Jason's buddy blossoming in his social-emotional development, showing himself as thoughtful, intelligent, patient, and displaying a high level of emotional intelligence with statements that proved he was aware of his role in helping Jason (i.e. using Jason's name, giving him toys, asking where and with what he wanted to play). It appeared as though this was an extremely effective pairing and both children appeared to be genuinely enjoying themselves as well as the environment.

In a conversation with the preschool teacher, I shared my observation and expressed how well it appeared to be working. The teacher explained that this was a strategy she was shown by her mentor teacher years ago, but continues to work with every group of children she has taught. "Children need to feel safe and that this [the classroom] is their space. Sometimes they come to me without the social skills needed to allow them to do this. Pairing them up with a buddy helps to show them they aren't alone and they have an immediate friend. It is amazing to see how quickly this resonates with some children, and the impact it has on their comfort level." Was Jason a different child from the week before? Of course not. It was not the child who physically changed, it was the environment that was different—creating a new sense of safety, comfort, and engagement through intentional experiences offered and use of the components of the environment (including peers). The teacher's choice to be flexible in teaching style and

implement a buddy system allowed for Jason to realize how he fit into the environment and provide opportunity for social interactions and learning experiences. The preschool teacher's choices had positive results and interpretations of the components of the preschool classroom and supported the culture of learning, and providing children with a positive system of learning. This way in which the environment was presented to the child resulted in the ability for all children to move freely throughout the classroom, have opportunities for social exchanges, and interact with the materials and learning experiences set forth by the teacher.

Climate. Many layers of climate form parts of the environment which supports social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development. This climate includes over-arching norms that were communicated from pedagogy, educational philosophies, and the micro-culture of experiences that children have with the teacher and other children in the classroom community, all of which have formed from their relationships with each other. The theoretical framework of sociocultural theory offers a way for this very abstract thought to be explained: children's individual development relies on the cultural, institutional, and historical context, and so the perspective of reviewing the observations in this case study should be looked at in the perspective of participation in social interactions and organized activities of play. The climate at Daisy preschool and kindergarten was representative of this theory because they offered multiple opportunities for play and social interactions.

One example of this sociocultural experience observed in this case study, is a pedagogy that views the teacher as an assistant to child-centered learning (supported through observations of the teacher-child interactions (both preschool and kindergarten),

as well as interview responses from both teachers). I have referred to my position at the Arizona Department of Education, and the experiences and prior knowledge it provides, multiple times throughout this study. In interpreting the data derived from the observations and interviews in this case study, I could not help but relate it to experiences I have seen throughout the state (both positive and negative). The high levels of freedom of choice in the Daisy preschool learning experience supported many more opportunities for children to find a way in which to feel socially accepted and supported and find opportunities of engagement. With children given more control over their environments, they were better able to create dynamics that supported their engagement with their peers and teachers. When compared to my experience with other preschool classrooms throughout the state, this is definitely not the norm. It is a unique finding and realization that the teachers here at Daisy school have been able to adopt a sociocultural theory of learning in which children are experiencing a climate of learning that truly reflects their choices and are developmentally appropriate.

From my experiences, I have found that, in general, the more restricted the environment, the fewer children were able to fit and assume an emotional bond to their classroom and learning experiences. However, when I have observed children having the freedom to find situations and arrange environments that are good fits for them, they are able to engage in experiences that encourage such skills as forming attachments, developing empathy, utilizing emotional literacy, and practicing stress responses. Connecting back to this case study, in the kindergarten classroom at Daisy school, there is a *Me Corner* that children have the freedom to enter and exit as they wish. This space in the classroom is set aside from the main learning area, and situated in a back corner.

The *Me Corner* includes three soft pillows, a basket of puppets, paper and drawing materials, a music player and headphones, and a social-emotional "My Feelings" poster. When asked how children utilize this area, the kindergarten teacher responded with, "Sometimes they [children] need a place to relax or calm down. They know they can come over here and draw, listen to music, or even just lay down for a few minutes to help them." This *Me Corner* aligns to strategies to help children deal with stress, develop self-regulation, and identify their emotions. As Wardle (1999) states, "Young children have unique personalities and needs that require us to respond to them as individuals, not as members of a group. The environment must be responsive to this need. Ease of cleaning, maintenance, supervision, cost, and adult aesthetics should not detract from providing spaces children feel are designed for them. Children need to have private areas, secluded corners, lofts, and odd-shaped enclosures" (p. 38).

One of the children who were particularly successful in the classroom culture was Scott, a 4 year old preschool boy. Scott had a very large personality, and his high level of energy, movement, passion for certain learning subjects, and clear and robust voice were traits that were frequently very positive tools for his exploration of his learning experiences. However, these same traits could spill over into disruption when he got carried away by his excitement and passion. In the preschool classroom philosophy, Scott's freedom of movement, voice, and energy appeared to be inherently accepted and the teachers used gentle structure and discussion to refocus Scott, which was effective in channeling his energy and appeared to lead him to a better understanding of himself and the environment. For example, during a visit in the first round of observations, Scott was engaged at the water table. His enthusiasm was very high as he interacted with the

materials, even though he was at the learning center by himself. After observing for about two minutes, another child, Sam, joined Scott at the water table. Scott immediately increased in his excitement and physical expressions as he started showing Sam all the materials, toys, and ways in which to use them all. In attempting to show off the materials, Scott became extremely loud, spilling water, and even at one point splashed water onto Sam. Although it was apparent that Scott was excited to share his knowledge, Sam appeared to be a bit more cautious and reluctant in engaging. Scott's proximity and vivacious approach seemed to scare Sam from engaging back. At this point, the preschool teacher approached the boys, standing very close to Scott, and initiated a conversation with him, modeling how to engage Sam. Preschool teacher: "Oh Scott, I see you're so excited to share the toys with Sam here. Sam did you see this funnel? Watch how Scott uses it." [Allows time for Scott to model the behavior]. "Sam would you like to try?" [Sam nods]. "Scott can we pass this to Sam and watch what he does with it?" As the teacher was standing there engaging the two boys in the conversation, Sam started to appear more comfortable as he started participating in the center and interacting with the materials more frequently. The preschool teacher continued to stand there and watch the boys play for about another minute, then transitioned away, leaving them to engage by themselves. After her time modeling and interacting with the boys, Scott appeared to be calmer, happy to have a peer there with him.

In many of the other preschool classrooms I have visited across the state of Arizona (utilizing a more teacher-centered environment and culture) Scott's expressions would not be tolerated, as they would have been perceived as challenging, uniformly disruptive, and possibly confrontational. However, when provided the support of

modeling, as well as given the opportunity to engage in hands on experiences, as the preschool teacher in this case study did, Scott then became more talented and sensitive in working with peers. Scott was well liked by both teachers and children; he showed very sophisticated social capabilities, quickly learning and adapting the behaviors modeled. His fit was highly dependent on the culture of the classroom, which accepted his style and skills.

In addition, the classroom climate did not include punishment or rewards as options for teachers to influence behavior, and this shaped the interactions of children. It was a climate that did not utilize shame, punishment, or bribery to influence the children's actions. The teachers strongly felt that one of the most successful ways of influencing behavior was through an understanding of social- emotional development, and adopting behavior management versus discipline, which was integrated in the classroom by building a sense of community, appreciating each child, seeing behavior as a combination of filling needs, and patience with development. It was observed and noted, in almost every observation round, rather than rely on the concept of punishment and rewards, teachers took the time to model and scaffold the behaviors. For example, the preschool classroom incorporated the Center for Social Emotional Foundations Early Learning (CSEFEL) *Solution Kit*. The *Solution Kit* consists of a 9 cue cards, with a problem solving strategy on each (picture and phrase). The following strategies are included in the kit: Get a Teacher, Ask Nicely, Ignore, Play Together, Say "Please Stop", Say "Please", Share, Trade, and Wait & Take Turns. It was observed during the final round of observations, a child utilizing this kit: Alma wanted to play with the doll that Millie had in the Dramatic Play center. Alma asked to play with the doll, but Millie

responded with no. At this point in the observation, Alma went to the preschool teacher and proceeded to tell her that Millie wouldn't let her play. Rather than solving the problem for the children by providing the responses, the teacher directed Alma to go get the solution kit. Alma retrieved the kit [ring with the strategy cards] from the whole group circle area. The teacher than accompanied her to the Dramatic Play area where they joined Millie. The preschool teacher began the conversation by stating, "Millie, Alma would like to join you and play with the doll too. I bet we can find a way that both of you can play. Alma what solution would you like to try?" Alma then pointed to one of the solution cards, "Play Together." The teacher modeled this choice by stating, "Play Together. Good choice. Millie would you like to play with the doll together with Alma? I bet you two will think of some really great ideas!" Millie then nodded, and she and Alma started playing in the Dramatic Play center. Although Millie did not hand Alma the doll right away, in continuing the observation, both girls interacted with the toy during their time within the center. The lack of punishment and rewards system (which depends on a teacher-as-authority and power as leadership model (Kohn, 2006) appeared to contribute to an atmosphere of problem-solving and social understanding. Children frequently engaged their teachers as mentors in problem solving (which is discussed further in the next sub-category of "Teacher" in regards to tattling) and the children often were engaged in a high level of social understanding as evident by choosing their own solution (from the kit).

Although the previous example of the climate of the classroom was centered on the preschool classroom, this importance of creating a classroom climate similar to this was also observed in the Daisy kindergarten classroom. One such example also relates to

behavior and behavior management, and how relationships were enacted by children as a response to the values and expectations projected by a punishment/ rewards free classroom. This was evident in the "*penny jar*". The *penny jar* was a clear glass Mason jar with a cup of pennies next to it. When children felt they had accomplished an act of goodness, as defined by their own standards, they would quietly add a penny to the glass jar. The glass jar slowly collected these emotionally meaningful (but ultimately anonymous) good deeds that the children felt they had accomplished, and children watched the jar fill with pennies of goodness that was happening in the classroom, reflecting their collective accumulating social growth.

In one instance, I witnessed Dee, a 5 year old girl, voluntarily and kindly lead a new child through the classroom's routine of preparing to go to lunch– cleaning up center work, washing hands, grabbing lunch boxes, et cetera. She instructed the other child on using the soap dispenser, she encouraged him to put the center materials away in the correct spot, and when he needed help, she helped him. Once she saw him line up, she smiled at him, and then headed to her own spot in line. As she wandered to her spot in line, almost as an afterthought, she quietly went over and put a penny in the jar and then assumed her spot in line. I am quite sure I am the only one who watched the interaction, and Dee never sought her teacher's approval or recognition, nor did she tell anyone about her penny. Dee's interaction in the event was respectful, helpful, kind, sensitive, and beneficial to the other child and ultimately the classroom community. This event elegantly describes how this classroom environment communicates and supports social - emotional values and how children are able to independently recognize the values of the classroom climate without enforcement or direct instruction.

Teachers. The teachers' personal interpretations of social -emotional development and approaches to learning skill development, how they view themselves in the classroom community, and the ways that they promote or intentionally individualize support of this development all affect the position, depth, actions, and values that are important components of the environment of children's social- emotional development and approaches to learning skill development. "Healthy social and emotional development refers to a child's emerging ability to: experience, manage, and express the full range of positive and negative emotions; develop close, satisfying relationships with other children and adults; and actively explore their environment and learn" (NHSA, 2005, p. 1).

In this case study, teachers' modeling of these skills for children was most visible in times of conflict. One dynamic that frequently created conflict in the kindergarten classroom, requiring specific modeling of social interactions, specifically problem solving, were issues of limited resources. This was expressed in concerns such as, "She is in my chair," and, "Joey won't share the crayons." Children of this age are very concerned with ethics, and they also view the world in black and white, not yet able to see the many shades of gray. They often do not have a full understanding of empathy and the positions of others (Hyson, 1994). Conflicts often arose when the needs of resolving the situation were more than the skill sets of the team members could accommodate, and teachers were asked to intervene. There were multiple times through the observations in which this concept was noted. Therefore, in hopes of making note of it, and allowing the area of problem solving and behavior management to support the category of *teacher*, I will review it as a general discussion, rather than include multiple smaller examples.

Interestingly, it was frequently the children who already had strong social skills who were the first to employ teachers to help resolve conflicts. Often when viewed superficially from outside the subtle dynamics of early childhood interactions, this may be thought of as tattling. However, tattling is more than a bid for power or manipulation. In line with Alfie Kohn's classroom community philosophies, both the preschool and kindergarten classroom at Daisy did not institute punishments or shame, but viewed disruptive behavior as need based. Teachers attempted to mentor children through recognition of those needs and in problem solving, for example the *Solution Kit* in the preschool classroom (mentioned above). This even continued to be apparent in the area of tattling. Rather than viewed as a negative, and an annoyance to teachers, in the early learning environments at Daisy school, tattling was often used to employ teachers as leadership models, mentors, problem solvers, and peacekeepers.

Messages from the teachers regarding safety, fairness, justice, and organization presented as class rules appeared to be deeply understood by the children as social values, as the children carried them out without a prevailing structure of enforcement. The tattle was often from a child unable to interpret or materialize these values because of their limited understanding and skill sets with which to collaborate with others. Their tattle was really a request for adult intervention. The teacher's response to the tattle helped to clarify the social messages and values on which the classroom operated, as children would essentially be asking the teacher questions about fairness, justice, and solutions. This shaped the culture of the classroom. The teacher's authority came from the children's acceptance of the teacher as being their interpreter of social expectations. As an interpreter who assumes a stance of problem solving mentor when presented with

tattles, the teacher's messages to the children were embedded in a framework of values (as opposed to power) that were the driving force of behavior expectations, modeling, and the foundation of social -emotional development and approaches to learning skill development. The children appeared satisfied when the situations were resolved in accordance with values of fairness, justice, and compassion. Tattling also did not hinge on punishment, as punishment was not a possible outcome in this classroom, yet tattling existed. It is possible that children who seek punishment of others as a result of tattling are actually seeking justice but are struggling with limited understandings of the possibilities of alternative outcomes as well as social and emotional understandings.

In sum, children who were invested in learning and interacting with the social values in the classroom would employ the most skilled individual who was also an authority in interpreting those values – the teacher – when others' actions were unclear to them or they perceived them to violate the classroom values systems. The teacher became a powerful shaping force in helping children to understand they were part of the environment, and in fact this was their environment in which they belonged to and therefore took ownership in.

It is understood at Daisy that the *penny jar* and the view of tattling are unique approaches to behavior management for young children. However, in interviewing the site principal, it was evident the support is reflected through all administrators. During the principal's interview, she stated "Children cannot be afraid to engage and learn naturally in their environment. At this age [preschool and kindergarten], this is the first time they are being exposed to situations, rules, responsibilities outside of their comfort level. It is our teacher's role to guide and mentor their understanding….usually done

through modeling. If we use harsh punishment, or embarrass children, they will not feel comfortable to repeat the positive behaviors they see". While the stereotype of a tattler is a power-seeking child who is disliked by his or her peers, this was not the case in the kindergarten and preschool classrooms at Daisy. The children were not fearful of punishment as a result of conflict or seeking the teacher's help. The teacher's self-identified role in mentorship and equity in problem solving was informative of the social and emotional development of children as they attempted to utilize the words and strategies they learned from the teacher in other situations. The tattler was often a child who was particularly sensitive to the emotional tone and possibilities of resolution and deeply committed to fairness and ethics.

The Individual. Referring back to the beginning of this chapter, the idea of describing a very social process of sociocultural theory is difficult in the written word. In continuing the goal of providing visual representations, the category of individual will reference "gears" and how these areas can be flexible and fit within each other. Participation from an individual as a team member is dependent on his or her fit in the environment and the social space. For participation in the social space, it was observed in this case study that the child must first fit in the dynamic as a whole. He or she must be able to feel an emotional stability, connect with the situation and also have the flexibility to fulfill the requirements of participation in the situation at hand. From this, entering the social interactions becomes a possibility.

However, a child cannot assume a position of social engagement if he or she does not have the potential for fit in the group and the flexibility to meet the needs of the group. Building on Figure 7, the children must be able to use the environment as a

"foundation" first, and to assume an interactive role, they must have the desire, flexibility, and interest as an individual to engage and persevere.

Organizations, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Head Start Association have provided literature that focuses on the child as "an individual" and strategies teachers needed to engage in to account for such. "Developmentally appropriate practice, is an approach to teaching grounded in the research on how young children develop and learn and what is known in effective early education. DAP involves teachers meeting young children where they are, both as individuals and as part of a group" (NAEYC, 2009, p.2). The National Head Start Association allows lends to this discussion by stating, "It is important to remind parents and teachers that every child grows and develops differently. Some of these foundational skills may come quite easily and will only need to be reinforced with praise, while other skills will need to be purposefully modeled, taught and practiced. This is the challenge of purposeful teaching and recognizing each child as an individual– making sure that the child's emerging social emotional needs are met by: modeling age appropriate social-emotional behaviors for the child. If they have nurtured a caring, responsive relationship with the child, the child will want to imitate these behaviors; encouraging emerging social-emotional skills to ensure that these important behaviors continue to be used; and teaching and even practicing social-emotional skills that might be more difficult to master – like healthy adaptations to cope with adversity or stress" (2005, p. 2). In relation to sociocultural theory, roles within the social and emotional development dynamic do not inherently reside with the individual child, but are derived from the environment as they interact, engage, and observe the behaviors with others. Skills or traits are needed by the

environment that supports the social interactions, and children's potential to develop these skills. In addition, the terrain and shape of the learning space has many requirements for effective learning, engagement, and energy. Multiple individuals may enter this space to assume roles related to the multiple requirements, creating variations of shared and distributed dynamics (social interactions and experiences). The following explores the contributions of the individual in shaping these experiences as a team member and also flexibility as it applies to the overall learning opportunity.

A representation of the individual is illustrated in Figure 8. The black circle is equivalent to the blue space in Figure 6 and represents the environment – the materials, climate, team, skills, traits, styles, knowledge, et cetera needed for effective social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development in the situation, viewed as a landscape or physical space required for effective learning within sociocultural theory. The gears represent the child, teacher, and peers in this case. Fit is the quality of the connection between the people and the environmental components is related to the quality of how the gears fit and move together. Flexibility is the potential for individuals to apply their skills and abilities to meet the needs of social-emotional and approaches to learning requirements and is represented here by the concept of the gears "stretching" to cover the black environment space.

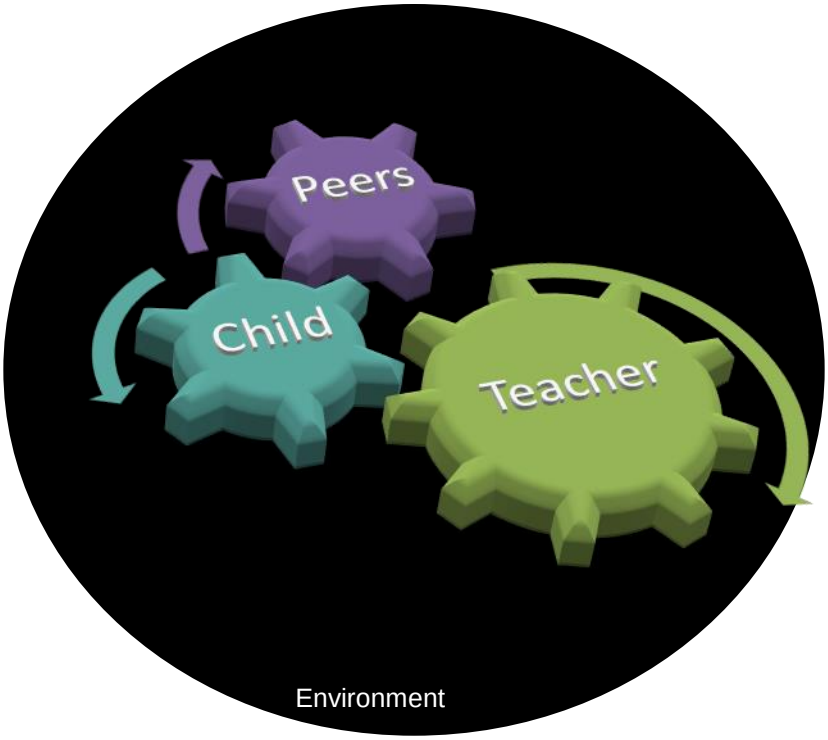

Figure 8: The interactions of individuals in the environment

Some children are more broadly successful at social skills and assume it frequently and with great skill. These are children that have often been described as "outgoing," or "social" and have been the subjects of interest and study. However, I contend by grounding my discussion in a sociocultural theory, that this is not because they are inherently better at social skills, but that they fit well with many pieces and have broad mastery of diverse skill sets and interests that support a high level of flexibility needed to fill requirements of many social interactions and settings. In general, children who have broad and diverse mastery of skills and interests can fit in many arrangements and assume a variety of social interactions and roles. Children with more specific interests or more limited social-emotional competence do not have the comfort level to

actively seek engagement, will not fit as well in many groups and will have less flexibility to cover the requirements of social interactions.

When we discuss social- emotional development and approaches to learning skill development, especially in relation to sociocultural theory, it is key to remember that in an early childhood setting, more than one person engages in that experience at the same time (Figure 8). As Rogoff (2003) states, "children's thinking is integrated with and constituted by contexts, collaboration, and signs and cultural tools. Views should focus on the participation of the child within an activity and how this participation transforms an activity, the children's collaboration and relationships with others, and on cultural/institutional/historical factors" (p. 48). Generally speaking, individuals involved in group interactions can develop their social and emotional skills at the same time, depending on what is being asked of them and how they choose to apply their flexibility. This is the benefit and true goal of teachers remembering children as unique individuals. Referring back to Figure 8 and previous discussion in this chapter, it is imperative for the teacher to develop and provide a successful and engaging environment. From here, treating each child as an individual "*gear*" in which the teacher has the power to fit with the *gear* (through respect and understanding of their individual characteristics), move the *gear* through their motions (modeling, support, intervention), and guide children to interact with the other *gear* of their peers.

A discussion of the nature of fit and flexibility will at some level merge with an exploration of the terrain of the learning space. Areas in which fit and flexibility are most frequent, influential, and important will be skills and traits common to early childhood classrooms. However, I have framed this discussion around fit and flexibility as

compared to an exploration of the early childhood classroom because (a) I believe that the nature of the environment is ultimately derivative of the specific location, (b) the terrain of the space is unique to every dynamic and changes constantly, and (c) by recognizing individuals and their fit and flexibility we are able to see areas of influence that appear to be connected with them and move with them as they interact in different social and emotional experiences and roles, therefore providing a more specific discussion to sociocultural theory. In addition, in exploring it this way, I can more easily focus on the teacher, rather than the child, and therefore address their influence. Some of the influences on fit and flexibility are described below.

Content Knowledge and Belief. In reviewing literature around the topic of non-academic skill development, the following idea was repeated in most research: a teacher who is knowledgeable about the social- emotional development and approaches to learning skill development of children, and who has a strong desire and inherent belief to foster these skills will have greater insight to their students, the environment they provide, and the ability to evaluate when additional support is needed. The teachers in this case study were firm believers in implementing processes to develop social-emotional skills and approaches to learning skill development. They both mirrored the belief that, it is their role to model and support the development of children's skills in these areas. The preschool teacher stated in her interview, "I always think of these [social-emotional development] as a set of skills, just like ABC's or Math. Children have to be taught what and how to act in the classroom and with their emotions. What's different is that I have to model these skills for them to learn, they don't just pick it up. This is why I really like the Solution Kit…it's a great way to show them how to solve a

problem with their peers". Although not inclusive of as much detail, the kindergarten teacher addressed social-emotional development by stating, "Just like the other information I teach them, these are skills that must be taught. Children start to master them through practice".

Through the knowledge that social-emotional development and approaches to learning skills are abilities children must be taught, the teachers at Daisy preschool and kindergarten appeared to be more equipped to create a learning environment that fosters these skills. Both teachers exhibited a knowledge that they must provide their children with the opportunity to observe these skills, practice these skills, and interact with others (adults and peers) to excel. This was evident through multiple interactions in the classroom, from the *Solution Kit* and *Penny Jar*, to the modeling of language, as well as the quiet areas defined in each classroom.

Greater knowledge and a strong belief in this area lend to greater flexibility. Through this case study, it was observed that fit and flexibility are exhibited in both the teachers and the children. As described via a visual representation earlier, children with limited knowledge and skill set around social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development will not fit as well in accordance to sociocultural theory and will have less flexibility to cover the requirements of social interactions. It is through the teacher's depth of knowledge and belief that the environment, climate, interactions, and support are provided to allow for the child's skills and thus flexibility to increase. As detailed above, it is apparent the teacher's in this case study at Daisy school district, have the knowledge that such skills are developed, because they are providing children opportunities to observe the strategies modeled, provide chances to practice, and

continuously help by scaffolding these interactions. For example, in discussing a problem solving, classroom management strategy, the preschool teacher is also inadvertently explaining how her depth of knowledge supports children in their social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development by stating, "It's a great strategy to use. It takes children a little to catch on and learn how to use it [*Solution Kit*], but once they do, once they've seen me use it and interact with the solutions, you can see them become more independent, figure things out with each other, and really take ownership of their experiences."

Interest and Energy. A component of understanding reflected by the field (observed through my interactions and work at the Arizona Department of Education) is that a teacher who brings new and interesting ideas to the group presents possibilities that shape the dynamic and garners the attention and interest of the children. This idea contributes significantly to vision and facilitates fit and flexibility in the potential for scaffolding social and emotional skills. When new ideas were exciting and intriguing to the group, children are more likely to express an interest and initiate engagement. In reviewing memos and notes from the observations in this study, many made note that positive social gestures and expressions provided by the teachers, inspired children to join in, thus facilitating fit. My sensitivity in recording these data was informed by symbolic interaction theory, which studies both verbal and non-verbal interaction dynamics (Goffman, 1959). Children who repeated actions modeled by the teachers, such as smiling, laughing, playing, were energetic, pleasant, funny, silly, creative, innovative, or mischievous (in a harmless and victimless way) found many ways to fit into social interactions. In one instance, Scott was hanging on the bathroom door handle. The

teacher reminded him that the door opens and he might be hurt if someone were to come out of the bathroom. Scott did a silly dance backing away from the door. The other children nearby watched the silly dance. Scott silly-danced his way to the group, amid giggles and smiles all around, and by the time he got there, they were all silly dancing. Another child added a new creative twist to the silly dance and Scott laughed and adopted the new move along with the others. During this exchange, the teacher came over, joined the group, and offered another silly move. In addition, she modeled how to take turns having each child offer a new move. As the teacher continued to be engaged, more children followed, until the entire class was now on the carpet involved in the dance activity. Recognizing it was a larger group, the teacher encouraged children to form a circle and initiated a "dance off," in which each child could individually or with a buddy show off their dance moves. This example of the teacher taking a child's lead, and modeling additional social and emotional behaviors, was exemplary to her fit with the environment and flexibility in scaffolding.

Communication. A teacher who actively engages in modeling and showing a child how to communicate with their peers can easily help that child fit into many environments. This also contributes greatly to flexibility since the more aware and accurate a child is in interpreting social information as well as crafting the messages they wish to send, the more possibilities a child has in assuming social interactions in diverse situations.

Children were aware that they had control of the messages they sent to others and the highly flexible children varied their modes of communication. In one instance, I observed Emma working in a small group at the water table. When she spoke to the

younger children, she gave simple and straight forward directions, offering a sense of guidance and support. When she communicated with the older children, her tone was more nuanced and complex. She sought their opinions and her directions were more complicated. Emma was aware that she needed to communicate differently with different members of her group in order to be engaged with them all. Her ability to do so was key to her fit and flexibility. At first I recorded this observation unaware of the influence the teacher may have had. However, the following week I observed a similar interaction in which a child, Kevin, was struggling in trying to communicate and engage. As I was recording, I observed the teacher come into the group and start modeling with Kevin on how to communicate and interact successfully with his group.

Kevin, a 4-year-old boy, very much wanted to be included in the dramatic play group. He was happy, social, sensitive, and playful. However, Kevin was more often observed in positions of singular or parallel play, rather than in groups with the older children, in part because he occasionally had a difficult time reading social boundary cues, which inhibited his flexibility to engage in established play. Because of this, it appeared that although the other children were welcoming of him in their groups, neither side could communicate the joining of the group. It is also possible that Kevin was in the process of learning the skills that would contribute to his fit and flexibility in emotional intelligence and communication by being a team member in a group with children who had more mastery over this area. Noting the teacher's engagement with Kevin, I would suggest the later, as she guided his interaction, scaffolding his communication and social skills. As the teacher observed Kevin standing by the dramatic play center, fiddling with a hat, she walked over and touched Kevin's shoulder asking him if he wanted to play

with his peers. When he nodded, she then called on another boy (Scott) in the center, asking him if it would be alright if Kevin came in and played too. Scott responded with a yes, smiling, and nodding. The teacher then guided Kevin into the dramatic play center, initiating a conversation between Scott and Kevin around the dress up clothes they were going to wear and the characters they would play. She maintained her presence there in the center, offering conversation pieces when needed, until the two boys were playing on their own. A good understanding and interpretation of social signals by the teacher gives a project a sense of emotional security and predictability. This was a great example of the teacher scaffolding and supporting the movement of Kevin's *gear* through modeling communication.

Problem Solving. It was also observed in this case study that children in the preschool and kindergarten classrooms who had stronger and more diverse problem-solving skills were able to assume and achieve social interactions in more situations, as having these skills contributed to fit and flexibility. Children who are only able to get others' attention and solve problems through coercive tactics were unable to solve many problems and their roles as team members were frequently short and limited. Children who were able to negotiate and think of creative solutions had more tools available to them to problem solve and were more effective and frequent team members. Reasoning and Problem solving are skills located in both the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* and *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards.* In addition, they are executive function skills that are acquired through social interactions and modeling by adults. The Office of Head Start explains, "Logic & Reasoning [Reasoning and Problem Solving] refers to the ability to think through problems and apply strategies for solving

them. Logic and reasoning skills are an essential part of child development and early learning and a foundation for competence and success in school and other environments. Children's ability to think, reason, and use information allows them to acquire knowledge, understand the world around them, and make appropriate decisions. Strategies to develop these skills include: engaging children in generating multiple solutions to problems and questions; engage children in the scientific method of asking questions, generating hypothesis, gathering data, etc.; play games that involve classifying, comparing, contrasting; help children verbalize their reasoning; and model open-mindedness and creativity." The kindergarten teacher was an excellent example of teaching reasoning and problem solving. During one observation, she was observed posing to children that they could go on a field trip, but first needed to raise enough money to pay for the school bus. She asked them to work in groups to determine ways in which they could raise money, determine everything they would need for their plan, how they would carry it out, etc. Although this was not a real scenario or problem they were facing, the students were not aware, and thus treated it as such. The results included a variety of events, graphs, pictures, plans, and verbal explanations and reasoning. When I interviewed the teacher and asked about this project, she explained, "It is important for children to have a real-life connection to the material asked of them. Although a field trip and school bus isn't directly information from the curriculum, it was a great way to have them work together, and use their problem solving skills to create solutions to the problem…this is above all what is important to teach."

Perseverance and engagement. Children who have developed key social and emotional skills are also the ones who are often the last to leave an activity, the ones who

are most involved with the materials and engage them most often, who show a high level of interest, and who are willing to persevere through difficult challenges without abandoning the project. Interest and the skills to persevere are part of flexibility, and children's Approaches to Learning Skills. The *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* describe this as, "Children's ability to stay focused, interested, and engaged in activities supports a range of positive outcomes, including cognitive, language, and social and emotional development. It allows children to acquire new knowledge, learn new skills, and set and achieve goals for themselves' (2013, p. 39). In the same interview as mentioned above, the kindergarten teacher included perseverance and engagement as part of her conversation around social and emotional development for children. Explaining that every word, action, and nonverbal form of communication a teacher does is observed by children, and therefore she is mindful to always stay positive and explain to her class how she is going to problem solve and try until she finds a solution. In observing the class, I noted children utilizing this same vocabulary as they completed assignments. In addition, relating to the data in the previous chapter, found through the content analysis, although not explicitly stated in the kindergarten assessments (and standards), these skills of approaches to learning [executive function] can be implicitly applied to what allow children to attend to and master the content within the activities asked of them.

Decision Making. Decision Making, represented by the top red triangle in Figure 7, is how decisions are made that affect the roles that children and teachers assume, how those roles might change in the course of the interactions, if or when team members decide to leave the dynamic, and how the group comes to agree on their vision and path. An environment may have a need for the traits or skills of a specific individual, making

an expectation that this person would move into a specific space or utilize specific materials to fill that role, but for social- emotional development and approaches to learning skill development to truly be enacted, decision making must be understood by the teacher and the administration, and utilized both intentionally and subconsciously in incorporating additional components to add to the success of children.

Again referencing my prior experience in the field through my current position, I have observed that throughout the child's microsystem of learning, multiple questions are being asked that lead to different decision makings. Examples of such questions are: Will I accept the ideas and rationale promoted by others? Do I have another idea to contribute? Do I value the outcome so that I want to participate in the teaching style? Do I think I can do better for my children by adding additional materials or experiences? Do I accept the ideas of the other people in the group? As a teacher, how do I navigate all of the various components handed to me (curriculum, assessments, etc.) to meet the needs of my children? How might I balance the curriculum needs and the emotional needs expressed by my children?

This area became extremely prominent through the interviews of the Daisy School District administration. When asked about the curriculum utilized in the preschool and kindergarten classrooms, the principal at Daisy Elementary stated, "In the pre-k she uses the Creative Curriculum through Teaching Strategies GOLD, but I know she also creates her own activities. [In the kindergarten] they have Houghton-Mifflin available. But I also know she creates different things for her students too. Honestly, I leave the decisions to them on how and with what they are teaching the material to children. I see their test scores, and I observe their classrooms, and am impressed every

time that I do. They understand their kids". Through the interview with the district's superintendent, it was expressed that all decisions on teaching strategies lie with the local, individual school principal. Therefore, if the Daisy Elementary principal is expressing that she allows her teachers to decide the strategies to utilize, then it is concluded that this area within this study rests on the teachers. In uncovering the interpretations and perceptions held by the administrators of the social-emotional and approach to learning skill development in children, it was found that they place the decision on how to teach on the educator.

Therefore, decision making moves beyond administration, and becomes not only the product of the fit between individual, environment and movement into and out of the educational space, but also interacts with the environment and the individual independently, forming a loop as the decisions and movement of the activity reshape the environment and the individuals as they continue toward their goal. Decisions made by the teacher(s) and administrator(s) have an effect on the environment, which compels the environment to respond to the action and change, which in turn affects the educational experience. This component of the learning experience requires more study; however, the following are trends that were observed.

Emotional Buy-In. Children have to feel interested and invested in the outcome of an activity to remain in the learning experience. The children observed within the classrooms of this case study showed that if they did not connect with the intellectual end product, were not interested, or had low or no participation. On the other hand, the children with strong curiosity had strong buy-in and commitment to seeing the end result.

For example, in an exploration of soap bubbles in the preschool classroom, Ellie was extremely interested. She was talking to the teacher about the bubbles, describing them, asking questions, and trying different techniques to change the bubble's shape. Her energy and enthusiasm was palpable. Other children would wander over and visit the bubble station with her and participate for a short while. Ellie was able to instruct, demonstrate, and teach the children who came into the station because of her strong interest and emotional buy-in to discovering the potential of the bubbles. Other children learned from her and contributed to the learning outcome with their discussions and attempts. In reviewing the categories established, and referencing back to sociocultural theory, this can also serve as a demonstration of the emotional buy-in that teachers must own and exhibit for their classroom and the learning experience they provide to their students. As evident in the previous chapter, the requirement of incorporating social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development are not always adequately addressed in standards or assessments (specifically the kindergarten environment). Therefore, it is up to the teacher to incorporate opportunities to do so. Through the observations and interviews completed in the case study at Daisy school district, it is evident that the teachers understand this, and hold a strong belief in ensuring this happens, aligning their teaching efforts to a sociocultural theory. *The Heart of Coaching* explains this further, "What you believe tends to determine how you behave toward others. Your behavior tends to influence the quality of the relationships you have with others, which affect their behavior. This, of course, influences the results you obtain from these people. In turn the results usually reinforce your belief in the correctness of your beliefs" (Crane, 2002, p.120).

Preserve Community. It also appears in these observations that children made choices about their actions, decisions, and participation in response to their feelings about their place in and benefit from their relationships with each other in addition to their feelings about the end goal. If a child wanted to play and/or wanted to be part of the process or end result, he or she would make decisions that supported his or her inclusion in the group. If a child was struggling with entering this relationship or opportunity, it was evident (and observed) that the teacher would enter and assist through modeling and support the child's social engagement.

For instance, Nicole and Kevin were working on a puzzle. Each had their own portion of the puzzle they were working on that they were going to combine to complete the whole puzzle. Meredith was very skilled at puzzles and was frequently in a position of leader. In this activity, she would see Kevin looking for a certain piece, and if she came across it in looking for her own pieces, she quietly gave Kevin pieces of the puzzle she knew he was looking for. It was an act that she did without looking for approval from others or even for recognition. She did not go looking for his pieces, but helped him when she could. It appeared to be an act of supporting Kevin and the project they were working on together. Meredith could have just as easily put the puzzle pieces in place herself. Instead, when she saw one Kevin was looking for she gave it to him. The relationship between them was critical to the success of the project.

Another example is when Steve was playing with a younger, smaller child. They were playing with the trucks and tricycles outside. At one point, Steve tells the boy he is "too small" to push the big truck after he sees the younger boy struggling with it. The younger boy responds, slightly hurt, and yelling at Steve that he is a big boy. Steve nods

his head, smiling at the other boy, and agrees that he is a big boy too, but also offers that "he's just not this tall" (holding up his hand). It seems gentle and kind. Steve then tries a few approaches to keep playing with the boy who is much smaller and having a hard time keeping up with the intense physical movement and the trucks. It is clear Steve is working to support the relationship with the other boy so they can play together, even if it means that the play is different than what they are doing now.

Interpretation and Use of Academic Materials. Arizona has a continuum of high-quality early learning development standards (*Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition*) that lay the foundation for school readiness and have been used by early learning programs within the state since 2003. They are incorporated into curriculum, assessments, and professional development opportunities. They further have been reviewed and aligned with Arizona's K-3 academic standards, which include the *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards* (formerly *Arizona's Common Core Standards* for English language arts and mathematics) on the domains that those K-3standards cover (primarily related to early literacy and mathematics and science). Although the *Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* explicitly incorporate the developmental areas of social and emotional and approaches to learning, the K-3 standards do not. Similarly, while the preschool assessment of Teaching Strategies GOLD explicitly incorporates these skills, although it can be implicitly applied, the kindergarten DIBELS assessment does not incorporate these non-academic skills. In preparation for this study, this was already known, and instead the goal of this study was to attempt to uncover, through the lens of sociocultural theory, the culture of learning that is established at the high academic achieving school in this case study. And then further

that discussion by incorporating Bronfenbrenner's view of the microsystem of the child and connecting the culture of learning to the Arizona policies.

Summary

Through the references to interviews and observations, the above sections detail how the preschool and kindergarten teachers incorporate such things as scaffolding, opportunities for practice and interactions, modeling, and experiences that develop children's social- emotional development and approaches to learning skill development. In addition, what was found through starting the data collection with just interviews, is that teachers hold this culture of learning at such a strong understanding and belief that it has become a natural process to their teaching experience. This was found through the results of the interviews, in which, the answers appeared to be "candid" or extremely short, and in fact, difficult for the teachers in this case study to answer. Observations were then added to allow additional data to be uncovered. These observations reaffirmed the idea that teachers had created a climate of learning (one that fostered social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development) for children, and viewed this as such a natural part of teaching (their sociocultural belief system), that it was almost impossible to uncover via interviews, and needed to be observed first hand.

In conducting the first portion of research, the content analysis, the data provided information on how these non-academic skills are identified in Arizona documents. As the qualitative portion (interviews and observations) of the data was conducted, what was realized began to extend beyond what the research questions looked to answer (interpretations and perceptions), and started to more closely align to the theoretical

framework of sociocultural theory, and began to address a culture of learning that is created in the classrooms of this case study. It started to become evident through the observations that teachers observed did not just perceive social-emotional development and approaches to learning skills as important, they believed in these skills so deeply that they created a culture that naturally and inherently supports these skills within their classrooms. I attempted to describe this culture in more detail by defining the components (environment, individual, and decision making) that contribute to its implementation.

It is important to note, the components of this theory are not static, and there is a dynamic relationship between them. There is exchange between the environment, the learning space, and the individual through the decision making performed by all parties in the early childhood context. The environment in particular is constantly shifting and changing as a response to decisions made by teachers and children as well as influences on the periphery of the dynamic. These environmental changes may influence the learning space, altering the social and emotional opportunities and interactions. These changes in the opportunities may again influence the environment as the relationships develop, illustrating the highly variable and constantly changing relationships between the components. Decision making is the driving force of these changes, as leaders and team members make decisions that change the shapes of the spaces in which they are operating by evaluating, contributing, interpreting, or responding to the events around them.

In terms of Figure 7, it is possible to imagine these relationships as the interactions between the pieces and the changes of the spaces. Some pieces have areas or

edges that are very pliable, and can easily be moved or changed to adapt to the varying conditions. Some pieces may have areas that are very rigid and inflexible, representing things that cannot be altered. When the piece belongs to an individual, this is descriptive of his or her potential for fit.

Some individuals may have *gear* pieces that can be stretched very large to cover a large area of the circle, influencing and scaffolding others by showing their broad skills and influence (flexibility). Other individuals will have less flexibility and their *gears* are firm and fixed. The learning environment will also change as these gears interact with each other, with skills and requirements for social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development being added, altered, or eliminated as needed by the changing environment. This is essential for the dynamic to function effectively. All of this movement of the pieces – fit, flexibility, stretching, squishing, moving, changing, pushing – is a result of the decision making and communication that is happening continually by all individuals.

The following final chapter will connect the results of the extent in which social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development are identified within Arizona documents with the qualitative results discussed in this chapter, by connecting the data through the lens of sociocultural theory, specifically adding Bronfenbrenner's system theory.

The intent of this data collection was to determine interpretations and perceptions, utilizing sociocultural theory as a framework and foundation for explanation. As mentioned earlier, an unexpected finding was the data moving beyond just perceptions, and into uncovering the creation and implementation of an intentional culture within the

classroom, allowing for a direct connection to sociocultural theory. Chapter six will look at how these results can be utilized to not only support children's development, but also to support teachers' efforts in the ever-changing landscape of early childhood education.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the previous chapters I described the grounded theory framework utilized for data collection and initial analysis, followed by the transition to a sociocultural theory used as a foundation for the description and interpretation of the data. In this final chapter, I will place the theories utilized in the context of relating both the quantitative data of the content analysis, to the qualitative data of the observations and interviews, along with relating to literature in the field and an explanation of the rationale for a needed focus on social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development. I will compare the three main ideas that emerged in describing the sociocultural theory (environment, individual, and decision making) and link each category back to theory and literature, which will hopefully expand the understandings of each main idea and enable the reader to place the theory in a larger context. I will then discuss how this research may inform educators in the area of social- emotional development and approaches to learning skill development in the early childhood environment throughout the state of Arizona.

This study sought to address the following research questions:

1. How are early childhood social-emotional development and approaches to learning framed in Arizona policies, standards, and assessments?
2. What are academic leaders' (superintendent and principal) perceptions of social-emotional development and approaches to learning in preschool and kindergarten instruction?

3. What are kindergarten and preschool teachers' perceptions of their abilities to support, teach and assess social-emotional and approaches to learning development in the classroom?

The original intent of this study was to determine how social-emotional development and skills and approaches to learning skills were identified within Arizona documents, as well as to uncover through a small case study, the interpretations and perceptions of these skills held by the highly academically achieving Daisy school district. Grounded theory serves as the underlining perspective in this study in the methods and data collection process.. To serve as a support in connecting the qualitative findings to the content analysis, as well as to Arizona policy, a rationale for non-academic skill development, and recommendations for research and practice the theoretical framework was centered on sociocultural theory.

The originally proposed method of data collection was to conduct related a content analysis of early childhood policy and curriculum documents and conduct interviews with academic leaders and teachers. As the content analysis began, an additional goal was pursued; namely, to align the analysis to Arizona's existing work with North Carolina and the ten-state consortium. Therefore the content analysis utilized the same constructs (identifiers) in the domains of social-emotional development and approaches to learning development, as well as identifying key terminology according to Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge. In return, the process shifted from a true content analysis, to a word count. As the interview process began, , it was found that educators were providing rather generic, or general responses that did not yield significant and useful data. Bringing my previous knowledge and understanding of the field to this

study, I felt the interview responses were not a representation of a lack of knowledge, but rather were representative of the teachers' adoption of a culture of learning that had become so natural and instinctual, it became impossible for them to separate themselves from the concept and provide a reasoning or explanation.. In an effort to ground this idea in theory, specifically in sociocultural theory, observations were added to the mixed methods approach of this case study. These observations provided the data necessary to identify repeated ideas and elements. In looking to utilize sociocultural theory as the framework of discussing this study, the data was reviewed, grouped into concepts, and then into categories (discussed below) in an attempt to provide an explanation of material that is based very strongly on one's ability to observe the interactions happening. This chapter will discuss these categories and how they formulate an observed instance of sociocultural theory and how they relate to the Arizona policy documents. In addition, especially in being mindful that this was a small case study, inclusive of an extremely small subject pool, this chapter will include possible recommendations for further research and implications in the field.

Summarized Results for Research Questions

The original intent of this study was to determine how social-emotional development and skills and approaches to learning skills were identified within Arizona documents, as well as to uncover the interpretations and perceptions of these skills held by local educational agencies, as identified in the research questions stated above. The findings resulted in the realization that teachers did not just perceive social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development as important, they believed in

these skills so deeply that they created a culture that naturally and inherently supports these skills within their classrooms. In order to capture all information, and relate to existing literature (as referenced above), the findings were organized into three main categories: the environment established for learning, the individual, and the decision making process demonstrated by teachers.

The content analysis of this project answered the first research question and identified the extent to which social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development are identified in Arizona documents, specifically those utilized by Daisy School District. As chapter 4 discussed, the areas of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development are extremely prominent in the documents designed for preschool (*Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* and Teaching Strategies GOLD ongoing progress monitoring tool). In fact, it was found that within *Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* the social-emotional skills were so prominent, that the constructs of this standard consisted of 20% of the entire document. In addition, constructs located within the approaches to learning standard accounted for about 23% of the standards document. It is also important, and interesting, to note that the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* are an interrelated set of standards. Again, making note that my position at the Arizona Department of Education allots for an existing understanding of the content analyzed in this portion of the study, I knew prior to beginning the word count that the skills identified within social and emotional development and approaches to learning skill development are described and referenced in all standard areas.

In contrast, *Arizona's College and Career Readiness Standards* for kindergarten did not explicitly include social-emotional development or approaches to learning skill development. The original intent of this analysis, was to perform the same word count on both sets of standards. In comparing the construct information used above with the *Arizona Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition*, to *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards: English Language Arts (ACCRS:ELA)*, it was found to be a much more difficult process to perform a word count utilizing the same constructs (verbiage in social-emotional and approaches to learning development). , Due to this fact that the ACCRS are not inclusive of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development standards, the word count utilizing the same constructs as the early learning standards was not possible (the same verbiage did not appear anywhere within the AZCCRS document). Therefore, in an attempt to gain some information, an analysis was conducted utilizing broader key terminology and concepts found within this area of development. In an effort to find terminology that would provide a similar opportunity for support and alignment to the state's efforts, I again looked to the KEA ten-state consortium. Their work suggested utilizing terminology and phrasing from Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge (Little, 2014). Even with broader phrases identified for the word count, explicit skills (key words) for social-emotional and approaches to learning development were very scarce within *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards*. There were only eight phrases applicable to social-emotional development and eleven applicable to approaches to learning skill development. Again, as detailed in chapter four, the assessments utilized by both the preschool and kindergarten classroom continued to represent the same pattern: the preschool assessment of Teaching Strategies

GOLD is aligned to *Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition* and thus includes measurable objectives in both areas (three in social-emotional development and four in approaches to learning). However, the kindergarten's DIBLES tool only provides and requires measures in the area of language and literacy mastery, with no explicit measures included to review non-academic skills. Although this information answered the first research question, it was truly meant to reaffirm an already held belief and understanding that these non-academic skills are included in Arizona's preschool documents, but not in the kindergarten documents. The field work portion addressed research questions two and three, situated around uncovering the interpretations and perceptions of social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development held by administration and teachers. In conducting interviews with the district's superintendent and the elementary school principal, both reflected the perception that these non-academic skills were important to incorporate. In addition, they both referenced self-regulation as an important related skill. The following are the responses recorded by each in regards to the question, "Why do you feel social-emotional skills are important to intentionally teach in the preschool and kindergarten classrooms?"

> Superintendent: "These are life skills, and we work hard at teaching our students all skills to be successful. For instance, self-regulation is what will help a child attend to the tasks asked of them as they progress through their academic careers."
>
> Principal: "For many of our students this is the first time they've been to a school setting. Helping them to learn how to regulate their behavior is key in helping them be successful and have a good experience."

The results of these interviews, as well as the classroom observation, revealed confirmation in which social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development are perceived to be important skills. In addition, the field research indicated that the interpretation of these skills resides with the classroom teacher at the Daisy School District. Further analysis revealed multiple memos explaining the ideas that the building of relationships between the teacher and students, between students as peers, and connecting the students to the larger community of the learning environment are an important aspect of the role of each of the teachers. The observations validated the teachers in this case study believing that one of their roles, was creating a culture of learning that fostered children's non-academic skills, aligning to a true sociocultural theory (i.e. Vygotsky).

From birth children possess a range of lower order mental processes, such as elementary attention, perception and lower order memory. Over time, with the mediation of signs and other symbol systems, and tools, these processes progressively are transformed into (rather than being replaced by) higher mental functions. Through speech particularly (especially egocentric and inner speech) children become less dominated by their perceptions, less impulsive and more able to control and direct their own thinking and actions, including their perception, memory, attention and other forms of goal-directed thought and activity (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 47).

For example, Vygotsky describes the act of drawing as one that also demonstrates that speech initially accompanies or follows children's actions. That is, at first children will simply draw, and then name parts of their drawing or they will describe to others the actions that they have just completed in the drawing [approaches to learning skills].

"Gradually, the naming of the subject of the drawing will shift to the beginning of the process – the intention of the drawing is announced. From there on speech progressively serves a planning and directing function, moving to the intramental, inner speech level. There has been a gradual restructuring to higher psychological processes. Thinking has moved to a higher level" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 52). The development of memory was one of the aspects of higher order thinking that was of particular interest to Vygotsky and his colleagues. In their studies Vygotsky (1987, 1997) identified two kinds of remembering. The first type he described as direct remembering (to remember without the aid of some supplementary means), while the other is mediated remembering. He contended that when children remembered with the aid of some auxiliary means (mediated remembering) they were able to perform differently on tasks. In early childhood children commonly use direct remembering, or remembering without auxiliary means. During this period the young child's thinking, which Vygotsky described as among the most basic and central mental functions, differs from that of a more mature child. As he eloquently stated, "to think is to remember for the young child, for the adolescent to remember is to think" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 309). As the child learns to use artificial means (signs or symbols) to aid memory, higher order behavior [approaches to learning skills] develop.

While this research sample was small, and focused on one high achieving rural school district, the observations indicate the perceptions held by the preschool and kindergarten teachers reflect their creation of a learning environment that is reflective of a sociocultural theory, specifically what is outlined by Vygotsky above. When asked why particular activities, areas, and strategies are utilized, the preschool teacher

explained, “Because this is how children learn. They need a place that is about them, that supports them, and makes them feel welcome.”

Even more so, as identified in the interviews, teachers created and adopted this culture of learning, without intentionally thinking about it. They were so connected to this idea, it was no longer a separate part to their process, it was in fact who they were as a teacher and individual. Their interactions with children happened so frequently and naturally, it appeared that they not only perceived these skills as being important, but now held them at such a high regard, that it created a learning culture that stimulates and supports social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development. “Research has demonstrated that such belief systems serve multiple functions, including helping the believer to filter incoming social information and guiding the believers’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward themselves, others, and groups (Levy, et al., 2012, p. 434). In describing the attributes of a teacher in a pro-social classroom, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) suggested that social and emotionally competent teachers develop supportive relationships with students, build on student strengths and abilities, establish behavioral guidelines, coach students through conflicts, encourage cooperation, and model respect and appropriate communication. The information uncovered in these observations and interviews affirms these concepts.

Connection to Existing Research

Young children’s social and emotional learning is not an isolated, independent topic but is part of the spectrum of human development dynamics and situations. As identified and organized in the previous chapter, the data collected of the theory of

creating a culture of learning in regards to social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development is best presented by organizing it into three main categories (environment, individual, and decision making). To guide the discussion of these categories, as well as identify implications for policy and future research, I will first explore further existing research. By doing so, I also will provide a rationale for social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development.

Environment.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provides a complex way of understanding how both the natural line of development and the social/cultural/historical line contribute to the development of children's thinking (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 49). Through ongoing interactions with others, together with the mediation of various signs and tools, culture (or social ways of 'being') is internalized and the lower order mental processes with which children are born are gradually transformed into higher mental processes (Vygotsky, 1997). A central principle of Vygotsky's theory is that learning occurs first on an interpersonal plane, between a person and other people while engaged in joint sociocultural (or shared social) activity. It is then gradually internalized or appropriated and transformed on an individual plane (Vygotsky, 1987, 1997, 1999).

He further explains that from birth children possess a range of lower order mental processes, such as elementary attention, perception and lower order memory. Over time, with the mediation of signs and other symbol systems, and tools, these processes progressively are transformed into (rather than being replaced by) higher mental functions. "Through speech particularly (especially egocentric and inner speech) children become less dominated by their perceptions, less impulsive and more able to control and

direct their own thinking and actions, including their perception, memory, attention and other forms of goal-directed thought and activity" (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 48). For example, in developmental progression, in drawing objects, the naming of the subject of the drawing will shift to the beginning of the process – the intention of the drawing is announced. From there speech progressively serves a planning and directing function, moving to the inner speech level. "There has been a gradual restructuring to higher psychological processes. Thinking has moved to a higher level" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 49).

The development of memory (approaches to learning skills) was one of the aspects of higher order thinking that was of particular interest to Vygotsky and his colleagues. In their studies Vygotsky (1987, 1997) identified two kinds of remembering. The first type he described as direct remembering (to remember without the aid of some supplementary means), while the other is mediated remembering. He contended that when children remembered with the aid of some auxiliary means (mediated remembering) they were able to perform differently on tasks. He declared that for children who used signs and auxiliary operations, the task required not memory so much as the ability to create new connections or new structures. "It required a rich imagination and sometimes well-developed forms of thinking. That is, the task required the use of psychological qualities that are not essential to direct remembering" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 308). In the early childhood years, children commonly use direct remembering, or remembering without auxiliary means. During this period the young child's thinking, which Vygotsky (1987) described as among the most basic and central mental functions, differs from that of a more mature child. According to Fox (2008), Vygotsky described play as an important role in the development of this more advanced memory, children's

approaches to learning skills, and therefore a significant contributor to a child's development. Vygotsky thought that adults and more knowledgeable peers enhance a child's ability to learn through play by modeling and encouraging more advanced skills. Thus supporting the decision that adults must make in understanding this development, and finding ways to implement opportunities and experiences in the classroom.

From a sociocultural perspective, Rogoff's (1998, 2003) work on the three foci of analysis provides a useful conceptual tool for analyzing research with young children. Importantly, it can highlight how children's thinking is integrated with and constituted by contexts, collaboration, and signs and cultural tools. "In this approach, rather than focusing on decontextualized individuals, as dominant methods particularly in science education research tend to do, the focus of analysis can variously be on the participation of a child within an activity and how this participation transforms during the course of the activity (personal focus of analysis), the children's collaboration and relationships with others (interpersonal focus of analysis), and on cultural/institutional/historical factors (community or cultural or contextual focus of analysis), with any one of these being in focus, while the others remain in the background" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 38). Significantly, one cannot interpret or understand any of these planes of analysis without seeing how it fits into the ongoing activity. Analyses that focus only on one of these foci (to the exclusion of others) and that present small extracts of conversations with children, as tends to occur in the dominant research methods, risk losing the multiple factors that are constituted with children's thinking. These can include the direct experiences of children, topics and issues taught at school or home or by extended family members, shared understandings (in contrast to those supposedly the child alone holds), contextually

relevant beliefs, and the importance of tools such as television, books of various kinds, songs, drawing materials, and others that frequently are integrated with young children's thinking.

Utilizing these sociocultural theories, it can be shown the environment and culture of learning that was created and has been described in the findings of this study is expressive of this theory of development. Even more, through research provided by Vygotsky and Rogoff, the rationale can be made that social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development are not only essential to children's overall achievement, but also it is the way in which they learn, attend to tasks (such as standardized assessment), provides support in academic areas of development, and in fact according to Rogoff, cannot be separated from their development in any area. Although this study does not look to create any new theories, in reviewing this research, determining this sociocultural theory of development is evident in the case study, knowing Daisy School District is the highest academically achieving school in Arizona, one can only start to wonder if the this type of culture of learning is responsible for student's academic achievement.

Individual. While there is recognition of the individual in social and emotional dynamics that extend from theories dependent on the environment to dictate the form of effective instruction, I believe that it is important to recognize the individual's contributions and perspectives as central to this skill development. Traditionally, attention that has been focused on the teacher is with trait based theories that rely on attributes of people to enact such skills, which in turn creates comfort to allow and guide the child into engaging in interactions. This body of theories explores the idea that

teachers recognize that children need to develop a set of characteristics, skills, or talents which enable them to be social and that successful interaction inherently comes from them utilizing these tools.

Using sociocultural theory, I argue that development is not derived from the individual, but is a result of a child's interaction with his or her environment and movement into and out of the learning experiences guided by the teacher. If viewed from the environment, the child is a relative constant, though certainly not a passive participant, being affected by the materials, culture, beliefs, and opportunities implemented by the teacher. "Research has suggested that teacher-child relationships play a significant role in influencing young children's social and emotional development. In studies of teacher-child relationships, children who had a secure relationship with their preschool and kindergarten teachers demonstrated good peer interactions and positive relationships with teachers and peers in elementary school" (Ostrosky & Jung, 2003, p. 3). The National Head Start Association, Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, reinforces the importance of the interaction between the teacher, child, and environment, "Providing experiences that allow children to become autonomous and independent is a general description of one of the key roles adults play in the early childhood years. The quality of teacher-child interactions and relationships impacts child outcomes in various ways in early childhood and the primary grades (ECLKC, 2008, p.1)".

The observations conducted in this study align to these statements and grounded theory. In analyzing observational data from the Daisy School District, it was noted that teachers provided multiple opportunities for the *individual* child to grow and scaffold

their skills. This was observed through items such as: multiple learning centers, interactive group activities, modeling of language, relationship, and problem solving skills, and overall engagement of children. In addition, when asked how children develop social-emotional skills, the preschool teacher responded, "by my interactions with them and modeling how to with their friends." Further supporting the idea that the preschool and kindergarten teachers at Daisy Elementary view the *individual* as spanning beyond the singular, and into the interaction with the environment, adult, and peers.

Decision Making. The complexity, diversity, and varying levels of importance of objects, people, and ideas that create the environment in which children find themselves when they are involved in social and emotional learning dynamics is reminiscent of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of nested influences on children (Albrecht & Miller, 2004; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Bronfenbrenner's initial theory (1989), the environment, is comprised of four layers of systems which interact in complex ways and can both affect and be affected by the person's development. He later added a fifth dimension that comprises an element of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This theory can be extended to model the development of an organization as well, and is particularly appropriate for describing the complex systems of a school. This model for child development describes levels of influence that exist in a child's environment, ranging from the microsystem of the child and his or her immediate surroundings of people, ideas and objects and extending to the macrosystem of large and complex influences such as politics, nationality, and culture. "The macrosystem consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture or subculture, with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources,

customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems. The macrosystem may be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 39). In utilizing sociocultural theory (Bronfenbrenner included) as the foundation to discussion for this case study, the "ecological setting" is a very useful tool in describing how the information around the Arizona policy documents is related to the information obtained through the observations and interviews at Daisy school district. As detailed by Bronfenbrenner's work, it is not only the actual physical environment that influences a child's learning, but also the varying levels of "systems" around them. Bronfenbrenner's structure of the environment provides great detail on the concept of the microsystem. This is the layer closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact. "The microsystem encompasses the relationships and interactions a child has with her immediate surroundings" (Berk, 2000, p.12). Structures in the microsystem include family, school, neighborhood, or childcare environments. At this level, relationships have impact in two directions - both away from the child and toward the child. For example, a child's parents may affect his beliefs and behavior; however, the child also affects the behavior and beliefs of the parent. Bronfenbrenner calls these *bi-directional influences,* and he shows how they occur among all levels of environment.

Bronfenbrenner's also explains that the relationships between individuals and their environments are viewed as mutually shaping. They provide the broad ideological and organizational patterns within which the mesosystem, exosystem, and macro-system reflect the ecology of human development. In addition, it is discussed within his research that "macro-systems are not static, but might change through evolution and revolution.

For example, economic recession, war, policy, and technological changes may produce such changes" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 40). This portion of his theory will be widely used in this discussion, as parts of the overall findings relate to the idea that the perceptions and implementations held by the teachers, in regards to social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development cannot be isolated into separate components and away from the Arizona polices (macro-system), but rather they are all a part of the learning experience for children. What must be uncovered by educators, is how to work jointly with the policies (standards and assessments), and provide experiences and interactions needed in order to achieve the creation of a culture of learning that fosters all skills in children.

Through the work offered by Bronfenbrenner we can see that decision making is acritical discussion in enacting any type of social - emotional development and approaches to learning skill development in the experiences of children.. An individual must want to incorporate these skill sets, make a decision to do so, and find a way to incorporate into the learning environment with or without the support of Arizona policy documents, thus connecting the systems needed for a child's learning (as outlined in Bronfenbrenner's work). This can also be connected back to the literature around environment, and the message offered by Vygotsky's research in sociocultural theory. In relation to his views on social interactions and human development, Vygotsky claimed that play is necessary to build a foundation of child development while also serving to guide the child to learn about life experiences (Powell, 2009). The teachers in this case study understood the premise behind sociocultural theory in such a way it became a natural part to their teaching method. Even further though, in relation to Arizona policy

documents, it was realized that these teachers were capable of implementing this culture of learning regardless of what is (or is not) incorporated in these policies.

Implications for Practice

The study of the social emotional learning movement, from the late 1980's until now, has revealed that there is a group of educators for whom the holistic development of children as people and students has never wavered in importance (Norris, 2003). The national movement has carefully built itself on the foundations of solid research and a measured political agenda that seeks to include the importance of standards and benchmarks of social and emotional growth of children alongside those of academic achievement in traditional assessment and curricular requirements.

The research that has been published on the topics of emotional intelligence, social emotional learning, and academic achievement has shown a strong connection between the growths of all areas toward healthy, successful adulthood. Tools for measuring emotional intelligence and its connection to academic achievement have been carefully designed and tested (Mayer & Cobb, 2000; Peters et al., 2009). Although the state of Arizona functions as a *Local Control State* (each district and learning center chooses the assessment they will utilize), the following tools are the most frequently used among programs.

The *Comprehensive Executive Function Inventory* (CEFI; Naglieri & Goldstein, 2013), published by Multi-Health Systems Inc. (MHS), is a new executive function (EF) rating scale for children and youth ages 5 to 18 years. Naglieri and Goldstein (2013) define executive functions as "a set of cognitive processes that control and manage other

cognitive processes" (p. 5). "The CEFI assesses behaviors that are associated with EF (e.g., inhibitory control, working memory), and determines an individual's profile of EF strengths and weaknesses. Test items were constructed based on the premise that EFs are involved in higher order cognition, as well as the regulation and control of spontaneous actions towards goal-directed behavior" (Goldstein, 2014, p.1). Another tool to review social-emotional intelligence is the Ages and Stages Questionnaires: Social-Emotional, Second Edition. "[the ASQ: SE-2] is highly reliable, parent-completed tool with a deep, exclusive focus on children's social and emotional development, you can quickly pinpoint behaviors of concern and identify any need for further assessment or ongoing monitoring" (ASQ:SE-2, 2015, p.1) . The Behavior Assessment System for Children, 2nd Edition Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BASC-2) is a behavioral questionnaire that examines strengths and problem behavior, including hyper-activity, aggression, anxiety, depression, functional communication, social skills, attention, and learning problems (DiStephano & Kamphaus, 2007). The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) examines initiative, self-control, attachment, and problem behaviors. "This tool was developed with professionals in the early care and education field, parents, current research, and information from American Psychiatric Association" (Buhs, 2003, p. 1). While these assessment tools are found within preschool and kindergarten programs in Arizona, the location of this study, Daisy School District, did not utilize any of these tools

Rather, as stated in the previous findings chapter, the preschool program incorporates Teaching Strategies GOLD. While this is not specifically an emotional intelligence testing tool, it does incorporate three objectives within the social-emotional

domain, and four within the approaches to learning domain, allowing for teachers to monitor children's progress in these skills. As the preschool teacher stated when asked about Teaching Strategies GOLD, "I compare my different notes I take through the year to see how my children have grown. I can also share this with parents". In connecting back to the other social-emotional/intelligence tools, an implication and recommendation for practice within the state of Arizona would be to suggest that one of these tools be utilized by all early learning classrooms across the state. The discussions provided by this research project address that the top academically achieving school district in Arizona has an early learning system (preschool and kindergarten classrooms) that perceives social-emotional development so highly it becomes the culture of learning. In conjunction, academic leaders in this program have adopted an assessment tool to account for the social-emotional component. In an effort to increase, across the state of Arizona, the quality of early childhood education and children's readiness for school, it may be beneficial to see other early learning programs adopt an assessment tool for social-emotional development, as Daisy school district did, helping to make the inclusion of this skill development more intentional in practice.

Humphrey (2007, p. 1335) states, "Education should encompass both the rational and the emotional to best prepare our children for adult life." Schools have become institutions that focus on the academic arm of education, rather than the emotional but there is now brain research and other research that encourages us to consider how emotions might play a role in improved academic success as well (Humphrey et al., 2007, p. 1335).

States and school districts nationwide have begun to work toward the establishment and requirement of attention to the social and emotional development of children within the efforts and time constraints of the school day. Yet what has seemed to be missing has been the understanding of how these skills are interpreted and perceived. The results of this study have potential for direct application in the classroom. Addressing inequities in educational opportunity is a shared vision among early childhood educators, parents and child advocates in the state of Arizona. Within this chapter, I have worked under the premise of attempting to connect the content analysis work of Arizona's policy documents to the culture of learning reminiscent of sociocultural theory observed through the case study. In addition, by connecting additional research, I looked to validate the need for this type of culture that fosters the development in social-emotional and approaches to learning skill development in a broader sense. The hope is then, others may discuss, apply, or refine the theoretical models in connection with other similar groups or actions. While no "new" theory was established here, the goal and hope of organizing and discussing this information, is to contribute to future dialogue regarding social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill development in the early childhood environment. In this case, I would hope the information found within this study be considered in connection with school readiness, early childhood education, and the goal of attaining academic achievement for children regardless of the direction of policy.

Research (OPRE Report, 2015) continues to show that social- emotional development, along with approaches to learning skills (defined as reasoning and problem solving, creativity, and confidence) is malleable and may serve as a predictor academic

achievement in children over and above IQ and socioeconomic status. Educational approaches that foster the development of the social-emotional skill set, including the regulation of attention, emotion, and stress response physiology can be expected to enhance executive function and thereby promote learning and beneficial educational outcomes (Blair & Raver, 2014, p. 1). In addition to early literacy skills such as alphabet knowledge and writing skills, there is growing appreciation for the role of social and emotional development in children's school readiness. School readiness now requires that children begin school not only ready to learn but also able to listen to instructions, sit still, be attentive, and get along with new peers and adults. The content analysis confirmed that this is realized in the preschool Arizona documents. "Social-emotional intelligence is defined as the process of acquiring a set of social and emotional skills – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making – within the context of a safe, supportive environment that encourages social, emotional, and cognitive development and provides opportunities for practicing social-emotional skill" (Cherniss et al., 2006, p. 243). "Time spent on climate-building and creating safety and belonging is considered time well spent". (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p.500). In addition, according to Norris (2003) purposeful, well thought-out actions and activities on the part of teachers can result in classrooms where students feel safe to take risks, and know they are valuable community members.

Literature also supports the idea that children's relationships with peers have implications for learning and school success (Ladd, Herald, & Andrews, 2006; Welsh, Parke, Widaman, & O'Neil, 2001). The number of mutual friends and the amount of peer acceptance has been found to predict children's achievement. Similarly, Buhs

(2003) found that rejection by peers during kindergarten was linked to children's school adjustment, and that this link was at least partially mediated through classroom participation and negative treatment by peers. In other words, children who were rejected by peers appear to be treated more negatively by their classmates and are less likely to participate in classroom activities. In turn, these children may be disengaged in the classroom or frequently off task, leading to lower scholastic performance. While relationships such as this were not observed in the classrooms at Daisy Elementary, multiple positive peer relationships were observed, in which children were highly engaged and achieving at their task.

It is likely that high-quality teacher-child relationships are linked to higher performance because teachers may invest more in children to whom they feel close and may provide more nurturance to these children. Moreover, children who feel a connection with their teacher are likely to feel more engaged in the classroom and approach school with enthusiasm. More positive teacher-child relationships have been related to children's higher academic performance (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001), classroom participation, and engagement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Ladd et al., 1999; Ryan, Stiller & Lynch, 1994), and positive attitudes about, or liking of, school (Birch & Ladd, 1997).

In addition to children's relationships with their peers and teachers, academic motivation plays an important mediating role in children's school success. Children's school liking and classroom participation are thought to reflect their motivation to learn and their goal orientation in regard to success in school (Dweck, 1989; Wentzel, 1999). There is constant evidence that school liking and classroom participation predict

academic achievement (Buhs & Laddm, 2001; Ladd, Buhs, & Seid, 2000). Ladd et al. (2000) found that children's liking of school had a positive relation to classroom participation and, in turn, predicted relatively high achievement in school, even in the early primary years.

This study performed a case study on the early childhood classrooms in the Daisy Elementary school system, which was chosen because of its academic success of being ranked first in achievement for the state of Arizona. I entered this study with a great deal of prior knowledge about what the content analysis would yield in relation to non-academic skills prescence in Arizona policy documents, as well as having experience and relatable information in regards to early learning practices and environments across the state of Arizona. Therefore, I could hypothesize at the beginning of this study that only half of the Arizona policies would include social-emotional and approaches to learning skill development. I also assumed the teachers in the case study would have found a way or method to address both Arizona policy, and children's development. New insights including observing that the teachers in this high academic achieving district had adopted a sociocultural theory to development so deeply that it became a culture of learning that was created. Young children who exhibit healthy social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment are more likely to have good academic performance in elementary school (Cohen et al 2005; Zero to Three 2004). Thus, understanding the view that early childhood programs support later positive learning outcomes in all domains by maintaining a focus on the promotion of healthy social-emotional development is a critical step to supporting children's school readiness (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2004; Raver 2002; Shonkoff 2004).

This case study provided evidence that there are academically achieving districts within Arizona that successfully balance Arizona policy documents and supports this idea of development. The content analysis provided evidence that the Arizona documents do not incorporate social-emotional and approaches to learning skills in great detail across the entire continuum of learning. The observations and interviews confirmed that the teachers at Daisy Elementary preschool and kindergarten hold such a strong belief in the importance of social- emotional development and approaches to learning skill development that they have created a culture of learning that naturally promotes and scaffolds this development. "Culture is loosely defined as 'how we do things around here'. It consists of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that both describe and guide the ways in which people interact" (Crane, 2002, p. 207). In order to create a culture in which an ideal is held in such high regard, the individuals within it must hold their belief at such a regard that this belief becomes behavior, that eventually becomes a natural part of their being (such as any other aspect to your culture). It is evident through this case study that the teachers in the early learning continuum at Daisy have done just that.

Policy Implications

Policy involving education in the state of Arizona is in the midst of possible significant change. In the last year, the *Common Core Standards* have served as a political issue across the country as opponents criticize them as driven by the federal government (Associated Press, 2015). Many organizations have formed within Arizona to support both sides of the issue. The group titled, Arizonans Against Common Core, released the following statement outlining their distaste for the standards: "Common Core

state standards are NOT state standards in the first place, and are nothing more than further federalization of our state education system" (Arizonans Against Common Core, 2013). In addition, "Arizona House is set to debate a proposal [HB 2190] that would ditch the state's new Common Core school standards and strip the Board of Education's power to adopt new standards" (Associated Press, 2015). In early March, the Arizona House of Legislation passed House Bill 2190, passing it onto the State Senate. Due to the nature of this bill, there is a great deal of uncertainty and nervousness within the education field. Even with the specific focus of this study, when asked about *Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards*, the district superintendent included in his response, "We are anxious to see if they [the AZCCRS] stick around, and how many teachers we'll lose if they don't."

However, in the midst of the uncertainty in the K-12 standards section, the early childhood unit continues to move the state of Arizona forward in the area of school readiness. As the content analysis confirmed, the Arizona documents around preschool already contribute to the incorporation of social-emotional and approaches to learning skills in the classroom. In response to the efforts to teach these skills and prepare children to be ready for school, the Early Childhood Unit at the Arizona Department of Education has initiated an *Ensuring School Readiness for Arizona's Children* program. "In early 2013, Arizona embarked on the process of developing its own KEA [Kindergarten Entry Assessment], which will be named the Kindergarten Developmental Inventory (KDI). Through the guidance of the KDI partners- the Arizona Department of Education, the Arizona State Board of Education, First Things First, and Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust- a Kindergarten Developmental Inventory Stakeholder Taskforce

was convened with the goal of providing recommendation to ADE and FTF on the process for developing a KDI in Arizona" (Fry & Little, 2013, p. 2). Although the KDI work was referenced in chapter four, as stated above, the work around school readiness within the state of Arizona expands far beyond the Kindergarten Developmental Inventory.

Along with initiating the work of the task force and creation of Arizona's own KEA, the Early Childhood Unit also created a definition for outlining what makes a child ready for school, calling it *Arizona's School Readiness Framework* (ASRF). The ASRF describes, "NAEYC recognizes that 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 (NAEYC, 2004). The commonality amongst the varying definitions establishes the expectation for a comprehensive approach to school readiness and emphasizes the role of the adults in a child's life as the key to developing readiness for school. This reflects a movement toward a more holistic view of school readiness that encompasses each of the domains of development" (ASRF, 2015, p. 5). In seeking a common definition for school readiness, Arizona has adopted a comprehensive approach to describing what readiness looks like for young children entering kindergarten. The definition of school readiness used in ASRF emphasizes both the knowledge and attributes children need in order to attend to rigorous curriculum presented in the classroom. This framework is meant to support *Arizona's Early Learning Standards*, assessment processes identified by the state (KDI), and most importantly to support the learning in a kindergarten classroom regardless of the K-12 standards adopted.

In lieu of these additional works, as well as possible changes in policy and Arizona K-12 standards, the implications for this study become focused on *what* teachers can do to support their students, regardless of the policy changes. The teachers at Daisy elementary showed through my observations that they extend far beyond the resources provided to them, and instead have adopted a culture that promotes and supports the development of children's social-emotional and approaches to learning skills. "My goal is to make my classroom feel welcoming, to build on children's skills, and to help them feel safe. Sometimes it is difficult to describe how this is done…I just do it" (Daisy Preschool Teacher). In addition, the administration makes it a focus of theirs to allow teachers the freedom to create and implement this culture, thus adding to the positive perceptions of these skills. As I have shown in the literature throughout this study, this is imperative to the development and school readiness of children. However, in regards to implications, recognizing that this culture of belief went beyond the preschool classroom and into the kindergarten classroom becomes imperative. Arizona is amidst a possibility of significant changes in regards to education. These changes can have an effect on everything from Arizona documents, to the resources provided to teachers. So how can teachers provide children the opportunity to flourish in their development, regardless of the movements happening in policy? I contest the answer is to promote across the state, in all areas of early childhood education, the depth of understanding and belief that is exhibited at Daisy School District. The culture of learning that has been created at this school district is so successful they are ranked the highest in Arizona for academic achievement. In order to create this strong belief and unique culture of learning fostered around social-emotional and approaches to learning development, administrators and

teachers must all make the intentional shift to believing in these skills and consciously looking to implement at all times. When this is achieved, teachers and children will succeed, regardless of the changes happening in policy. The culture of learning will foster learning and provide children foundational skills that will allow them to be successful against any standards document. I return to the kindergarten teacher's interview about the environment she provides:

> It is most important to provide my students with the opportunity to engage in their learning and develop all their skills. Our curriculum changes, things asked of us by the state change, but children will always learn through these things [pointing around the classroom] I provide, and my conversations I have with them.

Implications for Future Research

Although the information generated as a result of this study is based a mixed methods approach, various components of the research may specifically lend themselves to future quantitative, empirical examinations. For example, at times I suggest that things "frequently" or "often" happen. These may be areas that could be further explored with quantitative measures to provide a diversity of data to help describe the phenomena. Other aspects of this study would resist this type of measurement, as they are rooted in perceptions of significance, such as events that happen rarely but are important to the subjects or are highly descriptive of complex situations. The purpose of this study is to set forth a theoretical framework for study and discussion of social- emotional development and approaches to learning skill development. Future studies conducted on various components and using a variety of research methodologies would be welcome in

providing support or challenges to the theory, which would result in a better collective understanding of the topic.

This research study brings a few implications for future research to light. Many questions have emerged for me along the way. Some of them are centered on how we can ensure that this research study speaks for a large enough population, and others are tied to how we, as educators, can effectively develop a culture of learning that fosters these social-emotional development and approaches to learning development in children.

Increase Sample Size. I can think of three implications for future research. One is that of increasing the sample size (both in number of schools included, as well as number of preschool and kindergarten classrooms and teachers) in order to gain a larger set of data to see how that compares with these initial findings. A minimum sample size of ten is recommended, to allow the further sample populations to include schools found in both rural and urban settings, inclusive of various socioeconomic status, tribal communities, and multiple regions around the state of Arizona. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Arizona has 2,399 elementary and secondary schools (Institute of Education Sciences, 2015). Although this number is not inclusive of all preschool programs (i.e. neighborhood preschool programs, for-profit programs, in home programs) or charter schools, it does demonstrate there is a large number of early learning programs available to extend the sample size in future research. The current study was exploratory and meant to build grounded theory upon which larger scale studies could build.

Build the Belief in Individual Practitioners. A second implication for future research is to look more at the issues of the individual teacher practitioner. Because the

findings of this research study seem to be tied significantly to the educator, the questions become: What is the best way to determine how to increase positive assumptions and practices of social-emotional development among teachers? Is there an objective way to measure if the categories that create a culture of learning are evident within the classroom? Can it be determined the longevity this culture of learning has?

Is there a method of including in teacher preparation programs the discussion on how to implement a culture of learning similar to the one established at the Daisy School District, and aligned to a sociocultural theory of development? Could the categories described in this research (creating a culture of social-emotional learning) be encouraged and grown in other classrooms throughout the state as a result of training and professional development? Designing research to answer these questions would give valuable information that could be used in the planning, training, and development of both in-service teachers and teaching candidates.

Embed in Teacher Training Agendas. A third implication for future research is getting it to fit into current teacher training programs and professional development agendas for in-service teachers. Through this study, particularly teacher's responses, the understanding of how to create a culture of learning is realized through time and practice in the field, rather than focused course work or provided professional development. The content analysis of this study showed that social-emotional development and approaches to learning development is not incorporated in Arizona documents, thus resting the task of including this development on the teacher's perceptions and understandings. Although this study included a small sample size, the data was able to show how effective teachers can be in developing children's non-academic skills when a culture of learning, that

supports these skills, is created and fostered. Therefore, I suggest that future research should look at further answering the following questions: Is there enough evidence supporting social-emotional development in the lens of school readiness? Further, is there enough research to show the importance of developing these beliefs so strongly that a culture of learning is created? Then, where does it rightfully fit in the training process: as a curriculum, a classroom management theory, or a philosophy of education? Based off this study, I predict that further research will continue to support social-emotional development and approaches to learning development as foundations to children's school readiness. In addition, I also predict that as this further research is conducted, released, and discussed in the field of early childhood, the realization will be formed that more support needs to be placed on how to create a culture of learning. Thus more intentionality will be formed in creating and implementing professional development for teachers on this topic.

Summary

Through this case study with a content analysis, the following was reaffirmed: the relationships formed with children and the culture of learning created has a significant impact on children's response to learning, and (although only implicitly determined) their overall academic achievement. As eloquently stated by Jean Piaget, "The principle goal of education in the schools should be creating men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done". All educators should be given the opportunity to help develop their understanding of sociocultural theory and the belief that social-emotional development and approaches to learning skill

development serve as the foundation to a child's success. That the three components outlined in this study (environment, individual, and decision making) are all influential in creating successful learning opportunities. Further, to build the belief in such a way that the culture of learning created is the best the child has encountered. This study looked to establish points for conversation, and the beginning of this dialogue. Through additional research, the field can encourage further development and growth. As an educator, and practitioner not only in the field, but also in relation to policy, I feel then, and only then, will we start to address true school readiness and start eliminating the achievement gap.

Researcher's Reflection

As I reflect on not just this dissertation journey, but also the journey of a career in education, I think back on what seems to be most important. We, as educators, have the ability to model and increase all the skills of our children, when it is taught through the environment and the interactions we have. We can model and explicitly teach social-emotional and executive function skills through our own traits and attributes as a teacher. We can also explicitly teach it and assess our own progress by paying attention and giving as much regard for the progress of our students in areas of personal development as we do in academic achievement.

My current position at the Department of Education oversees not only the experiences of children in the early learning years (preschool and kindergarten), but also the transition into kindergarten. A main component of such is to help teachers, families, and community members identify the skills that help children be successful in this transition, against the standards they learn to, and overall to be successful in life. Within

the Early Childhood Unit our focus has always been on building the foundations for learning in our youngest children. The content analysis of the standards and assessments has reaffirmed this work that I do by showing the kindergarten standards are focused solely on academics. However, it has also resulted in asking myself two questions: 1) How can we create this strong belief system and culture which fosters social-emotional development in all our early childhood teachers? and 2) Can additional efforts in research areas such as this help to change the policy to incorporate non-academic skills in all k-12 standards?

Each teacher's journey is unique, but I believe we must never be shaken from the knowledge and in fact the mission, that teachers can and do make a difference in the lives of their children. I believe that the words of the teachers and the observations of children in this study, in part, confirm this. I also have observed through my ADE position, this in action on a larger scale. To see it connected to a school that performs the highest in the state academically, I cannot escape that the one supports the other. If we want children to succeed, we must develop relationships with them and guide them along the way. I also believe that this means that it is important for teachers to be trained and empowered to be the kind of people who can do this successfully. For this, we must alter the academics-only course of training that our teachers are embarked on and make available programs and professional development that teaches them to do so.

I see on a large scale across our state, the varying qualities of early learning experiences. As I've embarked down this path of intentional and specific research, I cannot help but wonder what would happen if the same culture was initiated and created across the state? The first five years are the most influential for a child's growth and

development. The experiences that take place will impact and shape the adult that they are going to become. With such a monumental effect comes an equally monumental responsibility to provide an environment that promotes children's skills at the highest potential.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Elizabeth Swadener
Social Transformation, School of
480/965-1452
Beth.Swadener@asu.edu

Dear Elizabeth Swadener:

On 4/1/2014 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Social Emotional and Approaches to Learning Development In the Lens of School Readiness: Taking a Closer Look at the Systems Approach of Building Preschool and Kindergarten Student's Social Emotional and Executive Function Skills
Investigator:	Elizabeth Swadener
IRB ID:	STUDY00000863
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Consent Form, Category: Consent Form; • Lauren A Zbyszinski Protocol, Category: IRB Protocol; • Introductory Letter.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Superintendent Interview, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Principal Interview, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Teacher Interview, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Introductory Letter.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SUPERINTENDENT

1. School District
2. Describe your background in education.
3. Describe your school district. Strengths. What do you identify as some of the main concerns with students in your district?
4. Describe to me the Arizona Early Learning Standards.
5. What area/content within these standards to you find is most important?
6. Describe to me Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards.
7. What area/content within these standards to you find is most important?
8. How did you gain your knowledge about the standards?
9. How is information about the standards shared with employees in your district?
10. What curriculum is adopted for the preschool program? Kindergarten?
11. Why were these curriculum adopted?
12. What are the basis/ key concepts/ developmental theories of the curriculum?
13. What assessments are utilized in preschool? Kindergarten? Why?
14. How do these assessments help to support the other grade level and child's development?
15. How is the work being done in preschool preparing children to be successful in the kindergarten? (looking for them to identify development of S/E and ATL)
16. What are some of the skills developed in kindergarten that prepares children for the rigor/curriculum/experience of the following academic years?
17. How is early childhood education (preschool and kindergarten specifically) incorporated in your district's literacy plan? (see if nonacademic skills are considered or discussed)

18. What do you see as the main social emotional needs of children in preschool? Kindergarten?
19. What role do administrators play in assisting with the social emotional needs of children? Teachers?
20. What role do parents play in helping with social emotional needs?
21. (may need to describe approaches to learning skills first) Why would approaches to learning skills be important in the child's continued success?
22. What role do administrators play in assisting with the approaches to learning needs of children? Teachers?
23. What role do parents have in developing these skills?
24. From an educator's point of view, what role do you think schools have, if any, in this sense of promoting these nonacademic skills of children?
25. What can they do, or should they do anything beyond the academic programs that they offer?
26. What specifically has your district adopted so that parents, administrators, and teachers have support in scaffolding social emotional and approaches to learning skills in children?
27. Would you make any recommendations to schools and educators about things they could do?
28. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPAL

1. School District and School
2. Describe your background in education.
3. Describe your school. Strengths. What do you identify as some of the main concerns with students in your school?
4. Describe to me the Arizona Early Learning Standards.
5. What area/content within these standards to you find is most important?
6. Describe to me Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards.
7. What area/content within these standards to you find is most important?
8. How did you gain your knowledge about the standards?
9. How is information about the standards shared with your teachers?
10. What curriculum is utilized in the preschool program? Kindergarten?
11. What are the basis/ key concepts/ developmental theories of the curriculum?
12. How are teachers "educated" in the curriculum?
13. What assessments are utilized in preschool? Kindergarten? Why?
14. How do these assessments help to support the other grade level and child's development?
15. How is the work being done in preschool preparing children to be successful in the kindergarten? (looking for them to identify development of S/E and ATL)
16. What are some of the skills developed in kindergarten that prepares children for the rigor/curriculum/experience of the following academic years?
17. How is early childhood education (preschool and kindergarten specifically) incorporated in your literacy plan, school if applicable, otherwise district? (see if nonacademic skills are considered or discussed)

18. What do you see as the main social emotional needs of children in preschool? Kindergarten?
19. What role do administrators play in assisting with the social emotional needs of children? Teachers?
20. What role do parents play in helping with social emotional needs?
21. (may need to describe approaches to learning skills first) Why would approaches to learning skills be important in the child's continued success?
22. What role do administrators play in assisting with the approaches to learning needs of children? Teachers?
23. What role do parents have in developing these skills?
24. From an educator's point of view, what role do you think schools have, if any, in this sense of promoting these nonacademic skills of children?
25. What can they do, or should they do anything beyond the academic programs that they offer?
26. What specifically has your school adopted so that parents, administrators, and teachers have support in scaffolding social emotional and approaches to learning skills in children?
27. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER

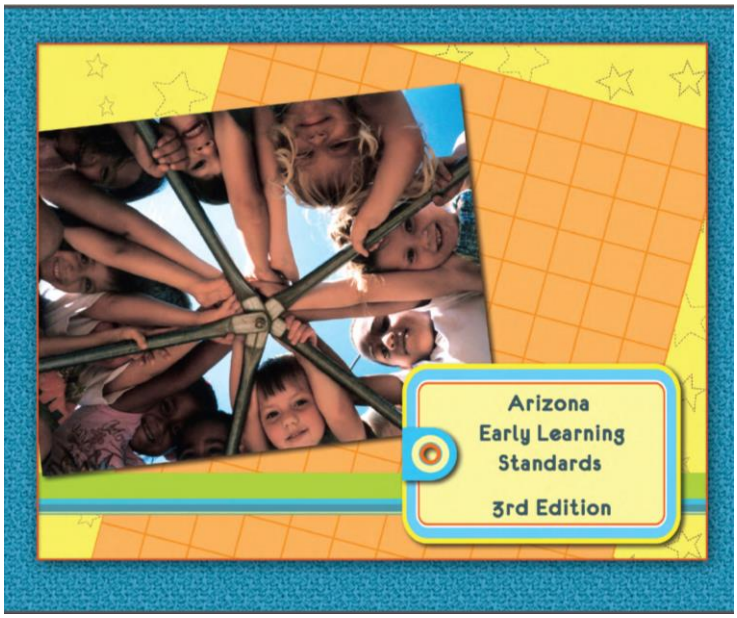
1. School District and School
2. Describe your background in education
3. Describe your class. What are overall strengths you are observing with your children? What are some of the main concerns?
4. Describe to me the Arizona Early Learning Standards.
5. What area/content within these standards to you find is most important?
6. Describe to me Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards.
7. What area/content within these standards to you find is most important?
8. How did you gain your knowledge about the standards?
9. What curriculum is utilized in the preschool program? Kindergarten?
10. What are the basis/ key concepts/ developmental theories of the curriculum?
11. How were you "educated" on the curriculum?
12. What assessments are utilized in preschool? Kindergarten? Why?
13. How do these assessments help to support the other grade level and child's development?
14. How is the work being done in preschool preparing children to be successful in the kindergarten? (looking for them to identify development of S/E and ATL)
15. What are some of the skills developed in kindergarten that prepares children for the rigor/curriculum/experience of the following academic years?
16. What do you see as the main social emotional needs of children in preschool? Kindergarten?
17. What role do you as the teacher play in assisting with the social emotional needs of children?

18. What role do parents play in helping with social emotional needs?
19. (may need to describe approaches to learning skills first) Why would approaches to learning skills be important in the child's continued success?
20. What role do you as the teacher have in assisting with the approaches to learning needs of children?
21. What role do parents have in developing these skills?
22. How does your curriculum address nonacademic skill development in children?
23. What are some of your teaching strategies to scaffold children's learning in the area of social emotional development? Approaches to Learning?
24. How does your classroom environment support this learning?
25. From an educator's point of view, what role do you think schools have, if any, in this sense of promoting these nonacademic skills of children?
26. What can they do, or should they do anything beyond the academic programs that they offer?
27. Are some developmental skills viewed heavier/ pushed more by your administration than others?
28. If you had to rank skill development based on the view of your district/administration, how would it appear?
29. How would you rank these developmental skills?
30. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX E

KEY TO POLICY DOCUMENTS

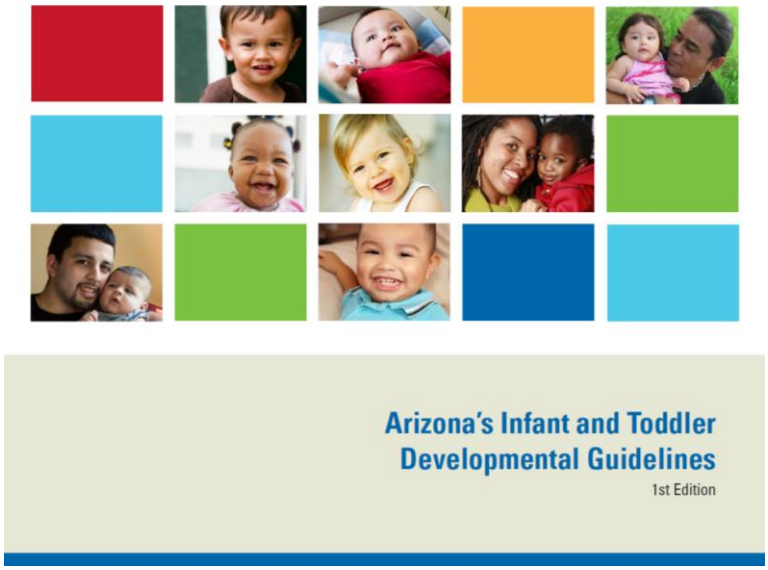
Arizona's Early Learning Standards 3rd Edition



The Arizona Early Learning Standards have been developed to provide a framework for the planning of quality learning experiences for all children three to five years of age. The standards cover a broad range of skill development and provide a useful instructional foundation for children from diverse backgrounds and with diverse abilities. The standards are intended for use by all those who work with young children in any early care and education setting in urban, rural and tribal communities (www.azed.gov/early-childhood).

Available at: http://www.azed.gov/early-childhood/resources-and-publications/

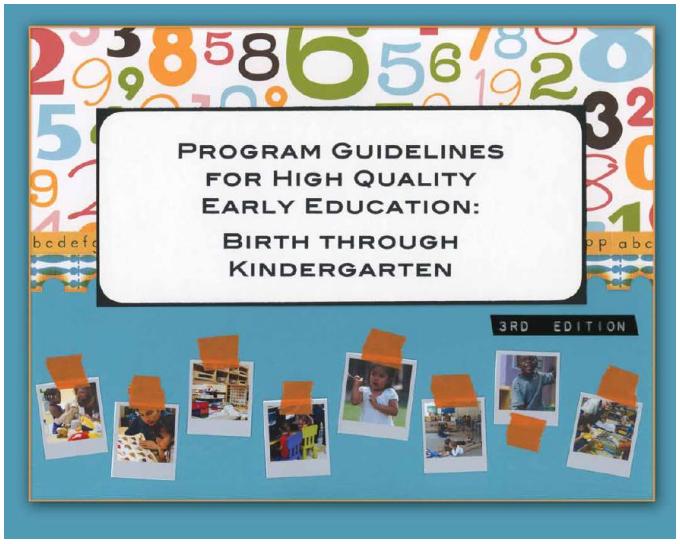
Arizona Infant Toddler Developmental Guidelines



Arizona's Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines are part of a continuum of early learning guidelines which provide a framework for understanding and communicating a common set of developmentally appropriate expectations for young children, presented within a context of shared responsibility and accountability to help young children meet these expectations. Specifically, these guidelines describe expectations about what infants and toddlers should know (understand) and do (competencies and skills) across multiple domains of development during specific age ranges, as well as what adults can do to support children's optimal learning and development (www.azed.gov/early-childhood).

Available at: http://www.azed.gov/early-childhood/files/2012/10/az_infant_toddler_guidelines_complete-2.pdf

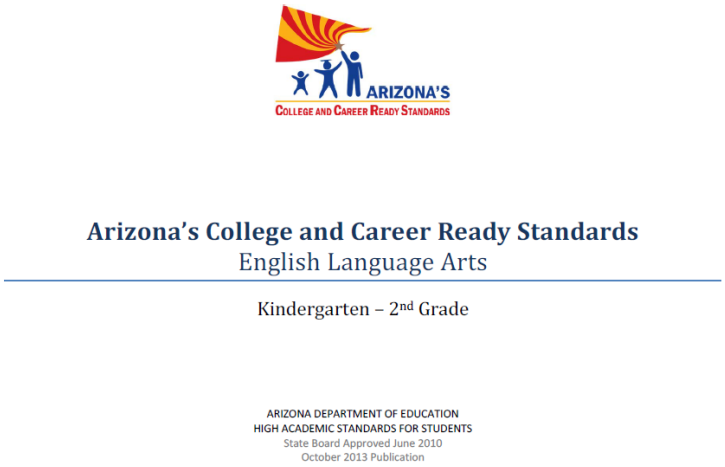
Program Guidelines for High Quality Education: Birth through Kindergarten



The *Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Education: Birth through Kindergarten* are not a list of requirements, but rather a set of recommended practices for programs to use as they strive for excellence in the care and education of young children throughout Arizona. This document is intended to provide guidance by delineating quality and providing a set of indicators that concretely describe what a program will look like when providing high quality early care and education for children birth through age six (www.azed.gov/early-childhood).

Available at: http://www.azed.gov/early-childhood/files/2011/10/program-guidelines-complete.pdf

Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards: English Language Arts

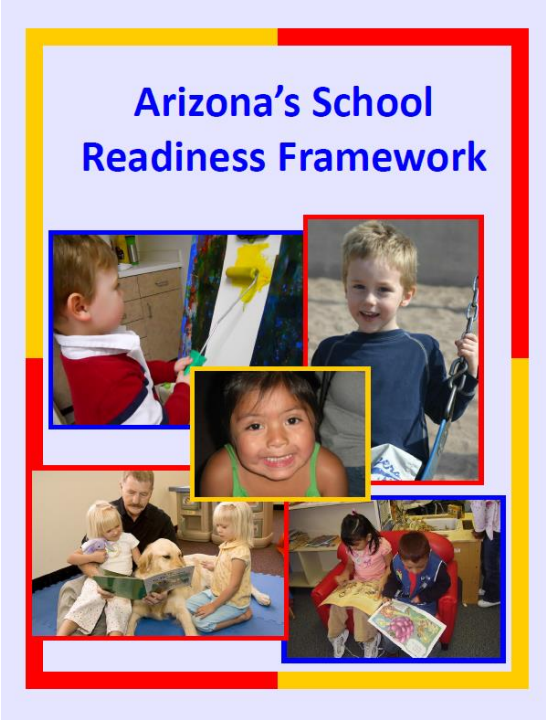


Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards - English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects ("the Standards") are the culmination of an extended, broad-based effort to fulfill the charge issued by the states to create the next generation of K–12 standards in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school. The present work, led by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA), builds on the foundation laid by states in their decades-long work on crafting high-quality education standards.

The Standards also draw on the most important international models as well as research and input from numerous sources, including state departments of education, scholars, assessment developers, and professional organizations, educators from kindergarten through college, parents, students, and other members of the public. In their

design and content, refined through successive drafts and numerous rounds of feedback, the Standards represent a synthesis of the best elements of standards-related work to date and an important advance over that previous work (www.azed.gov/azccrs). Available at: http://www.azed.gov/azccrs/files/2013/10/azccrs-k-2-ela-standards-final10_28_13.pdf

Arizona's School Readiness Framework

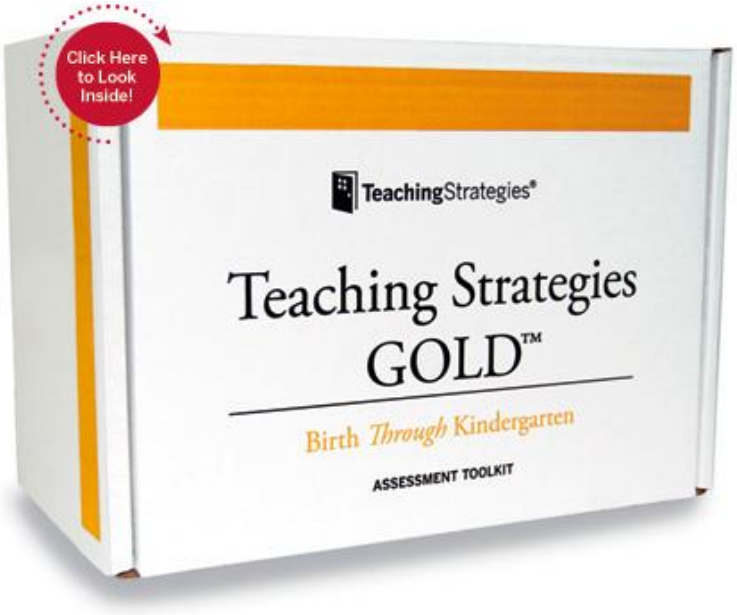


The *Arizona School Readiness Framework* (ASRF) encourages collaboration between services and the numerous parts of the early childhood system. The framework reflects the purpose of identifying readiness and builds on the state's efforts to establish a system in which all children have access to quality experiences leading to school success. There are four specific goals of the ASRF:

- Establish a common language around school readiness
- Develop a clear outline of the readiness framework
- Determine the roles of standards, effective instruction, and curriculum
- Identify meaningful, well-aligned assessment of readiness to facilitate individualization of instruction.

Available at: http://www.azed.gov/early-childhood/home/

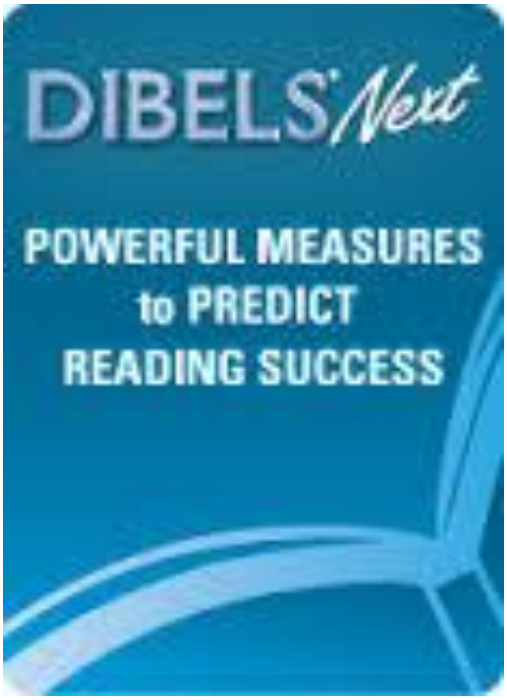
Teaching Strategies GOLD Ongoing Progress Monitoring Tool



Teaching Strategies GOLD is an authentic, ongoing observational system for assessing children from birth through kindergarten, proven to be valid and reliable by extensive field testing. It helps teachers observe children in the context of everyday experiences, which is an effective way to get to know them well and find out what they know and can do (TSG).

Available at: https://shop.teachingstrategies.com

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Assessment



The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills from kindergarten through sixth grade. They are designed to be short (one minute) fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of early literacy and early reading skills.

Available at: https://dibels.org/dibels.html

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE OF OBSERVATION FIELD NOTES

Preschool classroom visit: 3

10:00 AM

Children are in free choice play (centers available: dramatic play, art, library, manipulatives/math, science, two children at a computer, and block play).

Position self in between art center and manipulatives center (sitting behind the shelf to stay out of the way).

Children are all actively engaged in centers. Teacher and assistant are roaming classroom, sitting in and interacting with children at each center. Teacher in manipulatives, "Great job putting the puzzle back together, you two really worked together to finish it! Did you guys see the new stuff that Ms. __ got yesterday?" –pulls out new set of manipulatives. The two children get very excited and start asking to play with them. Teacher sits down at table with them and starts to describe how to use the new manipulatives. Models, then allows children to engage with it.

Jason: engaged with two other boys in the block play center. Has a smile, socializing with the others (talking, sharing blocks, cars). Together they are building a tower with ramps, and taking turns driving trucks around it. Jason is much more engaged and appears comfortable with his peers than the previous visits.

Art center: three children sitting at table, all engaged in free choice, process art.

Supplies that are out: paint, construction paper, crayons, markers, stickers, recyclable materials, pom-poms, stamps. The teaching assistant is sitting with children at the table having conversations with them.

TA: Your picture is beautiful, what are you painting?

Child A: It's frozen…you know when Elsa is doing this (makes hand

gesture) with the ice. TA: Oh yeah! I see it!!! You do love Elsa don't

you?

Child A: Yeah!

TA: Where you Elsa for Halloween?

Child A nods and smiles while she continues painting.

Child B is painting another picture. TA: [Child B] what are you making over there?

Child B: a picture for my dad's birthday

TA: Oh that's such a great idea!!! He is going to love it. Is today his birthday? (child

nods) His favorite color must be green.

Child B: Yeah, but it's all gone… I don't have any more.

TA: Well how about we go look and see what other green stuff we can find to put into your work of art!

Child B gets very excited, smiling and yells "yeah".

TA then takes Child B around the classroom, they look through cabinets and start

collecting various green materials and brings back to the art table. TA sits with child

and helps her with the new materials, gluing them on the paper, and holding up new

pieces.

TA: Are you going to sing happy birthday to your dad when you give him this picture?

Child B: No….we sing when we eat the cake!

Child A: We sang at my birthday party!!

TA: You did!!! I bet that was so much fun!!! Did you know it's [Child B's] daddy's birthday? She's making a

picture for him.

Child A: I can make a picture

for him too!!! Child B:

Yeah!!

TA: Oh that's such a wonderful idea! You are such a great friend. [Child B] says his favorite color is green. Look at all these neat green things we found around the classroom. [Child B] would it be ok if [Child A] uses some of these materials too? (Child nods). Great! Thank you for sharing! Oh, your dad is going to have such an amazing birthday!!!